







**"CORNELIA...THE LOVE STORY"**

by

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Written for the 1988 American Province  
Gathering at Rosemont College.

Video in Archives.

Dedicated to Terri MacKenzie, SHCS



"CORNELIA....THE LOVE STORY"

WE HEAR the EMPERORS WALTZ.  
The stage is empty except  
for one chair. The LIGHTS  
in the theater GO OUT,  
leaving only several  
spotlights on the stage.  
After a moment these dim  
out completely and we are  
in darkness. Then the  
MUSIC and LIGHTS BURST  
and we see A WOMAN and  
PIERCE CONNELLY and in  
the center.....  
CORNELIA CONNELLY.  
The woman sits in the chair  
as Cornelia speaks. The  
WALTZ CONTINUES under  
dialogue

CORNELIA

I thought when we reached a certain point in our eternity  
things would crystallize.

MUSIC SWELLS then FADES  
DOWN under dialogue

PIERCE

Reverend Connelly. Reverend Pierce Connelly.

CORNELIA

Cornelia Peacock sir.

PIERCE

Ma'am.



CORNELIA

They say the great liars never lie.....to them it's always the truth. So when he said he loved me...When we walked our romantic walks and dreamed our optimistic dreams...why would I not love him? Pierce Connolly told me I was his life. And there were times....wonderful - rapturous - passionate times, when I was.

MUSIC SWELLS then FADES  
DOWN for dialogue

PIERCE

I suppose this seems a bit daunting to you Miss Peacock.

CORNELIA

Why would it be daunting Reverend Connolly?

PIERCE

My position.

CORNELIA

What is your position?

PIERCE

A man of God Miss Peacock.

CORNELIA

God has never seemed daunting to me. So there's no reason for you to be.

PIERCE

I don't like to spend too much time alone with women.

CORNELIA (to audience)

I was very young.

PIERCE

Especially a woman to whom I am most peculiarly attracted.

CORNELIA

Yes. Most peculiar.

PIERCE

Would you object to seeing me again Miss Peacock?

CORNELIA

No. (To audience) I didn't jump right in.

PIERCE

Good. I'm honored.

CORNELIA

Honored?

PIERCE

You're a very beautiful woman.

CORNELIA

So you're honored.

PIERCE

May I call on you? Perhaps we could go for a long walk and talk about our secrets.

CORNELIA

I don't have any secrets Reverend Connolly.

PIERCE

You see. You even deny them.



CORNELIA (to audience)

I could never follow the man....But I did.

PIERCE

I've been watching you Miss Peacock.

CORNELIA

Me? Why?

PIERCE

Oh yes. At church. And after. On the steps. With the Montgomery's.

CORNELIA

Mr. Montgomery is Reverend Montgomery's brother.

PIERCE

And they took you in. Your parents died. And your brother. And the Montgomery's took you in.

CORNELIA

Why have you bothered to know all that?

PIERCE

It wasn't a bother Miss Peacock. It came out very naturally...when I inquired about you.

CORNELIA

Oh.

PIERCE

Would you like to inquire about me?

CORNELIA

I wouldn't presume to do so Reverend Connolly.

PIERCE

My father was a cabinet maker and I attended the University of Pennsylvania...where I became an Episcopalian...I am now a minister in the Episcopalian Church.

CORNELIA

My parents used to take me to the Presbyterian.

PIERCE

And now thanks to the Montgomery's you come to me.

CORNELIA

To you.

PIERCE

To our church. The Episcopal.

CORNELIA

Yes. I suppose I do.

PIERCE

And does it satisfy you?

CORNELIA

What an odd word.

PIERCE

There must be satisfaction in religion Miss Peacock.  
Our hearts must be filled with it.



CORNELIA

With our religion?

PIERCE

Oh yes. God is the ultimate passion.

MUSIC FADES OUT SLOWLY

CORNELIA

How nice for you.

PIERCE

What is your deepest passion Miss Peacock? If I'm not being presumptuous.

CORNELIA

Not presumptuous Reverend Connelly. Premature. Not unlike a few men I hear.

PIERCE

Then you agree to see me again?

CORNELIA

It it's a priority for you.

PIERCE

Miss Peacock. I am beatific.

CORNELIA (to audience)

I was only twenty-two.

Pierce crosses away

CORNELIA

Accuracy is important isn't it?

THE WOMAN

Honesty.

CORNELIA

I know, but the heart sometimes intrudes.

