

RECEPTION

By

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EXT. SNOWY FOREST - DUSK

FADE IN.

The constant cry of a BABY echoes dimly about snow-covered evergreens.

A clear crunch is heard - a WOODSMAN'S thick boots sink into the snow. He follows the unseen infant's wailing to its source.

He finds the baby sheltered beneath an evergreen, wrapped tightly in furs. It calms down as the Woodsman approaches. Concerned, he kneels down and pushes the pelts away to get a better look.

Tiny twin lumps on the baby's forehead are revealed.

EXT. SNOWY FIELD - DAY

FADE IN.

A group of children in puffy and tattered coats play in the snow.

One child stands apart: VICTOR is swimming in a dusty green jacket that nearly covers his boots, watching the rest of the kids fondly from behind a rustic wooden fence.

He tugs a tremendous wool hat more snugly around his head but it does little to hide two very conspicuous lumps.

He steps forward to join the others, but a wrinkled hand closes around his shoulder and holds him back.

He looks up to see THE HEADMISTRESS -- a very tall, very thin older woman. Her graying hair is pulled back into a tight bun. She seems like a severe sort of person. The Headmistress beckons the other children to her side.

They arrange themselves in a line, jostling each other around and striking poses. Victor is pushed and prodded, but he gathers his bearings and they all smile.

A PHOTOGRAPHER is revealed. He snaps a picture of the group.

STILL SHOT of the photo as its colors fade to black and white.

A beat.

Thin fingers sweep over the photo, as though in admiration.

INT. DARK ROOM - DAY

Victor sits alone on a dusty persian carpet, peering at the photo in his hands.

Now hatless, two striking black horns are revealed, poking through his shaggy blonde hair. He is thin and pale, with tired but gentle eyes. His blouse and dress shorts are clean and presentable but they hang awkwardly from his skinny limbs

The room is excessively dim. Dust motes swim in a small pool of light from a crack in the curtains of a lone window.

A KNOCK at the door captures Victor's attention. He places the photo reverently on the floor and stands up.

VICTOR  
Coming...!

The rest of the room is revealed as Victor walks, barefoot, toward the door. It's cramped and stuffy, littered with stacked boxes, assorted junk and random knickknacks. A flimsy bed is tucked into the corner, along with a battered old nightstand and shelving for a few books.

Strangely, Victor stops in front of the door instead of opening it.

VICTOR  
Um. You can come in now.

INT. HALLWAY

THE JANITOR stands just outside, a cardboard box tucked under her arm. She's sort of scruffy and appears to be in her late 20's. There's a friendly air about her.

JANITOR  
Alright. Comin' in.

She fumbles for a particular key amongst the many on the ring, and unlocks the door.

As it swings open and light pours into the room, it becomes apparent just how pale and sickly Victor looks -- like he's barely there. The Janitor smiles warmly down at him.

JANITOR  
Happy birthday, Victor.

Victor returns the smile.

(CONTINUED)

The Janitor jostles the box around and extends it toward Victor.

JANITOR

I got some good stuff for you this time around. Magazines n' such. You let me know if you find anythin' you like and I'll see what I can do.

Victor brightens considerably. He hefts the box into his arms.

VICTOR

Thank you... But the music is enough. It's very beautiful. Where is it coming from? Is there a band visiting?

The Janitor looks mildly concerned, but smiles it off -- the kind of look one might give an innocently confused dementia patient.

There's no audible music.

JANITOR

Oh, uh, the music...? I'm not sure, Victor...

A beat.

JANITOR

You enjoy that stuff, alright?

VICTOR

Alright. Thank you.

The Janitor closes the door after another glance at Victor's smiling face.

She locks it, sighs, and disappears down the hall.

INT. DARK ROOM

Locked in his room again, Victor closes his eyes. Muffled static ebbs and increases in volume while he wanders about, as though searching for better reception.

Toward the window, the static swells into a veritable symphony.

(CONTINUED)

Victor wipes hair away from his horns, and the music becomes even clearer. He dances and twirls by himself in the dark, happy and utterly serene despite the gloom.

An AERIAL SHOT of the dancing boy and his small room reveals that there is no music to speak of.

CUT TO TITLE -- "RECEPTION"

INT. DARK ROOM - DAY

Victor sprawls on the carpet, flipping through assorted magazines.

