



Jasper

THE DRUMMIN' BOY

Written and illustrated by
MARGARET TAYLOR

"When our children grow up I want them to be somebody," Mrs. Anderson said to Mr. Anderson. "So, I think Donna Jean should take dancing, and Jasper should take piano lessons."

Although Momma wanted Jasper to be a concert pianist, he wanted to be a hot-drummer, like his idol, Stomp King. He tried hard with the piano—he plunked and plinked and plunked and plinked, but he pounded so hard that all he did was make the piano sound like a drum.

The contrary desires of children are always a source of worry to their parents, but Miss Taylor understands and sympathizes with both, as she shows in this hilarious book. You will have to read it to see who won.

Maryna Burroughs

6/12/08

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by Margaret Taylor



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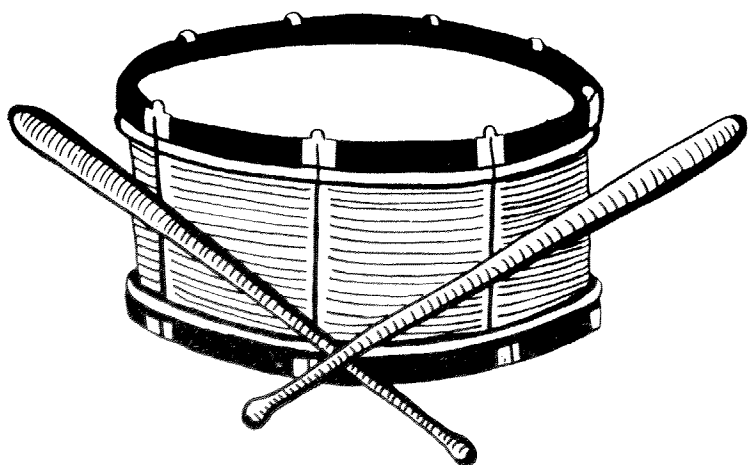
*Lithographed in the United States of America
by the Reehl Litho Company*

*To my daughter Gayle
and all the others*

To my daughter Gayle

and all the others

JASPER THE DRUMMIN' BOY



“WHEN our children grow up I want them to be somebody,” Mrs. Anderson said to Mr. Anderson. “So, I think Donna Jean should take dancing, and Jasper should take piano lessons.”

“That’s right,” said Mr. Anderson. “But I don’t know about Jasper playing the piano.”

“Some day he will be a great concert pianist,” Mrs. Anderson said with a dreamy look in her eyes.

And so, from that day on, every Monday after school Jasper had to go over to Mr. Patton’s school of music for his piano lesson.

Mr. Patton wore thick horn-rimmed glasses and was always tapping out time. “I bet he taps time in his sleep,” Jasper thought.

"Now look here, Jasper Anderson," Mr. Patton would say. "You don't at all have your mind on what you are doing. Keep your eyes on this piano and not on that drum over in the corner. Now let's try this all over again. One . . . two . . . three . . . one . . . two . . . three. . . ." Jasper stared obediently at the piano keys.

He tried hard. He plunked and plinked and plunked and plinked. Down went the white keys, and up went the black keys. Down went the black keys, and up went the white keys over and over again.

"Jasper Anderson," Mr. Patton said as he took off his horn-rimmed glasses. "Why on earth do you pound so hard? You make this piano sound like a drum."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Patton," Jasper said.

"James Anderson," Mrs. Anderson said. "I wish you would speak to Jasper. Mr. Patton says that he doesn't pay enough attention to his music lessons. It's a shame."

"I'll speak to him again, Alice," Mr. Anderson said in a hopeless voice as he looked up at the Army



band picture over the piano. "Maybe you should have let him take drumming lessons in the first place."

“Jasper is born to be a concert pianist, nothing else but,” said Mrs. Anderson, who had played the piano in her father’s church when she was young. “If it hadn’t been for you giving him the drum for Christmas that time he might be able to keep his mind on the piano now. It’s all your fault.”

