

MELANCHOLY MUSIC FOR CHILDREN

Written by

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SCENE 1

FADE IN:

INT. SERGEI ARSENIIEV'S APARTMENT -- LATE AFTERNOON

An apartment that has seen better days, now dim and airless.

Muted light seeps through heavy curtains. Dust hangs in stillness.

On the walls: framed POSTERS --- concert halls, glowing reviews, a younger SERGEI at a grand piano. Applause frozen in time.

On a table beneath them:

UNPAID BILLS & FINAL NOTICES

Silence.

At the piano sits SERGEI ARSENIIEV (30s), gaunt but striking. The kind of face that once commanded rooms.

He plays.

A fragment of a Chopin nocturne --- delicate, controlled.

Technically perfect.

Emotionally vacant.

He stops mid-phrase.

Listens.

Nothing.

He closes the keyboard lid.

CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM -- CONTINUOUS

The bathtub fills. Steam curls upward.

On the counter:

A bottle of pills. A glass of water. Two straight razors,
carefully aligned.

Sergei enters, methodical.

He tests the water with his hand. Adjusts it slightly.

Returns to the counter. Picks up the pills. Turns the
bottle in his fingers. Looks to see how many pills remain
in the bottle.

A ritual.

No hesitation. No drama.

Just completion.

He places the pills back down.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Sergei moves with quiet efficiency.

He straightens a chair.

Adjusts a crooked poster.

Wipes a speck of dust that no one else would see.

He pauses.

Looks at a poster:

"ARSENIEV --- A NIGHT OF FIRE AND TRANSCENDENCE"

"Works by Liszt, Scriabin, and Messiaen"

He studies his own younger face.

Then---

He reaches to the table.

He takes the top bill.

OVERDUE.

FINAL NOTICE.

He stares at the amount.

A long beat.

He sets it back down.

Carefully. Precisely.

Then---

The DOORBELL RINGS.

It cuts through the space like an intrusion.

Sergei freezes.

The bell rings again.

Longer this time.

He doesn't move.

A third ring.

He exhales, irritated --- almost offended.

INT. ENTRYWAY -- MOMENTS LATER

He opens the door.

Standing there:

ELENA RENAUD (late 30s) --- composed, elegant, impossibly self-possessed. No effort visible, yet everything exact.

Beside her: LILA RENAUD (12), small, observant, eyes far older than they should be.

A beat.

Sergei says nothing.

Elena offers a polite, almost formal smile.

ELENA

Mr. Arseniev. I apologize for
arriving unannounced.

Her voice is calm. Controlled. Expensive.

ELENA (CONT'D)
We were given your name.

Sergei glances briefly at Lila.

Lila says nothing.

SERGEI
I'm not taking new students.

No hostility. Just fact.

Elena nods, as if expecting this.

ELENA
Of course.

A beat.

She doesn't leave.

ELENA (CONT'D)
We would be happy to compensate
you accordingly.

Sergei begins to close the door---

ELENA (CONT'D)
Double your usual rate.

He pauses.

The bill flashes in his mind.

SERGEI
I don't---

ELENA
Triple.

Silence.

A flicker of calculation. Shame follows quickly behind it.

SERGEI
She'll need to audition.

Elena steps slightly aside.

ELENA

Of course.

A small gesture toward Lila.

Sergei steps back.

SERGEI

Come in.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Lila sits at the piano bench.

Sergei stands behind her.

Elena moves quietly through the apartment, taking it in.

Her eyes land briefly on the table.

The bills.

The stillness.

She continues.

Lila places her hands on the keys.

Then---

LILA

No children's music.

A beat.

LILA (CONT'D)

And I prefer a minor key.

Sergei watches her, intrigued.

SERGEI

You're here to learn.

LILA

If I have to play children's music
in a major key---

(beat)

LILA (CONT'D)

---I'll throw myself out your window.

A long pause.

Sergei studies her.

Something shifts.

For the first time --- interest.

SERGEI

Play.

Lila begins by playing "The Sick Doll" by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky.

Something simple.

But---

Her phrasing is... unusual.

Not incorrect.

Intentional.

Weighted. Thoughtful. Slightly mournful.

Sergei leans in slightly.

Listening now.

Really listening.

INT. BATHROOM -- INTERCUT

Elena stands in the doorway.

She sees:

The filled tub. The pills. The razors.

She takes this in without reaction.

No surprise.

No judgment.

Just... recognition.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Lila finishes.

Silence.

SERGEI

Again.

She plays again.

This time---

He gently adjusts her wrist.

A subtle correction.

The sound changes.

Warmer.

Deeper.

Lila notices.

So does he.

A connection --- immediate and precise.

Elena re-enters.

Sergei turns.

SERGEI (CONT'D)

I'll accept her.

Elena nods.

ELENA

Thank you.

SERGEI

Once a week.

ELENA

That will be fine.

Lila stands.

She looks at him.

LILA
Minor key.

SERGEI
Minor key.

A flicker --- almost a smile.

They move toward the door.

Elena pauses.

Turns back.

ELENA
Mr. Arseniev---
(beat)

ELENA (CONT'D)
You should open the windows.

She holds his gaze for a moment longer than necessary.

Then exits.

The door closes.

Silence returns.

Sergei stands alone.

He looks toward the bathroom.

Then at the piano.

Slowly---

He opens the keyboard again.

He places his hands on the keys.

This time---

He hesitates before playing.

FADE OUT.

SCENE 2

INT. SERGEI ARSENIIEV'S APARTMENT -- LATE MORNING

Light.

For the first time, the curtains are partially open.

The piano sits where it was.

But the lid is open.

On the stand:

A single page of handwritten sheet music.

Careful. Precise.

Title at the top:

"MELANCHOLY SMILE"

A knock at the door.

Sergei is already there.

He opens it.

ELENA RENAUD stands as before---effortless, composed.

LILA beside her.

SERGEI

You're early.

ELENA

We prefer not to rush.

A faint smile.

They enter.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Lila moves directly to the piano.

Familiar now.

Sergei notices.

Elena does not sit.

She walks the room slowly.

Taking in details.

SERGEI

I wasn't able to find anything
suitable.

Lila looks at him.

SERGEI (CONT'D)

So I wrote something.

He gestures to the sheet.

SERGEI (CONT'D)

It's simple.
(beat)

SERGEI (CONT'D)

It won't insult you.

Lila studies the title.

LILA

"Melancholy Smile."

SERGEI

Yes.

LILA

That doesn't make sense.

SERGEI

It will.

A beat.

LILA

Is it in a minor key?

SERGEI

Mostly.

That satisfies her.

She sits.

Places her hands on the keys.

Begins.

The piece is simple---

Mostly white keys.

But the phrasing is strange.

Unresolved.

Balanced between something gentle... and something sad.

She stumbles.

Stops.

LILA

It wants to go somewhere else.

Sergei leans in.

SERGEI

Don't let it.

She looks at him.