Illustrated advertisements for miscellaneous products and clothing, images of landscapes and smiling people, short stories and periodicals -- all litter his floor like a grand collage. The dated images indicate that the current year is sometime in the early 1900's.

A lazy waltz plays in Victor's head.

A particular advertisement catches his eye: It's something called a "radio." He pours over the sensationalized description and gazes at the attached illustration of a happy family, all gathered around the machine in their living room.

Dimly, through the waltz, the sounds of laughter and activity come from the direction of the window.

The glass RATTLES suddenly, and Victor looks up in time to see a ball bounce off the window.

He tentatively approaches, pushing the curtains aside.

EXT. LAWN

A group of children recoil, frightened at the sight of Victor's horned face appearing from behind the curtains.

Victor is all smiles. He seems to be speaking to them, but his words are muffled through the glass. Something about hearing music...?

A little girl retrieves the ball and shakes her head at Victor -- a hasty "I don't know" gesture -- before she and her friends run off.

Victor's smile falters. He turns away from the window and returns to his magazines, humming along to the waltz.

FADE OUT.

INT. HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

The Janitor walks by Victor's door and is surprised to hear knocking from within.

She checks up and down the hall cautiously, before yanking her key ring from her pocket.

JANITOR  
I hear ya...!

The door opens to reveal Victor mid-knock and rocking on his feet, more energetic than the Janitor has seen him in a while. He holds a magazine aloft, page opened to the radio advertisement. He points to it adamantly.

VICTOR  
This! I like this a lot!

The Janitor laughs and takes the magazine from him, examining the ad... She stops laughing.

JANITOR  
Oh... A radio, huh?

She purses her lips.

JANITOR  
This is really expensive, Victor...  
Do you know what this is?

Victor nods, very serious.

VICTOR  
(resolutely)  
Yes. A machine that plays music in  
the air.

The Janitor can't help but laugh again.

JANITOR  
Well, you're partly right...

She takes another look at the advertisement, then glances into Victor's room, at the clock on the wall.

Anxiously, she rolls up the magazine. Victor looks on, curious.

(CONTINUED)

JANITOR

Okay, then. We'll get you a radio.  
But it'll have to be after your  
Headmistress goes to bed, alright?  
You know how she gets.

Victor nods again, relieved.

VICTOR

Okay. Tonight, then.

JANITOR

Tonight.

Victor extends his hand -- a gentleman's promise. The Janitor smiles and takes it.

INT. DARK ROOM - LATE NIGHT

The Janitor tentatively opens the door. The hallway is dark, but there's a lamp burning dimly inside Victor's room.

The boy in question lays asleep on the carpet. A lullaby plays in his head.

The Janitor closes the door softly. She kneels beside Victor and goes to put a hand on his shoulder, to gently shake him awake.

She pauses at the sight of the horns, so close up.

JANITOR

(after a moment)

Victor, hey.

The boy's eyes flutter open. He's up in a flash.

VICTOR

Where's the rabio?

JANITOR

Radio. We're gonna build it.

An energetic symphony plays in Victor's head as the two look through the piled boxes in search of materials. They find assorted bits and pieces and, with the help of the Janitor's tool belt, assemble a very simple, bare bones radio.

Victor is ecstatic. This is probably the most human contact he's had in a long time. He looks on with boundless enthusiasm as the Janitor puts the finishing touches on the little contraption.

(CONTINUED)

VICTOR  
... Is that it?

JANITOR  
Yep!

Victor observes. His brow furrows.

VICTOR  
It doesn't look like the picture...

JANITOR  
But it does the same thing. Watch.

She attaches an alligator clip to a wire and suddenly, the symphony playing softly in Victor's head is echoing around the room.

Victor is absolutely shocked.

He leaps up.

VICTOR  
The music! It's the music!

The Janitor watches Victor's reaction, happy but a little bewildered. The boy dances excitedly around the room.

INT. DARK ROOM - DAY

Unsatisfied with the bare bones look of the radio, Victor has begun to decorate it using other materials found in the boxes of junk.

He gets the Janitor to bring him some paints, and soon he's fashioned a bubble-shaped, teal radio. Like he'd been shown the other night, he connects a clip to a wire and the music in his head fills the room.

