

23 October 2025

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*late*

The syrup is thicker tonight. Casimir must be reducing it differently, or the cold is getting into the stores. Either way it coats the throat like tar and I have to chew it down. Medicinal. That is the word Grigori uses. Medicinal.

Mother came to the Library today to tell me I look terrible. She said it exactly like that. “You look terrible, Andrei.” Thank you, Mother. I am forty years old and I look like a turnip that someone left in a sock. This is the gift. This is what Father’s bloodline purchases. Two hundred years of looking like a medical diagram.

I told her I was fine. She touched my face. Her hands are still warm. How is it that she is seventy-three and her hands are warm and I am forty and my fingers look like candles that have been left in a window? The gift does not distribute evenly. I suspect it was never meant to.

Drank until the walls softened. The Library is tolerable when it swims.

25 October 2025

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*morning, if it matters*

Could not sleep. The Hum was bad. Not the metaphorical hum of existential dread—the actual one. The one that lives in the floorboards. Anika says it is the house breathing. Anika says a lot of things. Anika once told me the east corridor “remembered” a fire from 1847. I nodded and poured another glass.

The point is: the sound was there and it would not stop and my bones conducted it like a tuning fork. I lay in bed vibrating like a struck bell. I thought: this is how they will find me one day. Rigid. Resonating. A human antenna receiving nothing.

Breakfast was bread and silence. Ivan stood at the kitchen door like a wardrobe someone had forgotten to move. He does not eat breakfast. I do not think he eats at all. I think he photosynthesises. Grim, enormous photosynthesis.

Father will not see me.

Grigori says he is composing. Grigori says he is in a delicate phase. Grigori says many things from the far side of a locked door. I am beginning to understand that the door is the point. I am the Heir. I inherit the door.

I asked Grigori directly: does my father doubt my capability? He performed the most elaborate diplomatic non-answer I have ever witnessed. It was almost beautiful. Like watching a man build a cathedral out of the word “no.”

Walked the corridors afterward. The house is so quiet in the afternoons you can hear it digesting. That is not a metaphor. The walls click and settle. Pipes groan. Something underneath shifts. I try not to think about what is underneath.

Saw Ksenia carrying her violin case through Corridor D. She looked at me like a rabbit looks at a lorry. I wanted to say: I am not dangerous, girl. I am barely solid. But she was already gone.

29 October 2025

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*2 am or thereabouts*

Drunk. Properly. The good kind where your thoughts come in slow and heavy like barges on a canal.

Sat in the Library for six hours. Read nothing. Stared at the spines. They stare back. There is a book on the third shelf—a red one—that I have been meaning to open for eleven years. Eleven years. It sits there like a dare. I will not open it. It has won.

Pedro came to find me around midnight. He wanted to ask about the brass arrangements for the memorial. I told him to speak with Everard. He said Everard frightens him. I said: Everard frightens everyone. That is his instrument. He does not play brass. He plays fear.

Pedro is new and he has not yet understood that this is not a house. It is a mouth. He thinks he was invited. He was selected. There is a difference he will learn, or he won't, and either way the house will close around him.

I am being dramatic. The syrup does this. It opens the sluice gates of the self-pity and everything floods out black.

But I am right.

All Saints' Day. The irony is so thick you could stand a spoon in it.

I do not have the words.

No. I have too many words. That is the problem. The composition is not music. It is an argument. It is a fist made of sound. I watched from the feed and I could see Ksenia's hands shaking and Ivan hitting the skins like he was trying to kill something underneath them and Anika's eyes were closed and she was smiling, which is the worst thing, because Anika should not smile during music like that. Nobody should smile during music like that.

Went down to confront Everard. Told him the piece was chaos. He looked at me with those chemical eyes and said: "It is written. We play what is written."

And what do you say to that? What do you say to a man who has replaced his own will with a score? He is not a conductor. He is a needle in a groove. He will play whatever Father scratches into the wax and he will call it devotion.

I called it chaos. He called it faith. We stared at each other across a silence that could have supported architectural load.

Stormed out. Drank the rest of the evening into a paste.

Grigori informs me that President Beltrov wishes to visit. In person. To “extend condolences” and “outline the future relationship between church and state.”

Future relationship. As if we are courting.

I do not trust this. Beltrov’s rallies have been crude—the anti-corruption posturing, the Chursava purges. He is cleaning house and I am not sure our house is exempt from his broom. And now he wants a private meeting? No press. Just myself and the newly elected saviour of the republic, having a polite chat about sovereignty in a building that has its own gravitational pull.

Asked Grigori if Father arranged this. Grigori said “our staff has been in touch.” Our staff. I did not know we had staff that arranges meetings with heads of state without informing the Heir. I am learning new things about my own irrelevance daily.

Mother says I am paranoid. Mother says trust Grigori. Mother says eat something.

Mother is right about the eating. I have not eaten properly in four days. The syrup suppresses appetite. Or perhaps the appetite has simply given up, like everything else.

*after midnight*

Could not find Anika at the count tonight. Ivan logged it—I saw the ledger on the kitchen table, that block-letter handwriting of his, every observation given the same weight. “Anika (location unknown).” He writes “noted” after things that should be screamed.

They found her in the basement. Standing at the sub-level door. Barefoot in the cold. Ivan wrote that she said she was “listening to the floor.” And then he wrote “noted” and moved on to the next perimeter check.

I should be concerned. I am not concerned. I am tired. The distinction between “concerned” and “tired” has collapsed in this house. They are the same corridor and I am walking it in my socks.

The sub-level door should be bricked up. I have said this. Nobody listens. Nobody listens because Father has not said it, and nothing is real until Father says it, and Father is behind a door composing music that sounds like a building falling down.

Looked in the mirror today. Should not have done that.

I am forty. I look sixty-five. My veins are visible through the skin like a road map of a country nobody wants to visit. My hands shake unless I have had the syrup, and after the syrup they shake differently—a finer tremor, more dignified, the tremor of a man who has merely poisoned himself rather than one who is decomposing upright.

The gift. The great Zagonov gift. Two hundred years of this. I will outlive everyone in this building except Father, and I will do it looking like a ruin, and they will prop me up in the Sanctum with tubes in my arms and I will compose music that sounds like screaming, and some boy-prince after me will stand in a corridor and wonder why nobody listens.

I would like to leave.

I would like to leave. I am writing it again because the first time it did not feel real enough. I would like to leave this house. I would like to walk through the gate and down the road and into a town where nobody knows the name Zagonov and sit in a bar and drink something that is not black and does not taste like penance.

But I will not leave. The gargoyle does not climb down from the cathedral. It sits and it watches and the birds

I've run out of metaphor. I've run out of syrup. Going to find Casimir.

9 November 2025

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2:41 am

Something is wrong with the house tonight.

Not the Hum. Something else. A feeling like being watched by a room. I was in Corridor B and I stopped walking because the air changed. It thickened. And I could hear, very faintly, from below—

No. I am not writing this down. I am forty years old and I am the Heir of the Krepost and I am not going to sit here and write about sounds in the dark like a child.

It lasted four minutes. I counted