

The Luthier

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INT. LUTHIER'S SHOP

A small, skinny person runs about the shop, arms full of varying items: wood, tools, varnish, or whatever the LUTHIER shouts for. They are curled over what they are carrying to take up the least space possible.

The LUTHIER sits at a work table in the back of the shop. He is broad and muscular with large, callused hands and squinted eyes. He rarely looks up from his work, even when he shouts at the APPRENTICE.

A bell dings as CUSTOMER enters the shop.

LUTHIER
(shouting)
APPRENTICE! Get the door!

The APPRENTICE drops off their items and goes to the small desk at the front of the shop.

APPRENTICE
(softly)
Welcome...How may we help you?

CUSTOMER
My daughter wants to learn the violin.
I've heard great things about the
master here. I want to purchase an
instrument from him. My daughter
deserves only the best.

APPRENTICE
Do you have a referral?

CUSTOMER
I have the money, don't worry.

APPRENTICE
(softer)
I'm sorry, but to get a violin made,
you need a referral.

CUSTOMER
That's absurd! It's just a violin!

The LUTHIER gets up and stomps to the entrance.

LUTHIER

Just a violin?! The instruments I make are not *just* violins. They are music embodied, given form and placed only into the hands of the worthy.

The LUTHIER straightens up and glares down his nose.

LUTHIER

I have made violins for virtuosos and princes and traveled to countries you have never heard of. I don't see how you could possibly think *you* are worthy of one.

CUSTOMER

Unbelievable!

The CUSTOMER leaves the shop in a huff. The LUTHIER turns to the APPRENTICE, still glaring.

LUTHIER

I have one such client this week. I'll be leaving in the morning, likely before you rise, for three weeks.

(lip curls)

Oversee the shop as usual. Take all the orders and keep them organized. Don't let any thieves in. And don't forget to tell any of the regulars where I've gone.

APPRENTICE

Yes, master.

LUTHIER

Don't slack while I'm gone! I'll do a thorough check when I return!

APPRENTICE

Yes, master.

The LUTHIER has already gone back to his bench.

CUT TO:

INT. LUTHIER'S SHOP, MORNING

The APPRENTICE wakes up in their pallet near the workbench.

They stretch and get up, opening the windows. They pause to breathe in the fresh air. They open the front door and organize the front desk. They pull a comfortable chair to the desk, with effort, and sit.

Customers begin arriving. The APPRENTICE takes notes for each one, nodding along as the customers talk. There is a peaceful air in the shop. Time is shown passing by the light coming in the open windows. The day comes to an end and the APPRENTICE begins closing up.

A STRANGER enters, in a cloak with the hood pulled up, holding something awkwardly concealed beneath it.

APPRENTICE

Hello.

(pause)

What can I do for you?

STRANGER

I would like you to make me a violin.

The APPRENTICE pulls a fresh sheet of paper from the desk.

APPRENTICE

Very well. The LUTHIER only accepts customers with referrals. If you have one, please give me their details and yours so he--

The STRANGER puts hand on paper, stopping the APPRENTICE from writing

STRANGER

You misunderstand. I would like you to make me a violin.

APPRENTICE

(slowly lowers pen)

I am just the apprentice.

STRANGER

I know.

APPRENTICE

I do not make the violins.

STRANGER

(smiles, with lots of teeth)

I know.

APPRENTICE

Well. Then, please give me your
referral--

The STRANGER draws several shining, beautiful pieces of WOOD from under their cloak and laces them on the desk. The APPRENTICE stares at them, awed then runs a hand along the grain.

STRANGER

I would like you to make me a violin.

APPRENTICE

(shakes head)

I don't understand.

STRANGER

Listen.

APPRENTICE

To?

STRANGER

The wood.

The APPRENTICE gives the STRANGER a skeptical look, but they focus on the WOOD. Their eyes drift slowly closed and then MUSIC begins to play. The APPRENTICE snatches their hand back and the MUSIC stops.