He brings his radio to the windowsill and fits it right up against the window. Immensely proud as he hums along.

He's satisfied... But it's not very loud.

Not dissuaded in the least, Victor begins to rummage through the boxes once more, setting out to make another.



EXT. LAWN - EARLY EVENING

Muffled music sounds from Victor's lone window. A boy passing close by happens to hear it and calls his friend over. They cautiously approach the wall, holding their ears to it.

As other children notice, they gather and start to stare.

SKEPTICAL BOY

Ain't he cursed? You'll catch it!

GIRL

But there's music! Listen!

The kids chatter amongst themselves, shushing each other in hopes of hearing the sounds more clearly. Soon enough, they are all gathered outside Victor's window.

The Headmistress steps suddenly out from the house. The sign above the door reads "LITTLE TREASURES ORPHANAGE."

With alarm, she notices the grouped children.

HEADMISTRESS

Step away from there! Inside,  
please!

The children hesitate, still curious about the mysterious music.

HEADMISTRESS

NOW... Or no dessert!

She gestures vehemently at the door and the kids begin to file inside.

Soon afterwards, a horse-drawn carriage pulls up to the gate of the yard. An older, haggard looking woman steps out, ushering a young girl from within.

EMMALINE wears a wide-brimmed sunhat over a freckled face. Clutched tight to her chest is what appears to be a violin case. She looks nervous, determined, but mostly blank.

As the older woman exchanges some words with the Headmistress, Emmaline stares fixedly at the ground.

After a moment, the Headmistress puts her hand tenderly over the young girl's shoulder, and leads her toward the door.

Just before she disappears into the building, Emmaline glances in the direction of Victor's window. She can barely make out the soft sound of a cello.

(CONTINUED)

EMMALINE

Miss? Does somebody here play  
music?

HEADMISTRESS

(resigned, a sigh)  
Not you, too...

EXT. LAWN - DAWN

The air is still and quiet. Birds chatter in the distance  
and the grass gleams with dew.

The door of the orphanage creaks open, just barely. A small  
hand curls around it and pushes it the rest of the way.  
Emmaline, clad in a nightgown and holding her violin case,  
carefully closes the door again and wanders onto the lawn.

She picks a spot, stops, and gently pulls her violin from  
its case, positioning it between her chin and shoulder...

She pauses. Now that her feet aren't crunching over the  
grass and the violin case lies dormant, she can hear muffled  
music again.

Emmaline purses her lips. It's louder, this time. She's  
definitely not mistaken...

Violin in hand, Emmaline approaches Victor's window. The  
curtain is pushed aside to reveal about 6 or 7 radios on the  
sill, all different shapes and colors, but all playing the  
same music.

Emmaline is delighted. She presses her ear to the window and  
closes her eyes. It's a piece she knows, featuring a string  
quartet.

She repositions her violin and serenely begins to play along  
with the music.

INT. DARK ROOM

Victor is passed out amongst piles of mechanical parts and  
half-finished radios. He wakes up to music, but it's more  
than just the tinny sound of the radios.

Something real and robust is heard beyond the window...!

Victor gets up, disheveled and wiping drool from his lips.  
He stumbles to the window, as delighted as Emmaline, and  
sees her there. Right outside.

He's frozen in awe, watching her sway and draw the bow across the neck of the instrument, eyes closed. He begins to sway, too...

EXT. LAWN

At a break in the tune, Emmaline opens her eyes and...notices Victor standing inches from her, behind the glass.

She makes a small squeak of surprise, stepping back from the window.

Victor is equally alarmed. Flustered, he drops below the sill.

For a beat, they both freeze.

EMMALINE

Hey...!

Suddenly, she presses her hands and face against the glass, trying to get a look at Victor.

EMMALINE

Heyyy...come back! Don't be scared...!

No avail.

EMMALINE

What are those things on your head?

Nothing.

INT. DARK ROOM

Victor crouches below the window, curled in on himself upon the floor. His cheeks are red with embarrassment.

EMMALINE

(muffled)

...I like your music.

He pauses. Then turns and kneels, peeking over the windowsill, between the radios.

EXT. LAWN

EMMALINE

Um...I'm kind of scared here. And lonely. And they won't let me play my violin indoors, but I heard your radio, so...

She watches Victor appear and disappear, peering through gaps in the radios.