“But Alice,” Mr. Anderson said. “Didn’t I lock the drum away? Don’t I take away every pair of sticks that he gets? How was I to know that he would be marked for life? I thought a drum would be just the thing for a boy.”

“That’s true. But it’s no need for a boy to go clean drum-crazy. Well, I’m sure he didn’t get it from my side of the family.”

“I guess my side will have to take the blame,” Mr. Anderson said. “He really didn’t steal it, you know.”

“James Anderson, are you taking that boy’s side? The first thing you know, the neighbors will be complaining and you know how hard it is to find a place to live. Now you do something about Jasper.”

“I’ll see about him, Alice,” Mr. Anderson said as he folded his newspaper to the sports page.



On Sunday Mr. and Mrs. Anderson and Jasper and Donna Jean dressed and went to service at Mount Olive Church. Jasper had made up his mind to be good so that he could go to hear Stomp King, who was playing at the Regal that week. It was easier to be good if you were alone. When Momma and Papa and Donna Jean turned in to their seat he marched on past, up to an empty pew right next to the front, and sat down by himself.

Jasper sat as quiet as a mouse while Reverend

Elder preached the sermon. The sun streaming in through the colored glass windows was like a rainbow, blue and green and red and yellow. It looked as if Reverend Elder were standing in a garden with all those flowers and ferns around the pulpit. Reverend Elder was brown and plump and his gray hair came down over his ears. Up above the choir loft was the large picture of Jesus in the garden. Why did Jesus look so sad? And why didn't he have a haircut? And why did he wear those long robes?

At last the sermon was over. The gospel choir in their black robes and white collars had stood up. It was hard to keep still when they started to sing.

Before Jasper knew it, he was drumming with his feet on the pew ahead, right along with the choir. "Joshua fit the battle of Jericho, Jericho, Jericho." Jasper kept up with them. He could see the walls tumbling, tumbling down.

The deep bass singers began to fidget in the back row. The heavy alto singers looked from side to side. The high tenor singers looked at the bass singers as if it were their fault. The bass singers frowned



at the sopranos. The sopranos glared at the altos and the choir director scowled at all of them.

He had stopped his directing to listen. Now motioning the singers to hum, he turned and looked across the pulpit at Jasper, who was still drumming away.

Reverend Elder looked at Jasper, with his eyebrows raised. Mrs. Anderson, in the eighth row back, frowned and nudged Mr. Anderson. Donna Jean was giggling.

The first thing Jasper knew Papa had come up and taken a firm hold of his shoulder and was sitting down beside him with a look which meant there would be no showfare to hear and see Stomp King at the Regal. Then Jasper saw that a lot of people were half-standing to see what was happening and he scrunched away down in his seat, as far out of sight as he could get.

When service was over Reverend Elder made his way down to Mr. and Mrs. Anderson. He looked at Jasper. "Ahem," he cleared his throat. "Mr. and Mrs. Anderson," he said. "You will just have to do something about Jasper. You heard how he got the choir all mixed up in their timing. Either he will

have to stop that drumming or you'll have to leave him at home."

"Yes, Reverend Elder," Mrs. Anderson apologized. "I can promise you it won't happen again."

"Listen, Jasper," Mr. Anderson said. "I'll take care of you for embarrassing your mother and me like that."

"Aw, Papa," Jasper said. "I was only helping Joshua to tumble the walls down."

When they got home Mr. Anderson had a very serious talk with Jasper about what had happened in church. Jasper was truly sorry. He didn't like to remember it.

"I guess I forgot where I was, Papa," he said humbly.

"So that you won't forget next time," Mr. Anderson said, "I think it will be best for you to stay at home this afternoon. You won't need showfare."

"I won't need it, Papa," Jasper said, as visions of Stomp King faded.

"After dinner," Mr. Anderson said, "you may play in the back yard for a while."

"Thank you, Papa," Jasper said.

Jasper was in the back yard now. He was thinking deep to himself. This old world makes me mad, he thought. Every time . . . Every time I get a pair of sticks they disappear. Somebody takes them. Maybe it's Donna Jean. I bet it's Papa who takes them. "Well," he said aloud, "I'm going to make myself one more pair of sticks and nobody will take these."

