

The Pianist

The transient stood, on the sidewalk, looking through the window at the musical instruments on the showroom floor. After a few minutes, the grungy homeless man opened the door and walked in unnoticed.

Gale the youngest store employee was helping a woman selecting a new bow for her twelve-year-old son's violin. Pete, the twelve-year-old, would have preferred to be home playing shoot-them-up on his Xbox. Tony, his five-year-old little brother, was playing with a transformer toy while his mother looked at the selections of violin bows.

Mike, another store employee, was on a ladder pulling down a guitar for an older Hispanic man that wanted to look it. The man's old guitar had served him well, but he needed a backup guitar. His conjunto band was getting more gigs and there was a little more money coming in.

Betty, the oldest employee, looked thru a box of sheet music for a High School marching band teacher. She was a retired schoolteacher and worked at the music store to keep her mind busy and help her cope with her husband's death.

Richard, the store manager, returned from the warehouse and was the first to spot the dirty-looking man walking around the showroom. He looked like one of the homeless people he sees on the streets every day to and from work. People call them transients, homeless, vagabonds, bums, tramps, or hoboes. Whoever he was he was the first to have wandered into the music store that Richard knew of. Since a homeless person had never walked in Richard was not sure what to do. It was obvious the man was not in the store to buy a musical instrument or anything. It occurred to him that he wanted to use the bathroom. Richard stood there thinking what he would tell him if he asked to use the facilities and what he would do if the hobo would hang around the store.

If I leave him alone, maybe he will leave on his own, he thought.

By this time Mike, Betty, and Gail also saw the transient and watched the man loitered walk around the showroom. They glanced at Richard wondering if he was going to do anything about the dirty homeless man, in their music store.

Mike was an ex-college football player, in excellent shape, and he did not want the transient in the store. He thought if the store manager did not do anything, he would take upon himself to escort the transient out of the store. After all, it would disrupt business, if the dirty man stayed in the store, he thought. Mike started to walk in the hobo's direction and Richard suspecting Mike's intentions called out his name, to get his attention. Mike stopped and turned to his manager. Richard moved his head from left-to-right meaning NO. Mike did not say anything but he did move his lips "What?" Richard understood and moved his head from left to right again.

The dirty man stopped in front of a beautiful Steinway Model B piano and stared at it for a few moments before sitting on the piano's bench. The look on Betty, Gail, Mike, and Richard's faces was priceless when they saw the transient sit at a \$61,000 piano. They could no longer concentrate on helping their customers. Richard began to walk to the dirty man not sure what he would do. He paused for a second something made him stop. By this time, the store customers turned to see the transient sitting at the piano.

The transient placed one finger on a key. The single keynote sound captivated everyone in the store. The homeless man stretched his right leg and placed his dirty tennis shoe on one of the piano's peddles. He placed both hands on the keyboard and started to play the \$61,000 piano.

I'll be damned. That sucker can play the piano, Richard thought with a surprised look. He saw the transient close his eyes as his fingers played a beautiful melody.

Betty listened with profound interest. She was a retired high school teacher and had taught music for thirty years. She had heard all of the greatest musicians in concerts or on music media. She searched her mind for the sweat melody her rears savored. It was not Beethoven, Mozart, Bock, or any of the great composers she recognized. It began to bother her because she felt she had abundant knowledge of all the great composers. What she heard was much more than a melody. This was not a simple melody. It was a complex arrangement of notes and tunes she had never heard. She put away her frustration on identifying the music, relaxed to savor the music, and enjoyed the moment.

"Holy mole," the Hispanic man mumbled in a low voice. He never cared for classical music but he felt he had been converted. He could not describe what he was hearing. It was simply beautiful. He wished his wife, children, and grandchildren were there to listen to the celestial melody.

Twelve-year-old Pete was decent on a violin for a twelve-year-old but hearing the music made his young heart skip a few beats. He felt a renewed inspiration to play his violin and in his young heart, he hoped that one day he could sound half as good as the man at the piano. Little Tony has stopped play with his transformer toy and was captivated by the man at the piano.

Everyone in the store stood frozen listening to the man playing the piano. He was not a transient, not a homeless man, or not a hobo. He was a fellow human being creating beautiful music.

Mike felt shame and embarrassment because a few moments earlier he wanted to kick the man out. The poor man wanted to play the piano and he was not bothering anybody.

Betty's customer was a marching band high school teacher from a small town nearby. He could not believe what his ears were listening to. The music touched him so profoundly his throat knotted up and he made an effort to control his emotions.

Richard was the closest to the transient and he could see the man at the piano still had his eyes closed. He saw tears pour from his eyes down his dirty beard and dripping on his lap, his hands, and the piano's keyboard. He moved his head close to the keyboard and back. The man played from his soul, something greater than muscle and nerves controlled his fingers.

The last note resonated from the piano and silence filled the store. The transient opened his eyes and noticed some of the keys on the piano were dirty. Tears from his dirty hands smudged some of the keys on the keyboard. He pulled out a dirty handkerchief from his pocket and whipped the keys clean. He stood, grabbed his old dirty backpack, and faced the people in the store. His emerald green penetrating eyes overpowered his long dirty hair and beard.

Five-year-old Tony pulled on his mother dress and with a loud and clear voice asked, "Mama... is that Jesus?"

Everyone heard little Tony and immediately turned to see the little boy looking up at his mother waiting for an answer. His mother did not know what to say and she knew all eyes were on her and wanted to hear what she would respond. Tony turned his eyes away from his mother back to the transient but he was no longer there.

He left the same way he entered, unnoticed. The five-year-old boy scanned the showroom then turned back to his mother still expecting an answer.

“Mama was that Jesus,” he asked again.

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