

A woman with long, dark hair, wearing a long, flowing black dress, stands on a dark, jagged rock. She is looking down and to her right, with her hands resting on the fabric of her dress. The dress has long, thin, tail-like extensions that trail behind her. The background is a cloudy sky with several birds in flight. The overall mood is dramatic and ethereal.

*The Power
of Music*

The Power of Music

a chamber play in four scenes

by Christian Lanciai (2013),
translated 2020.

The Characters:

Julia
Arthur
a voice on the radio
Jennifer
Harold
Father Perry
Celia

The action is in a house on the coast of Cornwall during the 1940s and 1960s.

Scene 1. At home.

Julia This is the evening of our lives, Arthur.
Arthur I am aware of it.
Julia How we worked for it!
Arthur It almost cost Jennifer her life.
Julia She wanted it herself. It was she who wanted it.
Arthur She didn't know what she was heading for.
Julia Now she knows, when it is accomplished.
Arthur It's not accomplished yet. It's not accomplished until it's over.
Julia No, Arthur, now when it has well begun it will never be over. It's here and now that it starts.
Arthur It hasn't begun until the beginning is over.
Julia How sapient you are!
Arthur No, I am trying to be realistic. This is a sensitive matter. I was always worried about Jennifer's delicate health. If I had been allowed to decide the course of her life, she would never have become a concert pianist.
Julia Nothing could have stopped her, not even you. Music is a spiritual natural force, that even less can be straggled against than nature. Nature you can

always work out, treat, provide against and chastise, but music will always totally overcome its chosen subject. It's more than a calling. It's a natural compulsion.

Arthur I am glad that you didn't become a musician.

Julia I allowed Jennifer the more that privilege. She needed all support she could get. It was always my joy to be able to support and encourage her.

Arthur I just hope you succeeded.

Julia What could go wrong?

Arthur Everything.

Julia Your realism sometimes goes too far.

Arthur I believe it's time to turn on the radio. (*turns on the radio*)

Julia There are still twenty minutes to go.

Arthur The live broadcast is already on. There are several numbers before hers.

Julia They pale in comparison.

Arthur Quiet! (*listens, increases the volume*)

Radio voice Before the next program we wish to once more point out, that the highly anticipated debut concert by Jennifer Trevelyan unfortunately has been cancelled because of unexpected complications. Our concert program will therefore be terminated half an hour earlier. We will later announce what will be broadcast instead. Now follows Paderewski's Polonaise Fantasy for piano and orchestra with Felicja Blumental as the soloist.

(Julia and Arthur are paralysed, staring at each other)

Julia (after a while) Turn it off!

Arthur (promptly turns it off)

Julia What do you think could have happened?

Arthur I can only guess. The nerves.

Julia Or an accident.

Arthur It could be anything.

Julia Someone should call us.

Arthur Sooner or later we shall know. (*takes care of her*) Take it easy, Julia. All we can do is to wait.

Julia Poor Jennifer! This should have been the highlight of her life!

Arthur Until further. Now it became a trial and a crisis instead, but such occur to be overcome.

Julia Alas, there will be no sleep for me tonight unless something happens!

Arthur I am with you.

Julia But not she!

(Some sound at the door. There is bad weather outside, someone gets in and stamps the dirt off her feet. Arthur and Julia are petrified. Then Jennifer enters.)

Julia (rushes forth immediately to embrace her in raincoat and all) Thank goodness that you are alive!

Jennifer I am sorry, Julia.

Arthur What happened?

Jennifer (sits down all washed up, sighs deeply) It's all my fault.

Julia What went wrong?
Jennifer Nothing went wrong. That's the worst of it.
Arthur Explain yourself.
Jennifer I just couldn't.
Arthur What couldn't you?
Jennifer Go through with it.
Arthur Stage fright?
Jennifer Not only. I wasn't satisfied. I needed to make improvements. The concert was unfinished. I needed more time to accomplish it.
Arthur But Jennifer...
Julia Don't press her, Arthur. (*sits down next to her embracing her*) I understand how it feels. You weren't ready.
Jennifer (*breaks down completely and cries out in Julia's arms*)
Julia (*to Arthur*) She has had a shock. She must have time to recover.
Arthur I had better leave you two alone. (*leaves prudently*)
Jennifer (*after having recovered somewhat*) I am so sorry, Julia. I ruined everything.
Julia Not at all. It's just to start all over again.
Jennifer I was completely paralysed. I just couldn't face going up to a piano. I don't know if I ever again will be able to touch a key.
Julia You need a rest.
Jennifer I have disgraced our name. I have ruined my own possibilities. I have completely made a fool of myself. I ran away from my concert debut.
Julia We are here to support you. It's just to start all over again.
Jennifer That's what I'll never be able to do. Turn on the radio. Felicja was to appear before me. She had no problems.
Julia (*turns on the radio without a word. The Paderewski Finale is going on at best.*)
Jennifer How brilliant! Completely without nerves! Like Paderewski himself!
Julia Your piece would have made an agreeable contrast.
Jennifer Never again!
Julia Never say never.
Jennifer (*cries again*) I am lost, sister. I will never be able to rise again.
Arthur (*enters*) I just had a call from London. They wonder if Jennifer has come home. I could satisfy them and tell them you were here, but they want to know how you are.
Jennifer I am perfectly well. No problems. It's only the soul that falters.
Arthur Then it's serious. (*goes out again*)
Julia Did you leave the studio just like that?
Jennifer I called them and said I couldn't perform the concert in its present state but had to revise it first. Then I hang up and ran away from it all.
Julia At least you gave notice. It would have been worse if you didn't.
(*Arthur returns*) What did they say?

Arthur They regretted what had happened but hoped and suggested that Jennifer would come back in a month. The expectations of her were great. Clifford Curzon was very disappointed.

Jennifer Would he have been there?

Arthur Obviously.

Jennifer It's getting worse and worse. What have I done?

