



Lajoyce Martin

*Fiddler's
Song*

The Fiddler's Song

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Table of Contents

<i>Chapter 1</i>	- A New Generation	9
<i>Chapter 2</i>	- The Interim	17
<i>Chapter 3</i>	- Interrupted Evening	25
<i>Chapter 4</i>	- The Ruse	33
<i>Chapter 5</i>	- Missing	41
<i>Chapter 6</i>	- The Hospital	49
<i>Chapter 7</i>	- Bert's Decision	57
<i>Chapter 8</i>	- A New Name	65
<i>Chapter 9</i>	- Number Forty-Three	75
<i>Chapter 10</i>	- The Urn	83
<i>Chapter 11</i>	- The Easter Lily	89
<i>Chapter 12</i>	- Surprise Visit	97
<i>Chapter 13</i>	- The Diagnosis	105
<i>Chapter 14</i>	- The Sacrifice	113
<i>Chapter 15</i>	- The Flower Pot	119
<i>Chapter 16</i>	- Forgiveness?	125
<i>Chapter 17</i>	- Martha's Plan	131
<i>Chapter 18</i>	- Uncertainties	139
<i>Chapter 19</i>	- The Memorial Service	147
<i>Chapter 20</i>	- The Violin	157
<i>Chapter 21</i>	- Number Forty-Two	165
<i>Chapter 22</i>	- Aware	171
<i>Chapter 23</i>	- The Fiddler's Song	179

Chapter One

A New Generation

“Life never lets me *rest*, Sally,” complained Martha Harris to her lastborn. “I thought when I got all my saplin’ s rooted in their own sod, my worries would pipe down. Then along comes a whole new generation o’ frightful frets. . . My brain gets so tired it hangs t’ween my ears all limp and tuckered out.”

“Let me guess,” volleyed Sally. “It’s Matilda.”

“Yes, it’s Tilly.” Martha gave a tired sigh. “My Sarey’s little Tilly.”

“*Little?* She’s twenty-two.”

“She’s still Sarey’s baby.”

“And that might be the problem,” Sally counted red. “Matilda needs to grow up. Besides, Sarah’s children aren’t yours to worry about. You raised yours, and she raised hers. Let Sarah stew over Matilda’s woes.”

“Now, Sally-girl—” Martha gave her a wounded you-don’t-understand look. “You ain’t never been a gran’ma. Bein’ a ma an’ bein’ a gran’ma all runs t’gether when you git as old an’ mossy as me. You uneasy over yer gran’children same as you did over your own sons an’ daughters.”

The Fiddler's Song

“And then the great-grandkids climb on the worry wagon and the great-great-grand—”

“What scalds my feathers,” interrupted Martha, shortening Sally’s verbal nib, “is that yore Pa has been layin’ a-*restin’* in yon graveyard fer seventeen long years an’ I’m obliged to do both my worryin’ an’ his’n. That’s a double whammy an’ ’tain’t fair.” She jabbed an age-atrophied finger toward the front window through which the iron bridge spanning the Brazos River could be seen. Across the bridge lay the Brazos Point community cemetery where Henry Harris was buried.

“Mama, you know that if Papa was alive, he wouldn’t spend his time with fretting. Papa didn’t believe in dreads. Remember how he always said God’s shoulders were broad enough to carry our loads? Papa never worried unless you worried him with your worrying.”

“But he’d sure as eternity grieve o’er his own gran’ daughter’s backslidin’.”

“I’m afraid you’re judging Matilda, Mama.”

“No, I ain’t jedgin’, Sally. The Bible plainsome sez ye shall know them by their fruits. An’ I’ve seen some mighty rotten fruits on Tilly’s limbs a-lately. When she came mincin’ in here in that short-tailed dress an’ them red shoes with th’ toes a-missin’, I knowed she had done listened to th’ devil’s whispers. Why, that dress was so skimpy you’d’a thought th’ seamstress ran a-shy on material. Do you think my ma would of let me out in public in sech a garb? Not on yer ferrottype! She’d’a sewed flour sacks on th’ sleeves an’ tail of it!”

“I hope you don’t expect Sarah to—”

“Sarey lost th’ game long ago. She let Tilly run bare-legged when she was in th’ first primer. It galled me somethin’ fierce t’ see th’ child without stockin’s. It looked so—so *immodest*. But then, I’m old-fogeyed.”

“Times do change, Mama. We crossed into the twentieth

A New Generation

century some time back. And I believe we've all profited by the change. Your son, William, drives a horseless. Your grandson, Michael, works at the railroad shops. And even yourself—" Sally inclined her head toward the telephone. "Alan and Chester can call you from Austin on the speaking horn."

Martha talked on as if Sally had said nothing. "Sarey hit a bad ball when she permissioned Tilly to go to work fer Mr . Jacob's son at the drugstore when she was fresh out o' school. I tried t' tell Sarey that warn' t a good idee, but she wouldn' t hear. Tilly wanted spending money. Tilly wanted new clothes. Tilly was bored a-sittin' home. An' at that drugstore is exactly where Tilly met that ungodly husband o' hers. That's where he flirted an' coaxed an' caught her: at her job. *He's* th' one who wants her t' dress an' act like a flapper! *He's* th' one who's strayin' her from her home larnin'! *He's*—"

"Mama, Matilda is grown now . She is no longer a child. She is responsible for her own actions. Sarah can' t boss her around and neither can you. All either of you can do is pray and leave her to God's loving care."

Martha fished a napkin from her apron pocket to sop away the gush of tears. "Oh, I do that ever' day. She's on my tell-God list. When all my brood was younger , I recited 'em t' God in alphabetical order each mornin': Alan, Arthur, Chester, Dessie, Joseph, Matthew, Sally, Sarey, an' William. An' fer awhile, there was Effie, that precious little crippled-up angel who took off t' Heaven so's God could fix up her bent wings. An' our Robert who got kilt in th' horse runaway accident.

"Then came along all th' mates. Alan's Elise. Arthur's Lucy. Chester 's Candice. Dessie' s Nathan. Joseph' s Amy. Matthew's Pauline. Your Jay. Sarey' s Hank. An' William's Nellie. Now, with all them and their'n, there's more'n *forty*, an' my mind can' t line 'em up in proper order any more. I jest clump 'em t' gether fer God an' let Him sort th' laundry an' git