

Tanta!



Diane Worfolk Allison



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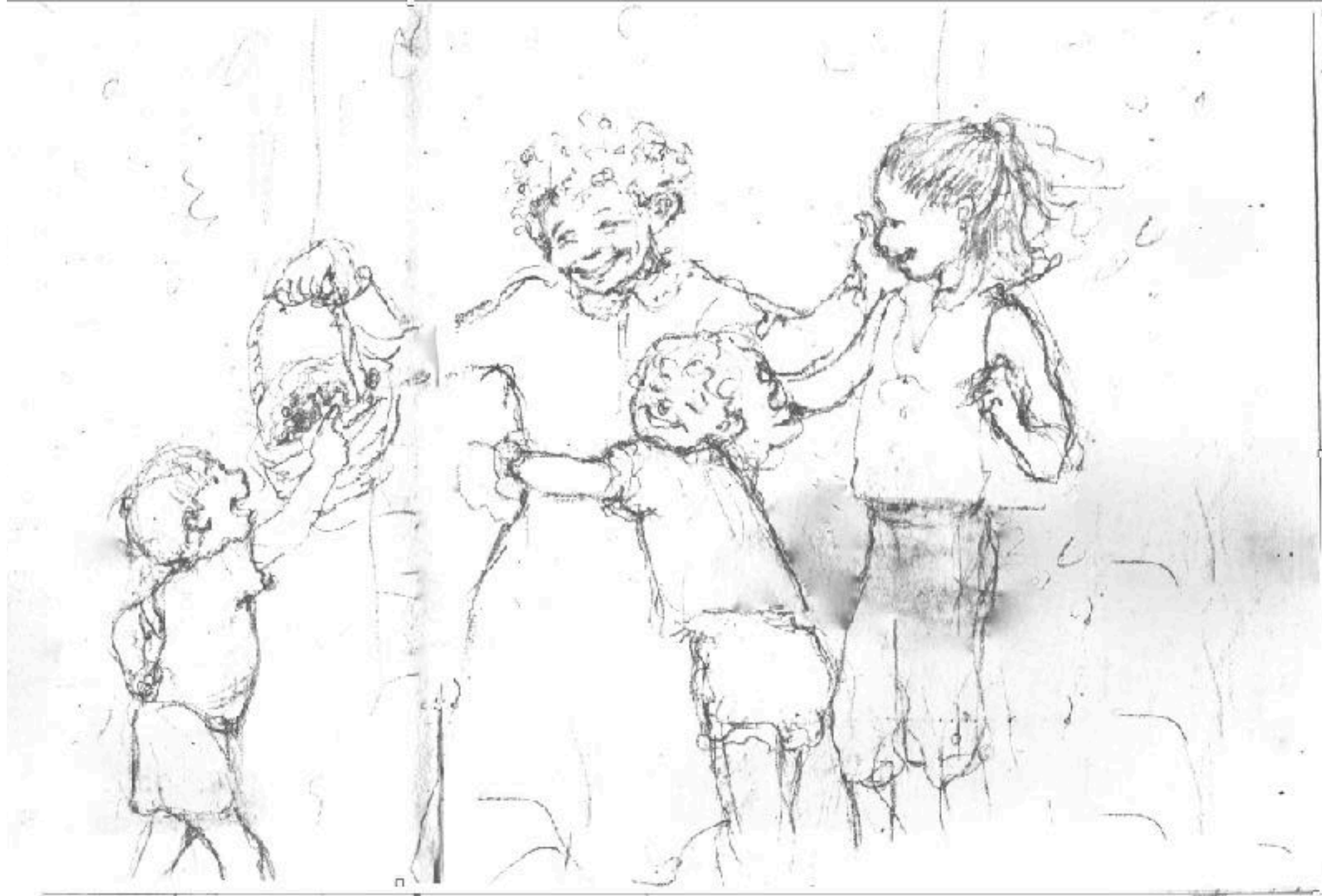


"Tanta's here!" I yell. We tear down the stairs, cheering. Tanta runs up. Already, she is laughing.

“Elise! Laurie! Gregor! It is so pleased I am to see you!” she says. “And look! Look!” She pulls the napkin off her basket.

Raspberries!” says Gregor. “For raspberry tarts?”

“Oh!” says Tanta. “I think maybe we make ruby necklace like I wear when I marry. But raspberry tarts? Yes. Good idea. You have such a good head, Gregor. I should have such a good head. We make tarts!”.