Arthur Whatever you have done, Jennifer, you haven't made a fool of yourself. It would have been worse if the concert had started and you had to interrupt it. Then you would not have been welcomed back. Now you *may* come back.

Jennifer No, I will not come back.

Arthur Why not?

Jennifer I don't think you will be able to understand it, Arthur, but I missed the chance of my life. All I lived for was this moment of truth, when I would have soared out among the stars and become established and recognized with contracts and a secured economical position for the rest of my life among my equals, like Felicja Blumental, Eileen Joyce, Clifford Curzon, Lili Kraus and all the others, and I would have made it with my own composition! I would have overcome all possible adversities and difficulties from the very start! I would have had a new life opened up wide to me, and this life would have imported just one long interminable enjoyment of culture and only spiritual inspiration for the rest of my life.

Arthur It is still possible, Jennifer.

Jennifer I thought you were a realist, Arthur. How do you think the BBC and the London Philharmonics will regard me now? They will all be aware of what I have done, and they will all see me with new eyes as a liable incalculable and unstable character of unreliable insecurity, which automatically will give me a taboo brand for the rest of my life. No, I have forfeited my life. I have so completely made a fool of myself, that the only sensible thing for me to do would be to go and throw myself into the sea.

Arthur You must not do that.

Jennifer I know, but it is *my* decision.

Arthur (*looks imploringly to Julia: he cannot handle this.*)

Julia Jennifer, what are you thinking of? You must get over it. We will back you up as we always have done with whatever you will do. Your life is yours, it is not wasted, and you must not throw it away yourself. Would your twelve years' of marathon practices seven hours a day by the piano have been wasted? Never in my life! You have your entire life ahead of you. It's now it begins.

Jennifer No, it's now it ends.

Julia You are out of your mind.

Jennifer I know. I have had a nervous breakdown, but nothing can make it better, least of all medical care, if that's what you are thinking of. I will never follow the way of Reginald.

Julia That pleases me.

Jennifer Then I don't mean his suicide but what preceded his suicide.

Julia Don't drag all that up again.

Jennifer Why not? It remains constantly actual, but it doesn't help to suppress it, as you always have tried to. He wanted to be a violinist, he wasn't allowed by his parents since his master implied that his handicap never could bring him to survive the competition, instead he became an unhappy official, who never could feel at ease in any stable position, never liked any decent ordinary work, married and had children and divorced, went abroad, grieved about his divorce and his lost family, failed in trying a second time, no girl wanted him since he was so oversensitive, instead he worked himself to death and had a nervous breakdown, was persuaded by his colleagues to apply for medical care, consented and was pumped up with psychic medicines, was released from hospital as a zombie with severe medicinal abstinence symptoms, just wanted to get back home, could not face it and was so ashamed of his life's failure that he hanged himself. Is that correct?

Julia It was an accident, Jennifer.

Jennifer Would you claim that our brother did not hang himself?

Julia No, but we are not speaking about that. The fault was that he was alone. If he the last day had had someone to speak to he would not have done it. He probably regretted it already as he had kicked away the chair. They always do, according to all those who survived their suicidal efforts. The thing is not to be too late about it. Even Anna Karenina regretted it when it was too late.

Jennifer It's a novel, Julia.

Julia Founded on the fate of his own sister-in-law and a very typical suicidal case.

Jennifer I don't think Reginald had any regrets.

Julia Why not?

Jennifer He knew what he was doing. He was educated and well read. He saw suicide as the one way out from an impossible situation when the doctors had poisoned his body.

Julia It's a hypothesis.

Jennifer We always had a close spiritual contact with each other. I never lost touch with him after his death. I talk with him every day, like I always did. He never leaves me. He saw his suicide as a possibility to try to become a violinist or musician in next life instead. He saw his death as a new chance.

Arthur Your thoughts are dangerous, Jennifer. At least fulfil your concert and think well in the meantime.

Jennifer It's completed, but I can't play it.

(Arthur and Julia exchange glances as if to say: What's all this about?)

Arthur Did you lie to the sponsors?

Jennifer They would never have understood the whole truth.

Julia Why can't you play it?

Jennifer It is finished, it's perfect and can't be made any better, but it still is insufficient. It is not according to my ideal. It sounds wrong although it is musically completely pure. There is something missing in it which I can't give it.

Arthur (giving up, to Julia) These oversensitive artists.

Jennifer Pardon me, Arthur, but I must be true to myself.

Arthur Of course.

Julia I think you had better go to bed. Before that you shall have a steady supper, so that you'll sleep well.

Jennifer You always sacrificed everything for me, sister. I am sorry that I failed to meet your expectations.

Arthur Take it easy, Jennifer. You have done nothing against us. It's only your audience you have let down.

Julia Don't say so, Arthur. It will always be there.

Jennifer It's not the audience. A pianist must ignore it. The audience is there for your sake, not you for the sake of the audience. The audience is there to share how you play for yourself, and that is what you must do. In the moment you start thinking of the audience or individuals in it you are lost, for then your concentration is shattered. Without concentration you can't play, unless you play like an automat, but then it's not music but pianola. If the audience distracts you by coughing or rustling with papers, it's better not to play for them at all. If someone makes some disturbing noise when Clifford Curzon is playing, he immediately interrupts the concert and tries to seek out the guilty one. It is very painful and awkward. But I cannot even play for myself any longer.

Arthur Why not?

Jennifer My fingers don't obey me any longer. I have lost control of my body. I have flipped out. I only grow tense, and the fingers get stiff and locked. It doesn't work.

Arthur Female pianists are more vulnerable than men. You must have more patience with yourself.

Jennifer It's not patience that I lack. Arthur, don't you think I went through all that? Jeers from manly colleagues, dirty jokes, sexist innuendos from the conductors, the tortures and manhandling by the teachers, "remove your thimbles", the nasty flirts, the insults for being a woman – it's running the gauntlet all the way, but you sacrifice yourself and endure it for the sake of the music. But the music always ultimately remains unattainable and unreachable. You will never master it. The ideal will always remain beyond you. It never turns out like you had expected. You know how it should be, but you never get there. And now I have busted myself in a total disaster by driving into the wall. It's not patience that is missing. It's the compliance of destiny.