SERGEI (CONT'D)

Hold it where it is.

He gently adjusts her fingers.

SERGEI (CONT'D)

Again.

She plays.

This time---

She resists resolution.

The sound becomes... suspended.

Sergei watches her.

Something like recognition.

Across the room---

Elena watches both of them.

Still. Silent.

LILA

It's a waltz... but slightly sad.

A flicker of approval in Sergei.

SERGEI

Yes.

She continues.

More confident now.

More deliberate.

She reaches the end.

Does not release the final note immediately.

Lets it hang.

Then---

Silence.

Sergei exhales quietly.

SERGEI (CONT'D)

Again.

INT. KITCHEN -- CONTINUOUS

Elena stands near the counter.

She does not touch anything.

She listens.

The piece repeats faintly from the other room.

Sergei's voice, low, correcting.

Lila again.

Again.

Elena's eyes move---

To the table.

The bills.

Still there.

Still unpaid.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Lila plays again.

Cleaner now.

Intentional.

Sergei circles slightly.

Observing.

SERGEI

You don't like it.

LILA

I do.

(beat)

LILA (CONT'D)

It just surprised me.

Sergei almost smiles.

SERGEI

That's the intention.

A pause.

LILA

You wrote it for me?

SERGEI

Yes.

She considers that.

LILA

Why?

He doesn't answer immediately.

SERGEI

Because nothing else fit.

That lands.

Lila nods.

Accepts it.

She begins again---

Without being told.

Sergei watches her.

Then---

He looks up.

Elena is in the doorway now.

Watching him.

Not the child.

Him.

A long beat.

ELENA

You work differently than I
expected.

Sergei straightens slightly.

SERGEI

How did you expect?

ELENA

Less... patience.

A faint shift.

Not quite flirtation.

But something adjacent.

SERGEI
She requires it.

ELENA
Or you do.

Silence.

Lila continues playing.

Softly.

Steady now.

Sergei holds Elena's gaze a moment longer than necessary.

SERGEI
You don't need to stay.

A test.

Elena doesn't hesitate.

ELENA
I can hardly leave my young
daughter with a strange man, now
could I?

A faint smile.

Polite.

Perfectly reasonable.

A beat.

SERGEI
As you wish.

Lila stops playing.

Looks between them.

LILA
It's better the second time.

Sergei turns back to her.

SERGEI

It will be better the tenth.

LILA

And the hundredth?

SERGEI

If you're still interested by
then.

LILA

I will be.

She resumes playing.

Sergei watches her.

Then---

He glances at Elena again.

She hasn't moved.

FADE OUT.

SCENE 3

EXT. SMALL NEW YORK CAFE -- MORNING

A quiet corner table.

A LATTE.

Steam rising.

A folded newspaper.

SERGEI sits alone.

He opens the paper.

Reads.

Unhurried.

The city moves around him---

distant traffic, footsteps, conversation.

Routine.

He lifts the cup.

Sips.

Sets it down.

Then---

something catches his eye.

Across the street---

ELENA.

Moving quickly.

LILA beside her.

Not composed.

Not lingering.

Purposeful.

They pass through the crowd at a pace slightly too fast for Lila to walk comfortably.

A beat--

Then--

Further back in the crowd--

TWO MEN.

Moving in the same direction.

Not running.

But not casual.

Their pace -- just slightly faster than everyone else.

Closing distance.

Hard to tell if it's intentional.

Or coincidence.

Sergei's gaze lingers--

Only a moment.

Ahead--

Elena reaches a black CADILLAC ESCALADE at the curb.

A DRIVER steps out.

Opens the rear door.

No words exchanged.

Elena guides Lila inside--

quickly.

The door shuts.

The Escalade pulls away--

smooth.

Immediate.

The two men reach the curb--

A beat too late.

They stop.

Watch the car disappear down the street.

Sergei watches.

A beat.

No reaction.

He looks back down.

Turns the page.

Continues reading.

The same as before.

CUT TO:

SCENE 4

INT. SERGEI ARSENIIEV'S APARTMENT -- LATE AFTERNOON

More light than before.

The windows are open.

A faint breeze moves the curtains.

The apartment is not clean---but it is no longer abandoned.

On the piano:

Several pages now.

Handwritten.

Two distinct titles:

"MELANCHOLY SMILE" and "FINDING COMFORT IN SORROW"

Lila plays.

More confident.

The same tonal world---but deeper now.

The phrasing is intentional.

She shapes silence as much as sound.

Sergei stands beside her.

Not correcting.

Listening.

SERGEI

Don't rush the third measure.

She doesn't stop playing.

A beat---

She adjusts, barely.

The phrase settles.

He nods, almost imperceptibly.

Across the room---

Elena stands.

Watching.

Still. Observing.

Lila continues.

Sergei steps slightly closer.

Leans in.

LILA

It's better slower.

SERGEI

OK, try it that way.

She plays through the phrase again---

More restraint.

More weight.

Elena begins to move.

Slowly.

Silently.

She crosses the room.

Stops just behind Sergei.

Very close.

Too close.

Sergei doesn't turn.

Focused on Lila.

Elena's eyes drift---

To his neck.

A faint pulse beneath the skin.

Stillness.

Then---

Lila's playing softens.

Recedes.

A low, steady sound emerges---

A HEARTBEAT.

Not loud.

But present.

Measured.

Alive.

Elena's gaze fixes.

Unblinking.

The world narrows---

Just the pulse.

Just the rhythm.

Her breathing slows.

Syncs.

The heartbeat grows---

Not louder---

Clearer.

Closer.

Sergei shifts slightly---

Exposing his neck more fully.

Elena leans in---

Almost imperceptibly---

Drawn.

The heartbeat fills the space---

Then---

SERGEI

Why are you holding the last note?

The sound cuts.

Immediately.

Back to the room.

Lila stops playing.

Looks up.

LILA

Because it doesn't want to end.

Sergei steps away from the piano.

Elena has already moved.

Back to where she was.

Composed.

Untouched.

SERGEI

Lento.

He claps the beat softly.

Measured.

Deliberate.

SERGEI (CONT'D)

Again.

Lila nods.

Begins.

Slower now.

More controlled.

She finishes---

lets the silence sit.

Sergei exhales quietly.

SERGEI (CONT'D)

Again.

INT. KITCHEN -- MOMENTS LATER

Sergei pours tea.

Elena stands near the window.

Watching the street below.

ELENA

She looks forward to these.

SERGEI

She hides it well.

ELENA

So do you.

A beat.

He hands her a cup.

Their fingers almost touch.

Don't.

SERGEI

I didn't, before.

ELENA

Before?

He hesitates.

SERGEI

I used to perform.

ELENA

I know.

A small shift.

ELENA (CONT'D)

You were... very good.

He studies her.

SERGEI

You've heard me?

ELENA

Of course.

(beat)

People don't forget that quickly.

A silence.

SERGEI

They do.

(beat)

SERGEI (CONT'D)

Trust me, they do.

