

“WHEN SONNY CAME HOME”

Sonny awakened to the rumblings of the big rig driving through rough mountain roads. “Where am I?” he wondered. He rubbed his tired eyes. Then he remembered. Suddenly, sadness flowed through his massive trunk. A giant tear rolled down his bark.

Tearfully, he recalled the sound of big trucks entering his forest. Loggers ran from tree to tree and, with heavy chainsaws, cut down a few of the tallest and most beautiful trees in the forest. Sonny was one of them. An ache settled deep within his bark as pictures of his forest home filled his memory.

Sonny wished he were back in his forest home. There, the cool, forest air and homey pine scent sweetened every day. He missed his friends - the chirping birds, mischievous chipmunks and amusing squirrels that frolicked and jumped among his branches.

“Come,” Sonny would shout to his friends. “Have fun in my branches today. I’m glad you came to play.”

“Thanks, Sonny,” they would all sing. “Make your branches sway so we can run and jump to the very top.”

Sonny would always answer with delight, “Anything for you, my friends.”

More tears spilled down his fine wood. Suddenly, the bump, bump of the truck startled Sonny. “What is going to happen to me?” he silently wondered. He felt scared. The only thing that made him feel comfortable was the odor of wood all around him. It reminded him of his forest home.

Sonny fell back to sleep for quite a long time. When he awakened he was no longer on the truck. He was sitting in a strange place. Sonny was jolted by the sun light

that streamed through tall windows. The room was huge. Workmen wearing leather aprons bustled about, carrying wood. They were busy sawing and carving the wood. Music was playing softly in the background. Sonny thought the melodies were lovely and soothing.

“Where am I?” he muttered. Then Sonny noticed the old man with a happy face, whistling while he worked. That made Sonny smile for the first time since he left the forest.

Guiseppe’s little, round spectacles sat on the tip of his nose. Wearing a worn, brown, leather apron, he was busily planing maple wood. He walked over to Sonny, stroked the strong wood and said, “Oh, you’re a beautiful piece of wood. I knew they’d bring me the best from the forest. I can’t wait to start working on you. You’re going to make someone very happy.”

Hope overcame sadness. Bubbles of excitement rushed through Sonny’s veins. “Maybe I’m meant to be something special,” he said to himself. He wanted to thank Guiseppe for such comforting words. Sonny found himself smiling for the first time in a long while. A beautiful Vivaldi Concerto was playing in the background. The music seemed to serenade the craftsmen while they worked. Sonny began humming to the music.

A few days later Guiseppe walked over to Sonny and whispered, “Now it’s time to get to work. I just received an order for a console piano. Before long you’ll be making music in someone’s home, someone very young and eager to play piano. Her name is Hannah.”

“A piano,” Sonny shouted. “I’m going to make music. How wonderful. There is something special in store for me.”

Sonny had been delivered to the Somer Piano Factory in New York City. When he lived in the forest he heard other trees talking about how their wood could be used to create beautiful pianos. Chills ran through his bark. Sohmer was one of the top piano manufacturers.

Days passed into weeks. Guiseppe was hard at work. It took a long time to transform Sonny to a new life. Sonny’s trunk was sawed and planed into beautiful pieces of maple wood. Guiseppe carefully sanded the wood over and over until each piece was sea glass smooth. Sometimes Guiseppe’s hands and arms felt very tired from the work, but the skilled craftsman loved what he was doing. He took great pride in crafting beautiful pianos.

After the pieces were put together, Guiseppe carved intricate, lovely designs in the wood. Then the complex task of building the piano’s inner works, the hammers, strings and pedals, began. A special musician worked on that task. With his ear for music, he made sure that the piano would be in tune. When those jobs were completed, Guiseppe stained the wood in a honey, maple finish.

Visitors to the factory walked by Sonny, smiled and commented, “That’s going to be a fine piano one day. Look at how skilled that craftsman is.” Sonny beamed when he

heard him visitors talk about his new friend, Guiseppe. He loved the old man. Guiseppe would talk to the wood as he worked.