Arthur Then destiny is what you have to have patience with.

Jennifer It's too late now. I am not even young any more. As a musician you have to have reached the tape of fame preferably under twenty, at latest by twenty-five. Then it's too late. Then you will only do as a provincial pianist at cinemas or at best as a church organist, where you go mouldy in weary dull routines of monotonous work that only gets more mechanical by the years, until like most organists you establish a small bar in the organ cupboard. For stranded musicians

alcohol is the only way to survive. You make a constantly more pathetic transcendence into nothing. That's what my destiny will be, if I go on from here.

Arthur (to Julia) She needs to go to sleep.

Julia What are they playing now? I don't recognize it.

Jennifer The Cornish Rhapsody. Haven't you heard it before?

Julia It sounds like the Warsaw Concerto backwards.

Jennifer It is the Warsaw Concerto backwards.

Julia But both sound good.

Jennifer That's the point.

Julia Jennifer, you must go on. At least you are no fake like those modern composers who believe themselves to be something special just because they can produce disharmonies.

Jennifer Stravinsky, Hindemith, Shostakovich, Bartok, Schoenberg and the other amateurs.

Julia And besides you are a woman and could be the first important woman composer in music history with what you already have produced.

Jennifer Don't forget Fanny Mendelssohn and Clara Schumann.

Julia Fanny died too early, and Clara had to support too large a family by being just a pianist.

Jennifer Reginald also pointed out my advantage by strictly sticking to only pure music. No one insisted on that course more than he. The more important then that *that* musical ideal is preserved intact. I can't serve it any more. I am finished.

Arthur Nonsense.

Jennifer Arthur, what do you know about music?

Arthur I listen. Listeners are as important as the musicians. As a listener I am accomplished.

Jennifer I mean the musical essence and element, its consistency and anatomy, its vibrations and that supernatural language which music is in its purest form?

Arthur That's what you have been lost in. I am content with nothing more than what I hear.

Jennifer No, that's what has taken me in. That's what transformed me into a nervous complex of hypersensitivity. That's what turned me into a initiated and enlightened esoteric.

Julia Just don't come along with all that mysticism again! Then we'll never get through, and Jennifer needs some sleep.

Arthur Is music your contact with eternity?

Jennifer Yes. In music eternity is explained.

Arthur So you solved the world enigma by music.

Jennifer Yes, but I can't explain it, because you can only understand by yourself.

Arthur Then you are a snob.

Jennifer No, natural.

Julia I always considered music a natural force. Without contact with life in nature there can be no real music.

Arthur That's why we settled by the sea.

Julia Your music is like the sea, Jennifer. You can't just leave it. No one plays like you.

Jennifer All musicians are unique, but some are too unique, like Chopin, Schubert, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Mozart, Pergolesi, Hugo Wolf, the more unique, the more extreme and unhappy.

Arthur It doesn't have to be like that. To many musicians and amateurs, music is the great unhappy love of their lives, but in contrary to ordinary mundane love you can never be deceived in your love of music. That should save you and your music.

Julia Come now, Jennifer, out with you in the kitchen and get some food. That's what you need. Then you will sleep soundly all night, and tomorrow you will be in better thoughts.

Jennifer You can never be deceived by music, but I am the deceiver, who deceived both my audience, myself and the music!

Arthur Don't say that.

Jennifer I have said it, for that's how it is, and I will not get over it.

Arthur You must get over it.

Jennifer How? I know only one way. Rebirth.

(suddenly rushes out without having taken on her raincoat.)

Arthur Jennifer!

Julia After her! Stop her! *(Arthur rushes out.)*

Jennifer! Jennifer! One small adversity, and you take it harder than if it was a new world war! Now don't do anything stupid, I beg of you! Reginald's suicide was an accident too much. Don't create any havoc for us again! You simply mustn't!

(stays by the window wringing her hands in total anguish)

And in this weather at that! Full storm, and the entire Atlantic is breaking on... A perfect night to disappear in without a trace... *(Rachmaninov's second piano concerto is booming on the radio.)*

Arthur *(enters wet through, devastated and paralysed to apathy.)*

Julia Where is she?

Arthur I couldn't stop her.

Julia You don't mean...

Arthur Yes. She just blew away. We have to alert the coast guard.

Julia *(benumbed and crushed)* This is too much.

Arthur I will make a call at once. *(leaves)*

Julia She will be back. She must come back. I know she will come back. *(sits down slowly but is all lost.)*

Arthur's voice Coast guard? I am afraid there has been an accident. Yes, Jennifer Trevelyan has fallen from a rock. Tomorrow? Yes, the storm is thundering on. I understand. *(a small ring)*

(enters) They can't do anything until tomorrow.

(Julia is completely motionless. Arthur sits down next to her in the sofa, hugs her and tries to comfort her.)

Julia (almost inaudibly) I know she will return.

(Rachmaninov thunders on keeping up with the storm, as if the music wanted to drown it.)

Scene 2. Some years later.

Arthur How does it feel, Julia?

Julia Melancholy.

Arthur Of course.

Julia I can't help it, Arthur. I am still expecting her to come back at any moment, especially on a night like this.

Arthur Shall we turn on the concert anyway?

Julia It's tonight twenty years since she disappeared. That must be marked somehow. Can we do it any better than by listening to the concert?

Arthur No.

Julia Turn it on.

(Arthur turns on the radio, and immediately the Warsaw Concerto begins.)

Who is the soloist?

Arthur I don't know. *(They listen in pious silence until there is suddenly a ring at the door.)*

Julia (startled) Do you think...?

Arthur No, I don't think so. *(goes to open. From outside:) Welcome, Harold. We were just sitting listening to the evening concert. (Julia breathes out and clasps her breast. Arthur enters with Harold.)*

Harold Good evening, Julia. I did think you would commemorate this evening in a special way.

