

SONATA DOLOROSA

BY

Hilary Ayshford

Exposition

She was conceived as Beethoven's "Appassionata" played softly in the background. Her father was a viola player and her mother a cellist, and it was hard to tell where making music together ended and making love began.

The pregnancy was as calm and harmonious as Brahms' "Wiegenlied". They sang Schubert Lieder to her in the womb, and when she kicked and stretched, they soothed her with "Air on a G String".

After a labour as long and complex and demanding as Mahler's third symphony, she finally pushed her way into the world to the triumphant strains of Beethoven's 9th.

Development

With such potent musical genes, they were sure their daughter would be a prodigy. They named her Carla Philippa Emmanuelle, and a one-sixteenth size violin was among her christening presents. They dreamed of the day when they would be able to play string trios together, and maybe, in time, increase their repertoire to quartets.

They filled the house with music; she gurgled happily at the melodies and lay on her back on the floor beating time with chubby fists. When she sat on her mother's lap, they would move her arms as if she were conducting as they sang to her, entranced by the way she would focus on their lips and tongues as they enunciated the words to "Humpty Dumpty" and "Jack and Jill".

They envisioned other potential careers for her: perhaps she would become an opera singer, a percussionist, a concert pianist, or a conductor.

Recapitulation

The name Andreas Rett sounded like an obscure Austrian composer, rather than a neurologist whose eponymous syndrome brought discord to their harmonious existence. A sudden change of tempo meant that the pudgy hands, destined to wield a violin bow or a baton lost the ability to grasp a spoon or a crayon; the gurgling and murmuring never became intelligible speech or tuneful song, degenerating instead into a wailing crescendo of dissonant shrieks; the waving of the incipient conductor's arms relapsed into spasmodic, uncoordinated jerks.

In time, the house became quiet and joyless. Making music was too painful a reminder of what might have been, and making love left a bitter and reproachful taste.

The tiny violin was consigned, unused, to the attic; the viola was placed out of sight under the bed; the cello in its case gathered dust in the corner of the music room.

Unable to hold up her head, feed herself or communicate, Carla Philippa Emmanuelle retreated to her own silent world, rocking gently to music only she could hear.

Author Biography

Hilary Ayshford is a retired science journalist and editor who lives in rural Kent in the UK. A devotee of short form fiction, her work has been published by Retreat West, Funny Pearls, and Pure Slush, among others. She has also written two pantomimes and is working on a novella-in-flash.