

"THE VIOLINIST"

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FADE IN:

It's difficult for us to imagine how dreadful was the suffering that went on in the Nazi concentration camps during the Second World War II. The enormity of the crime that the Nazis committed is just too overwhelming for us to comprehend. In their attempt to wipe out an entire race they caused the death of six million people, most of them Jews. It is when you hear the stories of the individuals who lived through it that you can begin to understand the horror just a little better, and to understand the evil that caused it.

Based on Paolo Levi's true story. - written by Michael Morpurgo

THE VIOLINIST

INT. BARBER SHOP - MORNING

Little barber's shop, behind the Accademia, near the bridge. Barber shop, Papa is working on customer, Paolo is sitting on the chair behind the mirror and smiling and swinging his legs and beside him barber shop customer. The rhythmic sound of meticulously snipped barber's scissors. Papa works in complete silence. Papa 42 years old. He's wearing white overalls. Barber shop customer old late 60 man who is wearing gray jacket and pants and black hat. Paolo Levi 9 year old boy. Paolo is wearing 1960s children's clothes.

Barber shop

BARBER SHOP CUSTOMER

The rumours are absolutely right.

PAOLO LEVI

What kind of rumours?

BARBER SHOP CUSTOMER

That your Papa is the best barber in this part of Venice.

Paolo looks at the customer in surprise and doesn't say anything

BARBER SHOP CUSTOMER

Do you hear that Paolo?

PAOLO LEVI

Those scissors are playing a constantly changing tune everytime?

BARBER SHOP CUSTOMER

Yeah!

Papa moves to the next customer. Papa starts to shave the customer.

PAOLO LEVI

Do you see that?

BARBER SHOP CUSTOMER

What?

PAOLO LEVI

That he is also excellent with the brush and the razor.

BARBER SHOP CUSTOMER

Yeah, he is the best barber in Venice.

PAOLO LEVI

(Happily saying)

Yes I know that.

Paolo stands up and start moving around.

BARBER SHOP CUSTOMER

Paolo do you know that he is a musician too, ...a violinist...

PAOLO LEVI

Yes I only know that he is a violinist because Mama has told me.

Papa is finished shaving and calling the next barber shop customer. All other customers are starting to talk each other.

PAPA

(With loud voice)

Next please!

BARBER SHOP CUSTOMER

It is my turn now Paolo.

The barber shop customer stands up and takes a seat. Papa starts to shave him. Shaving is also rhythmical, the swiffer sweep and dab of the brush, the swish and slap of the razor as Papa sharpened it on a strap, as he strokes away the foam to reveal a recognisable face.

INT. HOME - MORNING

Mama and Paolo are in the kitchen. Mama wearing a long dress and preparing breakfast for the family

PAOLO LEVI

Mama I heard a customer mention again that Papa used to play the violin. Why doesn't he play the violion anymore?

Silence of 25 seconds.

MAMA

(tears in her eyes)

....Paolo do you know that he was the best in the whole orchestra absolutely brilliant but why don't you ask him yourself.

Paolo runs to living room.

LIVING ROOM

Papa and Paolo are in the living room. Papa is reading a newspaper. Sitting on the couch. Paolo runs to Papa.

PAOLO LEVI

(happy voice)

Papa! Papa! Why don't you play the violin any more?

Papa doesn't pay much attention to Paolo.

PAPA

(speaking quietly)

People change, Paolo. Times change.

PAOLO LEVI

What do you mean?

Paolo is waiting for answer but Papa doesn't respond to Paolo. Paolo runs back to the kitchen.

KITCHEN

Mama and Paolo in the kitchen. Paolo is sitting at the table and Mama is making breakfast for the family. Eggs, coffee, bacon, and homemade croissant

PAOLO LEVI

Mama, Papa didn't say anything to me.

MAMA

Paolo, if I show you the violin will you promise me you'll not ask Papa again?

PAOLO LEVI

Which violin?

MAMA

Papa's violin and you'll not ask Papa again about violin! Do you promise?

PAOLO LEVI

I promise.

MAMA

And you're never ever to tell Papa that I showed you his violin.

Mama is starting to leave the kitchen. She moves towards the bedroom.

PAOLO LEVI

I won't tell Papa.

MAMA

He would be very angry. Promise me now.

Mama is standing next to the bedroom door.

PAOLO LEVI

I promise.

Paolo is following Mama. They are heading towards the
bedroom.