THE WOMAN

You call love an intrusion?

CORNELIA

I'm still not sure it was love.

PIERCE

Nelie.

CORNELIA

He pursued me for months.

THE WOMAN

And you loved him.

PIERCE

We're going to have a wonderful life Nelie.

CORNELIA

We?

PIERCE

Yes. My wife and I.



CORNELIA

Are you proposing to me Pierce?

PIERCE

I want you to come with me Nelie. I have a road to travel.  
And I need you.

THE WOMAN

Is this 'accurate'?

CORNELIA

I'm not sure. Looking back on it - it seems to be. He  
was very disconcerting.

THE WOMAN

So he married you to further his goals.

CORNELIA

Maybe not. But so many events seemed directly tied to  
his ambitions.

THE WOMAN

Including the Sacrament of Marriage?

PIERCE

Bishop White will marry us here in Philadelphia. Then  
we'll find God's work. Together Nelle. I need you.  
You're my life my darling.

THE WOMAN

He's Irish and a male. An offensive combination.

Pierce looks at The Woman

THE WOMAN

And he was very good.

CORNELIA

Oh yes. If silence is god's consent....if He doesn't interrupt us in our journeys, even when we beg for the direction, then what can we do? I begged Him to steer me away if it weren't right.

THE WOMAN

For whom?

CORNELIA

For me. For Pierce. For Mercer and Adeline and Frank. And John Henry. How could it have been right for John Henry?

THE WOMAN

How could it have been wrong?

CORNELIA

You must be a Jesuit. You answer questions with questions.

THE WOMAN

Be patient. Sometimes the questions are the answers.

CORNELIA

I was so hoping that the true reward of heaven was not being the dumbest one in the room.

PIERCE (his preaching skills are evident)

I heard a story recently of a man who had fallen off the edge of a high cliff. He managed to grab onto the root of a tree growing out of the side of the cliff, and was literally hanging on for dear life. He began to pray.

PIERCE (continued)

Then he heard the voice of God asking him: "Do you really believe in me?" "I do!" said the man. "Do you trust me?" asked the voice of God. "Yes. Yes!" the man answered. Then the voice of God came back: "Then I will see to it that you are saved. Now, do what I tell you to do. Now. . . let go!" If you get the point of the story, you know something of the nature of faith, the surrender of all the human certainties and calculations to which we cling for dear life, as God whispers in our minds and hearts: "Now. . . let go!"

CORNELIA

He had Him. His God. He had Him in his heart. Pierce's sermons were symphonies.

THE WOMAN

Music reaches the soul more quickly than logic.

PIERCE

When Jesus speaks to us he often says...Let go of all your little plans for human security....Don't worry about what you will eat or drink or what you will wear...Make me your first concern, and I will take care of you. If you feel a little chill of fear running through you, it may well be a sign that you are beginning to understand the investment and surrender of faith. If it really hits you, you will have a sense of crisis, you will know it by the fear you feel in your heart.

CORNELIA

That fear never left. My heart was filled with it from the moment I met him.

THE WOMAN

Fear, excitement, expectations.

CORNELIA

But he touched me. He was the conductor of my soul. Listen to his music. His faith. His lessons in love. How he used love. On all of us.

THE WOMAN

Who said that love knoweth no measure and maketh sweet  
all that is bitter?

CORNELIA

I did.

THE WOMAN

Oh yes. I knew it was familiar.

PIERCE

The Gospel of Jesus indicts our selfishness and challenges everything that is good and decent in us; it asks us to move from the prison of selfishness to a world of others, from egotism to brotherhood, from lust to love. It asks us to believe that the only real power in the world is the power of love. It requires us to love not only our friends but also our enemies.

CORNELIA

He was one in the same. My friend and my most treacherous enemy. Sex is an instrument. It brings us to our knees. Power is an aphrodisiac. It lures us to our beds. I didn't pray enough. I assumed that a man of this power...this sexual, religious hypnotic control was coming from my God. We trust ourselves. We shouldn't. Not for a moment. We must refer to God for every step, every decision, every thought. If we don't we can be ruined...By heroes and idols and our deep seeded human needs.

THE WOMAN

You were fooled by an expert.

CORNELIA

He was a master. A genius in God's clothing. And he spoke the truth. God's own truth.



