

EXCERPT

PRELUDE

Forty millennia ago, in a cave in what is now southern Germany, some nomads were having vulture for dinner when one of them discovered Music.

It was cold. Spirits flagged. Snowflakes spiraled in through the entrance to the cave and hissed on the fire, creating a sad, limping duet with the wind. Beauty had not yet made herself known to the human soul. But that evening, facing the chasm of another winter's night, one of the nomads felt a peculiar emptiness.

The woman was idly turning over a vulture bone when the wind caught in its hollow and sighed. Her eyes widened: the sound had been purer than the moan of the wind. She tilted the bone a second time: it sighed again. The others stared. Something inside them had quickened, like a living thing. The woman glanced up at the rocky ceiling, for although it was clear that the bone itself had spoken, the sound seemed to have come from somewhere overhead, far beyond the cave. Firelight caught on many pairs of bright, hopeful eyes.

It would take more idle moments for the woman to blow on the bone herself; and quite a few after that for her to carve holes in it with a sharp stone. Who knows how long it would be before someone played a tune on the thing? Centuries, perhaps. In any case, millennia still had to pass before Pythagoras discovered the building blocks of music; and another twenty centuries or so after that before Mozart took up his quill.

The nomads couldn't have known what raw material they'd encountered that night (the raw material of their egos still being wet, after all). They'd not yet considered, as the ancient philosophers eventually would, that harmony might order the universe and be reflected in every human soul. Or that they, humble cave-dwellers, had tempted Music down from her cosmic cradle with just a hollowed-out bone. But looking up into the darkness as they had, they must have already possessed some instinct—some native spark—that had alerted them to the distant provenance of their visitor.

Perhaps a youthful Fate was at work; or maybe a still-green god. For had those nomads not been eating vulture on a particularly windy evening; and had boredom not been weighing on them with its heavy winter hand...

Well.

Music might never have been tempted down to Earth at all.

Flutes would never have been invented, let alone pianos.

And certainly the singular events that follow could never have transpired.