He poked around the yard for a few minutes with his hands deep in his pockets. There should be some stray wood around. He walked over to the gate. Good! There was a small board. He picked it up and weighed it in his hands. "This will do if I split it," he said. He looked around. The basement door was open. Mr. Jellife wouldn't mind if he went in there and split one little board with the hatchet. Mr. Jellife wasn't there. Jasper came out balancing the two pieces of wood, one in each hand. He felt in his pocket for his scoutknife.

Jasper climbed up on the fence close to the shade tree and started to whittle first on one and then on the other. Zip . . . zipp zipp. . . . The shavings began to fly fast in all directions. It wasn't long before the sticks began to take shape. He balanced them again.



They were just right for flipping too. Then he began to smooth them off. If he only had a piece of sandpaper. . . .

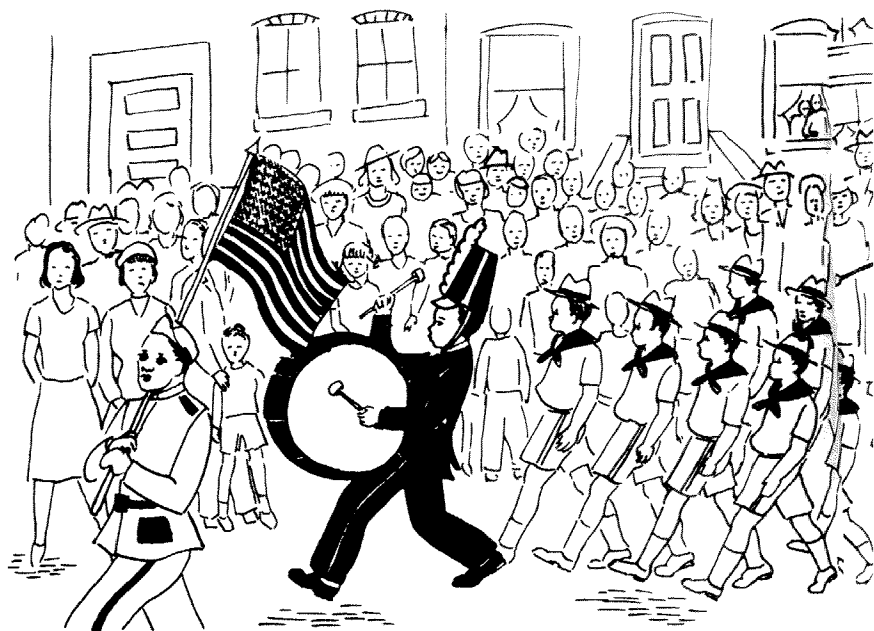
Jasper began to think about his best friends, Butch and Ike. He and Butch and Ike were the only members of the Three X's. They were the only ones in the whole world who knew the supreme secret handshake. Butch was fat and jolly and never got angry. Ike was tall and thin. He had high cheekbones and a tuft of hair over his forehead that stood straight up. It made him look like the African warrior who sat in Jasper's geography book beating a drum. Jasper wished that Momma would let him grow a fan like that but Momma had said, "No, Jasper Anderson, you are not an African warrior."

Jasper wondered what Butch and Ike were doing now. I bet they've gone to the show, he said to himself. I wish I was with them. I would love to be seeing Stomp King at the Regal right this minute. I must make these sticks curve like this. I hope Butch and Ike haven't forgotten about Saturday. I wish . . . I wish that I lived back in history. I could be that drummer boy in the Revolutionary War. I would be a Minute Man. They don't take boys in the Army today. If I was seventeen years old I could join the Navy like Ike's brother did. They have drummers in the Navy, too. I wish I was seventeen.

Jasper balanced the sticks again. These were going to be good. He flipped them in the air a couple of times and caught them the way Stomp King had done in the newsreel. Stomp King was some drummer. He could beat a drum with his eyes shut. He could do all sorts of flips and stunts and he never missed a beat.