PIERCE

Say the 'yes' of faith to Jesus and the whole world can no longer revolve around you, you'll have to revolve around the world. We are called to go out of ourselves, as though we were going out of a safe old home, a place where we once lived and felt secure, never to return. And no road maps that mark a certain destiny, no logical processes of verification. Only that voice, the voice of Christ somewhere inside us: "Let go....Let go....Trust me...Believe in me.....Let go." And it would be too much if he did not also gently put his hand into ours, saying: "Fear not. I have overcome the world!"

CORNELIA

And so he did. And he would gently put his hand in mine and stare into my eyes and ask me to trust him. And the seduction continued.

Pierce crosses to Cornelia  
and takes her in his arms

PIERCE

I miss you.

CORNELIA

What do you mean?

PIERCE

In my work. I watch them suffer and doubt and worry and I try to help them. And it reminds me how much I need you.

CORNELIA

Do they know that?

PIERCE

Who?

CORNELIA

Your flock. Do they know how much more you are than a man of God? How romantic. How powerful and productive.

PIERCE

Productive?

CORNELIA

Are you happy?

PIERCE

Of course.

CORNELIA

With me?

PIERCE

I'm sorry. I don't mean to complain. We have each other. What more could I ask?

CORNELIA

What about a child?

Pierce backs away in silence

PIERCE

Are you healthy?

CORNELIA

Healthy?

PIERCE

When? When is it due?

CORNELIA

Pierce. Come here. Why are you.....

PIERCE

I'm shocked Nelie. I'm sorry.

CORNELIA

Come over here.

PIERCE

Forgive me. I'm just ....overwhelmed.

CORNELIA

Happily I hope.

Silence

CORNELIA

I hope you're happy my love.

PIERCE

I'm beatific.

THE WOMAN

Remember....He's Irish.

Cornelia walks to a separate  
light

CORNELIA

Mercer was our son. We named him after Doctor William Mercer. And three years later Adeline was born. Pierce traveled throughout Mississippi tending to his flock. I missed him and suffered the loneliness of his frequent

CORNELIA (continued)

absence. But he loved his work. They appointed him chairman of the Episcopal Convention of the Southwest. His dreams of a bishopric were beginning to look very real. But then the awful Nativist Movement reared it's ugly head. It started in the northern industrial cities. They saw the immigration of Catholics from Europe as a threat to labor and finally to the Protestant tradition.

PIERCE

I'm concerned Nelle.

CORNELIA

In Massachusetts a mob burned a convent. There were riots. Priests and nuns were attacked. They were seen as forerunners of papal armies bent on overpowering America. When the movement touched our lives in Natchez it had a strange affect on Pierce.

PIERCE

The Roman Catholic Church is being attacked even here in our own state. By my own parishes. I can't agree with these actions. And I've been studying the allegations and find no truth in them. I'm going to resign Nelle. There's injustice here. And I'm drawn to new premises. New thoughts. I hope you understand. It means giving up my career - our security. But it's wrong Nelle and I have to pursue this. Joseph will guide us.

CORNELIA

Joseph was Joseph Nicholas Nicollet. The French explorer. And astronomer. And most importantly...a devout Roman Catholic. If he hadn't entered our lives at that moment...if the movement hadn't been so inflammatory...if I hadn't adored my husband....

THE WOMAN

What's your point?



CORNELIA

That I was an innocent. Shoved around by circumstances and events.

THE WOMAN

We're all 'shoved around' by events. And you offered them up. What's happened to your faith?

CORNELIA

There is more faith in honest doubt than in most of the written creeds. It is my faith which tells me that there are reasons to soothe the past and explanations to prepare the future. I deserve some answers. How do I get them?

PIERCE

Joseph suggests I go the St. Louis.

CORNELIA

My husband the traveler.

PIERCE

There's a Bishop there. Bishop Rosati.

CORNELIA

He kept leaving us. Searching.

PIERCE

If we're to become Catholics.....

CORNELIA

The children and I weren't enough.

PIERCE

Then Joseph says I should talk to him.

CORNELIA

Why? Why this man?

PIERCE

Joseph suggests it.

CORNELIA

How long will you be gone?

PIERCE

Not long.

CORNELIA

I'll miss you.

PIERCE

I have to settle this.

CORNELIA

Then go.

PIERCE

It has nothing to do with you. You have to know how difficult this is for me. I told them, from the pulpit, that I was going through hell. I have to pursue this Nelie. We have to know what God wants us to do.

CORNELIA

And who is Bishop Rosati?

PIERCE

He's connected with Rome.

CORNELIA

Rome? You'll be seeing the Pope next.

