

PENDULUM

by

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FADE IN

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dark small bedroom with two beds in a retirement home. Nightstand by each bed with patient's medicine, water bottle and small belongings. Two old men are sleeping in the room.

MICHEL KANAAN, 68, never goes a day without combing his white hair - even before he sleeps. He is wearing his dull pyjamas, and his thick glasses are on the nightstand beside him.

He grunts as he gets up slowly, with his hand on his back, and sits on the edge of the bed. He grabs the bottle on the nightstand and drinks from it. As he puts it back, it falls onto its side and onto the small stack of books on the table. He briskly picks the bottle up and closes it, then wipes the books meticulously. Slowly, he lies down on the bed and closes his eyes.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Office of retirement home's resident DOCTOR. The office is modest and is equipped with the essentials only. The doctor is seated in her chair.

The doctor Rania is a middle-aged woman who has difficulty juggling all the responsibilities in her life, be it her mischievous children, her distracted husband, or her demanding job. Nothing a hair band and rolled-up sleeves can't solve, she always says. And that is her everyday look.

The nurse opens the door and enters without knocking.

Conversely, the NURSE, Maya, is in her late twenties and engaged, so she still has time before she discovers the reality of married life. She is in uniform, and her brown hair is loose.

NURSE

You called?

DOCTOR

Yeah.

NURSE

Did they finally bring us the  
Bisocor?

DOCTOR

No, they haven't yet. But it's not  
about that.

NURSE

Oh... It's that time again.

DOCTOR

I'm afraid so.

The nurse takes a seat.

NURSE

Who is it?

DOCTOR

Michel Kanaan. His MRI results are  
back. I had my suspicions, but I  
didn't think it would be this  
serious. It's brain cancer, Maya.  
The tumor is malignant. He has a  
few months to live.

The doctor gives Maya a moment.

NURSE

Have you told him yet?

DOCTOR

Not yet. I've been through this so  
many times. Yet, it never seems to  
get any easier. How do you get  
used to telling someone they are  
going to die? That after enduring  
so much on this Earth, after all  
the joys and sorrows, it is all  
going to come to an end.

There is a moment of silence.

NURSE

I'll tell him.

INT. LUNCH ROOM - DAY

2pm. Lunch room with groups of tables and chairs scattered around to accommodate the densely populated retirement home. Each table has an assistant to help the incapable residents to eat. Most of the residents are almost done with their meals. MICHEL is sitting alone as he eats.

The retirement home MANAGER and young volunteer JANDARC SHIDIAQ enter the room.

The manager is middle-aged, slightly overweight and bossy.

Jandarc, 19, has a healthy figure. She is 170cm tall, and is in a colorful T-shirt and shorts. Her face gives the impression of innocence and playfulness. Her brown hair is loose. She is carrying her books close to her chest.

The manager claps his hand to draw everyone's attention. Everyone in the room turns to the manager.

MANAGER

Yes, wake up! Someone's here to see you.

The manager briskly leaves the room.

All eyes are on Jandarc now.

JANDARC

Hello everyone! How are you doing?  
My name is Jandarc Shidiaq. I'm a senior from Antonine International School, and I've come here to teach you how to play the piano. We will be going to the music hall in our school. The piano is a beautiful instrument, and we'll have fun together discovering it. You'll see - you'll become pros in a matter of weeks! So, any volunteers?

She looks around the room. Most residents have already cleared their tables, with a few still leaving the room.

Michel is the only one seated, and is distracted looking through the window. She approaches him.

JANDARC

Hello, sir. I'm glad you decided to join in.

Michel now turns to her.

MICHEL

I haven't.

JANDARC

Why are you still seated then?

MICHEL

I'm finishing my lunch.

JANDARC

Your plate is empty.

Michel looks down at his plate.

MICHEL

Oh. Ms. Shidiaq, I have a few months to live. What good will your piano do me?

JANDARC

Oh, stop being such a spoilsport! What better way to spend your final days than to be doing something fun? Plus, you'll get to add it to your list of life accomplishments.

She motions with her hand as if ticking a check box and tries to mimic a ting sound.

JANDARC

Learn the piano: Check!