STRANGER

You heard it.

APPRENTICE

(clutches hand to chest)

Yes.

STRANGER

The LUTHIER cannot do that.

(motions to room)

He makes an instrument, yes, but he does not bring to life the musician inside the wood. He cannot hear it playing before it's been born.

The APPRENTICE stares at the WOOD.

STRANGER

I would like you to make me a violin.

APPRENTICE

(softly)

Okay.

FADE TO:

INT. LUTHIER'S SHOP, EARLY MORNING

The APPRENTICE wakes up with the wood in their lap. They do not open the windows or the front door, nor do they settle at the desk. They sit at the LUTHIER'S workbench with the the STRANGER'S wood, listing to the MUSIC while they trace out the shape of the instrument.

APPRENTICE

(to the wood)

I have to finish quickly. The LUTHIER will return in three weeks.

The MUSIC turns playfully impatient.

APPRENTICE

(laughs)

Yes, yes, and you want to sing aloud. I know. You will, I'll make sure of it. Your songs are beautiful.

The MUSIC becomes satisfied and smug.

APPRENTICE

(sighs)

He won't approve of this, you know. If you're not finished or hidden when he returns, he'll want to take over. You're very beautiful and he will not be able to resist.

The MUSIC becomes angry.

APPRENTICE

I know. He would ruin you. I won't let him. You can trust me to finish *perfectly*.

(sighs)

That means I can't afford to rush though. You mustn't be rough or jagged when you are finally finished.

The MUSIC fades into contentedness.

FADE TO:

INT. LUTHIER'S SHOP, THREE WEEKS LATER, MORNING

The APPRENTICE wakes, blanket hiding the unfinished violin. The LUTHIER is already working at the bench. He doesn't greet the APPRENTICE when they get up, leaving the violin under the blankets.

APPRENTICE

(softly, to the violin)

I can only work at night now, while he's sleeping. We can't let him suspect anything.

The MUSIC softens to background noise.

LUTHIER

What did you say?

APPRENTICE

Nothing, master. Just getting to work.

LUTHIER

Good. About time.

The APPRENTICE glances at the violin and begins working with a sigh.

FADE TO:

INT. LUTHIER'S SHOP, NIGHT

The APPRENTICE sits on the floor, one small candle lit next to them. They carve the violin, slowly and quietly.

APPRENTICE

I know you want to be finished. But if we're too loud, the LUTHIER will wake and you will never be able to sing right. We must be careful.

The MUSIC becomes gentle and questioning.

APPRENTICE

(smiles)

You don't need to worry. I'm used to him. I'll catch up on sleep once you're finished and I'll survive the

scoldings until then. It is a small price to pay for you to be born. You're already coming into shape beautifully.

The MUSIC trills satisfactorily. The APPRENTICE laughs.

CUT TO:

INT. LUTHIER'S SHOP, MORNING

The APPRENTICE is asleep on the floor, candle burned down to the ground and nearly finished violin cradled in their lap.

The LUTHIER descends from his rooms. He picks up the violin. It wakes the APPRENTICE. He grips the violin tightly around the neck.

LUTHIER

What is this?

The APPRENTICE surges to their feet, reaching for the violin.

APPRENTICE

Give that back!

The MUSIC is fast and tense. The LUTHIER turns the violin over in his hands, easily holding it out of the APPRENTICE's reach.

LUTHIER

You're making a violin? When have you had the time for this? Where did you get this wood?

(suspiciously)

Are you stealing from me?

APPRENTICE

No! A customer gave it to me.

LUTHIER

(shocked)

A customer?!

APPRENTICE

They wanted me to make the violin. Please, just-

The LUTHIER sets the violin on his workbench and reaches for a gouge. The APPRENTICE pulls helplessly against his arm.

APPRENTICE

Wait! Don't, it's not-

The LUTHIER digs the gouge into the back of the violin and the MUSIC screams. The APPRENTICE falls to the floor, clutching their ears.