“Oh, you’re going to be a special piano very soon. Hannah is going to be thrilled with you.”

Sonny silently answered with his heart, “Who is this Hannah? Will I meet her? Where am I going?”

Hannah lived with her mother and father in a little town about an hour away from the big city. On a crisp, cold Saturday in February 1956, she bounced down the stairs shouting, “Hi, Mom and Dad. What are we going to do today?” Hannah was always ready for an adventure.

Her mother and father were preparing breakfast in their sunny kitchen. “Well, Hannah,” her Dad said with a smile on his face, “after breakfast I want you to get dressed. You and I are going into New York City.”

“Really, Dad? Are we going to your office?”

”Not today, Hannah. Where we’re going is a surprise.”

“Oh, please tell me, Dad. Where are we going?” Hannah pleaded.

Her father chuckled. “Hard to wait, isn’t it? Go get ready. You’ll find out soon enough.”

After gobbling her breakfast Hannah ran upstairs to get washed and dressed. She felt very excited. She had no idea where they were going. Hannah thought it was strange that her mother had this smile on her face all morning, like she knew what was up. Her mom wouldn't give her any hints about her mystery trip into the city.

"I'm ready, Dad," Hannah excitedly shouted. "Can we go now?"

"All set," he answered. They both kissed Hannah's mother good-bye, hopped in the car, and drove into New York City.

Hannah was always fascinated with these trips into the city with her Dad. She'd often go to his office with him when he had to work on Saturdays. Hannah loved to play secretary, answer the phone, take messages and pretend she was in charge of the business.

After an hour's drive her Dad stopped in front of a nine story brick building. Its tall, glass windows seemed endless. Hannah noticed a sign on the building that said "Sohmer". Still, she had no idea where they were or what they were there for.

When she entered the building she immediately smelled the odor of wood, just like Sonny had. Hannah felt like she was in a forest. "Where are we, Dad?" she inquired.

"You'll soon see. Keep your eyes open, little one," he encouraged.

Then she heard the sound.....the tap, tap, tap of a piano key. She remembered that sound when her first piano was in her home. Her parents bought a used piano so Hannah could learn how to play. It was in her home for just a short while.

She loved learning the instrument, and spent hours practicing and playing. After a year her parents finally sold the piano because it was too big for their living room. She felt sad, but hoped that one day her parents would buy a brand new piano.

Now here she was, standing in a massive piano factory. She and her father walked into a huge room that was filled with beautiful, new pianos, baby grands and smaller consoles. Each wore a unique design and finish. She turned to her father and asked, “Dad, why are we here?”

“Well, Hannah,” he happily shared, “your birthday present is somewhere in this wonderful piano factory.”

“You’re kidding,” Hannah shouted with excitement. “We’re really getting a brand new piano?”

“Yes, we are. We’ve waited a long time for this. It’s time music filled our living room again. Before long we’ll be playing duets, Hannah.”

“Dad, thank you, thank you, thank you,” Hannah screamed. “I can’t believe this.” Her eyes were filled with wonder. She felt like jumping up and down, but somehow knew better to contain her eleven year old emotions. “Oh, Dad,” she could hardly speak.

“We’re really going to get a new piano? I’m so excited!” she shouted with a joy that had her dancing inside.

“Hannah,” her Dad explained, “Mom and I ordered the piano months ago. It takes a long time for a piano to be crafted. Yours will be ready in a few weeks. You see that man over there, Hannah?” he asked.

“You mean the man with the gray hair and glasses, Dad?” she replied.

“Yes, that’s the man, Hannah. He’s called a craftsman. He’s been in charge of the construction of your piano. He’s building it by hand.”

“You mean that one is going to be ours?” she inquired.

“Yes, it is, Hannah. It’s so special to have something built by a craftsman. That man has spent his entire life creating these beautiful instruments.”

Hannah felt awed. She quietly tip-toed over to watch the piano builder at work.

“Good morning, Miss,” Guiseppe quietly said. Hannah thought he looked and sounded kind.