MICHEL

(sarcastically)

Life accomplishments... Alright, Ms.  
Shidiaq. I'll give it a try.

INT. MUSIC HALL - NIGHT

Well-equipped music hall. Mahogany interior. MICHEL and JANDARC are sitting at a grand piano. She is holding his hand as he presses keys.

JANDARC

...mi, fa, sol, la, si, do. Again.

Michel starts again, with Jandarc's hand over his, but accidentally presses two keys instead of one halfway through. He angrily pounds his fist on the piano, producing a loud cacophony of notes.

MICHEL

Enough with this nonsense. What  
was I thinking coming here.

JANDARC

Calm down, Vivaldi. Did you think  
you would master the piano from  
the first day?

Michel is silent for a moment. He acknowledges his  
impatience.

JANDARC (CONT'D)

Come on, let's go again.

He starts over.

INT. LUNCH ROOM - NIGHT

The residents are having lunch, with the aid of their  
assistants.

MICHEL is eating next to a feeble OLD MAN. The book "The  
Prophet" is beside him. The old man is having trouble  
holding his spoon still. Michel notices, and holds his hand  
still as he puts the spoon in the man's mouth. Michel then  
scoops what's left in his plate and swallows them. He then

looks distracted, and suddenly starts motioning with his fingers as if he's practicing with Jandarc. The NURSE, Maya, then approaches him. He doesn't notice her until she talks.

NURSE

I see that girl has gotten under  
your skin.

He stops abruptly.

MICHEL

Oh, that was nothing.

She gives him his pills.

NURSE

I'm happy for you.

He takes the pills and drinks from his glass of water.

NURSE (CONT'D)

Learning a new skill can be  
therapeutic.

MICHEL

Oh, I don't know about that. I'm  
just filling my time. Better than  
sitting with these poor sods.

She gives him a sincere smile as she picks up his tray and then leaves.

He opens "The Prophet" to a bookmark and starts reading. A moment later, the man beside him moves his tray aside and sets his head and arm on the table as if sleeping. Michel turns to him curiously. He pats him on his shoulder, but there is no response. He pauses a moment, presses two fingers on the man's neck, and doesn't detect a pulse. He closes his book, and slowly leaves the table.

INT. MUSIC HALL - NIGHT

Three weeks later. Michel and Jandarc are having a lesson. She is playing the last part of FÜR ELISE. She finishes the piece.

MICHEL

Beethoven was a genius.

JANDARC

This is actually one of his simplest pieces, but it's still my favorite. You wanna have a quick break?

MICHEL

Alright.

Michel grabs his copy of Darwin's "The Descent of Man" and starts reading.

JANDARC

How come you're never this enthusiastic? I take it you're finally starting to like me?

Michel chuckles.

MICHEL

I never said I don't like you.

JANDARC

Then why are you always so grouchy?

Michel smiles briefly. He places a bookmark and closes his book.

MICHEL

Jandarc, I'm going to die in a few months. The least I would be is grouchy, but I wasn't always like this. Certain past events have molded me into the man I am today.

JANDARC

So? Spill it. I'm a good listener.

Michel tilts his hand down as he contemplates his life.

MICHEL

You know what bothers me the most? I'm going to leave this life in a few months, but I've got nothing to show for it. No feeling of satisfaction or contentment. No sense of pride in my life's achievements - not that there were any. What have I done in this world? What mark did I leave? As a matter of fact, what mark does any of us leave? We're just specks in a vast universe.

He holds up the book in his hands.

MICHEL (CONT'D)

This book says we're just smart animals. Our primary goal is survival and reproduction. But for what? To bring more souls into this cesspit, and prolong human suffering? I can't believe that any omnibenevolent being would choose this reality over the endless other possibilities. This is a reality of cruelty and war, of famine and disaster. A reality of evil. And in the end, there is no afterlife, no heaven or hell. There is just silence. Soothing silence. A befitting end to-

Jandarc puts her finger on Michel's mouth, shutting him up, much to his surprise. She then gently removes it from his lips, slowly turns to the piano and plays an upbeat version of ODE TO JOY.