BEDROOM

Paolo is standing by the door in the bedroom and watching Mama get on a chair to take the violin down from top of the wardrobe behind all the stuff. The violin is wrapped up in an old grey blanket. Paolo is kneeling on the bed beside her as she pulls away the blanket and opens the violin case. The lining inside is faded and worn to tatters. Mama picks up the violin with infinite care. Mama hands it to Paolo. Paolo strokes the polished grain of the wood. The violin is dark honey colour on the front, and golden honey underneath. Paolo runs his fingers along the black pegs, the mottled bridge, the carved scroll.

PAOLO LEVI

Can I play it?

MAMA

Papa might hear us. He is downstairs. He'd be furious with me for showing it you.

PAOLO LEVI

But why mama?

MAMA

He never wants it to be played again. He hasn't even looked at it in years

PAOLO LEVI

But why doesn't he want to play it.

MAMA

You promised if I showed you you'd not ask any more questions. You know now it exists, Paolo. But you have never seen it. Do you understand?

PAOLO LEVI

But Mama!

MAMA

And from now on I don't want to hear another word about it, all right?

PAOLO LEVI

Mama!

MAMA

You promised me, Paolo.

Mama puts the violin back. She lays it back safely in its case, wrapped it in the blanket, and puts it back on top of the wardrobe.

INT. PAOLO'S BEDROOM - SUNSET/NIGHT

Paolo is in the bed. Paolo is wearing pyjama. Late summer evening, lying half awake in bed. The distant sound of an unaccompanied violin- Vivaldi. Paolo looks out of the window. Over the sound of people talking and walking, over the throbbing engines of the passing water buses, comes the sweet sound of the violin from somewhere beyond the bridge. Paolo steals past the kitchen door, down the stairs and out in the street.

EXT. STREET/BRIDGE - NIGHT

Paolo, goes to the bridge. Warm night, and quite dark. Paolo runs to the middle of the bridge and stops. All on his own, standing by the railing in the middle of the bridge, there is an old man playing the violin, his violin case is open at his feet. Benjamin is alone, playing the violin. There is no one else. He is so engrossed in his playing that he doesn't notice Paolo at first. Paolo can see now that he is even much older than Papa. Benjamin notices Paolo. Benjamin stops playing.

BENJAMIN

Hello young boy. You're out late. What's your name?

PAOLO LEVI

Paolo.... Paolo Levi. Papa was a violinist in a orchestra.

BENJAMIN

So was I, all my life.Benjamin....Horowitz.
But now I am what I always wanted to be, a soloist.
I could play you some Mozart. Do you like
Mozart..... a Minuet and Trio in G major?

PAOLO LEVI

I don't know. I know the name, but I don't think I've ever listened to any of his music.

BENJAMIN

He wrote this piece when he was even younger than you - I would guess you're about seven?

PAOLO LEVI

I'm nine.

BENJAMIN

Well, I'm sixty-two - and Mozart wrote this when he was just six years old. He wrote it for the piano, but I can play it on the violin.

Mozart (Minuet and Trio) starts to play. Paolo is listening. Other people are gathering around and they drop some coins.

EXT. BRIDGE - EVENING

BENJAMIN

Would you like to play the violin Paolo?

PAOLO LEVI

Of course, I do.

Benjamin gives the violin to young Paolo and shows him how to draw the bow across the strings and how to hold the violin under his chin, without hands.

PAOLO LEVI

My Papa has a violin at home too but he doesn't play it any more, because it's a bit broken.

BENJAMIN

Do you know what is broken?

PAOLO LEVI

I think it needs mending. Two of the strings are missing, I think, and there's hardly any hair left on the bow at all.

BENJAMIN

Bring it to my house sometime and leave it with me. I'll see what I can do.

PAOLO LEVI

I don't know if I'm able to bringg the violin but I'll try my best.

Benjamin goes on playing. Paolo leaves the bridge.

INT. PAOLO'S HOUSE - DAY

Mama and Papa's bedroom, to reach the violin on top of the wardrobe Paolo has to balance a suitcase on the chair and then climb up to get the violin on top of the wardrobe.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Paolo runs through the streets hugging the violin. Benjamin lives along a winding passage, up a narrow flight of stairs in one small bare room.

INT. BENJAMIN APARTMENT - DAY

Lots of huge posters on the wall: Milan, London, New York. All posters are black and white. Each poster has a city view. One small bare room.