Arthur She still believes she will come back. She first thought it was Jennifer when you rang.

Harold It's a fact that she could come back. After all, her body was never found.

Arthur But she never did come back.

Harold Yet.

Julia Thanks for your support, Harold. I needed that.

Harold And you never saw her jump the cliff, Arthur.

Arthur I thought I saw her.

Harold It will not hold in court. She is not proven dead and buried, only missing.

Arthur Why have you come?

Harold If it's not possible to bring her back to life, at least I wish to resurrect her. If anyone has reason and right to do that, it's me. I always assisted her and turned her leaves when she appeared in public. I have made the BBC orchestra interested in her score again and arrived that far, that they are interested in a performance.

Arthur No one has touched it since she left it.

Harold That's what I mean. It's time for it to be recognized. And there is nothing wrong with the score, no matter how dissatisfied she might have been with it

herself. At least she didn't destroy it, like Sibelius did with his eighth symphony.
(*Arthur and Julia are benumbed by gratitude.*)

Arthur When would an eventual performance take place?

Harold We shall see. We must first find the right pianist. It could take some time. The orchestra and BBC are interested. That's the first and most important step. The question of the pianist will be more sensitive, since we can't accept just anyone.

Arthur Can't you take on the task, who knew her and well?

Harold Thanks, Arthur, for your offer. I actually thought about it but did not want to offer myself.

Arthur That you should be number one of suggestions would be imperative, wouldn't it, Julia?

Julia Absolutely. (*The door bell.*)

Arthur Who is it now then? (*goes to open.*)

(*from outside*) Welcome, father Perry! Come in!

Julia It's our vicar. He has been invaluable ever since Jennifer disappeared.

(*Enter Arthur with Perry.*)

Perry Good evening, Julia. I hear that you follow your tradition as usual.

Julia Anything else would be impossible. This is Harold. He just agreed to undertake to carry through Jennifer's missed debut.

Perry How appropriate! Which orchestra?

Harold The BBC Symphony orchestra. It would be broadcast.

Perry When?

Harold In a year at the earliest, maybe two. Since she never was pronounced dead or alive, there are certain formal complications.

Perry Naturally. It's a true mystery, which perhaps never shall be solved.

Julia She made herself immortal by disappearing without a trace at her debut concert.

Arthur Which never took place. I am certain she threw herself into the sea.

Julia But you never saw her do it.

Arthur I thought I saw her disappear.

Julia There was a storm. It was all darkness. You only had a lantern. You saw her flutter away towards the cliffs. You tried to run after her. You called on her, but she didn't turn around but just rushed on. Then you stumbled and lost your lantern. When you got up again she was gone. Wasn't it so?

Arthur We have gone through every detail thousands of times before. She can't have gone anywhere else than down the cliffs without having turned around and passed me.

Perry The fact remains that her body never was found.

Arthur Not strange in that storm in the howling fury of the sea with breakers that almost foamed and towered up above the cliffs. All the Atlantic was breaking in and took care of her. She was directly brought far out to sea.

Perry A parallel case is Virginia Woolf, who also disappeared without a trace, but in that case we know that she abandoned herself to the river.

Radio voice And now we present Robert Schumann's Piano Concerto in A minor. Soloist is Lili Kraus.

(The concert starts. They listen.)

Perry Here is another case. Robert Schumann, like later also Peter Tchaikovsky, tried to drown himself by jumping into the Rhine and the Neva respectively. Both failed, Schumann to his misfortune, but Tchaikovsky to the benefit of music.

Arthur Do you mean that Schumann would have become happier if he had been allowed to die?

Perry Absolutely. His last two years in a mental hospital were only painful both to himself, his family and Clara with Brahms. He wanted to die but was not allowed. He could no longer compose, he could not work as a conductor any more, he became more and more inaccessible and tried to do something about it. It would have been happier for all if he had died when he so desperately wanted to.

Arthur Still the church condemns suicide.

Perry My dear Arthur, do you still know me so little that you have forgotten that I in my faith include all metaphysical possibilities and consider reincarnation equally obvious as a possibility as all Hindus, Buddhists and Theosophists?

Julia (to Harold) Father Perry is a very learned man.

Perry Instead of being allowed to disappear to be able to start all over, he was confined to stay imprisoned in a body which he no longer had any use of and that in a mental hospital for two insufferable years. Wouldn't then freedom have been a happier alternative?

Julia It would have been a harder shock for Clara and her seven children.

Perry Correct. Maybe that's why it failed.

Julia (half to herself) Jennifer would then be twenty today...

Arthur So you take reincarnation for granted, father?

Perry That possibility can't be excluded. For half of humanity it is self-evident, and that may be the better half of humanity, since those who don't share that view or insight, that is us Christians, Muslims and Jews and in our time communists, almost only have caused wars and genocides. Another thing: the reincarnation prospect excludes racism, the greatest curse of our age.

Arthur But don't you find the reincarnation prospect risky in its consequence, since it must result in irresponsibility?

Perry Does it?

Arthur Absolutely. Life loses its importance since you can't die anyway. You don't care about the secular world. It is as fatalistic as the *inshallah* of the Muslims. They don't care but leave everything to chance. That's what I call irresponsibility.

Perry Don't forget that king Ashoka, who after Alexander the Great created a greater united Indian kingdom than we ever could accomplish there in 300 years, was a Buddhist who rejected all his riches.

Arthur And thus his kingdom was lost and dissolved after his death.

Perry That was not his fault. The fact is that he kept it intact and well in law and order in perhaps its happiest period ever. That was not irresponsible. On the contrary. A person who embrace the reincarnation theory has a greater respect for life than one who merely views it as meat and a means for consumption, like the materialist Stalin means: to kill a man is murder, but to let millions die is statistics. I suggest that materialism is the most inhuman evil of our time and perhaps of all history that ever possessed humanity, and the cure for it is the respect for the soul in life by embracing the reincarnation aspect.

Arthur But sometimes it can go too far. In Tibet you dare not kill a fly since it could be a relative, and there certain lamas are cocksure of their identities in earlier existences.

