

A HOUSE OF *Tailors*



YEARLING



patricia reilly giff

two-time Newbery Honor-winning author

The Heartbeat of a Dinosaur

BY DELIA GORMAN

In between the first time Miss Jazzie opened our door and the last time she closed her eyes, the stars shone brighter over our house. There was another seat at the dinner table and my nails were always painted. Daddy used to say that she needed a house and we needed a home, so together we were beautiful no matter how funny we looked. She, with her dark braided hair, crazy patterned dresses, and cinnamon-scented skin, and I with my ears that didn't work, and my big green eyes that she said could see straight through anything. We were like a garden with all different types of flowers, growing in the same place. Somehow, seeming more alive.

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Outside was war. I could hear the pop-pop-pop of the cannons.

Inside was the sewing room. Gray cloth forms of Mama's clients stood along one wall, reminding me of the soldiers we saw on the streets outside, but without their spiked helmets, of course, or their splendid blue tunics with the gold trim.

War! How exciting it was. Our own German soldiers from the Fifth Infantry Regiment had swarmed into our sleepy little town, determined to take on the French who lived just on the other side of the Rhine River.

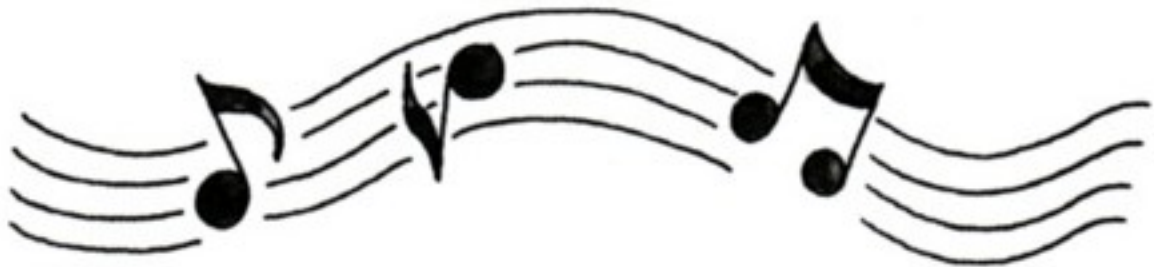
And that sparkling river flowed so close to our front door I could have tossed a stone from my window and seen the ripples it made in the water.

I didn't care two pins about our Otto von Bismarck

THE HEARTBEAT OF A DINOSAUR

I always knew when Miss Jazzie was telling a lie. She would look down instead of into my eyes as if she were afraid I could see into her soul where she kept all those secrets. Then, when she gave me an answer with those shaky lying hands, I knew. Her lips were tight as if she didn't want me to read them at all.

Why do you like this music so much, Jazzie? I signed once, watching her rock to the music one morning while she was making breakfast. I didn't remember what music was like, but I had felt the tape player pulsing and I had seen Miss Jazzie close her eyes and swing around while it was playing.



It reminds me of when I was young, she replied, *signing with her hands wet from peeling potatoes, and when I could swing dance like nobody's business.*

Why was it nobody's business?

THE HEARTBEAT OF A DINOSAUR

She tilted her head and smiled at me. *I guess because I was the best there was, Babycakes.*

Can you still dance like that? I couldn't yet tell if I was pushing her further than she wanted to go. But I hadn't let that stop me before and I didn't let it stop me now.

She looked downwards, setting down a potato mid-peel, and her mouth got tight. *Sweets, I danced with the dinosaurs. Don't see none of them 'round, do ya? So you ain't gonna see me doin' no dance.*

Even though I couldn't hear the words, I knew she was angry by the tensing muscles in her face and the way she narrowed her lips. Angry, I guessed, because she missed those memories. She sensed my disappointment. *'Less of course you find me some dinosaurs,* she added, her eyes twinkling for just a second.

Of course she was surprised when I came home with it the next day, but I was pretty sure she'd known that I wouldn't let that twinkle disappear. I'd picked it up at a thrift store on the way home from school. It had been two dollars, but the lady at the counter gave it to me for one, she said, because I was smiling. Jazzie always did say that I could charm December into skipping Christmas.

Sewing!

No one could hate it more than Dina Kirk.

Endless stitches, buttonholes, darts. Since Dina was tiny she has worked in the Kirks' dressmaking business, where the sewing machine is a cranky member of the family.

When Dina, thirteen years old in 1870, leaves her small town in Germany to join her uncle's family in Brooklyn, she turns her back on dressmaking. Never again! But her search for work leads her right back to the sewing machine. Why did she ever leave home? Here she is, still with a needle and thread—and homesick to boot.

Dina didn't know she could be so homesick, but she didn't know she could be so brave, either. In her new country, she finds herself standing up to an epidemic, then a fire. She didn't know she could grow so close to her new family, or to Johann, the young man from the tailor's shop. And she didn't know that sewing would reveal her own wonderful talent, and her future.

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