BENJAMIN

Some of the concerts I have played in: Milan, London, New York. Wonderful places, wonderful people, wonderful music. It is a wonderful world out there. There are times when it can be hard to believe that. But always believe it, Paolo, because it's true. And music helps to make it so.

PAOLO LEVI

Wow.

BENJAMIN

Now, show me that violin of yours.

Paolo gives the violin to Benjamin, he studies it closely, holds it up light.

BENJAMIN

A very fine instrument. It's a bit on the large size for a young lad like you... But you'll grow into it.

PAOLO LEVI

And when it's mended, will you teach me? I've got lots of money saved up from my sweepings.

BENJAMIN

Sweepings?

PAOLO LEVI

In Papa's barber shop.

BENJAMIN

I'll teach you for nothing! You're my best listener. You're my lucky mascot. When you're not there, everyone walks by and my violin case stays empty. When you come along and sit there. Then people stop to listen. A lesson or two will just be paying you back. I'll have the violin ready as soon as I can and then we can start your lessons.

PAOLO LEVI

See you later Benjamin!

Benjamin starts to mend the violin. Paolo leaves the room.

INT. PAOLO HOME - NIGHT

Bedroom

Paolo is worried if Mama and Papa will find out that the violin is missing. Paolo is lying on his bed camera is taking him and then showing Papa nad Mama sleeping an empty spot on top of the wardrobe.

INT. BARBER SHOP - MORNING

Paolo is sweeping and hoping that Mama won't find out that the violin is missing while Paolo is sweeping the floor. When Paolo has finished sweeping he goes to Benjamin's apartment.

PAOLO LEVI

Bye, Papa!

Paolo leaves barber shop. Papa is watching him and doesn't say anything.

INT. BENJAMIN'S apartment - DAY

Paolo knocks on the door and Benjamin opens the door.

BENJAMIN

Good afternoon, Paolo.

PAOLO LEVI

Good afternoon, Signor Horowitz.

Benjamin lets Paolo inside and they sit behind the table. Benjamin has finished mending the violin and Benjamin and Paolo are sitting and practising the violin.

BENJAMIN

I think this instrument was invented just for you, Paolo. Or maybe you were made for it. Either way it is a perfect match for you.

BENJAMIN ROOM

Paolo and Benjamin have been practising for while now. Benjamin teaches Paolo how to play violin and how to keep maintain it.

10 different days by Paolo and Benjamin practising the violin on different days they have been practising for month. Benjamin is playing on the bridge and Paolo is watching. Paolo has made improvements and playing the violin well.

Lesson ends, Paolo and Benjamin drink a cup of mint tea made with fresh mint. Benjamin looks at Paolo.

BENJAMIN

(serious voice)

It is strange, Paolo, but I feel I have known you before, a long, long time ago. I've met a boy ...Levi was his name too. Like yours: Levi. It's a common name. It is you who reminds me of him. He was the youngest player in our orchestra. He's name was Gino!

PAOLO LEVI

But my father's name is Gino! Maybe it is him? Maybe you played with my father? Maybe you know him?

Benjamin is staring at young Paolo.

BENJAMIN

It can't be possible. Gino Levi, I have not heard of him in a long while. Maybe I should meet your Papa, and your Mama, too.

PAOLO LEVI

No, you can't! They would find out! It's a secret.

BENJAMIN

It's about time anyway Paolo. You've been coming for lessons for a good while now.

PAOLO LEVI

Mama showed me Papa's violin and made me promise never to say anything.

BENJAMIN

Listen to me they need to know, they have a wonderful violinist for a son.

PAOLO LEVI

But mama said, I can never tell papa about the violin and I've kept it a secret all this while, even from Mama that I have been practising a violin.

BENJAMIN

Secrets, Paolo, are lies by another name. You do not lie to those you love. You should not hide things from Mama or Papa. You must tell them your secret, Paolo. If you want to go on playing the violin, you will have to tell them. If you want me to go on teaching you, you will have to tell them. And now it is a good time to do what must have been done a long time ago.

PAOLO LEVI

Will you come with me? I can only do it if you come with me.

BENJAMIN

I will come with you.

Benjamin and Paolo leave the apartment with the violin.

EXT. STREET TO PAOLO'S APARTMENT - DAY

Benjamin carries Mama violin and holds Paolo's hand all the way back to Paolo's home.

They go to Paolo's home, Paolo is very nervous so Benjamin holds his hand, Mama and Papa are in the living room.

