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The Prelude

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The Prelude

Gene Davis

The murmur just beyond the curtain was enough to set the young musician on edge, even after all of these years. Fourteen alive, six practicing his craft, four performing on a large scale such as this. His nervous jitters ruefully reminded him of his human state, that he was more than just a body attached to the cello in front of him. It dwarfed him, truly, taking on a life of its own. After all, its sweet groan was what the gathered crowd had come for—to see, to hear, to *taste* the ascension and descension of notes, a climbing from Heaven to Hell and back again. He was naught but the messenger of God in this scenario, a pale boy that they would soon forget once the music started. The curtain began to rise, the audience hushing as they were cast into darkness. He prayed that he could be what they needed—or that, at least, he could show it to them.

As the bright lights began to shine in his eyes, beaming their uncomfortable warmth down on him, he breathed in the dust. He let it coat him, transform him. And then, he began to play.

Bach's Suite No.6 in D Major, I. Prelude.

A technical, specific title that tells the listener nothing about the piece, save for that it is a prelude. An opening; a beginning. Through it, perhaps they can find a new start of their own. Or perhaps they would simply sleep, lulled by the singing of the strings. The weakness of their flesh would be put to the test against the willingness of their spirit in the warm velvet seats and dim lights, serenaded by a stranger. All attention was on the cello, and they could shed their daily chains, and simply be.

The musician found himself halfway through the song before he noticed, having long committed this piece to muscle memory. He wished, idly, that he could return to the beginning, and start over. It was his favorite part, and he felt that he hadn't enjoyed it enough while it had lasted.

He hadn't always been a cold creature.

He hadn't even lived here in Moscow until a few years ago.

He wasn't sure he would ever grow used to the cacophony of traffic, nor the casual, indifferent cruelty that shrouded every changing face of the city. Every building, every person, every inch of the air stifled him, their shadows encroaching onto his spirit entirely.

He preferred to climb into the cello's warm, wooden core, to hide away from it all. Through it, he found salvation. Music was the closest thing man could get to a tangible God, and he was its messenger, dragging the bow against the catgut strings like a knife to the throat of a sacrificial lamb. He had long found that his pallid humanity had no place in this realm of the divine, and thus, he suffocated it whenever he could.

Still, something about this song made him remember. Unwittingly, he'd become one of the audience, beholding the heavenly groan and letting it take him beyond his mortal flesh. And from that, there was no returning.

His own prelude was that of whistling winds in the clambering, old shutters of his house, tightly wrapped in threadbare clothing and quilts crafted by his mother. It was the bubbling laugh of his little sister, Yevgeniya, or Shenechka, as they called her. It was borscht

and pirozhki—of which they pretended the filling was beef—on Christmas Eve, with a crackling, roaring fire, as Papa plucked a few notes on the old, out of tune piano with his rough, worker's hands. It was hoping that his elder sister, Avdotya, would lead them in a hymn with her melodious voice before bed, but knowing that her bashfulness would overcome her. It was correctly guessing that his brother, Vasily, would take up for her immediately, singing in his tone-deaf, just-too-loud manner until everyone was singing and laughing.

It was more than enough, and it was long gone. A lone note reverberating in the packed auditorium, of which all the faces were obscured, and cold. The applause roared in the young musician's ears. For him or the cello, he could not be sure.