He looks toward the piano.

Listens to Lila playing.

SERGEI (CONT'D)

Or worse---

(beat)

SERGEI (CONT'D)

---they look at you with pity.

Elena watches him now.

ELENA

And which are you afraid of?

He doesn't answer.

Instead---

SERGEI

I stopped performing.

ELENA

Why?

SERGEI

I couldn't feel it anymore.

ELENA

The music?

SERGEI

Its soul.

That lands.

Elena studies him.

Not sympathetically.

Precisely.

ELENA

When I first met you, I thought
that perhaps you had given up.

SERGEI

That part of me, it's... not dead.

A beat.

ELENA

What changed?

Another beat.

He glances toward Lila.

SERGEI

I'm not sure.

Silence.

That sits between them.

Elena does not react immediately.

Then---

A faint smile.

Measured.

ELENA

Be careful not to anchor that to
something outside of yourself.

(beat)

ELENA (CONT'D)

It rarely ends well.

From the other room---

Lila stops playing.

LILA (O.S.)

I don't like this part.

Sergei turns slightly.

SERGEI

Which part?

LILA (O.S.)

The ending.

Elena's eyes flicker.

Just slightly.

SERGEI

Why?

LILA (O.S.)

It doesn't feel finished.

Sergei considers.

Then---

SERGEI

Leave it that way.

A pause.

LILA (O.S.)

On purpose?

SERGEI

Yes.

Elena watches him closely now.

ELENA
You're comfortable with that?

SERGEI
Not finishing things?
(beat)

SERGEI (CONT'D)
I'm learning to be.

A quiet moment.

Something shifts.

Elena sets her cup down.

Perfectly placed.

ELENA
We should go.

SERGEI
Already?

ELENA
I'm afraid our time is short
today.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Lila stands.

Gathering the sheet music.

LILA
Both of them?

SERGEI
Yes.

She nods.

Careful with the pages.

LILA
I like this one better.

(beat)

LILA (CONT'D)
"Finding Comfort In Sorrow."

SERGEI
Why?

LILA
It feels sadder.

SERGEI
Sadder is not always better.

A beat.

She considers that.

Doesn't agree.

Elena stands at the door.

Sergei approaches.

ELENA
Thank you, Mr. Arseniev.

SERGEI
Sergei.

A small pause.

ELENA
Sergei.

She holds his gaze.

Just long enough.

Then---

ELENA (CONT'D)
Next week.

SERGEI
Yes.

Lila looks at him.

A small beat---

almost to herself, looking at the music where he gave playing instruction---

LILA
(under her breath as she
looks down at her new
music)
Je préfère dire « lent »...

Sergei catches it.

SERGEI
E preferisco dire "lento".

She gives the smallest hint of a smile.

They exit.

The door closes.

Silence.

Sergei stands there.

Then---

He turns back toward the apartment.

The open windows.

The piano.

He sits.

Looks at the keys.

This time---

He begins to play the first movement of Beethoven's
Moonlight Sonata.

FADE OUT.

SCENE 5

INT. SERGEI ARSENIYEV'S APARTMENT -- EVENING

The apartment is dim.

Only a few lamps lit.

Warm pools of light. Deep shadows.

The windows are closed now.

Curtains partially drawn.

On the piano:

"MELANCHOLY SMILE" "FINDING COMFORT IN SORROW" "WITHOUT
YOU, I AM NOTHING"

Lila plays.

Slower.

More controlled than before.

Each note placed with intention.

Sergei sits beside her now.

Closer than usual.

SERGEI

You'll be crossing your right hand
over the left for those bass
notes.

Lila pauses.

Looks at the page.

Then her hands.

LILA

Ah... I see.

She tries it.

Awkward at first---

The motion unfamiliar.

She hesitates mid-phrase.

SERGEI

Don't stop.

She continues---

Finds the shape of it.

The dissonance lingers longer than expected.

She stops.

LILA

It feels like a gimmick.

Sergei studies the music.

Then her.

SERGEI

Crossing hands, sure.

(beat)

SERGEI (CONT'D)

But don't you like the way it
holds the dissonance a little
longer than is comfortable?

She considers that.

Then---

Plays it again.

This time---

She lets the discomfort stay.

Doesn't resolve it too quickly.

LILA

It's better.

SERGEI

Dissonance causes unease, but it's
satisfying when it finally
resolves.

A quiet beat.

INT. LIVING ROOM / KITCHEN -- LATER

Lila continues playing softly.

Repetition.

Refinement.

Sergei stands near the table.

Elena has moved into the kitchen.

She opens a drawer.

Searching.

Her hand pauses---

A CHEF'S KNIFE.

Clean. Balanced.

She lifts it slightly.

Tests the weight.

Sets it down.

Opens another drawer.

An ICE PICK.

Slim. Precise.

Her fingers rest on it---

She holds the ice pick.

Noticing the grip of the handle, the sharpness of the point.

A moment too long.

Singularly focused.

Then in the other room---

SERGEI

Watch your fingering on this part-

Elena closes the drawer.

Continues searching.

Finds a corkscrew.

Returns to the living room.

Nothing acknowledged.

A bottle of wine now open.

Two glasses.

Elena pours.

SERGEI

I don't usually---

ELENA

Here.

She gives him a glass.

Their fingers brush---

briefly.

Not accidental.

She lifts the glass.

Studies the color.

ELENA (CONT'D)

It opens slowly.

A beat.

She inhales the aroma.

ELENA (CONT'D)

At first, it's restrained.
(beat)

ELENA (CONT'D)

Then it becomes... more
expressive.

She looks at him.

ELENA (CONT'D)

If you give it time.

A silence.

Sergei watches her.

Then takes a sip.

SERGEI

And if you don't?

A faint smile.

ELENA

Then I suppose it's an opportunity
lost.

That lingers.

From the piano---

Lila repeats the same passage.

Again.

Again.

SERGEI

You don't have to stay every time.

Elena doesn't look at him.

ELENA

I prefer to.
(beat)

She turns slightly.

ELENA (CONT'D)

Mr. Arseniev...

A faint smile.

ELENA (CONT'D)

Are you trying to get rid of me?

Sergei meets her gaze.

SERGEI

No.
(beat)

SERGEI (CONT'D)

Not at all.

A longer silence.

Lila stops playing.

LILA

I don't like this one as much.

Sergei turns.

SERGEI

Which one?

LILA

"Without You, I Am Nothing."

A beat.

LILA (CONT'D)

It still feels like a gimmick.

Sergei walks to the piano.

Looks at the page.

SERGEI

I wrote it just for you.
(beat)

Lila watches him.

Then---

She plays it again.

This time---

She leans into the discomfort.

Holds the dissonance longer than is reasonable.

Unresolved.

Elena watches this exchange closely.

ELENA

You encourage that.

SERGEI

I allow it.

ELENA

There's a difference.

SERGEI

Yes.

(beat)

SERGEI (CONT'D)

I'm deciding which I prefer.