INT. RETIREMENT HOME LOBBY - DAY

Sunday afternoon. Table and chairs are scattered around the room, all facing the CRT television on the wall. The room is mostly empty, with a few residents sitting and watching a soap opera on the TV. MICHEL and JANDARC are playing backgammon.

JANDARC

I wanted to tell you about this talent show that's happening in about a month. I think we should do it.

Jandarc moves a piece.

JANARC

Not for the prize - it's just that I'm certain playing in front of an audience will do you wonders.

Michel throws the dice.

MICHEL

Alright.

JANDARC

No way! No excuses or complaints?

Michel smiles. He moves a piece.

MICHEL

I guess my time with you is actually doing me some good.

JANDARC

Great! I have the perfect piece for you to play.

Jandarc rolls the dice.

INT. PIANO HALL - NIGHT

MICHEL and JANDARC practice for the talent show.

MONTAGE

- 1) Jandarc is playing slowly and explaining while Michel watches carefully.
- 2) They each drink a bottle of cola. Jandarc proposes a toast.
- 3) Michel starts playing with relative ease.
- 4) Jandarc grabs Michel's book from his hands and starts teasing him. He smiles as he tries to take it back.

5) Jandarc counts to three and signals for Michel to play. He plays spectacularly and with confidence.

INT. BACKSTAGE DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

A medium-sized dressing room with a large mirror as the room's centerpiece. JANDARC is helping MICHEL with his tie.

Michel is in a suit with his hair combed to one side like always.

Jandarc is in a red dress and red heels, and her hair is wavy.

JANDARC

Almost done. Now, I don't want you to worry, alright? If you mess up, just keep going.

There is a short moment of silence. Jandarc finishes with the tie.

JANDARC

Here you go. You look handsome.

MICHEL

Thank you, Jandarc.

He puts his hands on her shoulders in a caring manner.

MICHEL (CONT'D)

You have no idea how big a change you were in my life. You helped me care again, and for that I thank you my dear.

He hugs her fondly, and then let's go.

MICHEL

You're the daughter I never had...

She holds his hand.

JANDARC

Come on, better not keep the audience waiting, my Vivaldi.

They leave the room.

INT. THEATRE - NIGHT

Large dimly lit theatre with a mahogany interior and rows upon rows of maroon seats. They are full of formally dressed people. A suited up PIANIST bows to a steady applause. He leaves the stage.

MICHEL hesitantly takes his place and sits in front of the piano. He proceeds to play but misses a note, much to his dismay. Some hushed chatter breaks around the theatre.

JANDARC is seated with the audience.

JANDARC

(whispering)

Just keep going.

Michel pulls himself together and begins to play Yanni's ONE MAN'S DREAM.

INT. OFFICE - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

1986. Dark office with only the desk lamp on. Michel's wife JEZEBEL makes out with her young ASSISTANT passionately.

Jezebel, 44, has short black hair and is dressed in an olive shirt and a black skirt. The assistant is in a black top and pants.

She pushes him onto the desk and unbuttons his shirt, lips still locked together.

INT. THEATRE - NIGHT (PRESENT)

Michel gains confidence and plays with his eyes closed.

INT. FOYER OF KANAAN RESIDENCE - DAY (FLASHBACK)

1994. MICHEL is arguing with his daughter ELIANE.

Michel is 48, has thick brown hair, and is wearing glasses.

Eliane, 22, has brown straight hair and is dressed casually.

He holds Eliane by her arms as he yells at her but she pushes him and runs for the door.

INT. THEATRE - NIGHT (PRESENT)

MICHEL approaches the piece's climax.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

1995. Christmas eve. A downcast MICHEL is eating alone at the dinner table. A colorful old handmade Christmas card that has a hand-written note saying "love u daddy" is lying on the table beside him. He still has his wedding ring on.

INT. THEATRE - NIGHT (PRESENT)

MICHEL's eyes tear up as he recalls his agonizing past. He finishes the piece, and anticipates the audience's reaction. His face radiates with sincere joy when he realizes they are actually applauding him. He stands up with the smile of a child as he tries to fathom what is happening in front of him.

Jandarc is standing with tears in her eyes as she applauds her best friend.

He has finally discovered the taste of happiness.

FADE OUT