

A Musical Short Story
Prequel to
The Strings of Sisterhood
**Borod-in
Class**

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The Strings of Sisterhood Prequel: Borod-in Class

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Jerry Chang flicked his bow over the cello strings to Haydn String Quartet Number Five Million, Two Hundred, and Whatever. For the next several lines, or pages, all he could see were repeated notes, with an occasional rest or slow note thrown in for good measure. Could this song get any more boring?

A flourish of fast notes jolted Jerry from his stupor. Well, maybe it wasn't boring for Mr. I'm-better-than-everyone Franklin Curtis, the pale guy in skinny jeans and a beanie sitting opposite him. Why did Hadyn give all the fast lines to the first violinist, leaving the monotonous accompaniment part to the remainder of the string quartet? Couldn't the composer share the love with the other instrumentalists every once in a while? This year, his junior year of college, all he'd played in chamber music class were Mozart and Haydn String Quartets, which he'd practically memorized.

Jerry glanced at the girl seated next to him. Nineteen-year-old violist Adrienne Pearson leaned back against her chair, tan legs crossed and bouncing her golden stilettoed foot up and down to the beat. With her blonde pixie haircut and short dress, she stood out like a Van Gogh painting in a Renaissance art museum. The dazed look in her hazel eyes suggested she'd tuned out as well.

Across from Adrienne, her older sister, Victoria Pearson, perched on the edge of her seat, bow held in a firm grasp. Every facial feature burned with intensity, from her deep brown eyes to her taut red lips, as though the weight of the world depended on a perfect execution of the repetitive accompaniment.

Jerry smiled. If anyone deserved to be first violinist, it was conscientious, dedicated (not-to-mention attractive) Victoria. Not uppity Franklin.

###

“Excellent job.” Mr. Vatchev, their teacher, applauded at the close of the song. “Franklin, you played the runs with impeccable precision.”

Franklin's nose rose several inches in the air. "Thanks, Professor. My privilege. As the first violinist, I'm *always* happy to lead the quartet in our performances."

Adrienne rolled her eyes. "This is a college chamber music class. Not a concert in Carnegie Hall. Besides, your mechanical execution of the lyrical phrases nearly put me to sleep."

"Anyway," Franklin shot Adrienne a glare, "I was wondering what we should play next? What do you think, Mr. Vatchev?"

The teacher stroked his chin. "Hmm, today you played the Hadyn String Quartet, Opus 20, No. 5 in F minor. Next, I would suggest the String Quartet, Op.20, No. 6."

Jerry groaned.

"Excuse me." Mr. Vatchev arched his eyebrows. "Jerry, do you have a problem with my selection?"

"Yes," Jerry blurted. "The cello parts are so repetitive. They all sound the same."

"I agree." Adrienne ran a hand through her golden hair. "It's a total *ennui* to play for the viola."

Jerry nodded. "If I spoke French, I'd totally agree with you. What does *ennui* mean?"

"It's *boring*. Look around." She gestured to the rest of the students seated in the recital room. "They're all bored in class."

Mr. Vatchev frowned. "Borod-in class?" His thick Eastern European accent colored his words. "What do you mean?"

"That's it!" Jerry exclaimed as excitement pulsed through his veins. "We should play the Borodin String Quartet."

Victoria nodded. "It's opening cello melody is breathtaking. Jerry, I'm sure you'd sound amazing."

Her gaze met Jerry's, and heat crept up his neck under the black-colored shirt. Why did this happen every time she paid him a compliment? She probably liked the song.

“All right.” Mr. Vatchev’s staccato voice pulled Jerry back to reality. “I’ll allow you to try it. But you’d better master it in time for our next chamber music performance next month.”

Jerry swallowed. Not much time.

###

Over the next several days, Jerry poured over the score of Russian composer Alexander Borodin’s String Quartet No. 2 in D Major. He practiced it every spare moment he could find and listened to it the rest of the time. The luscious melodies and rich harmonies captured his interest in a way he’d never experienced from chamber music. Sure, he’d found a deep connection with other music before, like the great cello concertos and dramatic symphonies. But this quartet was different, so personal. And intimate. Like a conversation between a group of friends. A warm sensation bubbled up in his chest as his thoughts turned to Adrienne and Victoria. Then he froze. Franklin. He’d ruin it. Their first rehearsal together would take place the following day. How could they ever achieve this level of artistic mastery with mechanical Franklin as the first violinist?

The next day, Jerry entered the spacious chamber music classroom. Drab, cream-colored walls offered little artistic inspiration for the upcoming endeavor. The clock read ten minutes until the hour. Best to arrive early with time to warm-up. He pulled out his instrument, situated himself on the chair, and ran through the opening measures.