“Hello. My name is Hannah. What’s your name? My Dad just told me that you’re building my piano.”

The old man with a kind face looked at her father and smiled in acknowledgement. He answered Hannah. “That’s right, little one. My name is Guiseppe. Do you play piano, Hannah?”

“Yes,” she answered. “I’m still learning, though. We had a used piano once. My Dad was my first teacher. He taught me how to read music. I’d practice a lot, but we had to sell the piano. It took up our whole living room. Dad always said we’d get another one, but I never believed it would really happen. He told me how expensive pianos are. I thought I wanted to play violin like my Dad, but Dad always said that the piano would be for me.”

“What do you think about that, Hannah?” Guiseppe asked. “Do you enjoy playing the piano?”

“Very, very much. I love to practice and learn new songs. Sometimes Dad and I play duets, especially at Christmas. I know some Christmas carols.”

“And your father plays the violin, Hannah?” Guiseppe asked.

“Yes, he does. Dad’s played violin since he was a little boy. He now plays in two orchestras. Mom says that the violin is his first love.”

Guiseppe laughed. “I know what she means, Hannah. My wife says the same thing about me.”

“Do you play violin, too, Guiseppe?” Hannah inquired.

“No, little one. The piano is my love.” Hannah smiled. “Well, Miss Hannah,” continued Guiseppe, “very soon this beautiful instrument will be yours.”

Hannah had so many questions. She couldn’t stop looking at her piano. All of a sudden the factory owner walked over to say hello to Hannah and her father. He looked at Hannah and said, “It’s wonderful to be in on this surprise, Miss Hannah. I knew your Dad was bringing you here today. He and your mother ordered your piano months ago. When they told us what they wanted we sent our men into the forest to find the best maple tree for your piano.”

Hannah suddenly felt alarmed. “You mean you had to cut a tree down for my piano?”

“Don’t you worry, Hannah,” responded the factory owner. “For every tree we cut down we plant a new one, a small sapling that will one day grow to be a happy, tall tree.”

“I’m glad to hear that,” confided Hannah. “We talk about that in school and I think too many trees are being cut down from our forests.”

“I agree,” continued the owner. “We’re very aware of that, too.” And with that he patted Hannah’s head.

Hannah already loved her piano. She walked all around Sonny, watching Guiseppe as he worked. She asked if she could touch the wood. Sonny was beaming. He already liked the little girl. She had kind eyes and a warm smile. Sonny heard Hannah tell Guiseppe that she didn’t have any brothers or sisters, that music was her friend. Sonny knew that he’d become one of her closest friends. And Sonny already knew in his heart that he loved Hannah. She couldn’t wait for him to arrive at her house. He was so beautiful, the most gleaming piece of maple wood she’d ever seen.

Guiseppe stopped work for a while and took Hannah and her father all around the factory. Hannah learned all about how pianos were constructed. There was a lot she didn’t understand, but she knew it took a long time and a lot of skill to create this beautiful musical instrument.

At the end of the tour, while her father was talking with the factory owner, Hannah walked over to Sonny and lightly touched the wood, once again. Sonny thought that Hannah had piano fingers, and he hoped that she’d make music on his keys every day. Hannah thanked Guiseppe and the factory owner for the tour and asked them to take good care of her piano.

“Don’t you worry, Hannah,” promised Guiseppe. “It’s my joy to build this for you. I’ll take good care of your piano, but you have to promise me one thing.”

“What’s that?” Hannah wanted to know.

“Promise me,” asked Guiseppe, “that you’ll practice every day and always treasure this beautiful instrument.”

Hannah, kindly, responded, “Don’t you worry, Guiseppe. I’ll love my piano forever.”

Hannah and her father returned home, and Guiseppe went back to work. Hannah couldn’t wait to tell her mother about her adventure at the piano factory. Then the waiting began.

Many weeks passed. Hannah kept asking her parents when the piano would arrive. “It’s so hard to wait for something you love, Hannah. Be patient. Your piano will be here very soon,” encouraged her Mother.

One day in May her home bustled with activity. Her parents were rearranging the living room furniture. Hannah knew something was up.