Lila returns to "Finding Comfort In Sorrow."

Softer now.

More internal.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- LATER

The lesson has dissolved into atmosphere.

Lila plays quietly.

Almost background.

Sergei and Elena stand near the piano.

Close.

Not touching.

But aware.

ELENA

You're changing.

A beat.

SERGEI

So are you.

She studies him.

ELENA

No.

(beat)

ELENA (CONT'D)

I'm simply... revealing more.

That lands.

Sergei holds her gaze.

A longer beat this time.

Lila stops.

LILA

I'm tired.

Elena turns immediately.

ELENA

Then we're finished.

Sergei starts---

SERGEI

One more---

ELENA

No.

A beat.

Final.

Lila stands.

Gathers the pages.

Sergei watches Elena.

Something new in his expression.

Awareness.

SERGEI

Of course.

INT. ENTRYWAY -- MOMENTS LATER

Elena prepares to leave.

Lila already at the door.

ELENA

Next week.

SERGEI

Yes.

A pause.

They stand close again.

Closer than before.

ELENA

Goodnight, Sergei.

SERGEI

Goodnight.

She holds his gaze---

just long enough---

then turns.

Lila pauses.

Looks back.

LILA

Don't resolve it too quickly.

A beat.

SERGEI

Exactly.

A flicker---shared understanding.

They exit.

The door closes.

Silence.

Sergei stands there.

Longer than before.

Then---

He turns.

Walks to the piano.

Sits.

Sees Lila has left the latest piece behind.

He looks at the page:

"WITHOUT YOU, I AM NOTHING"

A beat.

He plays---

slowly.

Letting the dissonance linger.

Longer than is comfortable.

FADE OUT.

SCENE 6

INT. RENAUD APARTMENT - LATE AFTERNOON

A different world.

High ceilings.

Clean lines.

Understated luxury.

Everything intentional.

Soft, indirect lighting.

Muted tones---stone, cream, dark wood.

No clutter.

No history visible.

A STEINWAY GRAND PIANO sits near the windows.

Pristine.

SERGEI stands just inside the doorway.

Still.

Taking it in.

ELENA RENAUD places the book she was reading on an end table, "The Unbearable Lightness of Being" by Milan Kundera.

Effortlessly.

LILA has already crossed the room.

At the piano.

Familiar.

ELENA

Please.

A small gesture inward.

Sergei steps in.

Careful not to disturb anything.

The door closes behind him.

Quietly.

Too quietly.

INT. LIVING AREA -- CONTINUOUS

Sergei moves slowly through the space.

Observing.

No photographs.

No personal artifacts.

Just---

Objects.

Chosen. Curated.

Placed.

SERGEI

You play?

He nods toward the piano.

ELENA

Yes.

(beat)

ELENA (CONT'D)

But I preferred to play the cello
when I was young.

From the piano---

without looking up---

LILA

She still plays sometimes...

(beat)

LILA (CONT'D)

...when she's feeling despondent.

Sergei notices.

SERGEI

Despondent.

(quietly, almost to himself)

He files it away.

A beat.

ELENA

That's not quite the right word.

Sergei approaches the instrument.

Runs a finger lightly across the lid.

No dust.

Across the room---

Lila sits at the bench.

Already opening her music.

LILA
It sounds different.

Sergei looks up.

SERGEI
It will.
(beat)

SERGEI (CONT'D)
Play.

She begins.

"MELANCHOLY SMILE."

The same notes---

But the room changes them.

The sound is fuller.

More resonant.

Less intimate.

Sergei listens.

Adjusting.

Recalibrating.

SERGEI (CONT'D)
Slower.

She adjusts.

The sound deepens.

Elena watches.

From a distance.

A glass in her hand.

Already poured.

Lila plays again---

This time forcing the weight.

INT. DINING AREA -- MOMENTS LATER

Elena stands near a long table.

Minimalist.

Precise.

She pours another glass.

Doesn't ask.

ELENA

Your apartment suits the music.

Sergei accepts the glass.

SERGEI

And this one doesn't?

A faint smile.

ELENA

This one resists it.

A beat.

ELENA (CONT'D)

It prefers something brighter.

From the piano---

Lila shifts into "FINDING COMFORT IN SORROW."

More confident now.

More personal.

SERGEI

She doesn't.

Elena watches him.

ELENA

No.

(beat)

ELENA (CONT'D)
She doesn't.

Silence.

Sergei studies the room again.

SERGEI
You live here alone?

A small pause.

ELENA
With my daughter.

SERGEI
Of course.

He nods.

But something in the answer doesn't settle.

From the piano---

A wrong note.

Lila stops.

LILA
The ending still doesn't work.

Sergei walks toward her.

SERGEI
Good.

LILA
Why is that always good?

SERGEI
Because you're still listening.

She considers that.

Then---

Plays again.

INT. HALLWAY -- MOMENTS LATER

Sergei steps away briefly.

Drawn down a short hallway.

Quiet.

Too quiet.

Doors.

Closed.

One slightly ajar.

He pauses.

Looks back---

Elena is watching him.

Not moving.

ELENA

You can look.

A beat.

He pushes the door open slightly.

INT. BEDROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Minimal.

Immaculate.

No books.

No disorder.

A bed.

Perfectly made.

A dresser.

A single photograph: two parents and a daughter.

Clean surface---

Except for one thing.

A MAN'S WATCH.

Stainless steel.

Inexpensive.

Out of place.

Sergei steps closer.

Studies it.

Not dusted.

Recently handled.

He doesn't touch it.

Just looks.

INT. LIVING AREA -- CONTINUOUS

Lila continues playing.

Softly.

Repeating.

Sergei returns.

Elena hasn't moved.

SERGEI
It's very... clean. Very
minimalist.

A faint smile.

ELENA
I prefer it that way.

SERGEI
Why?

She studies him.

ELENA

Because it allows me to notice
when something changes.

A beat.

ELENA (CONT'D)

And when something doesn't belong.

That lands.

Sergei holds her gaze.

A little longer now.

SERGEI

And do I?

A pause.

Longer than necessary.

Elena steps closer.

Not touching.

But close enough to feel.

ELENA

I haven't decided yet.

From the piano---

Lila stops.

LILA

It's better here.

Sergei turns.

SERGEI

Why?

LILA

Because it echoes.

A beat.

LILA (CONT'D)

It sustains longer.

Sergei watches her.

Then---

SERGEI

Then don't rush it.

She plays again.

Letting each note linger.

The sound fills the space.

Elena watches Sergei.

Sergei watches Lila.

The music holds.

Unresolved.

FADE OUT.

SCENE 7

INT. RENAUD APARTMENT -- NIGHT

The apartment feels different at night.

Darker.

More contained.

The city lights glow faintly through the windows.

The STEINWAY unoccupied.

A table is set.

Simple.

Elegant.

Two place settings.

Two glasses.

A single candle.

SERGEI stands near the table.

Uncertain.

