

PRELUDE TO CELLO SONATA

A short play

By Mark Chrisler

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PRELUDE TO CELLO SONATA

PETE

(clinking his glass)

May I... excuse me everyone: may I have your attention, please? I'd like to say a few words, here, before we get started.

HARRY

May I speak?

PETE

No, Harry. I don't think that's appropriate. Sorry, folks: what I was saying is...

HARRY

I've got some reservations.
(standing up from chair)

PETE

Well the ship has sailed on reservations. The reservation ship is out of port. Please sit down.

HARRY

(sitting)

May I have a drink?

PETE

A drink? Of course, Harry: we're not monsters.
So, we're joined here today to execute Harry Stein.

HARRY

Pete...

PETE

(admonishing)

Harry.

HARRY

Sorry.

PETE

Please don't make this a chore.

HARRY

Sorry. I'm not comfortable with...

PETE

What did I say? The ship? Where's the ship, Harry?

HARRY

...Sailed.

PETE

Alright. What was I... Yes. We're here today to execute Harry. And, so far... so far I'd say we're handling it with aplomb. A good location, good drinks. Tom's got a lovely selection from Rilke to read for us. Which leaves us with two *loose ends*, really. The first is the music.

HARRY

I'd like...

PETE

No, Harry.

HARRY

Well, I've always been partial to Debussy's Prelude to Cello Sonata.

PETE

Yes, Harry. I know. And, personally, I like the piece. But two concerns, off the top of my head: First, the beginning is very somber. Very... I might say, morbid.

HARRY

I thought... Because...

PETE

See, Harry: this has been the problem all along. You *misunderstand* us. We're your friends. We're not here to mourn your death. We're here to... celebrate... your... death.

HARRY

I'd just always pictured it that way. With The Prelude.

PETE

And I'm--we're all of us--sensitive to that, I think. Right?

(MORE)

PETE (CONT'D)

But, here's the other thing. In the middle, it gets very... *violent*. You know the part?

HARRY

That's in Debussy's personality.

PETE

Yes. Yes it is. And I understand that. But, here's what I think: we're really taking a lot of risk on ourselves to do this for you the right way, you can appreciate. But eventually, we can imagine, there will be authorities involved. And they might ask what music we played. If we say "Debussy's Prelude to Cello Sonata," someone is bound to think of the angry bit in the middle and it may lead them to question our motives. Which, we don't want that. Legally, or *philosophically* either.

HARRY

Right.

PETE

You understand?

HARRY

I just find it comforting.

PETE

A compromise: Arabesque Number Two. So, you still get your Debussy-- which, like I say, I'm an admirer-- but when whoever comes knocking asks what we played they'll say "those were some friends that really cared." So, we're all agreed. Kevin: do you know the second Arabesque? And he knows it, so that's a sign.

HARRY

(Standing and leaving the chair)

I don't want to do this.

PETE

(sigh)

Harry.

HARRY

I don't.

PETE

We've done a lot of work, here; to make this evening nice. But there comes a point where it's up to you. The success, the... eclat.

HARRY

I don't deserve this.

PETE

Deserve? Who--no, no--who said anything about deserving? It's impersonal.

HARRY

It's a *rock* crushing me to death.

PETE

A poetic rock. The rock is poetic.

HARRY

Crushing.

PETE

Poetic, too. You can see that, surely? We all do.

HARRY

How about an electric chair?

PETE

Harry.

HARRY

What?

PETE

With all the smoke and the... It sounds, and I don't mean it as an insult, it sounds like an opportunity for you to show off.

HARRY

I don't like it.

PETE

We've got the rock. The rock is done. Please sit down.

HARRY

I won't do it.

PETE

Goddamnit... Okay, let's be... I knew this would happen. Let's talk this out.

HARRY

Why should I?

PETE

Because talking is how civil people--and that's us--how civil people handle matters.

HARRY

No! Why should I die?

PETE

I don't understand the question.

HARRY

I won't. I'm leaving.

PETE

No, Harry. Stop. Harry. Hey. Listen: you can have The Prelude.

HARRY

(pause)
Yeah?

PETE

Yeah. Kevin, you know it? Great. Please take your seat, Harry.

HARRY

(sitting)
Thank you, Pete. That's all I wanted.

PETE

Well... you're welcome then. Moving on: Tom's going to read "Orpheus" for us. Step on up, Tom.

Lights down, Debussy's Prelude to Cello Sonata plays. End.