

# The Recital

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The man in the foyer of the Center for the Performing Arts looked dispirited or unsettled. It was not his personal appearance necessarily – he was neat enough in his olive sport coat, ecru trousers, and necktie, but you could tell. It was his comportment mostly. He stood beside an entrance to the auditorium with his feet a measure ahead of him and his hips braced against the wall. He was clearly comfortable that way, hands in trouser pockets, but it seemed incongruous with the formality of the interior architecture of the new arts center. His posture made him look restless. His eyes gave him away too – his meandering focus. Head bowed slightly, he followed the mineral veins in the white marble and red slate tile floor. He studied the odd shadows cast on the floor by the irregular, pentagonal windows of the arts center. He watched music lovers straggle into the auditorium through the double doors next to him, and he furtively eyed the usher who stood opposite him at the doors with a handful of piano recital programs. His program he'd stuck into his coat pocket without looking at it. He knew his estranged daughter would be playing Beethoven. He had received an email announcement of the event.

The usher, white blouse and black skirt, occasionally fanned the programs like playing cards cards, and then collapsed the fan into a stack again. Now she removed a program from the top of the stack and handed it to a couple, ("Has the recital started yet?" "Not yet. A few more minutes."), and she pulled open a door to the auditorium for the elderly pair. Patrons seated themselves in the spacious place.

The man in the olive sport coat turned toward the usher. "Music student?"

"Oh, yes," she replied. "Handing out programs is the job of music students."

“Piano?”

“Violin.”

“I love it.”

“Violin?”

“Especially Fritz Kreisler.”

The usher looked kindly at him. “You’re not entering the auditorium?”

He responded with a silent rumination.

“You have a family member playing this afternoon?”

“My daughter. A Beethoven piece.”

The usher opened a program and scanned it. “Oh, then she’s playing a very difficult Beethoven sonata. She’s very advanced.” The usher looked up. “There’s good seating up front,” she said.

The man in the olive sports coat was agog to hear his daughter play. He’d not seen her for many months, but he would listen through the door. He didn’t want the girl to be embarrassed by the sight of him and emotionally distracted from what she would be doing at the piano. She should concentrate only on her Beethoven, he thought. He was not going to miss hearing her play for anything. He had too many regrets in his heart for room for another disappointment.

The faint strains of a piano began seeping through the double auditorium doors. The man in the olive sport coat recognized “Musetta’s Waltz” from *La Boheme*, “Memory” from *Cats*, “I Dreamed a Dream” from *Les Misérables*, and other familiar *morceaux*, and finally, the start of a Beethoven sonata. He recognized it from his own brief dalliance as a piano student. He looked over to the usher. She was gone. Maybe seated inside, he thought. He hadn’t noticed her leave.

He moved to the double doors. There he had a myopic view of the scene through a very slim gap between the doors; the pianist was only a blur. He’d forgotten the name of the Beethoven piece she was playing, but she was wonderful. The man breathed deeply. His chest heaved. He felt the chill of pride.

The piece began happily, playfully. It was lively, fun. In his mind he saw his daughter's hands hopping all over the keyboard and fingers spanning impossible distances over keys. The Beethoven piece was joyful and optimistic, somewhat teasing, the man thought. Played perfectly by his daughter. His daughter! The man moved his fingers to the music as fast as he could over an imaginary keyboard in the pockets of his olive coat. He could not keep up with the speed of the pianist.

When the sonata came to an end, the audience applauded vigorously, and the man peering through the tiny gap between the double doors touched the finger tips of both hands together and applauded silently like that. He would surprise his daughter later that evening with a call, he decided. He'd tell her how beautifully she played. He wanted her to know of his pride and affection. Maybe it would be a first step in mending family relationships after a long period of alienation. He looked forward to hearing her voice. He was hopeful.

The man crossed the foyer and left the Center for Performing Arts bursting with pride. That's my DNA, he told himself. Well, maybe not all my DNA, he admitted. But without him, she might not be as talented she was. An opportunity at his twelve-step recovery meeting that evening would allow him to share his story about his talented daughter. He'd show the group how he was working to bring his family together again.

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The twelve-step recovery group meeting followed its usual procedure. Attendees sat in a circle of steel folding chairs in a drab church basement, many sipping coffee from stiff paper cups, some scanning the bare church basement walls. The man in the olive sport coat, absent his necktie, sat giddy in anticipation. He'd get to boast about his daughter's piano recital in the Grand Hall at the Center for the Performing Arts.

An introductory moment of silent prayer began the group session, followed by business announcements, and a recitation of the twelve steps. Each member of the group read aloud one of the steps in turn from a card circulated among them. A self-introduction by a first-time visitor was next: a first name and an admission of alcoholism. Each person in the circle greeted the new member stating the same.

The story-sharing portion of the meeting followed. The man in the olive coat was first to raise a hand. He had prepared his presentation well. It was going to be the first step in reconciliation, he would tell the group. He'd mention the call he would make to his daughter after the meeting. His would be an inspiring story, he thought.

He was keyed up for this. He set his paper cup on the floor next to his chair. He stood and gave his first name. He related his experience at the Center for the Performing Arts. He omitted the part about listening to his daughter play through the narrow gap between the double doors. The members of the twelve-step recovery group would be impressed by his daughter, he'd thought, and they were.

"You're lucky," one member complimented. "You have a very, very talented daughter."

"Truly," another agreed. Others nodded.

Regarding reconciliation with his daughter and family, one member said, "Keep at it."

Another member asked what piece his daughter had played. The man in the olive sport coat removed the recital program from his coat pocket and opened it. "Beethoven Sonata 29 in B flat major, Second Movement," he read. And with that he now noticed that the pianist listed with the piece was not his daughter. His daughter's name was nowhere in the program for the recital in the Grand Hall. The man felt his face grow warm. He swallowed hard in front of his audience. He felt like he had been cornered. Silence overcame the twelve-step gathering. The group members began to feel uncomfortable.

The man closed the recital program and noticed on the back of it a list of pianists and their pieces for Mrs. March-

and's students in a smaller recital venue below the Grand Hall. He saw his daughter's name preceding "Moonlight Sonata" by L. Von Beethoven. He was completely emptied by this discovery, and the group in front of him saw it on his face. Many in the circle of chairs turned to sipping coffee. He felt heartsick. He had missed his daughter's performance. What'll I tell my daughter when I call? he thought. Do I lie to her? The members at the twelve-step meeting could see the man was crestfallen, and they applauded noisily to spare him embarrassment. The man slowly returned to his folding chair. He sat with his chagrin and took a deep breath. He thought maybe a gin and tonic would be good after the evening's meeting.

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As the man in the olive sport coat rose to leave after the meeting, two women approached him.

"How about coffee with us across the street," one of them said. "They have good cake, too," said the other.

"Oh, thank you," the man said. "I think I need to get back and call my daughter before it gets too late."

He knew he wasn't going to call his daughter, but he didn't want coffee to keep him up all night thinking about his disappointment.