“It’s coming, it’s coming, isn’t it?” she, excitedly, asked.

“That’s right, sweetie. The factory owner called to tell us that the piano will be delivered this afternoon.” Her parents were just as excited as Hannah.

“You’re kidding. Really? It’s finally coming? I’m sooo excited. I can’t believe it.”

Hannah started running around and jumping up and down. Her parents burst into laughter at her exuberance.

Hannah kept watch by her front window. It seemed to take forever for the truck to arrive. Finally, it pulled up in front of her home. The sign on the side of the truck said “Sohmer, Maker of Fine Pianos.”

“Mom, Dad, it’s here. Come quickly,” screamed Hannah.

Her father answered the door and the movers announced that they were here to deliver a piano. Hannah watched as the men carefully slid Sonny out of the truck. The piano was very heavy. It took three movers! The men were carrying it very carefully. Before she knew it, the piano was sitting in her living room. Hannah could hardly contain her joy. She felt as if Sonny were telling her to play and bring him to new life. His maple finish sparkled. Hannah's mom was smiling too. She told Hannah's dad, "Oh, dear, the piano looks beautiful with the rest of our French Provincial furniture."

Hannah fell in love with her piano. Excitedly, she sat down and played one of her favorite songs, Beethoven's "Fleur De Lis". Sonny's tone was rich and deep. Hannah's dad took out his violin and joined Hannah while she played. Once again, music filled their living room.

For many years Sonny became Hannah's special friend. Hannah would spend hours practicing new songs and playing old favorites. Over the years she had two different piano teachers, but her favorite was her father. He loved music so much. He instilled in Hannah a love of music and an appreciation of the classics. Often they'd play duets. She loved to accompany her father to the "Ave Maria" and Handel's 'Largo'. The music gave her goose bumps.

Sonny beamed as well. He was happy in his new home. He was well cared for and loved. Hannah would play often and keep his keys singing. Her mother would dust and polish his wood each week. Sonny shined. Visitors always remarked on the piano's beautiful finish and rich tone.

Years passed. Life changed for Hannah and Sonny. Hannah went to high school and then college. Many days Sonny sat still and silent. He missed Hannah's daily practice sessions. Still, he was home and felt loved. Sonny always looked forward to Christmas, his favorite time of year. That's when Hannah and her father spent hours playing Christmas Carols together. Family members would sit around and sing along.

One day, life, drastically, changed for Sonny. Hannah had a new friend who spent a lot of time with Hannah and her family. He seemed to make Hannah very happy. This man loved to listen to Hannah play piano. A special day rolled around, a day that made Hannah very happy, but one that would fill Sonny with sadness.

Hannah was getting married. When the wedding photographer arrived at her home, Hannah asked, "Please take a picture with me sitting by my piano." Sonny was so pleased. He was beautifully polished and looked as good as new. He thought his special friend looked beautiful in her flowing, white wedding gown.

Sonny's delight and happiness for Hannah turned to terrible sadness. The day after she was married, Hannah and her new husband moved far away to a place called Kansas. Sonny missed his friend. No one played on his keys anymore. A tear once again trickled down his wood.

"Oh, my," he sighed, "when will someone play with me and make beautiful music again? I miss Hannah so much."

Hannah missed her piano, too. After two years away from Sonny, she called her parents to ask, "Mom, Dad, I've saved some money. Would you mind if I had the piano shipped to Kansas? I miss playing."

Her father hesitated. "You really want to practice again, Hannah?"

"I sure do. And little Emma might one day want to play, too." By now Hannah and her husband had a little baby girl of their own.

"Well," her Dad responded, "This is your piano. I'll make the arrangements to have it the piano shipped to Wichita."

"Thank so much, Dad," she kindly said. "It means a lot to me."

The day Sonny arrived Hannah was so excited. She felt like a little girl again, waiting like she did the day that Sonny first came to her home. Sonny and Hannah were overjoyed to see one another again. Tears of happiness rolled down their eyes.