INT. PAOLO LIVING ROOM - DAY

PAOLO LEVI

(blurting it out in one breath)

Mama, Papa this is Benjamin, he is my violin teacher. I didn't really steal Papa's violin, I just borrowed it to get it mended, and to learn how to play it.

Mama and Papa don't look angry, they stare at Benjamin.

BENJAMIN

Your Mama, Papa and me, I think perhaps we do know each other. We played together once, did we not?

Papa looks at Benjamin

PAPA

Benjamin?

BENJAMIN

And if I'm not mistaken, Signora, you must be little Laura Adler - all of us violinist, all of us there, and all of us still here. It is a miracle.

Traditional Jewish string music. Mama, Papa and Benjamin start to hug each other, all of them are crying through their laughter.

BENJAMIN

You see, Paolo, Didn't I tell you it was a wonderful world?

PAPA

It's been twenty years or more since we last saw you Benjamin.

BENJAMIN

I had no idea you are alive. I always hoped you survived, these two little lovebirds, but I never really believed it.

Everybody except Paolo sits around the table, they all hold hands.

BENJAMIN

Paolo was about to tell you both something, I think. Aren't you, Paolo?

PAOLO LEVI

Well...yes...Signor Benjamin has been my violin teacher - he is the best teacher in the world! But please don't be angry.

Mama and Papa are very happy.

MAMA

Didn't I say Paolo would tell us, Gino?

PAPA

I didn't believe it!

MAMA

You see, Paolo, I often take down my violin, just to touch it, to look at it. Papa doesn't like it, but he forgives me, right?

Papa nods.

MAMA

Because he knows I love this violin. When it went missing, I knew it had to be you. Then it came back, mended.

PAPA

And then, after school, you've started to come home late, and when you haven't been home, the violin has always been gone.

MAMA

I told Papa you'd tell us when you were ready. We thought you might be practising somewhere, but it never occurred to us that you were having lessons, with Benjamin, who taught us and looked after us like a father all those years ago.

PAOLO LEVI

But you told me it was Papa's violin, that he'd put it away and never wanted to play it again? And what do you mean Signor Benjamin was your teacher and like a father to you, too?

Silence!!!

Papa, Mama and Benjamin all look at one another, not sure what to say.

PAPA

Mama and me, we try never to speak of this, because the memories we have are like nightmares, and we want to forget. But you told us your secret. There is a time for truth, it seems, and it has come. Truth for truth.

PAPA

The three of us were brought by train to the concentration camp... to Auzchwitz.... from all over Europe: Benjamin from Paris, Mama from Warsaw,

and me from Venice. We were all musicians, all Jewish.

MAMA

We survived only because we were able to say 'yes' to one question by one SS officer on arrival at the camp.

EXT. SS OFFICER - DAY

Auschwitz train clips.

Concentration camp at Auschwitz, a group of people is walking beside the fence and one officer stops the group and asks. There is also young Gino with his family.

SS OFFICER

Is there anyone amongst you who can play an orchestral instrument, who is a professional musician?

Young Papa raises his arm and says

YOUNG PAPA

I am.

LIVING ROOM

PAPA

I didn't know that when I stepped forward I would immediately be separated from my family...I will never see them again.

BENJAMIN

Playing was very hard because our fingers were so cold that sometimes we could hardly feel them and

we were weak with hunger. Sickness had to be hidden.

MAMA

These were feelings what we experienced. Not knowing what would happen next.

PAPA

The SS were always watching. In those rehearsals the three of us met. Benjamin was a good deal older than me and your Mama. We were very much the babies of the orchestra, we were barely twenty. Why the orchestra was rehearsing, who we would be playing for, we didn't know and didn't ask. We played Mozart, a lot of Mozart.

MAMA

The repertoire was for the most part light and happy.

BENJAMIN

(deep voice)

Eine kleine Nachtmusik

MAMA

At first we gave concerts only for the SS officers. You never looked them in the eye. You played with total commitment. Every performance was your best performance, not to please them, but to show them what you could do, to prove to them how good you were despite all they were doing to humiliate you, to destroy you in body and soul.

PAPA

We fought back with our music. It was our only weapon.

BENJAMIN

You see, Paolo, your Papa could speak no Polish, your Mama knew no Italian, but their eyes met when they were playing. They shared a joy in music-making, and they fell in love - the whole orchestra knew it, before they did! 'Our little lovebirds', we called them. For everyone else in the orchestra they represented hope, the future.