Soon, in puffs of flour, with the rolling pin pounding and Tanta humming, Laurie says to Tanta, "Tell us about when you married."  
"It was the violin," says Tanta, scooping more flour.

"What violin?" I ask.





“Don’t I tell you, Elise?” says Tanta. “How when I am little I love the song from the violin the old man play in the bakery. And I come every day and he help me to play it. And one day he is gone and the old woman, his wife, says it is mine, the violin. And I play her his song and she cries. See?”

“But what about when you married?” asks Laurie.





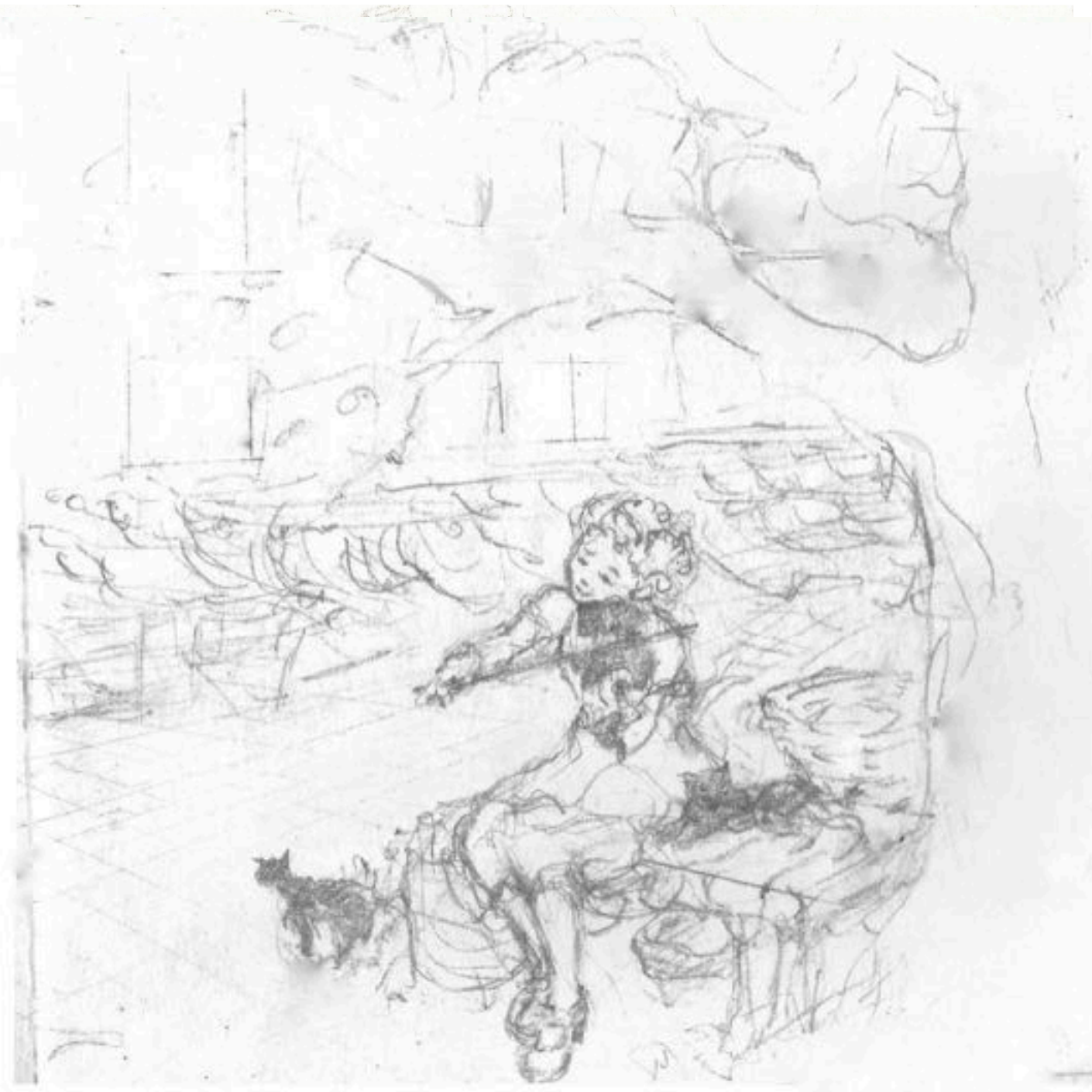
“I tell you. It was the violin,” says Tanta, “in Papa’s laundry.”