Perry And could anyone claim that they are wrong, convince them of the contrary by evidence or be even more cocksure of the contrary? The fact is, that when a reincarnated lama is discovered, it's almost always by signs that indicate the earlier lama, like when a child asserts that he misses things that belonged to the earlier incarnation without ever having seen these things.

Arthur And when several claim to be the reincarnation of the same lama?

Perry In psychiatry it is well known, that a personality could split in several personalities. Duality of personality is no illness but a spiritual process, which occurs when a personality feels he has to divide into several. We have several examples of multiple personalities in our English literature. One writer is using so many different pseudonyms of different styles that you never can get all his different personalities sorted out.

Julia So what do you think of my sister, father? What are your latest speculations in her case?

Perry I think she will come back.

Arthur How?

Perry In one form or another.

Arthur Why?

Perry She left her life's work incomplete. She must feel that she wants to come back to complete it.

Arthur Do you think she committed suicide that night or not?

Perry I dare not answer that.

Julia I believe we will have the answer when she comes back.

Perry I believe so too.

Harold I believe so too.

Arthur I don't believe it until it happens, if it happens.

Perry Sceptics are always indomitable when it comes to strengthening the faith of believers. The most important food of religion is doubt.

Arthur You always surpass yourself when it comes to positive platitudes, father.

Perry Am I not right?

Arthur In your own words, the opposite cannot be proved. I must beg your leave though to drive my scepticism as far as to question the very essence of faith.

Let me use Job as an argument, in my opinion one of the best books ever written and one of the very oldest as well, where he already in the beginning of civilization points out the divine injustice of the wicked having success while the innocent and righteous are punished for nothing, a phenomenon we have seen too much of throughout this terrible century beginning with the Czar and his fate, born on the day of Job, when his conscientious sense of responsibility and deep Christian faith did not help in the least against his unfair fate to with all his family with servants and dogs get massacred because he was principally innocent, to the unsurveyable mass murders of the Nazis on innocent Jews. What can be left of your Christianity and your God to believe in after that, father?

Perry That's the question.

Arthur What do you mean?

Perry Don't you think, Arthur, that I as a theologian did wonder over the same problem myself practically every night and day during all my life? That's why I searched for answers in other religions, like Hinduism, Buddhism and Theosophy, which all are more tolerant than Catholicism and Luther's terribly dogmatic, militant and devastating Christianity, but only found that no religion can be perfect, no religion can be sure, and you are quite right: no faith can be positive. But you'll have to agree that the reincarnation possibility tempers the problem.

Arthur How?

Perry If someone has his life ruined there is a remaining hope of exoneration and perhaps even justified compensation in the next life. Then the *karma* idea could mean a comfort, that things will get even, all the evil that you do will come back to you, and all endured ordeals will lead to recompense.

Arthur Then we speak of hope and not of faith.

Perry It was in that mind that Jennifer left us.

Arthur And it cost her life.

Perry Not if she comes back.

Arthur There we are again.

Perry You have to agree, Arthur, that the possibility cannot be excluded.

Arthur And as long as it can't be, the vain delusive hope will linger, the only thing that all the terrors of Pandora's box could not destroy. Do you think the Czar and the Jews nourished any hope about the possibilities of reincarnation?

Perry The Czar most probably since he had Tibetan advisers. The Jews like the Christians and Muslims have generally and regrettably excluded that possibility for themselves.

Julia But Jennifer lived for that possibility.

Perry Yes, she did.

Arthur If nothing else, it appears we shall see her resurrected when her concert at last will be realized. Thanks for your contribution, Harold.

Harold We still have a long way to go, but we have started on it.

Perry (rising) I must go on. Call on me any time, Julia.

Julia Some tea before you leave? We could all do with a cup of tea, couldn't we?

(All seem to agree.)

Scene 3. Three years later.

Arthur What do you think?

Julia What shall we think?

Arthur You don't need to worry. That's the only certain thing.

Julia Is that so certain?

Arthur Believe me. Everything will flow smoothly like melted butter. Nothing can go wrong. A concert couldn't have been better prepared. Thanks to Harold we have reached the goal.

Julia It's twenty-two years since she disappeared. What if she could hear her own concert?

Arthur What a happy surprise to her in that case.

Julia It's just a few more minutes left to the broadcast.

Arthur We might as well turn it on.

Julia Father Perry hasn't arrived yet.

Arthur He will come. *(In the same moment the doorbell rings.)* There he is. *(goes out to open)*

Julia Something tells me that this will be more than a rebirth for my sister. She will resurrect by her music. It almost feels like inevitable.

(enter Arthur with Perry)

Perry I wouldn't have missed this for everything in the world.

Julia (has risen and cordially welcomes him) Welcome, father! You have kind of been part of this since the beginning.

Perry I feel like initiated in a great mystery which now will be revealed to our ears. So you never heard the concert yourselves?

Arthur Only fragments of it.

Julia It's really no concert but only a beautiful simple melody with accompaniment.

Perry Musical fundamentalism in other words.

Arthur Something like that. Nothing worse. No artifice or technical advancements. Just pure music.

Julia Turn it on. It is time.

(Arthur turns on the radio. The voice appears almost immediately.)

Radio voice Then we have the great pleasure to announce, that a debut concert that was cancelled twenty-two years ago on this very day when the soloist and the composer disappeared in a strange way, now will be performed live with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Harold Wilson as a soloist.

(All three sit down to listen attentively to "Dream of Olwen" by Charles Williams.

The music has hardly started before it starts to blow fiercely outside.)

Julia I think another storm is coming up.

(The music continues while the storm winds increase. Suddenly the terrace doors are opened, the wind comes whirling in with a young lady who seems completely absent in her mind, goes directly to the grand piano, sits down and plays exactly as the music plays, which she obviously knows by heart.

Arthur, Julia and Perry are utterly dumbfounded, gradually rise one after the other, exchange astonished glances, while quietly experiencing the phenomenon, until the music ends.