Someday . . . someday Jasper would be a great drummer like Stomp King and then Momma would be proud of him. She would be sorry that she had made him practice the piano. She would be sorry then. Papa would let him have Grandpa's Army





medal. He would wear it in a grand parade down South Parkway. The neighborhood boys would boast about how they had lived in the same block with Jasper Anderson, the outstanding drummer.

Jasper looked proudly at the sticks he had made. "These are fine drumsticks," he said. "I think I will warm them up to take the newness off for Saturday." He began first a slow rhythm, da da da, da da da, and then he picked up speed, faster, faster, like a train right there on the backyard fence. This was a streamline train and he was the engineer.



“Hey you, Jasper,” Mr. Jellife said as he came around the side of the building. “Get down off that fence with all that noise. And pick up all that trash you put there, too.”

“All right, Mr. Jellife,” Jasper said as he climbed down from the fence. “This train won’t go no further.” He began to pick up the shavings.

“What’s that last you said?” asked Mr. Jellife.

“My train has to stop right here.”

“Boy, who’s talking about a train?” Mr. Jellife shook his head. “That boy Jasper is a pain.”



With sticks in hand Jasper walked slowly up the stairs to the second-floor back porch. He sat down in the swing and began going to and fro. He looked at his sticks. I wonder what kind of sound these would make on the porch rail, he thought. He began. This time he was a machine-gunner. Da da da da da da . . . I got him that time . . . Now I'll clean out that nest of snipers up there. He aimed the flying sticks at the storage box in the corner. Da da da da da da da da. . .

"Hey you, Jasper," Mrs. Clendenning, the third-floor neighbor, called down. "Stop that drumming on the porch rail. Do you want to wear all the paint off of it?"

"All right, Mrs. Clendenning," Jasper said. "I was trying to clean out that nest of snipers."

"Who said anything about snipers? That boy Jasper is a card," Mrs. Clendenning said as she went into her kitchen.

Through the screen door Jasper could see Momma come into the kitchen. He quickly shoved the drumsticks inside his shirt.

"Jasper! Jasper! Come this very minute and practice your piano lesson. I could weep every time I think about how you acted in church this morning."

"I'm coming, Momma," he said, and he kicked at the garbage can.

Jasper walked slowly through the house to the parlor. He plopped himself down on the piano stool and started to go through his finger exercises. Plink plank plunk! Plink plank plunk! Plinketty planketty plunk plunk! His fingers thumped heavily along the keys. I wish this was a drum, he thought, and he looked up at the picture that hung on the striped

wall over the piano. It was a colored photograph of Grandpa on Papa's side and the company band from the last war. Grandpa was the one in the center with the big drum. If you looked real close you could see the medal that he won for bravery. "You want to try to be like him," Papa had said. Then Papa had told him about the medal down in the bottom of the trunk that would belong to him whenever he did a worthy deed. He had tried very hard to do a worthy deed but he always seemed to have bad luck. The main reason was his drumming. But then, Grandpa was a drummer and it couldn't be wrong to want to be like Grandpa. Most people didn't understand, but Papa did.

Jasper looked at the picture for a long time. It looked as if Grandpa were smiling at him. The other musicians were smiling too. Grandpa crooked his finger and beckoned to Jasper. The next thing Jasper knew he was walking right into the picture, through the glass and frame and all.

There they stood holding their instruments and smiling. Jasper knew the names of some of the instruments. The long skinny black one was the clarinet. The shiny fat one that bulged at the end was



the saxophone. The one that went around in a coil and flared out at the end like a bell was the French horn. There were shiny tinkling cymbals and long wailing trombones. There were great grandfather horns that coiled around and had big bell mouths. And most exciting of all, there were the drums. The big bass was in the middle and there were two smaller snare-drums on each side. Behind the big bass drum was Grandpa. There were other instruments but Jasper didn't know the names of them.

"Why hello, Jasper," the man with the bugle said. "We have been expecting a visit from you for a long time."