Not uncomfortable---

But aware he doesn't belong here.

ELENA moves through the space with ease.

Carrying a plate.

Setting it down.

Everything deliberate.

ELENA

I hope you're not disappointed.

A beat.

SERGEI

By what?

ELENA

That it isn't more elaborate.

He looks at the table.

Then at her.

SERGEI

It's lovely.

They sit.

A moment of silence as they begin eating.

The quiet is not empty---

It's intentional.

SERGEI (CONT'D)

Where did you learn to cook like
this?

ELENA

My family used to own some
restaurants.

(beat)

ELENA (CONT'D)
Among other things.

A small pause.

ELENA (CONT'D)
I learned from the chefs there.

He studies her.

SERGEI
About what?

ELENA
About balancing textures and
tastes.
(beat)

ELENA (CONT'D)
Precision.
(beat)

ELENA (CONT'D)
Knife skills.
(beat)

ELENA (CONT'D)
Wine pairings.

A small pause.

SERGEI
You learned well.

That lands.

SERGEI (CONT'D)
Do your parents still have the
restaurants?
(a long beat)

ELENA
My mother passed away when I was
very young.
(beat)

ELENA (CONT'D)
Father was never the same. He
relied on me more than he should

have. It wasn't fair to a young girl.

Sergei gives her a sympathetic look.

An awkward silence follows.

They continue eating.

No rush.

SERGEI

Lila is progressing quickly.

ELENA

Yes.

SERGEI

She's... unusual.

A faint shift.

ELENA

In what way?

SERGEI

She listens.

(beat)

SERGEI (CONT'D)

Most students wait to be told what to feel.

ELENA

And she doesn't?

SERGEI

No.

(then, without calculation)

SERGEI (CONT'D)

She's very talented.

A beat.

SERGEI (CONT'D)

And... very beautiful.

Silence.

Elena sets her fork down.

Carefully.

ELENA
Be careful with that word.

Sergei looks up.

SERGEI
Beautiful?

ELENA
Yes.
(beat)

ELENA (CONT'D)
People mean different things when
they say it.

She watches him.

Closely.

SERGEI
She's a child.

A beat.

Elena holds his gaze.

ELENA
Yes.
(beat)

ELENA (CONT'D)
And some people don't care about
the difference.

Silence.

It sits.

Heavy.

Sergei doesn't look away.

SERGEI

I do.

A long beat.

Elena studies him.

Measuring.

Then---

A faint shift.

Almost imperceptible.

She relaxes--- just slightly.

ELENA

Good.

She picks up her glass.

Drinks.

The tension dissolves---

but not entirely.

SERGEI

You're very protective of her.

ELENA

Of course.

SERGEI

More than most.

A pause.

ELENA

Most people are careless.
(beat)

ELENA (CONT'D)

They assume things will remain as
they are.

She leans back slightly.

ELENA (CONT'D)

They don't.

A silence.

Sergei studies her.

SERGEI

And you correct that?

A faint smile.

ELENA

I pay attention.

That lands.

A longer pause now.

More intimate.

The distance between them feels smaller.

SERGEI

You said before...

(beat)

SERGEI (CONT'D)

...that you were revealing more.

She watches him.

ELENA

Yes.

SERGEI

Is this part of that?

A beat.

She considers him.

Then---

She stands.

Moves toward a console.

Selects something.

Music begins---

Soft.

Minimal.

Measured.

Unfamiliar.

She turns back toward him.

Steps closer.

ELENA

That depends.
(beat)

ELENA (CONT'D)

On what you're able to see.

Silence.

Sergei doesn't move.

But he doesn't retreat either.

SERGEI

I'm trying.
(beat)

SERGEI (CONT'D)

You're complex.

A faint smile.

Not flattered---

Acknowledged.

ELENA

So are you.

A beat.

She reaches past him---

to take his empty glass.

Their bodies nearly touch.

The moment lingers---

then passes.

She steps away.

Refills his glass.

As if nothing happened.

ELENA (CONT'D)

You should stay a little longer.

A pause.

ELENA (CONT'D)

The night improves with time.

Sergei watches her.

SERGEI

Like the wine.

A faint smile.

ELENA

Exactly.

They hold each other's gaze.

Longer this time.

No interruption.

No music beyond the quiet, steady piece she selected.

Just---

possibility.

And something else.

Unspoken.

FADE OUT.

SCENE 8

EXT. NEW YORK CITY STREET -- DAY

Cold light.

A gray afternoon.

Pedestrians move with purpose---

coats, bags, noise.

Sergei walks among them.

Unnoticed.

He passes a newsstand.

Pauses.

A moment---

then buys a newspaper.

EXT. SMALL CAFE -- MOMENTS LATER

A narrow outdoor table.

A LATTE sits in front of him.

Steam rising.

The city continues around him---

cars passing, distant horns, conversation.

Sergei opens the paper.

Turns a page.

Then another.

Not searching---

just reading.

He sips his latte.

Calm.

Routine.

A few tables away--

TWO MEN sit.

Vaguely familiar.

One faces the street.

The other sits at an angle -- reading.

Neither speaks.

Nothing unusual.

Then---

his eyes pause.

Something small.

Buried in the page.

INSERT --- NEWSPAPER

A modest column:

"MAN FOUND DEAD"

"Police report no indication of forced entry. Robbery does not seem to be the motive."

Sergei reads more closely now.

Leans in slightly.

He continues reading---

"Although a watch the victim always wore was missing---"

"---a silver Timex wristwatch."

A beat.

He leans back.

Thinking.

Questioning his memory---

One of the men shifts slightly--

Not toward Sergei--

Just enough to adjust his view of the street.

Or something else.

Hard to tell.

The city noise softens.

Sergei doesn't move.

The words land.

A memory:

--- The watch on Elena's dresser.

Out of place.

Too ordinary for the room. Too ordinary for Elena.

BACK TO SCENE

Sergei lowers the paper slowly.

His latte sits untouched now.

Cooling.

He looks out at the street---

but not seeing it.

People continue moving past him.

Unaware.

A long beat.

At the neighboring tables--

the two men are gone.

He folds the newspaper.

Stands.

Leaves it on the table.

And walks away---

back into the crowd.

CUT TO:

SCENE 9

INT. RENAUD APARTMENT - LATE AFTERNOON

Quiet.

The apartment is empty-- except Elena.

Light fades through the windows--

cooler now.

More diffuse.

The STEINWAY sits untouched.

No movement.

Then--

ELENA enters.

Alone.

Her clothing more relaxed. Her hair French-braided.

Bare feet.

She closes the door behind her.

Softly.

A beat.

She does not move further into the room immediately.

Just stands.

Listening.

Nothing.

Stillness.

Then—

She crosses to the corner of the room.

A CELLO rests on a stand.

Well-kept.

Precise.

Like everything else.

She lifts it.

Measured.

Brings it to position.

The bow in her hand.

A small adjustment—

shoulder, wrist, posture.

Exact.