The young pianist then supports herself with her arm against the music-rack, bows down over it and cries convulsively.

Slowly Julia approaches her while the others wait.)

Julia Who are you?

Young lady (collecting herself after a moment) I don't know.

Julia Who taught you this music?

Lady I don't know.

Perry (to Arthur) I know who she is.

Julia Don't you know your own name?

Lady (finally, after yet a moment) Celia Forrester.

Julia How did you get here? How did you know our house?

Celia I don't know. I just felt drawn here.

Julia And the music?

Celia It came to me by itself.

Julia (collects her breath before the next question) How old are you?

Celia Twenty-one. Why?

Julia (deeply moved, returns to Arthur and Perry)

Arthur Father Perry says he knows her.

Perry Yes, I know who she is.

Julia Who is she?

Perry It's a delicate question, and my obligation of silence compels me to some afterthought before I can answer.

Arthur At least she is a live human being of flesh and blood and not Jennifer.

Julia But she is twenty-one years old.

Perry We are facing an unquestionable miracle.

Arthur We must speak with her. We can't just let her go on crying. (goes up to her) Do you know what you have been playing?

Celia No.

Arthur You played the same piece that right now was broadcast on the radio in a first performance.

Celia So what?

Arthur Who taught you that music?

Celia It was within me.

Arthur But you have played the piano before?

Celia All my life.

Julia Come and sit here with us, dear. You have offered us a very great moment.

Celia I didn't intend to. I am sorry that I forced my way in and disturbed you. It was not my intention to intrude, but something drove me on.

Perry What?

Celia A feeling, an intuition, an irresistible force, I just had to get in here and play that piece right now.

Arthur And you have no idea of what piece it was?

Celia It was always within me.

Perry She has no home, Julia.

Julia Would you like to stay here? You could have a room for the night.

Celia (overwhelmed) I am very grateful.

Julia In gratitude for your music.

Celia It was not mine. It was incomplete.

(The three look at each other.)

Julia (takes the initiative, rises) Come, dear. I will show you to your room, where you shall stay. You must be exhausted after your wandering in the night.

Celia I was driven to this house. Nothing could stop me. I just had to perform this moment. I can't explain it.

Julia (takes care of her) Come. You will have a supper as well. *(goes out with her)*

Arthur Well?

Perry She has escaped from a mental institution. She was an over-gifted child but with a one-sided inclination in just one direction. She could have made a musical wonder child if she hadn't been so extremely eccentric, incalculable and ungovernable. She could take no discipline and claimed to be dictated to by dead masters like Chopin, Liszt, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann and others.

Arthur So in all her life she only played the piano?

Perry Yes. But she couldn't manage on her own. She was hopelessly practically helpless. That's why she was interned in a home here in the vicinity for hopeless cases of disorientation for life.

Arthur Has she any family?

Perry They don't want to know her. They called her the cuckoo child, and she was not treated well by them. That's perhaps why she turned out the lost child she is. Music became her safe haven and way of escape. She was sent to various music schools for education but was so hopelessly moody and undisciplined that she couldn't fit anywhere. Finally her family saw no other possibility than to send her to an institution.

Arthur Will they search for her?

Perry Probably, but not the family, only the institution, and that without any great enthusiasm. If you run away, it can't be made more clear that you disagree with the place,

Julia (enters) She is asleep. I heard it all. I suggest that she stays here until further.

Perry She couldn't find a better home and a better family.

Arthur You mean that we should take care of her?

Julia What else? She could be Jennifer.

Perry In another body, which almost is proved by evidence.

Arthur I never heard of anything like it.

Julia I always felt that she would come back.

Arthur But this is another human being, traumatized by her family and escaped from a mental hospital!

Perry Kindly use another word, like a nursing home or asylum. It's an asylum she has come for here.

Julia Therefore we must give it to her.

Arthur I am not against it, but let's take one day at a time.

Julia Of course, Arthur.

Perry This was indeed a most unexpected twist to the concert.

Arthur Father Perry, could there be any other explanation to the phenomenon than that Celia would be Jennifer's reincarnation?

Perry That would in that case be that the power of music is so extraordinary that it could have that influence to be able to inspire such a one as Celia with existing music which she never heard. Mark well, that she earlier profiled herself as a musical medium and claimed to have been taken dictation by piano composers like Chopin and Liszt.

Arthur And was then the result Chopin and Liszt?

Perry Only pale copies, at best pastiches.

Arthur But this actually was Jennifer Trevelyan.

Perry Yes, it was, and therefore my only thinkable alternative explanation appears as rather far-fetched.

Julia So it's Jennifer.

Arthur Yes, everything indicates that it's she that's haunting us by another medial musician of the same oversensitive kind as she.

Julia No, Arthur, it *is* Jennifer in another body.

Perry But she is not conscious of being Jennifer.

Julia Everything points at it, and then she should gradually become aware of it.

Arthur Is that so, father Perry?

Perry It's not so certain. No brain memory survives death. The only reminiscences of earlier lives that could exist are purely intuitive, like emotional experiences or deep impressions of integrity.

Julia Like Jennifer's music.

Perry Exactly.

Julia I will take care of her as if she was Jennifer. It's our obligation, Arthur, now that she has come back. We can guide her in the right direction and reclaim her for the music. She could get it right this time.

Arthur A bold and interesting experiment, which I have no objection against. You are welcome to follow the development, father Perry.

Perry With keen interest.

Julia What about a toast in sherry for Jennifer's finally successful debut concert?

Arthur It turned out something of a ghost concert, but the idea is excellent.

Julia It feels as if at last after all these years I was confirmed right. And I think Jennifer in some way feels the same.

Arthur She actually seems to have come right.

(Julia rises to bring glasses of sherry and serve.)

Scene 4. *(No one is seen.)*

The doorbell. Someone opens.)

Arthur (outside) Welcome, Harold. We have been expecting you. Congratulations to your success.

Harold (enters with Arthur) We are all deeply moved by what occurred. Of course we dare not publish the phenomenon. She must be protected at any price.