EMMALINE

Oh...! Can you hear me? Can you open the window?

Victor looks at her, finally. He's still nervous. He shakes his head.

EMMALINE

No...?

Victor chews on his lip. Deliberating. After a beat, he points at her, finger against the glass.

VICTOR

(muffled)

Can-...Can you?

INT. DARK ROOM

As the music plays on, Victor watches Emmaline set her violin down and tuck her fingers somewhere below the window.

He holds his breath.

Emmaline struggles. The window evidently hasn't been opened in quite a while.

Finally, with a ROAR of exertion, she jolts the pane of glass upward -- with a mighty CRACK, it's open!

EMMALINE

(a little exhausted)

Okay!

She goes silent after a look at Victor's face.

Gentle strings sound over the radio as he stands, blinks. He feels the wind ruffle his hair, brushing it away from his face.

He takes a deep breath of the fresh air. It rustles the pages of the open magazines on his floor. He has not felt this in a long, long time...

EXT. LAWN

EMMALINE  
(after a beat...)  
Are you a *kind* monster...?

Victor stares at her curiously, hands on the windowsill.

VICTOR  
(confused)  
Um...

A pause. He tries a smile, and his cheeks redden again.

VICTOR  
I'm Victor.

Emmaline smiles in turn.

EMMALINE  
That's a good name. I don't think  
you could be a bad guy.

She thrusts her hand past the window, into his room. Victor recoils slightly and Emmaline laughs.

EMMALINE  
I'm sorry, did I scare you? My mom  
used to say I was scary. My name's  
Emmaline.

Victor stares at her hand, unsure of himself. She wiggles her fingers for emphasis.

EMMALINE  
Shake my hand! Then we'll be  
friends, officially.

VICTOR  
Oh...

He fits his palm against hers and shakes it gently.

VICTOR  
Hi, Emmaline.

(CONTINUED)

EMMALINE  
Hi, Victor.

## INT. UPSTAIRS BEDROOM

A group of pajama-clad children crowd around their window, all straining to peer downstairs.

CHILD #1  
She opened it!

CHILD #2  
Do you hear that? It's the music again...

CHILD #3  
Is she gonna go inside?

CHILD #4  
I can't see!

CHILD #5  
He'll eat her!

CHILD #2  
Shh! Listen!

## EXT. LAWN

Emmaline sits upon the windowsill, kicking her feet in the air. Her violin rests on her lap.

EMMALINE  
Where did you get your radios? I've never seen ones like these.

Victor sits awkwardly on his side of the sill, a little in awe of this girl.

VICTOR  
I made them. The Janitor showed me how.

EMMALINE  
(astounded)  
Really...!?

She gives the radios another look, leaning and peering into his room to glance at the piles of incomplete ones scattered across the rug. She's amazed.

(CONTINUED)

EMMALINE

Why are there so many? My old house  
only had one.

VICTOR

(a little puzzled)

I want to make sure everyone hears  
them. It used to be that only I  
could.

It's Emmaline's turn to look puzzled. Victor gently lifts  
one of his radios into his lap, patting it like a beloved  
pet.

VICTOR

I thought, it must be lonely being  
invisible. You float through the  
air all by yourself and nobody sees  
or hears you...

Emmaline stares at him... Her face brightens suddenly.

EMMALINE

I could help.

She raises both her brows and her violin.

Victor looks curiously from the radio to Emmaline.

A beat.

He smiles -- strong and bright -- and gives a firm nod of  
his head.

INT. UPSTAIRS BEDROOM

The music flooding the front yard easily reaches the open  
window of the shared bedroom. The kids are totally in awe.  
Some of them begin to dance, some are rooted in place.

The door opens, revealing the Headmistress in her nightgown.  
A few of the children leap fearfully back into bed.

HEADMISTRESS

All this racket so early in the  
mor...ning...?

She trails off upon hearing the music. She's surprised, but  
her expression softens. She makes her way to the window,  
gently pushing children aside, and peers out alongside them.

(CONTINUED)

HEADMISTRESS

So they both found a place to play,  
then...

EXT. BACKYARD

The Janitor leans against the back of the building,  
languidly smoking a cigarette. She taps her foot and sways  
to the beat.

EXT. LAWN

As the sun rises, music and birdsong fill the air.

END.