"Now that you have come at last, welcome," the bandmaster said, bowing low with a wave of his baton. The other musicians crowded around Jasper.

"I am very happy to be here," Jasper said. "Where I live, folks just don't seem to appreciate a boy like me." And he told them about the fuss folks were always making and the punishment they gave him just because he wanted to get in a little drum practice.

The musicians shook their heads in sympathy. The bandmaster said, "No sir, they don't have any



appreciation for a boy that's born to be a real drummer."

"This boy is just a chip off the old block," Grandpa said as he came forward proudly. He hoisted Jasper up in his arms and gave him a big hug. Jasper squirmed away. "What's the matter, son?"

"Your medal! Grandpa, it hurts!"

"Oh, I'm sorry," Grandpa said. "I'll fix that." He took the medal off and slipped it into his coat pocket. Jasper followed it with his eyes.

"Didn't they give it to you for bravery? That's what I told the boys in the neighborhood."

"It's really nothing much," Grandpa said modestly.

"It's nothing much at all," the bandmaster said. "They just gave it to him for wiping out almost singlehanded an enemy company in the Argonne Forest. That's all."

"Gee, I'm proud of you, Grandpa," Jasper said.

"Let's have some music," the bandmaster said. "Jasper, if your grandpa doesn't mind, you can try out his drums."

"It is a pleasure, son," Grandpa said, as he handed his sticks to Jasper and began to adjust the drums. "Let's see how much of an Anderson you are."

"You are the best Grandpa Anderson in all the world," Jasper said.

"Everyone ready?" asked the bandmaster. "Let's try 'The Stars and Stripes Forever.' One . . . two . . . three. . . ." The band swung into action.



Jasper could hear the moan of the clarinet, the baby bear voice of the flute, the mamma bear voice of the French horn, and the papa bear voice of the tuba. He could hear the lonesome wail of the long trombones and ever so often the sprinkling tinkling of the cymbals. And throughout the whole piece *he* was rumbling the drums. Boom boom boom, rub a dub dub, boom boom boom, rub a dub dub. These drums were wonderful. Just as he was starting to end the piece with a great cannon-like rumble, he felt someone shaking him by the shoulder.

Jasper opened his sleepy brown eyes to see Mrs. Anderson standing over him.

"Jasper," she said, "I sent you up here to practice your lesson and here you are fast asleep making a lot of noise rumbling these keys. Your father will hear about this."

"Aw, Momma," Jasper said as he rubbed his eyes and glanced toward the picture, "I didn't have a chance to tell them thanks or good-bye."

"Boy, what on earth are you talking about? Here, I want you to go to the store for me right now and hurry back. Don't you stop on the way."

"Yes, Momma," Jasper said.

Jasper walked slowly out of Room 303 and down the corridor to the steps that led to the outside door. Mrs. Ellis had made him stay after school again and this time she had written a long note for him to take home to his mother. He was so sad that he didn't even feel like sliding down the banister. There wasn't a soul around, either, and he could have taken two or three slides. He went out into the yard, and Butch and Ike were waiting for him. They were true pals. They never let a fellow down.

"What did she do to you?" Butch asked.

"Oh, she gave me a note to take home, that's all," Jasper muttered.

"Did she stick it?" Ike asked.

"Yes, she stuck it. But I can just about guess what she wrote in it," Jasper said.

"Will you get a whipping?" both boys asked.

"I guess I will," Jasper said.

When they reached Indiana Avenue Jasper had to turn off.

"Say, don't forget about Saturday. Are we still going to do it?"

"Sure we are," said Butch.

"You fellows got yours?" Jasper asked.

"Sure. What about you?"

"I'll have mine ready," Jasper said.

The Three X's shook the secret handshake and went their ways.



When he reached the big redstone building in the middle of the forty-six-hundred block, Jasper turned in and climbed to the second-floor flat. As he edged in the door his mother marched up to meet him.

"Donna Jean brought me the news about your acting up in school today, Jasper Anderson. What is it this time?"

"The teacher sent a note," Jasper said as he handed it to her.