Lost in the beauty of the phrase, he barely noticed the patting of footsteps behind him. They stopped, but he continued for several more moments. At the conclusion of the first section, he stopped.

Victoria stood beside him, hands clutching the neck of her violin, eyes closed. A black sweater accentuated her hourglass frame, reminding him of the instrument she loved to play. Her brown hair, bobbed at her shoulders, shone in the light that streamed in from the windows. Seconds later, her eyes fluttered open.

“Jerry, that was stunning.” She placed a hand on his shoulder. “I doubt even Yo-Yo Ma could have played it better.” She smiled at him—a rich, warm smile.”

A tug of excitement pulled at his heartstrings. This girl could melt him every time.

Adrienne waltzed from her viola case to the chair beside Jerry. “I thought it was beautiful, too. Much better than the lame Haydn we played last week.”

He nodded.

The door opened and Mr. Vatchev strode in. He placed his score on a music stand in front of them. “Time to begin.” He frowned. “Where is Franklin?”

“I’m here.” Franklin’s lackadaisical voice carried from the entrance as he sauntered inside. His bloodshot eyes and unkempt hair didn’t bode well for a good rehearsal.

“Sit down,” Mr. Vatchev grunted. “You’re late.”

“Sorry, Professor.” Franklin plopped into his seat and struggled to tune his instrument for the next several minutes. Something was off.

“Are you finished yet?” Mr. Vatchev exclaimed in an exasperated manner. “We don’t have all day. Please begin.”

Jerry drew a deep breath, then commenced with the opening. For the first few bars, he felt as if time stood still. He, Adrienne, and Victoria played in perfect harmony with each other.

Suddenly, a horrible squawk erupted from Franklin’s violin.

“What was that?” Mr. Vatchev shrieked.

“I’m sorry,” Jerry mumbled, speech slurred. “I couldn’t read the notes.”

“Try again,” growled Mr. Vatchev.

Again, the opening measures sailed smoothly, but the mood crumbled with Franklin’s entrance. He played a few more moments this time before Mr. Vatchev waved his hands to cut them off.

“Franklin, this is abysmal. I don’t know what’s wrong with you today, but you’re not playing like a first violinist. Please switch places with Victoria.”

His bloodshot eyes widened. “But...”

Mr. Vatchev’s eyes retaliated by shooting daggers. “Now. I can’t waste my time listening to this rehearsal when clearly you haven’t practiced. I’ll leave you to sight-read the material today, but it needs to be up to par by our next rehearsal.” His gaze softened as he turned to Victoria. “If you have any questions about your new first violin part, feel free to visit me. I’ll be in my office preparing for our symphony rehearsal.”

She nodded as he exited the room. Like a queen on her throne, she straightened in her chair and addressed the rest of them. “I think we should reschedule for tonight.”

Franklin glared at her. “Why?”

She placed a hand on her hip. “Because you’re in no condition to play with us right now. Go take a shower and get a coffee or something to wake yourself up. I can’t believe you joined us in this condition. I’ll expect you to join us tonight at eight to make up for this morning.”

“What?” Franklin cried. “You can’t make me come to an evening rehearsal. You’re not the boss.”

Jerry laughed. “Yeah, she is, now that she’s the first violinist. I’m fine with rehearsing tonight. Adrienne, what about you?”

She scrunched her ski-jump nose. “Well, I was planning on going out tonight with some of my friends...”

“Adrienne,” Victoria barked.

“Oh, all right. I’ll come.” Her shoulders sagged as she slumped against her chair. “But it better be a short one.”

Jerry grinned. *Way to take control, Victoria!*

###

That evening, adrenaline pulsed through Jerry’s veins as he entered the music school. Despite the late hour, the music building buzzed with

trumpet blasts and flute trills. He pushed open the door to the chamber music room where Victoria already sat in her chair, pouring over the music. Her eyelashes fluttered as she glanced up at him. A wide smile spread across her ruby lips. "Jerry, you're here early."

His mouth went dry. "I can leave, if you need more time to prepare." He turned to go, but she reached for his arm.

"No, stay." Her soft voice implored. "The opening is largely a duet between the cellist and first violinist. We pass the melody back and forth."

"Like a musical conversation." He grinned, and she smiled back.

"Yes."

For a moment, she paused, as though speech had eluded her. A soft blush crept into her cheeks.

"Should we begin?" He asked with a wave at the music.

She nodded. "You start."

