

## A Violinist's Evolution

I.

As a five year old I bounce in place,  
my small violin snug  
under my chin,  
the bow gripped in my little fingers.

My feet are rooted to the copper pennies  
on the faded yellow rug—  
my reward for standing still,  
the excitement of learning to play  
hard to contain.

My teacher, Ellen, perches  
on the green cushion  
of an old wooden chair.  
Her chin-length gray hair threatens  
to leave its place, tucked behind her ears  
as she patiently helps  
guide my bow  
across the A string.

She talks me through the rhythm  
of *Stop, pony—Stop, pony*,  
then praises my screechy response.

The small violin's off key  
*Stop, pony— stop, pony*  
is only the beginning.

II.

At eight years old, I stand  
in our living room  
on a faded green rug  
with coral flowers sprawled across it,  
wooden blocks scattered around  
my gold high heels.

My mom sits on our gray couch  
in front of me—tea mug in hand.  
“Remember, Ruth, Ellen wants you  
to practice part one of ‘Etude’ five times,”  
she directs, and I nod in response,  
slowly working through

the part on my 3/4 size violin.  
The gold heels  
tap along to the music.  
I feel confident in what I know.

IV.

Now I stand in my room as a cold fall wind  
blows through my open window.  
My full- sized violin rests under my chin  
while I guide the bow across the strings,  
and my fingers follow  
as I play a part of “Bourrée”  
over and over  
until my fingers dance across the strings,  
and the notes float into my room—  
finally—  
with no mistakes.

—RUTH BURCHSTEAD

1<sup>st</sup> Place Winner, The Poetry Society of Virginia