Then—

She begins.

Bach: Cello Suite No. 4 in E-flat Major.

The opening is clear.

Structured. Almost like scales.

Each note placed exactly.

No excess.

No interpretation beyond intention.

The sound fills the room—

warm, controlled, resonant.

She plays without hesitation.

Technically assured.

The phrasing clean.

Balanced.

A performance with no visible effort.

Time passes.

Unbroken.

Then—

Something shifts.

Subtle.

Almost imperceptible.

The tempo tightens.

Not faster—

but less forgiving.

The bow presses slightly harder into the strings.

The tone sharpens.

Edges where there were none before.

She continues.

No pause.

No acknowledgment.

The phrasing becomes—

not incorrect—

but less fluid.

Her mind not fully focused now--

Each note arrives with more weight than it should carry.

The structure remains.

But the space between notes narrows.

Breath is reduced.

The sound begins to press forward.

Insistent.

Her posture remains perfect.

But her grip—

firmer now.

A note sustains—

just a fraction longer than intended.

Then the next—

cut shorter.

A disruption in balance.

Small.

But present.

She continues—

The pattern holds.

Controlled—

but no longer at ease.

Then—

She stops.

Not abruptly.

Not dramatically.

Just--- stops.

Ends the phrase before it resolves.

The tone carries through the apartment, then--

Silence.

The room holds the absence of sound.

Elena remains in position.

Bow hovering.

A long beat.

Her breathing—

slightly elevated.

Barely.

Then—

she lowers the bow.

Slowly.

Places it on the nearby table.

Not carelessly—

but not the correct place.

She notices it.

A beat.

Then—

She lowers the cello.

Returns it to its stand.

Perfectly aligned.

She places the bow on its Bow Cradle.

Straightens it.

Exact.

She steps back.

Looks at it.

No expression.

Everything as it should be.

Or appears to be.

A beat.

Then—

She turns.

Exits the room.

Softly.

The apartment returns to stillness.

CUT TO:

SCENE 10

INT. RENAUD APARTMENT -- LATE AFTERNOON

Quiet.

Lila eating a snack.

Alone.

She sets her food down.

Listens.

Nothing.

A beat.

She walks through the living room.

Measured.

Familiar.

INT. HALLWAY / BEDROOM -- CONTINUOUS

She moves down the hallway.

No hesitation.

Into Elena's bedroom.

INT. ELENA'S BEDROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Everything is precise.

Ordered.

Undisturbed.

Lila closes the door behind her.

Softly.

She stands in the room a moment.

Then---

She moves to the dresser.

Not the top drawer.

Not the second.

Her hand goes beneath---
fingers finding something unseen.
A slight shift.
A hidden compartment releases.
She opens it.
Inside:
A small collection.
Not arranged.
Not displayed.
Just... there.
A MEN'S TIMEX WATCH.
A single monogrammed CUFFLINK.
A DRIED ROSE.
Lila looks at them.
No surprise.
No curiosity.
Recognition.
She reaches in.
Takes the watch.
Leaves the others.
Closes the compartment.
It disappears seamlessly back into the dresser.
She crosses the room.
Sits on Elena's bed.
Then---

lays back.
Still wearing her shoes.
The watch now on her wrist.
A beat.
She closes her eyes.
Stillness.
Then---
A faint awareness.
Subtle.
A rhythm.
Not sound at first.
Just... presence.
Her fingers press lightly into her wrist.
Feeling it.
The rhythm becomes clearer.
A pulse.
Not faster.
Closer.
Her breathing shifts.
Shallow now.
Controlled.
The pulse presses against her.
Or from within.
Hard to tell.
She doesn't move at first.

Listens.

Feels it.

It becomes louder.

Her hand tightens.

Now---

uncomfortable.

Not pain.

Not fear.

Just... wrong.

Her eyes open.

Immediately.

She sits up.

She inhales sharply.

Removes the watch.

The sensation stops.

Silence.

She holds it for a moment.

Looking at it.

Expression unchanged.

Then---

She stands.

Returns to the dresser.

Finds the hidden seam again.

Opens it.

Places the watch back.

Exactly where it was.

Aligned.

Untouched.

She closes the compartment.

Smooth.

Invisible again.

She turns back to the bed.

Notices the slight impression where she had laid.

She smooths it.

Carefully.

Perfect.

A final look.

Everything as it was.

She exits.

Closes the door behind her.

Softly.

Silence.

CUT TO:

SCENE 11

INT. SERGEI ARSENIYEV'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

The apartment is quiet.

Dim.

A single lamp.

The city outside---

distant.

Sergei enters.

Chewing on the last bite of something.

A beat.

He moves to the piano.

Sits.

Stillness.

Then---

He begins to play.

Mozart: Piano Sonata No. 11 in A Major, K. 331 "Alla
Turca": III. Rondo alla Turca.

Major key.

Light.

Measured.

The melody is pleasant---

cheerful.

He plays it well.

Technically precise.

Controlled.

The sound fills the room---

but doesn't belong to it.

Or to him.

Halfway through---

He stops.

He leans forward.

Head on his arms.

His arms press into the keys---

all of them.

A chromatic cluster.

Sustain pedal depressed.

The sound of his malaise carries on--

The sound lingers.

Something unsettled.

Eventually, his head rises, even while the sustain pedal still carries the fading chromatic cluster.

He looks at the sheet music.

Studies it.

Then---

slowly---

he lifts the page.

Holds it.

A moment.

Then---

he tears it.

Once.

Clean.

He tears it again.

Measured.

Not violent---

decisive.

The pieces fall onto the piano.

Some to the floor.

He doesn't look at them.

A beat.

Stillness.

Then---

He reaches to the side.

A stack of music.

He flips through it.

Not searching---

knowing.

Stops.

Pulls one free.

ALEXANDER Scriabin

PIANO SONATA NO. 9, OP. 68

"BLACK MASS"

He places it on the stand.

A moment.

His hands hover above the keys.

Then---

He begins.

Slowly at first.

Pianissimo.

Controlled.

The opening is restrained---

almost careful.

Then---

something shifts.
The phrasing tightens.
Darkens.
The tempo breathes---
then presses forward.
His posture changes.
Less rigid.
More... committed.
The sound grows.
Not louder---
deeper.
More insistent.
His hands move with abandon now---
but not chaos.
Intensity.
The air, heavier.
He leans into the instrument.
Fully present.
No hesitation.
No distance.
The music continues---
unrelenting.
We stay with him.
Long enough to understand---
This is not practice.

This is something else.

CUT TO BLACK.

SCENE 12

INT. RENAUD APARTMENT -- LATE AFTERNOON

Daylight.

Cooler.

Controlled.

The STEINWAY sits untouched.

LILA plays:

"DESPONDENT, STANDING IN THE JANUARY RAIN."

Sparse.

Measured.

SERGEI listens.

But not fully.

Part of him is elsewhere.

SERGEI

The piece has an ostinato
throughout.