Arthur Of course. *(They settle down, when Julia enters.)*

Julia Welcome, Harold, and congratulations to the exceptional success.

Harold It was my greatest pleasure that we succeeded. It was a very sensitive challenge, you know.

Arthur What do the teachers say?

Harold They undertake her with pending patience and are aware of her liability. They train her with woollen gloves.

Arthur So her training works?

Harold So far.

Julia To at all get her accepted was almost a greater miracle than her entry.

Harold Did you have any difficulties with her?

Arthur None at all, but she was very moody and naturally difficult to handle by her over-sensitivity.

Julia We did what we could for her, gave her a home and the comfort of good friends, warmth and an inspiring environment.

Harold That helped her on. Thereby she could expand enough by developing her piano repertoire in order to get access to the conservatory.

Arthur Have you heard any report of her from her teachers?

Harold It seems like she is the one who is teaching them. She has short patience with them and keeps correcting them, denounce their pedagogy and books as obsolete and simplistic and gets angry when she encounters pedantry.

Julia Jennifer was also completely without patience.

Harold It's good luck that the teachers have patience with her – so far. It's only because of her superior talent, which is self-evident to everyone who has any sense at all. It opened all doors to her, thanks to the fact that you gave her personality a home to mature and find security in. Before she came to you she appears to have been a hopeless case.

Arthur No second thoughts among her teachers about her background?

Harold No. Not a word. There is only one thing they mentioned as an element of worry.

Arthur Well?

Harold She is a narrow specialist. She knows nothing else than music. She is a single-tracked laser talent without any other interest or inclination than music.

Julia Anything wrong with that? Jennifer was the same.

Harold A talent should spread her light like the sun. A laser beam is limited and could be destructive.

Arthur In Jennifer's case it was self-destructive.

Harold Exactly.

Julia I think it's time for the evening's concert. Music always overcomes all worries. *(turns the radio on just as the first movement of Brahms' first piano concerto begins.)*

Arthur The monster among piano concerto movements.

Julia Rachmaninov's third is much worse, and this sounds better.

(They sit and listen for as while, until the sound of a door is heard. They get attentive.)

Julia Who could it be?

(enter Celia)

Arthur and Harold *(rising)* Celia!

Celia I am sorry. I have made a fool of myself. I have left the conservatory. I can't go back there any more. I have let you down and Harold. I am sorry.

(enters and cries out in Julia's arms, who comforts her.)

Julia There, there. – You are at home here.

Arthur What has happened ? Could you tell us?

Celia I could not bear it any longer, with the amateurism, the superficiality, the amateurism, the academic pedantry, but the worst was all the rest.

Arthur All the rest?

Celia I don't fit in anywhere. I was born in the wrong time. I can't work any more with music in a time of noise. Today's music is not music. It's a grotesque distortion of music, a disfigurement and debasement of music, a barbarity of dissonance and disharmonics. All composers of serious music today are freaks and charlatans. They know nothing and don't even have a musical ear.

Julia Jennifer also thought that of Stravinsky and Schoenberg.

Celia She was right whoever she was.

Julia She was your predecessor. She composed the music you played by heart when you arrived here.

Celia This house pulled me into it. I had often come here and watched it at some distance. And then I came by that night and heard the music from your radio. "That music I recognize," I thought. "I know it. I heard it before I was born." And I had to come nearer to this music and materialise it. I took for granted that there must be a grand piano. That's what I thought when I blindly rushed into the arms of my destiny...

Harold You can return to the conservatory at any time. Pauses are ever a necessity in music.

Celia You are the one I let down most of all, Harold, who got me into this ideal institution, and there is nothing wrong with it, you should know, but I can't return there.

Arthur But why? Something must have happened.

Celia There is nothing wrong with it. There is nothing wrong with me either, although most people think so, especially my own family, who sent me to an institution since I didn't fit anywhere and never could adapt to this derailed age, because that's what everything is wrong with and not me. All asocial outsiders and outcasts can endorse that.

Harold But you with your music could set the age right again.

Celia Do you think so? I am just a woman. I am more regarded as a sexual object than as a musician. As a composer I could never be taken seriously as a woman. I can only observe everything that is false and bear witness of it and make most musicians of this age furious about it. We live in an age of noise and brainwash, in which industries have screeched all existence into a grenade shock and excluded all harmonic sound and silence by deafening fracas and racket, and where media by radio and TV turns all humanity into dumbbells by electronic brainwash, contributing to the transformation of all humans into deteriorating automats. Worst of all is the music abuse, when nonsense radio channels constantly enforces their overwhelming brainwash flow of heavy brain-paralysing earthquake rhythms in so called popular music, which just constantly remains the same simplistic melody bankruptcy all the time with idiotic texts and a synthetic bass which only bombs people's consciousness to dumbness, destroying their awareness and sensitivity and unnoticeably transforming them into cold inhuman robots. The TV is worst.

Arthur That's why we don't have a TV.

Celia I can't stand this age. I am sorry. Just take for example such a gadget as the electric guitar. It's no instrument any more but a synthetic amplifier of noise producing an all penetrating sound of total lack of nuances in hard and inhuman lack of sensitivity. And this so called musical instrument now dominates all musical scenes in the world. That is a symptom of the condition of humanity. I am sorry. I want another world.

Arthur Calm down, Celia. All depressions pass if you just allow them, no matter how reasonable they may be, and yours certainly is reasonable, but with nature and the sea out here you will rediscover the real music and can start working with it again. Have patience with yourself, Celia. That is more important than to have patience with the world, with which indeed there are ample reasons to lose patience ever so often.

Celia But it is there, the whole corrupt ruined denaturalised and dehumanised world with its killing noise and all its false music, which I as a woman can't remedy and even less endure.

Julia What will you do then, Celia?

Celia Most of all I would like to go up there to the cliffs and cast myself into the sea to disappear and maybe come back some other time instead.

Julia You mustn't.

Arthur Anything but not that.

