

## Cold

Swirls of snow kicked up from the path, delicate snowflakes landing on ebony socks and deep footprints marring the ground as she hurried along.

In the world above, the sun set, splashing vibrant hues of magenta and gold onto the tops of buildings, melting the surroundings into dancing silhouettes.

But she had no time to dance.

She willed her legs, rigid in the punishing cold, to hasten. Her violin, swaying at her side, banged into her legs with loud thumps as she wove through the city.

*Thump, thump.*

Her gaze kept drifting towards the sky, as though yearning to pause the dying light.

Though shadows already loomed, silver sparks of fear licked at her insides at the thought of being left alone, with the biting cold.

She felt it then, chasing her, nipping at her heels. Wolves of snow and ice, sharp teeth and howls in the wind.

Though she was still far from The Grand Hall, it was within sight, a towering building with tall, intricate, marble columns. A place that swept away the chill with only its mighty gaze.

A flicker of a memory pried at her thoughts. She glanced at the melting pinks in the sky. The memory wriggled, squirmed.

Her heartbeat quickened, cheeks flushed and icy.

Suddenly, she was somewhere else entirely.

*Lilting music flowed in from the living room. She felt the warm glowing lights, even where she cowered in the dark hallway. Tugging at her hair, which her mother had strung in too-tight pigtails, she fidgeted with the pegs on her violin, fingers tracing them up and down, as though scaling a mountain.*

*She heard it then, the call of her name from her mother's lips, and knew it was time. She entered the living room, cautiously placed her bow on the string, and began the soft entry into the song.*

Flurries of snow spiked her pink skin. The sun was nearly set, night-time leering it's cruel face at her.

*The last note hovered in the air, and she pasted on a broad smile for the audience, the corners of her mouth wavering as she looked to her mother and found only coldness in her stare.*

A few meters, then she would reach The Grand Hall. A chance to prove herself.

*With a shove, she landed on the front porch steps, the warm light above only spilling out for a few seconds longer once her mother closed the door.*

*And then she was alone. The swirling, icy wolves howled at her, bit at her raw skin. The tears froze before they ever left her eyes.*

She stopped suddenly.

The Grand Hall. She had made it. Washed in the glow emanating off the building, she no longer glanced fearfully towards dying sun, or the cutting snow. She stood for a long while, waiting for something in her to shift. Tears welled in her eyes, and standing in that mellow warmth, she let them fall.

Then, she slipped through the doors.

And left the cold night.