MAMA

I don't know about that, Benjamin. Our love numbed the pain, protected us from the fear we were living through, from the horror going on all around. But we all shared a shame. We were being fed while others were not.

PAPA

A train arrived, the wagons packed with new prisoners. Once they were all out they were lined up and then divided. The old and young and frail were herded past us as we played, on their way - so they were told - to the shower blocks. The able-bodied, those fit for work were taken off towards the huts. And all the time Mama, Benjamin, I and the orchestra, we played Mozart.

BENJAMIN

We all understood what Mozart was for. It was to calm each new train-load of frightened souls, to give them a false sense of security. We all knew that the shower block was a gas chamber.

MAMA

Week after week we played, month after month, train after train. And twenty-four hours a day the chimneys of the crematorium spewed out their fire and their smoke and their stench. Until there were no more trains; until the day the camps were liberated.

PAPA

We were all living skeletons. It was unlikely that any of us would survive. Your Mama and I walked out of the camp. That was the last time we saw Benjamin.

BENJAMIN

Until now.

Mama leans toward Paolo.

MAMA

We walked across a shattered Europe, playing our violins for bread and shelter. We came here to Venice, to your Papa's home. And he smashed his violin. But I kept mine. It had brought me through all the horrors of the camp, brought us safely across Europe, back to Papa's home in Venice.

PAPA

Ever since I have never played a note of music again.

MAMA

Which is why I haven't played my violin all these years. And now, Paolo, you have brought Benjamin, Papa and me together again.

PAOLO LEVI

What happened to you, Benjamin? How did you come to be in Venice?

BENJAMIN

I found my way back to Paris after a while. I played again in my old orchestra. So I came to Venice because Vivaldi was born here. I have always loved Vivaldi above all other composers. I play in the streets - not just for the money, but because I could not bear not to play the violin. I couldn't imagine living a single day of my life without music. Which is why I would dearly like to go on teaching Paolo if you both would allow it.

Benjamin looks at Papa, Papa looks at Mama, Paolo looks at Mama.

MAMA

Can we hear Paolo play, Gino?

Pause

PAPA

As long as it's not Mozart.

Vivaldi's 'Winter' movement from the Four Seasons on unaccompanied violin. Benjamin turns to Papa

BENJAMIN

He has a great and wonderful talent, your son, a rare gift you have both given him.

PAPA

(quietly)

Then it must not be wasted.

Paolo starts playing the violin.

EXT. BRIDGE - DAY

Bach 'Double Violin Concerto' unaccompanied.

People have gathered in a circle and listening to Benjamin and Paolo's excellent performance. Papa is also watching and listening to Paolo playing the violin. Afterwards they walked home and saying nothing until they reach the front door.

FRONT DOOR

PAPA

So, Paolo, you prefer playing the violin to sweeping up in my barber's shop, do you?

PAOLO LEVI

Yes, Papa. I'm afraid I do.

PAPA

Well, then, I can see I'll just have to do my sweeping up myself. ...Paolo, I want you never to

forget it.... When you play, I can listen to music again. You have made music joyful for me once more, and that is a wonderful gift. You go and be the great violinist. I'll help you the way I can. You will play heavenly music and people will love you. Mama and I will come to all of your concerts. But you have to promise one thing: until the day I die you will never play Mozart in public...Never Mozart.... Promise me.

PAOLO LEVI

I promise Papa.

INT. CONCERT HALL BACKSTAGE - EVENING

Old Paolo is writing his diary. Behind the stage between curtains. One strong light is shining on him.

PAOLO LEVI

(voiceover)

I have kept my promise to Papa all these years. He died two weeks ago before my fiftieth birthday concert. I'll be playing Mozart, and I'll play it on Mama's violin, and I'll play it so well that he will love it, they all will love it, wherever they are.

Mozart violin music - which then builds into the whole orchestral version. Orchestra is playing music on stage starting to introducing Paolo Levi.

PAOLO LEVI

(voiceover)

Music belongs in the streets, where Benjamin played it, where I played it with him, not in the concert halls.

Pause.

PAOLO LEVI

(voiceover)

It was time to tell the truth. Because secrets are lies...

Paolo closes his diary and stands up and takes his violin and goes on stage to perform. Mozart violin music - which builds into the whole orchestra version.

Mozart the violin soars.

FADE OUT