The move to Kansas was the first of many moves for Sonny. He traveled with Hannah and her family all over the country. Hannah played piano often. What became extra special for Sonny was that Hannah's daughter, Emma, learned to play piano, too. Even little Emma loved Sonny. He was again happy and gleaming.

Years later life changed, once again. A dark cloud shrouded the sunshine from Hannah's life. She was older now and needed some money for school. She had to make a very difficult decision. She had to sell Sonny.

Hannah told her husband, "Look, I don't play the piano much anymore. We've moved around so much and it's so hard to move this heavy piano. If I'm ever going to finish my Master's, I need the money for tuition. I think it's time to sell. The piano is just sitting around. It's meant to be played."

"Are you certain," her husband asked, "you really want to do this? You've loved your piano for so many years."

“Yes, I’m sure,” Hannah sadly answered. “It’s time to let go.”

Hannah was sad for other reasons, too. Her husband was diagnosed with cancer, and they were short on money.

Sonny was devastated. His heart sank. “How could you think of selling me?” he screamed inside. “We’ve been such good friends.” He wanted to shout, “Hannah, don’t do this. You’ll regret this. One day you’ll miss me so much you’ll wish you never sold me.”

But Hannah couldn’t hear his heart’s song. Sonny was sold to a piano dealer on Cape Cod where Hannah was living with her family. The day Sonny left her home Hannah cried. She felt like she was losing an old friend. Telling herself she didn’t have time to play anymore and that she needed the money for school didn’t make her feel any better. She was hurting inside. She knew that way down deep Sonny would be crying, too. And he was!

Months later Hannah regretted selling Sonny. She tried to find him. She called the dealer who bought Sonny. He was no help. She called other piano dealers, but no one heard of Sonny.

Years passed. Hannah was much older now. Her children were grown and she even had four grandchildren. She and Emma would often talk about the piano. Hannah would tell Emma that she would sometimes dream of the piano. But she never saw anything like her beloved Sohmer.

Hannah bought a used piano that she kept for a short while. She loved playing again, but it wasn't the same. It didn't have the sound of her beautiful Sohmer, and it was far from grand looking like Sonny. She sold that piano. It just wasn't the same.

Then something magical, surprising and wondrous occurred. The news gave Hannah goose bumps, just like her father used to get when he heard beautiful music. Hannah received an email from Emma. It said, "Mom, I found the piano. Check it out. Buy it, but it, please, please, please!" Hannah immediately went to the web site. She didn't know what Emma was talking about. She opened the page and froze. She couldn't believe her eyes. There it was.....her beautiful Sohmer console, identical to hers in every small detail.

Hannah was overcome with emotion. Tears spilled down her cheeks. There was her beloved piano. She couldn't believe what she was seeing. She thought she was dreaming.

Quickly, she called the seller.

"Hello," she tried calmly speaking. "I'm calling about the Sohmer Console you have for sale." It was hard containing her excitement.

"Yes, I'm selling this fine piano," he replied.

"I have a story for you," Hannah began. "Do you have a few minutes?" she asked.

"Sure do," he kindly answered.

"When I was eleven years old," she began, "my father brought me to the Sohmer Piano Factory in New York City to watch my piano being built. I had the piano for many years but sold it in 1994. I've regretted that sale for the past thirteen years. Your piano is

an identical twin to mine – Sohmer console, French Provincial in a honey maple finish. I’ve searched for my piano over the years, but never found it again. My daughter noticed your sale on the internet. I can’t believe it. What can you tell me about it?”

“What a story,” the man responded. “As you know,” he continued, “Sohmer is one of the finest names in piano manufacturing. This piano was also built at the Sohmer Factory in New York City. It’s in mint condition. Its last owners used it mainly for furniture.”

“Tell me,” Hannah asked, “what’s the identification number of the piano?”

The dealer gave Hannah the number, and Hannah gasped in disbelief.

“Oh, my goodness,” she exclaimed in wonder, “that was my piano’s number.”

“How did you remember the number?” the dealer inquired.

“I kept copies of the original paperwork,” Hannah replied.

