ForeWord Reviews

The Music Teacher
Barbara Hall
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A sense of doom overshadows this book from the very first paragraph. Pearl Swain was neither pretty nor popular as a child, yet she showed some musical gifts and was given violin lessons by a school friend's mother. The lessons ended when the friend decided that she could no longer tolerate Pearl in her house. Pearl's parents took away her violin. One fall, she found her father burning leaves. In the center of one burning pile lay her violin. Her life didn't get any better from there.

Music is life in this novel by Barbara Hall, author of previous adult and juvenile fiction and writer for television shows like *Judging Amy*, *Joan of Arcadia*, and *I'll Fly Away*. Hall lives in Los Angeles; her portraits of the city and its inhabitants are spot on, especially the musicians that work with Pearl. These guys dream a lot and argue a good game, but they're just not quite good enough. They get occasional session work, but not a philharmonic first chair, and not stardom. They're just talented enough to teach.

Pearl's life is drab: she lives in a trailer park, her cat ran away, and she is still in love with the husband who used to look at her like she was a spot on the carpet. Sometimes a music teacher finds a truly gifted student. Into Pearl's sphere comes Hallie. "Will I teach her at all?" Pearl asks. "Will I invest myself?…Once you have made the decision," she explains, "nothing can stop you. Because it is no longer about the student. Now it is about the teacher. The teacher makes a choice to live her ambitions through a person other than herself. To invest in your student is in many ways to let go of your own dreams." There's an old saying (which Hall does not quote): Those that can't do, teach.

Barbara Ardinger