PIERCE

If that's what it takes.

Silence

Cornelia is confused

CORNELIA

What takes?

PIERCE

Finding my destiny.

CORNELIA

You have two children Pierce. And a wife.

PIERCE

All sent to me by God. And now....I have to see what's next.

CORNELIA

Next?

PIERCE

Look at me Nelle.

CORNELIA

Ignore the tears Pierce. It's only fear.

PIERCE

Fear? What are you afraid of?

CORNELIA

Your destiny.

THE WOMAN

Revelations.

CORNELIA

Of what?

THE WOMAN

Pay attention.

PIERCE

I'm a man of God Nelle. I have to let Him direct me.

CORNELIA

He speaks to us every day...Through our love. Why must you go to Rome?

PIERCE

Trust me Nelle.

THE WOMAN

And you did.

CORNELIA

Oh yes. I certainly did. But then I even trust God.

Cornelia crosses down-left

CORNELIA

When he returned from Rome we sold everything we had and I found myself on a steamboat to New Orleans with two children and a husband madly in love....with religion.



CORNELIA (continued)

He was taking all of us to Rome so he could investigate The Church. When we got to New Orleans our crossing was postponed. So I spent time with Bishop Rosati. A lot of time.

"PIE JESU" COMES IN under  
dialogue

CORNELIA

And I became a Catholic. When I look back on it I suppose it might have been a reaction. Maybe I knew I was losing him. So I yearned for a father. In robes. In grandeur. I needed power and teachings and leadership. And I went to mass and listened to the language of love. The music. And I became a Catholic.

The MUSIC SWELLS as Cornelia  
moves slowly downstage.  
Pierce observes her as  
she goes through the ritual.  
At the end, Cornelia  
genuflects then steps aside  
and the MUSIC CONTINUES  
SOFTLY under the dialogue

CORNELIA

We were forty-seven days at sea. I was sailing into a world for which I was too naive and a life I was ill-prepared to enhance.

THE WOMAN

We don't enhance life. It enhances us.

PIERCE

Nelie.

THE WOMAN

These trials shaped you. They formed your eternity.

PIERCE

I've spoken to Pope Gregory.

CORNELIA

Most men would have been satisfied seeing the Coliseum  
or a painting.

THE WOMAN

Pierce was not most men.

CORNELIA

Oh do I know that now.

PIERCE

I've asked him if I could possibly...if there's any way...I  
want to become a priest.

PIERCE

Not right away my darling. I mean the children. Their  
upbringing. I would never shirk my responsibility.  
Naturally it would take time.

CORNELIA

I would lie in bed and wait for him. Actually pray that  
he'd touch me. The excitement was indescribable. He  
would talk to me at first. About love. And he'd kiss  
me gently and run his hands across my skin and stroke  
my hair and whisper into my ear that I was the most beautiful  
woman God ever created. And we'd make love for hours  
and I'd look at him and cry with happiness. I can still  
feel him. And I miss him....I still miss him.

Cornelia looks at Pierce

CORNELIA

God did a good job didn't He?

THE WOMAN

Which job?

CORNELIA

Men and women.

THE WOMAN

Oh yes. Superb.

Pierce exits. The MUSIC  
FADES OUT.

CORNELIA

Rome was magnificent. Pope Gregory advised Pierce regarding his vocation. He strongly suggested that Pierce would do more good as a married man than a priest. It seemed to satisfy Pierce and he was a husband again and a father. He became a Catholic on Palm Sunday and four days later we were confirmed by Cardinal Weld, and Englishman. We were a family again and the threat of Pierce leaving us had diminished. Then John Talbot, the Early of Shrewsbury who spent a lot of time in Rome, took Pierce to England.

Pierce enters

CORNELIA

I stayed behind with the children at the Palazzo Simonetti...Lord Shrewsbury's residence. And I nursed the sick and cared for the poor. And I missed Pierce.

PIERCE

Hello Nelle.

CORNELIA

We've missed you. How was England?

PIERCE

It was wonderful Nelle. I met some Jesuit priests.

CORNELIA

The kiss of death for any man.

PIERCE

We have an audience with the Pope.

CORNELIA

Why?

PIERCE

Nelle. What does that mean?

CORNELIA

It means "what does that mean?"

PIERCE

He wants to see us Nelle. Naturally I told him you'd be.....

CORNELIA

Naturally.

PIERCE

Nelle for heavens sake. What's the matter?

CORNELIA

What's he going to tell me?

