

Salzburg

by John Riley

One night while in rehab I had a dream that I worked as a violin maker in Salzburg. It was the late eighteenth century and the most interesting thing about the dream was there was nothing dream-like about it. I had one daughter. A son had died the year before and I could still see his face if I stopped pegging a new hole or trimming the bass bar and closed my eyes. I had spent most of the day of the dream talking with other rehab clients sitting in the day room or while walking on the pleasant trail that skirted the patch of woods between the rehab and the interstate highway. By the end of our stay we would know one another more thoroughly and with more love than we knew ourselves. There was a doctor of the throat who had sung bel canto but could no longer sing, a counter of the coins who could no longer bring himself to touch money, a mother who failed to master the thimble and said her children were tiny shells she should have left on the beach. Before turning to sleep on my single bed I'd realized I wanted to press my lips against each of their mouths and suck out the chaos leaping for the light in their exhausted bodies. I would let it frolic in my bloated stomach and hang like a bloody shirt over my brain. Perhaps this is why in my dream there was little new death, which was unrealistic because it was the eighteenth century when death was the landlord of the cobble-stoned streets. As I walked to my appointment with the Kapellmeister to demonstrate my newest instrument made from the cherry wood that was so dear I saw a young girl with a flushed face. Death had invested in her eyes but that was its only sighting. I walked on inhaling chimney smoke although it was spring and burning the wood was wasteful. I should have been thinking of my appointment, my income depended on a good outcome, but mostly I thought of my daughter who would soon marry a dull shopkeeper. I wondered how she would live without music. She was a happy girl whose face, unlike my son's, never creased with worry about the ambitions she'd never fulfill. The dream ended as I sat in a tiny room

waiting for the Kapellmeister to come bow the strings made from polished sheep gut. I remember thinking I had been kept waiting too long. That a proud man would stand up and make his presence known. I had no impatience, though, and now wish I had. But how was I to know the night nurse was standing outside my bedroom door? That the sleep that made such life possible was about to be no more?