Mrs. Anderson tore open the envelope and read the note. It said: "Dear Mrs. Anderson. Your son Jasper is a very smart child in his studies but there is one thing that he does that I just cannot put up with any longer. He finishes his work and while the others are working quietly he starts drumming all over everything. When he drums with sticks I take them away from him. The next thing I know he is drumming with his pencil. When I take that away he uses his fingers. He even uses his feet. Will you and Mr. Anderson please try to do something with him? I give up."

Mrs. Anderson folded the note slowly and said sternly: "Jasper, this is too much. Your father will



take care of you when he gets home. You'd better stay in the house the rest of the afternoon."

An hour later Jasper heard Butch and Ike whistling for him downstairs. He waved sadly to them from the window and went off to the parlor and sat down on the piano stool. He looked up at Grandpa Anderson and that made him feel better.

The thing that Jasper liked best about Butch and Ike was that they never minded hearing him tell about what a fine drummer Grandpa was, or the medal for bravery which he had received.

"Gee, Jasper," Butch would say. "Your Grandpa really must have been a great soldier, getting a medal like that."

"He sure must have been a great musician, too," Ike would say.

"I bet he was better than Stomp King even," Butch would say.

"Grandpa was truly great," Jasper would say.

The week passed slowly for Jasper. But he endured it. After all, Saturday was only a few days away now. A very important meeting of the Three X's was called for Friday after school in Ike's basement. All X's were pledged to be there on their word of honor. "Remember," Ike had said, "come equipped."



It was Saturday noon and Mrs. Anderson had just come in from doing her marketing. She had a bulging shopping bag in her hand. Donna Jean was struggling with a package almost bigger than she. Mrs. Anderson waved to Mr. Jellife.

“Have you seen Jasper, Mr. Jellife?”

“I saw him a while back hammering on something in the basement.”

"If you see him, please tell him that I want him."

"If I see him I'll send him straight to you, Mrs. Anderson."

"Thanks," said Mrs. Anderson. She unlocked the kitchen door.

"Whew!" she said as she plumped the bags down on the kitchen table. "Now for that cake."

She slipped into her house apron, put the groceries away, and set out the ingredients for her cake. It was to be a chocolate one. It was to celebrate the Andersons' tenth wedding anniversary. Mr. Anderson was very fond of chocolate cake. It would be a lovely little party with a few close friends. While she was sifting the flour there came a knock at the door.

"See who it is, Donna Jean. My hands are full of flour."

"Yes, Mommie. It's Mrs. Jenkins, Mommie."

The first-floor neighbor bustled in. "How do, Mrs. Anderson. I just ran up to see if Jasper has finished with my washtub."

"Your washtub! Did Jasper borrow your washtub?"

"Jasper did just that."



“Well, I never! That boy! That boy! Mrs. Jenkins, if you will just be a little patient I’ll see that he brings it right back.”

“That will be fine,” Mrs. Jenkins said. She threw up her hands as she went out the door. “This younger generation!” she said.

“If that Jasper isn’t the beatin’est boy I ever saw!” Mrs. Anderson said as she broke the eggs into a bowl. “What on earth would he want with Mrs. Jenkins’ washtub?” And Mrs. Anderson started churning the egg beater.

Brr-ring! Brr-ring! Brr-ring!

"Now it's the telephone," Mrs. Anderson said, wiping her hands and going into the hall to answer it.

"Hello?"

It was Mrs. Spotser.

"What? You need your scrubpail? You say that Jasper borrowed it? Oh, Mrs. Spotser, I didn't know that he did . . . No . . . Well, I'll see that he brings it right back . . . I'm really very sorry . . . Yes, I will . . . Good-bye." She clicked the receiver back into place.

"Mommie, what's Jasper into now?"

"Don't even mention his name. Just imagine! Borrowing things from the neighbors and not returning them. Wait until he gets home!"

