

Janelle Kelso

The Violinist

The chill of the morning city air mirrors the harsh tempest of the winter night. Light falls onto the slate buildings, reflecting from windows and igniting a sea of concrete angles and linear structures. Time-poor souls stride tenaciously with their heads low, purposefully blocking distractions from the outside world. Some are connected to a device, an instrument secured to either their ear or their palm, and some are connected to leather cases, handles clenched in their fists. As if belonging to the same species, each adorns tailored and formal attire, passing in an unplanned unison. Yet, beyond the surge of modern life sits a man silently observing without prospect, his back pressed up against a cold, bleak, city wall.

My chin nestles deeper into my scarf, curling further inside myself as another day breaks. I bow my head, diverting my anonymous gaze from the heavy pound of determined footsteps. No one ever notices, I'm sure. Rather, no one ever lingers. I rub the tips of my fingers that poke out from holes in my gloves, attempting to breathe life and warmth back into them.

“Mama, why is that man sitting there like that?” The voice of a young boy filling my ears.

“Hush,” the mother hisses. “Don’t say such things where he can hear you, Benjamin.”

“But he looks like he’s sleeping,” the little boy persists. “Why doesn’t he sleep in his bed, Mama?”

I try to give a faint smile of understanding, while further shielding my face from their direction.

“Hush,” the mother repeats before their sounds fade and the faint, rosy scent of her perfume is all that stays behind.

My Katerina loved roses. She would wear one every day, using it to tuck her wavy black hair behind her left ear. Her cheeks forever resembling that similar blushing glow. Each opening night she would sweetly kiss my forehead, whispering a soft prayer of good fortune.

Standing tall before an appreciative audience, my violin shone. The bow danced across the delicate strings creating a passionate, soulful sound. The constructed notes hung deeply in the air, resonating an ancient, untold story. My arm vigorously influences the bow, my body rapidly turning and twisting with the beauty of the music. My best friend and I were at one; performing recited melodies and impromptu harmonies that demanded to be painted vibrantly then and there. The endless crowd conjured a mighty roar, applauding the music that had defined what love was.

My reminiscences are short-lived, the ring of a man’s phone pulling me back into my frozen elderly body. Classical rhythms fill my mind once more, an escape from the rumbling echoes of hunger and the harsh wintry chill.

I think back to the days of being Ivan Petrov: proud and honoured. My violin and my Katerina were all I needed in life, and there was nothing I longed for more. My heart ached for that time, before the blistering flames that had taken my beloved and darling wife, my sight and my dearest friend; my soul.

My shoulders slump lower, depressed by the heavy guilt and eternal longing for the past. Resting my head on my deteriorated fingers, I wait; wearily.

I can sense when daylight has been sucked from the sky, falling prey to the enveloping darkness. It is not the lack of light, the shadows appearing throughout the streets. It is the hum of the time-poor slowing down, retreating to their homes and their families. The pace is

slow and tiring, until it is so still that only I remain.

I rise arthritically, standing tall once more. I tuck my imagined violin firmly and comfortably under my chin, a blessing to be reunited with such an old friend. Raising the bow, a calm smile warms my face, and a silent tune warms my soul.

Dancing once more, the fictional bow fills my eyes with coloured brush strokes and fills my ears with breath-taking notes, mounting and swelling higher and higher, until I am no longer anchored to the ground.

Silent to the looming walls of the bitter city, I play for Katerina.

I play for my soul.

I play to be free.