“This is unbelievable,” the dealer said with excitement and wonder. “All I know,” he added, “is that this piano was bought in 1994 by a dealer on Cape Cod. That dealer then sold it to a woman living on Long Island.”

“I live on Cape Cod,” Hannah continued, “and sold my piano that year. A dealer bought it, but I never knew who he sold it to.”

“Hannah,” the dealer excitedly shared, “I believe this is your piano.”

“Oh, my gosh. Please don’t sell it to anyone else. What can I do to make sure of that?”

Not to worry,” he kindly offered. “This piano is yours. You were meant to meet again. I can’t tell you the number of people and instruments I’ve brought together. Some things are meant to happen.”

Hannah knew instinctively that this kind sounding man, who shared in her delight over this extraordinary connect, was more than just a dealer. She later learned that he not only sold instruments, but played and taught piano as well. He, too, harbored a love of music.

Hannah and the seller spoke a few times about the piano while arranging the payment and move. Hannah was excited because Emma wanted to play again and they both hoped that one day Emma’s son, Hannah’s grandson, Logan, would learn to love the piano, as they had.

Finally, the big day arrived. Hannah had been notified that her piano would be delivered sometime after noon. She felt like she was, once again, stepping back in time. But more than anything she believed with all her heart that she was experiencing a sacred mystery and gift.

The sound of a big rig rolling down her stone driveway caused her to jump. Even though Hannah was now a Nana she couldn’t contain her emotion. She ran out the door and up the stone driveway to meet the truck. When the mover opened the truck door and she saw her beloved piano, she cried. If Sonny could speak, he’d be shouting with joy as well. He was so happy to see Hannah again. She was older now, but still agile, in good shape and active. He couldn’t believe this was happening. He and Hannah together again. What a mystery.

Hannah, excitedly, told the driver the story about the piano – how she saw it being built in the factory long ago, about having to sell it and regretting what she did, and then about the day she received the email from her daughter. He was so moved by her story and her obvious love for the piano that he told his helpers to be especially careful in moving the piano into her home.

Hannah watched quietly as this beautiful instrument re-entered her world. A lump settled in her throat. She felt like she was eleven years old. Her friend, once loved, then lost, had returned. Gratefulness overwhelmed her. She felt her father's presence and could almost see the goose bumps on his arms. Hannah could almost hear him, "Dear Daughter, never sell the piano again. Love it forever and pass it on to Emma and Logan." Hannah was smiling. In her heart she whispered to her father, "Dad, I'll never let it go, ever again."

Within minutes Sonny was sitting in Hannah's living room. It felt surreal as she sat down to play. Almost like she was standing on holy ground. Hannah played her piano for hours. Sonny was smiling again. His tone was as rich and clear as it was the first day Hannah ever touched the beautiful white and black keys.

The next day Emma arrived with little Logan to see the piano. "Oh, Mom, she shared. "This feels really eerie, seeing the piano here. It's like stepping back to Kansas, Oklahoma, Maryland, and all the other places we ever lived. I can see the piano in all our living rooms."

Little Logan immediately became mesmerized with Sonny. He enjoyed hitting the keys and hearing the different tones. Hannah smiled at her daughter. "You made this

happen. You know your grandfather is assuredly smiling down on us, too. He always regretted the day I sold the piano. In some way I think he had a hand in this miracle. Promise me one thing, Emma,” her mother asked.

“What’s that, Mom?”

“Promise me that you’ll always keep this piano in the family and never, under any circumstances, let it go.”

“You have my word, Mom. This piano is here to stay.”

Hannah sat down at the piano and silently whispered, “Dad, I’ve learned many lessons in life. I will never let the piano go, ever again. It will always remain in our family. Our dear friend found his way home. Or perhaps I’m the one who was truly ready for his return.”

As Hannah began playing “Moonlight Sonata” her fingers knew just where to go. Sonny was singing, Hannah’s heart was beaming, and tears trickled down their faces. Sonny was home. Hannah looked at Emma and, gratefully, whispered, “Thank you, dear daughter.”

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