She lit the oven. The batter was about ready now. Where were those cake tins? Mrs. Anderson looked high on the pantry shelf. They were not there. She looked in the bottom drawer of the cabinet. They were not there. Where could they be? In the bottom of the stove? No, not there. Mrs. Anderson was getting a little bit warm. She wiped her hands across her forehead.



“What are you looking for, Mommie?”

“My new cake tins. The ones I bought last week.
Where in the world . . . ?”

“If you let me lick the batter dish I’ll tell you
where they are.”

“Listen, child, if you know where those pans are,
tell me this minute. Tell me!”

“Jasper will call me a tattletale if I tell.”

“Where are those cake tins?”

“Jasper borrowed all three of them.”

"This is the end," Mrs. Anderson said, and she was very angry. "Mrs. Jenkins' washtub! Mrs. Spotser's scrubpail! And now my new tins! I'll see that he returns those things right now!"

Her brown eyes flashed as she put a plate over the batter and took off her apron. She went out the front door with Donna Jean following.

"Whatcha gonna do to Jasper, Mommie?" Donna Jean asked.

"I'm going to see that he returns the things he borrows," Mrs. Anderson said, and her lips were in a very straight line.

She rapped at Mrs. Spotser's door.

"Follow me if you want your scrubpail."

She rapped at Mrs. Jenkins' door.

"Come along if you want your washtub."

Mrs. Clendenning, Mrs. Amos, and Mrs. Tolliver opened their doors to see what the commotion was.

"Come along if you have time," Mrs. Anderson called.

"We'll be coming," they answered.

Mr. Jellife was downstairs mopping the vestibule. "If you're looking for Jasper, I hear he's up on Forty Seventh and South Parkway playing music



with Butch and Ike. He borrowed my best broom-handle.”

“Street corner band indeed! Just follow me, Mr. Jellife, for your broomhandle.” Mrs. Anderson’s lips were in a very, very straight line now. “After all the money I have spent giving him piano lessons, here he is drumming on a street corner!”

Down the street they went. Mrs. Anderson walked in front. Then came Mrs. Spotser and Mrs. Jenkins. Next came Mrs. Amos, Mrs. Tolliver, and Mrs. Clendenning. Mr. Jellife and Donna Jean brought up the rear.



When the neighborhood boys saw Mrs. Anderson and all the neighbors, they joined the parade, too. On the corner Mrs. Ellis, Jasper's teacher, stood



talking to Reverend Elder from Mount Olive. They noticed the little army led by Mrs. Anderson and decided to follow curiously after them.



A crowd of people were standing on Forty Seventh and South Parkway patting with their feet and snapping their fingers.

“Oh, play it!” one man said.

“How’s that for a homemade guitar? It’s the funniest thing I ever saw,” a lady laughed.

“Children of today really have imagination,” an old man said.



“Look at that drum contraption,” a big boy said. The street voices blended in with the sounds coming from the center of the circle. “These boys are good. . . . The fat one blows that jug as if he was playing a million-dollar horn. . . . The skinny one plucks his three-string homemade box as if it was Leadbelly’s twelve-string guitar. . . . The one with the drum has got Stomp King down to a T. . . .”

Mrs. Anderson and her army drew closer. Ike's guitar whined a steady twang twang twang. Voop ... voop ... voop went Butch as he puffed his cheeks in and out. Jasper's big brown eyes sparkled and his face was crinkled by a wide smile. His hands clenched the sticks lightly but firmly. His arm looked like a windmill as he put his whole heart into the drumming. Boom boom boom boom, roared Mrs. Jenkins' washtub. Thump te thump te thump, echoed Mrs. Spotser's scrubpail. Zing zing zang zing zang zang zing, sang Mrs. Anderson's cake tins as they dangled merrily from Mr. Jellife's broom-handle.

Every so often Jasper would toss the sticks high in the air, clap his hands and then catch the sticks in perfect time, like Stomp King. Jasper was drumming as he never had before. If Grandpa could only see him now, he would be proud.

Mrs. Anderson and her army pushed themselves right into the center of the crowd.

"There's my washtub!" Mrs. Jenkins said as she noticed the dents in it.