(beat)

SERGEI (CONT'D)

Ostinato is the repeating tone
that represents rain drops falling
rhythmically on a grey rainy day.

Lila continues playing---

listening as she plays.

She subtly adjusts---

leaning into the repetition.

The phrase becomes more defined.

More insistent.

Sergei nods---

distracted.

Across the room---

ELENA gathers her things.

ELENA

I won't be long.

SERGEI

Of course.

A pause.

ELENA

Help yourself to anything you
need.

She exits.

The door closes.

Silence.

Lila continues playing.

Sergei watches her---

then glances toward the hallway.

The thought returns.

He stands.

He moves down the hallway.

INT. BEDROOM -- CONTINUOUS

The door is slightly ajar.

He pushes it open.

Steps inside.

Everything---

unchanged.

Controlled.

He moves directly to the dresser.

Focused.

Expectant.

The surface---

Empty.

No watch.

He freezes.

This time, it lands harder.

Not curiosity---

confirmation of something missing.

He scans the room.

Nothing.

Too clean.

He exhales.

Barely.

INT. LIVING AREA -- MOMENTS LATER

Lila continues playing.

Soft.

Unresolved.

Sergei returns.

Slower now.

Measured.

SERGEI

Lila.

She doesn't stop.

LILA

Yes?

SERGEI

Earlier---

(beat)

SERGEI (CONT'D)

I thought I saw a watch in your
mother's bedroom.

She stops.

Looks at him.

Calm.

LILA

Perhaps.

SERGEI

It's not there now.

A small pause.

LILA

Things don't always stay where you
leave them.

Sergei studies her.

SERGEI

Who moves them?

A beat.

She turns back to the piano.

LILA

Sometimes people forget things.
(beat)

LILA (CONT'D)

Sometimes they don't come back for them.

Silence.

Sergei doesn't respond.

Lila resumes playing.

"Despondent, Standing in the January Rain."

The ostinato continues.

Steady.

Unyielding.

Like rain.

FADE OUT.

SCENE 13

INT. RENAUD APARTMENT -- EARLY EVENING

The light has shifted.

Darker now.

Shadows longer.

The apartment feels more enclosed.

LILA sits at the piano.

SERGEI stands beside her.

SERGEI

I'd like you to try something by Erik Satie.

(beat)

SERGEI (CONT'D)

Gnossienne No. 1.

Lila looks at the page.

Unfamiliar.

SERGEI (CONT'D)
Don't count it.
(beat)

SERGEI (CONT'D)
Just follow the shape of it.

She begins.

Slow.

Tentative.

The strange, floating phrasing fills the room.

Unresolved.

Hypnotic.

SERGEI listens.

More present now.

The door opens.

ELENA enters.

She pauses just inside.

Listens.

The music holds her.

Then---

her eyes move to Sergei.

A beat.

She crosses the room.

Sets her things down.

ELENA
Please continue. Erik Satie?

Sergei nods.

Lila resumes.

More confident now.

ELENA (CONT'D)

It suits her.

SERGEI

It does.

A pause.

Lila continues playing---

then, without looking up:

LILA

Mr. Arseniev has a question about
a watch.

The music falters---

then stops.

Silence.

Elena turns her head slightly.

Looks at Sergei.

ELENA

What watch is that?

Sergei shifts.

Caught---

but containing it.

SERGEI

I've been thinking about buying
one.

(beat)

SERGEI (CONT'D)

It's nothing.

A long beat.

Elena studies him.

No reaction.

No challenge.

Just---

seeing.

Then---

she turns away.

ELENA

I'm going to get us each a glass
of wine.

She moves toward the kitchen.

Unhurried.

Controlled.

The tension stays in the room.

ELENA (CONT'D)

Lila, please go finish your school
work before supper.

LILA

Yes, Mother.

Leaves.

Her footsteps fade.

A door closes.

Silence.

No piano now.

Only the room.

INT. KITCHEN / LIVING AREA -- CONTINUOUS

Elena pours wine.

Measured.

Precise.

Sergei remains where he is.

She returns.

Hands him a glass.

Their fingers touch.

A beat---

then separate.

SERGEI

It was nothing.

(beat)

SERGEI (CONT'D)

Please forgive the intrusion.

Elena says nothing.

She takes a sip of wine.

Lets the silence extend.

Sergei waits.

Uncomfortable now.

ELENA

I've allowed you into our world.

(beat)

ELENA (CONT'D)

Don't abuse that privilege.

The words land quietly.

More weight than volume.

Sergei nods.

SERGEI

Of course.

A beat.

She studies him.

Closer now.

ELENA

You're not like the others.

A pause.

SERGEI

I'm not sure what that means.

ELENA

You will.

Silence.

She steps closer.

Very close now.

ELENA (CONT'D)

Just be careful what you choose to see.

A beat.

ELENA (CONT'D)

And what you choose to ignore.

Their eyes lock.

No distance.

No music.

Only tension.

She reaches up---

adjusts his collar.

The gesture lingers.

ELENA (CONT'D)

Stay.

A beat.

Sergei doesn't move.

SERGEI

I will.

Silence.

Heavy.

Unresolved.

FADE OUT.

SCENE 14

INT. RENAUD APARTMENT -- NIGHT

The apartment is dim.

Lamps only.

Shadows gather in the corners.

LILA sits at the piano.

She plays Gnossienne No. 3 by Erik Satie.

Slowly.

Floating.

Unmeasured.

SERGEI stands beside her.

Closer than before.

SERGEI

Let it breathe.

(beat)

SERGEI (CONT'D)

Play it slowly.

(beat)

SERGEI (CONT'D)

Then even slower than you want.

Lila adjusts.

The phrasing opens.

SERGEI watches her hands.

He leans in---
gently adjusts her wrist.

SERGEI (CONT'D)

Softer.

Then---
without thinking---
he steadies her knee to correct her posture.
A light touch on her thigh.

Neutral.

Instructional.

Across the room---

ELENA watches.

Still.

Expression unchanged.

A beat.

The music continues.

Then---

Elena moves.

Quietly.

Decisive.

She picks up a small MARBLE SCULPTURE from a nearby table.

Steps forward---

and strikes Sergei across the back of the head.

A dull, controlled impact.

The music stops.

Sergei collapses.

Disoriented.

Not fully unconscious.

Lila doesn't scream.

She watches.

Elena sets the sculpture down carefully.

Then---

moves with efficiency.

She rolls Sergei onto his stomach.

Pulls his arms back.

ZIP TIES.

Tight.

His ankles---

bound next.

Sergei groans.

Trying to focus.

Trying to understand.

Elena stands.

Goes to the kitchen.

Returns with plastic wrap.

Rolls him on his back.

Straddles him.

Calm.

Measured.

She pulls the wrap across his face---

tight.

Seals it with her hands.

Sergei thrashes.

Muffled.

Air nearly gone.

Elena leans over him.

A wild look he'd never seen.

Watching.

Still.

