

## The Little Pianist

The rain outside only made her isolation more draconian. She had been placed under house arrest by her country's vicious dictator, Klaus Heinrich, after she had attempted to pass military secrets to the enemy. Her homeland, had been at war for four years with neighboring Mueslichstan. She had watched as their leader had imprisoned and murdered thousands of her fellow citizens. She had not liked what she had seen.

Svetlana was wildly popular in her country. She was considered the queen of Lardanian pop music. It had been her fame, she thought, that had prevented her outright imprisonment or execution. Supreme leader Heinrich wanted her alive, of that she was clear.

The Supreme leader's birthday celebration was nearing and Svetlana had been ordered to perform. She would perform, she knew, as she was a Lardanian patriot above all else. She planned a special original composition for their leader.

Svetlana practiced the piece day after day, in her little apartment that overlooked the square that held Klaus Heinrich's statue. She would spend her time, when not at the piano, looking at the square and the faces of the people that flitted in and out. The faces were drawn and defeated. War will do that to a people, she reasoned.



The guards that attended her in her home imprisonment would complement her frequently on the quality of the music. Svetlana had a voice above all others. She had a flair for composition, as well. That delighted her captors.

The day of the birthday celebration arrived and Svetlana was ready. The guards transferred her to the concert hall where she would give the performance. The hall was packed, with no seat left unfilled.

The Supreme Leader occupied the box at the back of the auditorium. Herr Heinrich sat proud in his velvet lined throne with the gold leaf frame. He waved to the audience upon his entry. His arrival was met with furious applause and well wishes from the crowd.

The curtain was raised, and it was Svetlana's turn to wow the multitude of sycophants to the king. She approached the microphone that

she would use to amplify her singing and made a small announcement.



"I have written a small piece of music today in honor of our Great and Supreme Commander, Herr Klaus Heinrich."

The audience turned around and gave the dictator another standing ovation. A little boy threw his hat in the air. Another whistled his delight.

"The piece, I have entitled, 'The Little Pianist.'"

With that, Svetlana took her seat behind the massive grand piano. She adjusted the bench and took a deep breath. In time, with the crowd in front of her as still and quiet as an auditorium of dead people, she began.

Svetlana crooned the lyrics she had written in a sweet velvet voice. The song told of a father, who had sold the family milk cow to give

his darling daughter a piano. It was the one thing for which the daughter wished. Moisture started to appear in the eyes of the on-lookers in the concert hall. The milk cow was a very valuable thing to give up. It was then Svetlana sang:

“The precious daughter began to play.”

And it was also then that Svetlana played the part the daughter was supposed to play. The music shocked the host gathered. It lacked melody. It lacked congruity. It was loud, and passionately performed by Svetlana. The cacophony grew to a crescendo. Folks were clapping their hands over their ears to deaden the noise.



Svetlana paused. She wanted the message of the music to sink in. Slowly as a virus spreading, the laughter started in the front and travelled to the back. Soon the entire concert hall was awash in the glee of the comedic element just introduced. The father had bought a piano for a girl who couldn't play! The Supreme Commander even cracked a smile, something that he almost never would do.

After the laughter abated, Svetlana dove into the second verse of the song. She sang low and measured of the trials the father had brought upon himself. She sang:

“His darling would play all day.”

She then descended into piano dissonance hell. The walls of the hall vibrated with the grating caterwauling of every key she struck. She paused again to the thunderous roar of the crowd. Her song was an undisputed hit.

On and on Svetlana played until the end of the song where the father took a sledgehammer to the piano. All that the girl was left was a pile of sticks.

The crowd erupted at the finale of the piece and stood tall in appreciation for the masterpiece they had just witnessed. Even Herr Heinrich stood and applauded his captive.



Svetlana curtsied low to thank her fans. She blew a kiss to the Supreme Commander's box. She left the stage, only to be escorted back to her apartment prison.



That night, in Mueslichstan, Claude Gilbert had tuned his radio to the Lardanian government-controlled news station. It was his job as an operative for the Mueslichstan secret police to keep current on what was going on there.

He had been the person responsible for getting the state secrets from Svetlana. Svetlana had approached him with the possible information, but he still felt guilt that she had been caught. His mood darkened when he heard her sing her song to that vile and vicious tyrant. His blood burned that she would have been forced to do this tribute.

It wasn't until the third verse of the song that Claude started to hear something. He jumped from his office chair and called to his aide, "Get me the cryptographers!"

He raced downstairs to the records room. "I need a copy of tonight's tape of Lardanian News Radio."

The young man behind the counter rubbed his eyes.

"What?" "Now! STAT!" Claude was in a hurry.

Upstairs again, in the conference room, Claude Gilbert commanded his hastily assembled crew.

Claude had been blessed with an ear for perfect pitch. Pulling some headphones over his ears he listened intently to the music. He would write notes on the giant chalk boards in the room. He was only interested in the notes that the little girl of the song would have played.





A Cryptographer yelled out. "Middle C seem to be the letter 'E'!"

Claude quickly wrote an 'e' next to all of the middle C's he had transcribed on the board.

"The flats seem to be numbers." Another of his math whizzes chimed in.

"Which flats are which numbers!" Claude was in no mood for guesses.

It wasn't long and his team had solved the coded message that Svetlana had placed in the song. Claude made two copies and called to his aide.

"It's all here. Troop movements. Logistics. Everything!" Claude couldn't believe their luck. "Get a courier. ... Make that two!"

The aide was back in minutes with the couriers. Claude addressed the men.

"Take these to generals Wellington and Boslivich. This information is of vital importance!"

The couriers palpated the envelopes that contained the deciphered message.

"Now!" Claude showed them the door.

The couriers flew from the room.

Claude Gilbert sat down in front of his team. He sipped the, now cold, coffee from his mug. His face contorted in response to not only the cold temperature of the drink, but it's bitter, acrid flavors.

"They will have their own special birthday present for Herr Heinrich, I'm sure."