"There's my scrubpail!" Mrs. Spotser said. "It's ruined!"





“My broomhandle won’t be any good with all those nails in it,” Mr. Jellife said.

“My new cake tins!” Mrs. Anderson said as she marched right up to Jasper. “Jasper Anderson! You stop your racket this very minute! Borrowing other people’s property! Drumming on the street! You are a disgrace to the Anderson family.”

“That’s his mother,” someone said.



"Whatcha gonna do to Jasper, Mommie?" Donna Jean asked.

Jasper felt like sinking through the sidewalk.

"Gee, Mrs. Anderson," Butch said. "It wasn't his fault."

"It was our fault," Ike said. "It was my idea."

The crowd began to giggle. Mrs. Ellis and Reverend Elder didn't even look sorry. Jasper's big brown button eyes slowly filled with water. He tried not to cry in front of all those people.

There was a flurry in the crowd. The people stopped looking at Jasper and looked at someone else. Jasper felt relieved. He brushed his tears on his sleeve. Even Momma had turned away too.

The people began talking, all at once.

"It's Stomp King!"

"Yes, Stomp King! The famous bandleader!"

"He was listening to them all the time."

"He's the greatest drummer in the business."

Stomp King pushed forward into the circle. He was dressed in the latest fashion and had sleek hair. Butch and Ike stared at him with their mouths wide open. Jasper stood rooted to the pavement with his head down in shame. He had wanted to see Stomp King, but he hadn't wanted the great drummer to see him like this.

"Good afternoon, Ma'm. Is he your boy?" Stomp King asked.

"Yes, and he is no prize package," Mrs. Anderson snapped.

"On the contrary, Ma'm, you have here a boy of rare talent," Stomp King said. "Of very rare talent. As a matter of fact, I think he has the makings of a great drummer."



Jasper's heart began to thump louder than he had made the washtub thump. He stole a glance up at Stomp King. He looked at his mother. The thin angry line of her lips was disappearing.

"Do you really think he has talent, Mr. er—King?"

"I certainly do, Ma'm," Stomp King said. "Has he ever taken any lessons?"

"Oh, he takes lessons, but not exactly on the drum."

"By all means he should have lessons on the drum, too," Stomp King said. "And another thing, Mrs. er—er—"

"Anderson," Jasper's mother said. "Mrs. James Anderson."

"One other thing, Mrs. Anderson. If it will be all right with you and the other boys' parents, I should like for them to be my special guests on the stage at the afternoon show tomorrow." Stomp King pulled some tickets out of his pocket. "Do you think it can be arranged, Ma'm?"

Mrs. Anderson thought for a minute. "Well—yes, I think it can be arranged . . . I'm sure it can be arranged. Yes, I'll get in touch with the other boys' parents too."



“That’s wonderful, Ma’m. Here are tickets for the boys and for yourself and a few friends. This boy is going to make you very proud some day.” As he turned to leave he shook hands with the boys. “I will be expecting you tomorrow, fellows. And you, little drummer, I’ll let you try out my special drums.”

“Oh, Mr. King! Thanks!” Jasper squealed.

“Gee, sir! Gee!” Butch and Ike said.

The crowd began to dwindle and go their ways. Mrs. Anderson’s little army reassembled. The procession started back home. The neighborhood boys ran on ahead. First came Jasper carrying his drum contraption and Mrs. Anderson walking proudly beside him. Jasper was smiling a big wide smile and Mrs. Anderson was smiling too. Then came Butch with his jug and Ike with his guitar. Butch and Ike were smiling big wide smiles. They were followed by Mrs. Jenkins and Mrs. Spotser, who were followed by Mrs. Tolliver, Mrs. Amos, and Mrs. Clendenning. Each of them was smiling a big wide smile. Next came Mrs. Ellis and the pastor from Mount Olive. They were smiling big wide smiles.





Last of all came Mr. Jellife and Donna Jean, and they were smiling too.

When they arrived at the red stone building,



there was Mr. Anderson in front, talking to some neighbors. He was smiling too and looking very proud.