Focused.

His movement weakens.

His breath disappears.

His eyes---

finding hers.

A long beat.

LILA

Mommy...

A beat.

LILA (CONT'D)

Not this one.

Silence.

Elena doesn't move immediately.

Still watching Sergei.

Measuring.

Then---

slowly---

she peels the plastic back.

Just enough.

Sergei gasps.

Air floods in.

Sharp.

Desperate.

He coughs.

Still bound.

Still on the floor.

Elena remains close.

SERGEI

What the fuck?

A beat.

Coughing as he continues to regain his breath.

Elena watches him.

SERGEI (CONT'D)

I shouldn't have gone in there.
(beat)

SERGEI (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

A beat.

ELENA

You touched my daughter.

Silence.

Sergei processes.

SERGEI

It was instruction. Her posture
was wrong.

He steadies his breath.

She leans slightly closer.

Her head shaking--

ELENA
You triggered me.
(beat)

ELENA (CONT'D)
Don't make me regret this.

Sergei doesn't hesitate.

SERGEI
I won't.

A beat.

Elena holds his gaze.

Then---

to Lila:

ELENA
Go to your room.

LILA
Yes, Mother.

She leaves.

A door closes down the hall.

Silence.

Elena turns back to Sergei.

ELENA
No one was supposed to see this
side of me.

SERGEI
I know.

ELENA
And you're alright with it?

A long pause.

Sergei considers.

Then he coughs lightly.

Elena loosens the plastic wrap completely.

A long pause.

Sergei tries to sit up, but fails.

Restraints still around his wrists.

His body is still shaking.

Then---

SERGEI

Yes, mostly.

(beat)

A faint shift---

The wildness recedes from Elena's face.

Her composure returns.

Almost a slight smile.

She reaches down---

loosens the restraints.

ELENA

Good.

A beat.

ELENA (CONT'D)

Then we understand each other.

She reaches up---

brushes his hair back in place with her hand.

The gesture lingers.

Sergei looks directly at her.

SERGEI

Your daughter is safe with me.

Silence.

Elena studies him.

Long.

Careful.

A shift---

Controlled.

But friendlier.

ELENA

Let's have that glass of wine.

SERGEI

I could use something stronger.

A beat.

SERGEI

I wasn't planning on being around
much longer...

He lets that land.

Doesn't elaborate.

ELENA

I know.

A beat.

SERGEI

Then you understand why I'm not
leaving.

Silence.

Heavy.

Unresolved.

Elena moves her face closer to Sergei.

Then closer.

Taking in his breath.

Her breathing-- slightly ragged.

Perched on the precipice before pulling back.

She nods.

Hands Sergei a glass. Bourbon neat.

Then stands and walks slowly down the hall.

FADE OUT.

SCENE 15

INT. BACKSTAGE -- NIGHT

SUPER: "SIX MONTHS LATER"

Quiet.

Dim.

Low voices.

Sergei stands near the curtain.

A MAN (40s, well-dressed, a presenter or organizer) approaches him.

MAN

Sergei.
(extends a hand)

MAN (CONT'D)

I saw your last performance.

Sergei nods politely.

SERGEI

Thank you.

MAN

No, really---
(beat)

MAN (CONT'D)

Everyone is talking about you again. There's something different.

Sergei listens---

but not fully.

MAN (CONT'D)

More alive.

A small pause.

MAN (CONT'D)

You're taking risks again.

Sergei absorbs that---

but his attention drifts.

Something catches his eye.

Beyond the man---

Elena stands a few feet away.

Still.

Watching him.

The man continues speaking---

fading slightly in Sergei's awareness.

MAN (CONT'D)

---whatever you're doing---

(beat)

MAN (CONT'D)

keep doing it.

Silence.

Sergei glances at Elena.

She does not react.

Does not acknowledge it.

Just---

holds his gaze.

A long beat.

STAGE MANAGER (O.S.)

You're on.

The moment breaks.

Sergei nods.

The man moves off.

Sergei turns---

Lila stands nearby.

Ready.

Composed.

He leans slightly toward her.

Quiet.

SERGEI

Just play it like you do for me.
(beat)

SERGEI (CONT'D)

Pretend it's just your mother and
me watching you.

Lila nods.

No fear.

Only focus.

Sergei straightens---

and walks toward the stage.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL CONCERT HALL -- NIGHT

Dimly lit.

Intimate.

A modest but attentive audience.

The stage is simple:

A STEINWAY GRAND.

A single chair.

A glass of water.

Sergei steps onto the stage.

Applause.

Measured.

He steps to the microphone---

then pauses.

Looks out.

A full house.

SERGEI
Before I begin---
(beat)

SERGEI (CONT'D)
I'd like to introduce someone.

A ripple of curiosity.

SERGEI (CONT'D)
My student.
(beat)

SERGEI (CONT'D)
Lila Renaud.

A small stir.

SERGEI (CONT'D)
She prefers music in minor keys.

A faint, knowing smile from Sergei.

Lila enters.

She catches the line---

a subtle smirk in return.

She sits at the piano.

Sergei steps aside---

then offstage.

INT. WINGS -- CONTINUOUS

Sergei stands in the shadows.

Watching.

Elena beside him.

Still.

Unmoving.

Together---

but not touching.

Lila begins to play Nocturne No. 20 in C-sharp minor by
Frédéric Chopin.

Simple.

Melancholy.

Clear.

Unadorned.

The room softens.

The audience leans in.

Sergei watches---

not analyzing.

Just listening.

A quiet pride.

Elena watches Lila.

Then---

briefly---

Sergei.

A beat.

Lila finishes.

Applause.

Warm.

Unexpectedly strong.

She stands.

Bows slightly and gives a curtsy.

Exits.

Elena and Lila move to their seats---

front row.

Sergei watches them sit.

Then notices---

Ten rows back, two men.

A beat.

He looks again.

Just a couple.

Talking.

A beat--

Sergei steps out of the shadows.

CUT TO:

INT. STAGE -- MOMENTS LATER

Sergei returns to the piano.

No introduction.

Slight applause.

No acknowledgment.

He sits.

A moment.

Stillness.

Then---

he begins:

Maurice Ravel's "Le Gibet" from Gaspard de la Nuit.

A low, tolling note.

Again.

Again.

Relentless.

The sound hangs.

Unforgiving.

CUT TO:

Elena and Lila in the front row.

Still.

Composed.

Together.

Cut---

Sergei's wrist.

A watch.

Stainless steel.

A faint glint.

The second hand moves.

Tick.

Cut---

Sergei plays.

Deeper now.

More certain.

Cut---

closer.

The watch.

Tick.

Tick.

Cut---

the tolling note continues.

Sound and image begin to merge.

Tick.

Note.

Tick.

Note.

Closer---

the watch.

Ordinary.

Precise.

Sergei does not look up.

He does not need to.

The tolling continues.

The image holds---

on the watch.

Tick.

Tick.

Tick.

CUT TO BLACK.