Harold That, Celia, would be the supreme betrayal of us who did everything to help you.

Celia Who could stop me? It concerns me and my life. That would be my only possible way of defeating the world and all the falseness it stands for. You can't live in this age without getting brainwashed, and I refuse to allow myself to be brainwashed.

Harold Please, Celia, you are perfectly right, but give yourself a chance. That's what you haven't done. You demand too much of yourself, that's why you get frustrated and angry, because it's not the world that angers you but yourself by your insufficiency. We are all insufficient in our human limitation, there are always matters that we are not good enough for no matter how hard we hard we try, and it's not yours or the world's fault. It's only human.

Arthur Now father Perry should have been here. How was it old Lionel Barrymore did in that film? He brought out his harmonica and played a worn out and cheap tune just to allow the problem to solve itself, which it always seemed to do.

Julia Sit down by the piano, Celia, and play that beautiful piece, which you almost regard as your own. Give yourself a chance.

Arthur Forget the world and let music lead you and nothing else.

Harold Celia, the only world that is true is your own dreams.

(After some hesitation Celia goes across to the piano. Arthur tones down the radio and turns it off. Celia plays "Dream of Olwen" without orchestral accompaniment, preferably Charles Williams' own recording.)

The three listen in pious silence with some enjoyment, when suddenly the terrace door is opened with caution and Jennifer enters.)

Celia (notices her almost at once, rushes up) Mummy! (embraces her. Jennifer embraces her with equal tenderness.)

Jennifer Celia. Imagine that you found your way here.

(Arthur, Julia and Harold are absolutely perplexed, understand nothing at first, but the most questioning one is Harold.)

Julia (rising finally, can't help it, and embraces both Jennifer with Celia.)

Welcome back, Jennifer. I knew you would come back one day.

Jennifer You have hardly aged at all.

Julia Neither have you.

Jennifer And the home you kept exactly as it was.

Julia For your sake, as we expected you.

Arthur (finally rising) May one ask, where have you been?

Jennifer I have been everywhere and nowhere. But mostly I have been in Brazil and India.

Arthur A curious combination.

Harold Have you been abroad all the time?

Jennifer Yes.

Arthur Without any communication?

Jennifer Arthur, I needed a completely new life freed from all my past which I had to create myself from nothing from the beginning. Therefore I had to assume a new identity. When I ran away from my own career and concert that stormy evening, all I wanted to do was to throw myself into the ocean and perish, but I changed my mind in the last second.

Arthur And – you and Celia – do you know each other?

Jennifer She is my daughter, my one great error, which I had to leave behind. Forgive me, Celia, all these years of my absence, but I am now willing to make up for it.

Celia (to the other three) I never had any mother. All I ever learned about her was that she had disappeared abroad directly after my birth. My father married an alien woman with several children who never became my mother and never understood me.

Jennifer It was when I knew that I was pregnant that I had my severe crisis. It would ruin my career and everything else as well, but it was the awareness that you were there in my belly, Celia, that stopped me from throwing myself into the sea. I could leave and abandon everything but not you.

Arthur So that's maybe why Celia recognized and knew your music, since that was what you were working on when Celia came into being.

Julia That's the only explanation.

Arthur Not even father Perry could imagine such an explanation

Celia Will you stay at home now, mother? Can I trust you? I have been waiting for you all my life.

Jennifer Yes, Celia, I will stay at home now. I happened to be home already when my belated debut concert suddenly was performed by you on the wireless, Harold, my best leaf-turner, but I wanted to carefully wait. When I found that a young lady lived with you and played my music I became even more cautious and wanted to wait as long as possible with the sensitive moment of my re-entry into my former life, but finally I just couldn't wait any longer. And when passing by in the garden I suddenly hear my own music being played and understand, that it can only be my own daughter who is playing it...

Arthur You have much to catch up with if you haven't worked with music for twenty-two years.

Jennifer On the contrary, I made progress. In Brazil I studied under Hekel Tavares, I was also very much in Spain and Italy, but it was in India I finally realized that I could no longer deny my earlier life nor keep my daughter separated from me any longer. I had to take responsibility for myself, my past, my relationships and even for the music that was my only real life and which obviously quite miraculously my daughter has cultivated in my absence.

Harold With some assistance by me.

Arthur And with our fullest support.

Julia Jennifer, I never doubted for a moment that you would come back as yourself, but you seem to have doubled your return, in two portions and in two versions, and now our happiness seems to grow absolutely consummate by our succeeding in having you both.

Jennifer You are welcome. – Celia, we shall manage the music all right together. We have an entire world of barbarous noise to grapple with.

Celia You were all I needed, mother. I needed you all my life, I knew that you one day would reveal yourself, and when you entered I felt immediately who you were. Now I have you at last! Now I can manage anything.

Jennifer That's the spirit. Me too. But I needed to mature first.

Arthur We all need that.

Julia What are they giving on the radio now? Is it still Brahms?

Arthur I don't think so. Let's hear. (*turns it on*)

Radio voice Next in our program is a concert for piano and orchestra in Brazilian form by Hekel Tavares with Felicja Blumental as soloist.

Jennifer (positively surprised) My master!

(They all sit down to listen.)

Julia I should go out and put on some tea. Or would it be more gratifying with a sherry?

Arthur (calming) Afterwards, Julia. Let's first enjoy the music.

(They all sit down comfortably to enjoy, while the first movement of Tavares is concluded. Simultaneously with the scene tuning down and fading out finally with a curtain, also the music fades out.)

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"Your son is your son till he marries a wife,
but your daughter is your daughter for all your life."

– a saying from Finland

Comment

Robert Bell wrote the play "*While I Live*" which was made a film in 1947. Both he, the film and its actors were and remained obscure, he was known for nothing else, while the film music by Charles Williams became and has remained well known. We have neither seen the play nor the film, since they are almost impossible to find, but only heard about the film by rumour – and heard the music. How much this musical play is different or like the original is therefore impossible to say, but we sincerely tried to at least carefully mind the music.