“With the underwear?” asks Gregor.

“Ha, no!” says Tanta. “Listen:



I hang up the shirts for to dry. One day I am lonely. I play my violin. I think that only the shirts, flip-flapping in the wind, hear me. I did not know, but a handsome man who comes in the shop, he hears me! And when Papa doesn’t look he comes very quiet to see. And there I am with my violin singing. And he fall in love. And we marry.”







“And have babies!” says Gregor.

“Two!” says Tanta. “Who would not close their eyes but I play them the violin to sleep.”

“Did they play too?” I say.



“Yes,” says Tanta. “But not my violin. Jozsef -- he like a big violin. He like the cello. Anna -- she like every note already there, not like bow on string you have to find. She play piano. We make music together. A trio!”





Tanta spoons the raspberries into the circles of dough and folds the circles closed. “But they grow up. They don’t know from songs anymore. And the house, the violin, the instruments, the music, all gone.”

“Where?” asks Laurie.

“The war, swallow everything like a fiery dragon.” Tanta sighs.



She puts the tarts in the oven and creaks the door shut.  
“Everything ashes.”

“Not music.” says Gregor. Tanta stares at him.

“You so right, Bubbulah,” says Tanta, hugging him. “I not lose my music. No one lose music.” She wiggles her fingers. Such a naughty smile grows on her face! I catch my breath

“Uh-oh” says Gregor, backing away.



“And I know from songs!” says Tanta.  
“Yes! Follow me!”  
Tanta throws off the apron and makes for the big room.

“Tanta?” says Laurie.

“Come, my raspberries,” says Tanta.  
“You see!”

We run after her to the room where the lake-light ribbons the ceiling.





“Elise!”

I jump.

“Elise!” says Tanta. “You are, you are. . .let’s see. A cello! A beautiful cello, yes? Are you in tune? No these are not your ears. It is how we tighten the strings to make it in tune, yes?”

She pretends that my buttons are strings and listens, singing soft “Zoom, zoom, zoom,” in different notes, wiggling my ears.

“Perfect! Now I need a bow. Ah!” Tanta grabs the toy bow from Gregor’s bow and arrow set. “What kind of bow with no string? No good. Maybe arrow better.”

She puts an arrow next to my feet.







“Laurie? Laurie! My Xylophone! Lie down here. How I play a standing-up xylophone? You think I magician?” Laurie lies on the long table. “Well,” says Tanta, “I think I magician if I try to play without sticks.”

Tanta disappears into the kitchen. We wait, the way instruments do. She comes back waving two carrots. “Ready now!”

Laurie covers her face. “Oh, no!” says Laurie.

“What’s with ‘Oh no!’?” says Tanta. “I not play one note and already my xylophone says, ‘Oh, no’? Maybe screw loose.” Tanta studies each elbow, shrugs her shoulders and then bounces the carrots off Laurie’s tummy singing, “Bong-bong-bong.”

“This a most wiggly, giggly xylophone,” says Tanta. “But it has beautiful sound.” She puts down the carrots. “Now to warm up Gregor.”





Gregor squeals and makes his feet run in place

“Come here, Gregor, my little guitar that I love so much. Up! Up on my lap! Straighten up! How I play a bent over guitar?” Tanta strums invisible strings singing, “Brrumm-brumm”

“Perfect!” she says.

“Now, children. We play wonderful song I just make up call, ‘I Been Workin’ on the Railroad.’ Are you ready, my little guitar?” Gregor whimpers. She strums his tummy, “Brrum, brum-brumm brum-brrumm”

“You’re tickling me!” cries Gregor, jumping down.

“My guitar has legs?” says Tanta. “I need my xylophone!”







She runs to Laurie, grabbing the carrots. “Bong ba-bong ba-bong bong. . . I know I play low notes,” says Tanta. “Why I hear high? This xylophone need to fixing, I think. Let me just tickle this one note. . . here.”

Laurie screeches and squiggles off the table.

“What’s this?” Tanta scolds. “Some trio!”







“My cello!” She scoops up the arrow, ruffles the arrow’s feathers across my middle and dances her fingers up and down my arm singing, “Zoom da zoom da zoom da zoom, zoom.”

“Too much, Tanta!” I cry, running away.







“Come back!” says Tanta, running after us. “Come back! I catch you! I catch you!”





A wonderful smell fills the air.  
“Children stop!” she cries. We stop.  
“The tarts!” We run to the kitchen.



Ah, Tanta!

