



Edited by Tyree Campbell

# The Fifth Di...

APRIL  
2024

Flame by Maureen Bowden  
The Nascent Rose by Lawrence Buontello  
The Beasts of Night by Sandy DeLuca

Reviews of Prey  
and Uber Cat and Dragon Owner Manual

# The Fifth Di...

April 2024

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they tore down the  
big steel tower.  
most boring place on

make history. The  
would be played all

did. It was a new

## The Tenth Symphony

Matias Travieso-Diaz

Death comes knocking at your door at the most inopportune times.

Take the case of Dmitri Ivanovitch Petuleff. Not that he was young when the black robed skeleton appeared before him; no, he was in his sixties and had known for months that his liver cancer was fatal and his exit from this world was approaching. Yet the specter's appearance took him by surprise as he crouched at his piano, trying to milk a few more notes off his tired brain.

"Go away" he challenged the visitor. "I'm busy."

"It does not matter," replied the phantom inexorably. "Your heart is about to fail. Come!"

"Please, not yet! Wait just a couple of hours! I'm nearly done here!"

"Death waits for no one. I hear the same plea from just about every mortal who faces me."

"My case is different. I'm on the verge of completing a monumental achievement!"

"Which is?"

"I'm composing the last few bars of my tenth symphony. I have most of the phrases figured out in my mind. I only need to flesh them out and complete the orchestration..."

"And why can't someone else do this after you are gone?"

"Because what I want to do will provide a sublime, unexpected ending that will bind together all the main themes of the symphony and render it unforgettable. Nobody else can do this but me!"

"Assuming that is true, why does it matter? What is so special about this symphony of yours?"

"Look, I've written a lot of music in my life, including nine other symphonies. I have met some recognition and success, but I'm no Beethoven or Mahler. This work will raise me to the rank of the immortals. It will be listened to

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centuries after I am gone, if only I can complete these last few bars!"

"So, your vanity is what is at stake here. Right?"

"Not just my vanity. Great music elevates the souls of the people, makes their existence better while they wait for you. I'll be forgotten shortly after I am gone, but this symphony, if I get to finish it, will endure. You owe this small gift to the multitudes you'll be taking after today. Just give me at least a few more minutes!"

"I said I do not wait. But a war plane just dropped an incendiary bomb on a hospital. Many are dying in terrible agony. I must prioritize collecting those casualties. You have a few moments respite. Use them well!"

\*\*\*

He sat at the keyboard and focused on the love theme from the third movement, recalling how he meant to integrate the delicate melody into the crashing finale he envisioned. His progress, however, was interrupted by a rush of memories of his beloved wife and children, lost one way or another in the tides of the years. He recalled the tender embraces, the whispered words of passion, the glowing logs in the fireplace casting points of light and shadow on their faces, the one perfect summer afternoon all five of them had spent at the shore...

He shook himself away from those thoughts and started drafting a rising motif for the strings, underscored by the brass and the timpani, when again other memories intruded: his bitter fight for acceptance at the conservatory, a fight that had ended with the grudging recognition of his talent by director Smolensky; recognition, but never full acceptance due to his mixed race, rural background, rustic manners; his eventual success...

He was still lost in reminiscences about his triumphs and failures, his loves and losses, when there was a chill in the room and the hooded figure reappeared to stand in front of the composer, still bent over the piano, his fountain pen scribbling on the manuscript paper.

"Let's go!" commanded the figure, raising a skeletal finger to summon the composer.

"No! I need more time!" implored Petuleff.

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etuleff.

"There is never enough time!" replied Death, making an irrevocable summoning motion with its outstretched arm.

"Oh, well, maybe the memories were worth the loss..." started the man. There was the shadow of a smile on his lips as he clutched his chest and tried in vain to right himself up.

\*\*\*

The nurse found Petuleff on the floor. There were cuts on his face and hands from his fall to the ground; his body was cold and rigor mortis had set in. Also on the floor was a jumble of papers, the manuscript of a score he had been working on when he suffered the fatal heart attack. One of his students picked up the loose sheets reverently and arranged them in proper order. The last page showed an irregular diagonal ink stain that ran down from the middle of the page to its edge. Upon review, it was determined that the stain originated on the incomplete last bars of the Finale, and appeared to be the start of a variation on a theme from the preceding Adagio. It was not obvious where the composer was going with this when death overtook him.

Efforts were made to correct a few errors on an otherwise polished score and add a coda, a short climax to the main body of the movement. The codas that were generated by composers and conductors were either trite or bombastic and did little to enhance Petuleff's music, other than putting a final period on an interrupted sentence. One critic likened the efforts to complete Petuleff's final symphony to adding the missing arms to the Venus of Milo: workmanlike, but uninspired attempts to match the scope of the original artist's conception.

Petuleff's tenth symphony received its premiere three months after the composer's passing. The work was well received but, perhaps encumbered by its hobbled ending, never found a place in the pantheon of everlasting classics. In generations to come, only musical archeologists would dig up the memory of Petuleff and his many compositions, including his unfinished tenth symphony.

Maybe the world was not all that worse off for the loss.