After a quick breath, he drew his bow over the strings and played the first few measures. It poured from his strings with such ease that his cello felt as though it were an extension of himself. Moments later, the beautiful melody soared from Victoria's instrument like a bird in flight after a long winter. They had caged her too long as second violinist. Now was her time to fly!

But as quickly as she'd started, she passed the melody back to him. Why did it feel so much easier to talk to her with notes than with words?

A second later, the door burst open, and Adrienne entered, followed by Franklin. From the looks on their faces, neither appeared happy to be there. Adrienne's makeup, heels, and sequined top hinted she had more plans tonight than simply a rehearsal.

"Look at the two overachievers already here for extra practice," Franklin cackled. "Are you here to make me look bad again, Victoria?"

"Shut it, Franklin, and sit down," Jerry growled. "You made yourself look bad this morning. That's what you get for showing up to rehearsal in that condition."

Franklin sank into his chair. "I can play however I want. It's not like I'd show up that way to a concert."

Jerry's insides clenched. "You'd better not."

"Enough." Victoria rapped her pencil on the music stand. "Let's get started."

They began again, but this time lacked the same connection as before.

After several lines, Adrienne set her viola down on her lap. "Franklin," she sighed, exasperation evident in her voice. "You and I are supposed to play the same rhythms, but you're always a beat ahead of me."

"Then you're just slow," he snorted.

Victoria shook her head. "No, she's not. You need to come in on the off-beats."

Franklin's face flushed red. "You're wrong. I won't tolerate this. I should be the first violinist, since you don't know what you're talking about."

He put his violin away and slammed the case shut. "I quit!"

Jerry turned to Victoria. What were they going to do? How could they play the Borodin String Quartet with only three musicians?

###

The following day, Jerry trudged warily to the music school for rehearsal. What would Mr. Vatchev say after the events of yesterday? Who knew what lies Franklin might have told him?

Victoria sat in her chair, practicing the first movement with a surprisingly serene look on her face. How could she be this calm after last night?

"Hi Jerry." She smiled as he settled into his seat.

The door opened, and Adrienne entered, followed by, not Franklin, but Victoria and Adrienne's younger sister, Marie. What was she doing here?

Adrienne grinned. "I brought reinforcements."

“Hey, guys.” Marie pulled out her violin and took her seat next to Victoria. Hair pulled back in a ponytail and dressed in jeans and a T-shirt, Marie’s casual attire suggested she had no fear of playing with the college students. But would Mr. Vatchev allow it?

Jerry waved. “Hey Marie. Good to see you again.”

Victoria raised her violin to her shoulder. “Should we commence?”

As before, Jerry and Victoria fell easily into their duet with each other, passing the melody back and forth. But unlike the previous rehearsal, this time the second violin and viola played perfectly in sync with each other. All three of the girls played well with each other, as though connected by the strings of sisterhood.

Several minutes later, Mr. Vatchev entered, with an angry Franklin at his heels.

“Professor, you can’t allow this *high school* student to take my place. It’s not allowed,” Franklin sneered.

Mr. Vatchev waved him off. “Don’t worry about that. The violin professor and I have worked it all out. She was already enrolled in college credit for her private violin lessons, and we can add chamber music as well. It will give her an excellent jump start on her future collegiate career. Franklin, you can join the freshman quartet. The first years need a leader who can help them with Pachelbel’s Cannon.”

Franklin’s eyes flashed as he turned and stormed from the room.

Mr. Vatchev settled into his chair in front of the musicians. “Shall we begin? I’m excited to finally hear the Borodin Quartet.”

“Definitely.” Victoria beamed.

Never a boring moment with the Pearson sisters around.

About the Author



Ashley Rescot is a professional violinist, educator, writer, and Fulbright Scholar. An aficionado of music, pedagogy, family, faith, and language, she writes about her life as a musician. With degrees in both music and literature, she hopes her stories will inspire the next generation of musicians, encourage music professionals, and educate others about the exciting world of music.

Other Works by Ashley Rescot

Discover more about Jerry Chang and the Pearson sisters in Ashley's debut music fiction novel *A Change in Tune!*



Violinist Victoria Pearson dreams of attending Johann Conservatory of Music in New York City for graduate school. As the oldest of five sisters, she hopes to escape her Midwestern college town and hectic family situation to fulfill her passion in life—music. But when she decides to participate in Belton University's Concerto competition to bolster her chances of acceptance, Victoria finds herself competing against her sister Adrienne and lifelong cellist friend Jerry Chang. This sets in motion a rivalry that questions the roles of sisterhood, friendship, and maybe love.

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