APPRENTICE

Stop! Stop, you're hurting it!

LUTHIER

It's a violin, you little idiot. It doesn't feel anything.

The LUTHIER does not stop. Every drag of the gouge into the violin makes the MUSIC abruptly crescendo into a grating, shrill note.

The APPRENTICE looks desperately around the shop for something that will make the LUTHIER stop. They grab a peg hole reamer and grip it tightly.

APPRENTICE

Stop.

(Lifts the reamer)

Please, don't make me do this.

The LUTHIER ignores them.

The APPRENTICE lifts the reamer. After a moments hesitation, they slam it into the side of the LUTHIER's neck. The LUTHIER freezes and he makes a strange gurgling noise. The APPRENTICE pulls the reamer back out. Blood sprays all over the APPRENTICE, the workbench, and the violin.

The LUTHIER's body slumps forward. The APPRENTICE drops the reamer to save the violin from being crushed. With the violin, they sink to the floor, cradling it.

FOCUS ON THE VIOLIN. SEVERAL DEEP GOUGES ARE TAKEN OUT OF THE BACK AND THE BLOOD SPATTERED OVER THE OTHERWISE CLEAN, PALE WOOD ALMOST SEEMS LIKE THE VIOLIN'S BLOOD.

The APPRENTICE runs shaky fingers over the damage. The MUSIC is wailing softly, painfully.

APPRENTICE

I'm sorry.

(whispers)

I shouldn't have let him...I'm sorry.

There is a loud knock on the shop door. The APPRENTICE gasps, looking at the blood everywhere and the LUTHIER's body.

APPRENTICE

No, no, no...

The door opens. The STRANGER enters. They walk up to the APPRENTICE, looking at the violin.

APPRENTICE

I'm sorry.

(lifts the violin)

I'd almost finished, but...The LUTHIER, he...

The STRANGER says nothing, just examines the violin.

APPRENTICE

I don't know if I can fix this. There isn't enough wood left to remake the back plate. I could replace it with something else, but I don't think the violin-

STRANGER

It seems finished to me.

APPRENTICE

(pause)

What?

STRANGER

You did well. I wasn't expecting him to be holding it when you killed him. The blood will add extra depth. I brought the finish for you.

APPRENTICE

You...

(struggles to feet)

You wanted me to kill the LUTHIER?

STRANGER

(laughs)

Of course I did. Why else would I ask you to make a violin?

APPRENTICE

I'm...

(shakes head)

I could hear the violin. Can hear it.

STRANGER

Mm. And how does it sound now? Sated?

The APPRENTICE looks down at the violin. The MUSIC is considerably calmer. The notes are low and crooning.

STRANGER

As I said, I brought the proper finish for you. Don't bother cleaning the blood or smoothing the back.

The STRANGER holds out an unlabeled jar to the APPRENTICE.

The APPRENTICE takes it and goes to the counter and sets down the violin before gathering brushes. The APPRENTICE pays no attention, uninterested in whatever the stranger wanted with the body. The APPRENTICE applies the substance to the surface of the violin, laving even strokes over the smooth wood. The finish darkens the wood and draws out the contrast of the LUTHIER'S blood.

The STRANGER appears as soon as the apprentice finishes. They hold out a few long strings of twisted material, pink and white and stringy. The APPRENTICE glances back at the LUTHEIR. His stomach is torn open and his organs pulled out.

The APPRENTICE takes the strings from the stranger and strings the violin. They carefully tune each one, violin tucked securely under their chin. The music, louder and clearer now, is just as rich and beautiful in reality as the apprentice had heard them in their mind, if not more so.

STRANGER

Beautiful.

The APPRENTICE nods. They turn to look at the mess, but it's gone. The shop is spotless. They turn back to the STRANGER.

STRANGER

Very well! I'll be back when I need another violin! Thank you for your hard work!

The STRANGER leaves with the violin.

The APPRENTICE stares at their shop, spotless and clean, and then down at their hands and apron, stained with dark blood and varnish.