PIERCE

Who?



CORNELIA

The Pope.

PIERCE

Nothing. I don't know. Why do you assume that he's going....

CORNELIA

You can't become a Catholic priest while I'm alive.

Silence

CORNELIA

That's true isn't it?

PIERCE

No.

CORNELIA

Of course it is.

PIERCE

No. It's not.

CORNELIA

Well how could you be a priest if you have a wife?

PIERCE

Chastity.

Silence

CORNELIA

Whose?

Silence

PIERCE

Mine.....and yours.

Silence

Pierce moves into the shadows

CORNELIA

His papal robes were soft and shiny. The room was huge. The sun was behind him. His voice was gentle and quiet but it had a lilt to it. Humble and gracious. He seemed to like me. I like him. I kissed his ring. He touched me. And I knew I was very, very close.....to God.

THE WOMAN

But Gregory told him to be a husband.

CORNELIA

Oh yes. I even trusted the Pope.

PIERCE

How long now?

CORNELIA

June. About six weeks.

PIERCE

I want to go to Vienna. I have a chance to meet with Prince Metternich. Can you go?

CORNELIA

Do you want me?

PIERCE

Nelie. Don't be obtuse. I'm just asking about the baby.

CORNELIA

Yes. I can go.

PIERCE

Wonderful. You'll love it Nelle. They say Vienna is one of the most romantic cities in the world.

CORNELIA

I hope they have good doctors.

Pierce smiles at her and  
exits

THE WOMAN

John Henry.

CORNELIA

We called him Harry.

THE WOMAN

June 22nd.

CORNELIA

He never reached three.

THE WOMAN

Two or a hundred. They're only years.

CORNELIA

Asleep or burning alive. They're both death?

THE WOMAN

The highest suffer the most and the strongest wander the furthest.

CORNELIA

I must be very strong. Because I'm very lost.

THE WOMAN

You're in sight of land. Keep rowing.

Cornelia walks down to  
a single light

CORNELIA

In 1837 the United States was hit by the panic of depression. We raced home to financial ruin. The Jesuits offered Pierce a teaching job in Louisiana. Grand Coteau, Louisiana. A small cottage named Gracemere....We were in the simplest of surroundings. With very little to do but be with each other. And love each other. Mercer, Adeline, John Henry and Mary Magdalen. Our fourth. Born in those years of peace and sharing and happiness. She came to us in the summer of 1839. We were a family for her and we loved her and we made her comfortable and secure and Pierce says we made her smile. Our love, her family....brought her joy and six weeks of humanity. What about six weeks? "Two years or a hundred. They're only years." But what, dear God.....what about six weeks?

Silence

Not long after she died I made a retreat. Father Nicholas Point...Society of Jesus. I began 'The Exercises'. And the third degree of humility. I was humble enough I thought. But they had me look at Christ on the cross and seek poverty and humiliation and suffering. Merty went to school at St. Charles with Pierce every morning. I took Ady to Sacred Heart. I had John Henry, our Harry, with me during the day. At night I would play the piano and Pierce would

CORNELIA (continued)

try to write his letters to our friends. I say try because three noisy children in a small cottage can be an obstacle to concentration. We played Blind Man's Bluff. And Pierce was wonderful. With all of us. And I was the happiest I'd ever been in my life. One day I had the children with me in an open field. The air was clear and the sun was bright and my spirits were soaring. I talked to my God and I thanked Him and I told Him I was so grateful for this full heart that if He thought it better for me to.....

Silence

That if my happiness were not for His greater glory....(pause) I told my God that He should take it from me....If it weren't for the good of my soul.

Silence

The light closes in on  
Cornelia until she's in  
a tiny spot around her  
face

CORNELIA

The next day...the very next day....I was at school. Sarah....the daughter of Phoebe, the wonderful lady who looked after our children.....came for me. I remember her face. We ran to the cottage. I thought it was birds at first. Shrieking birds. The pitch was so high. There was a vat of boiling sugar cane on the grounds to make maple syrup. It had been set off in the distance. We had a Newfoundland dog. He was large and playful. John Henry had somehow found the vat. He was knocked into it by the dog. The shrieking wasn't birds. It was ending by the time I reached him. I held him for forty-three hours. I saw the skin peel back. I saw his bones. Occasionally he'd open his eyes and look at me. And we'd connect. (pause) God waited for forty-three hours. Then He took him. (pause) I had looked at the cross and asked for suffering.

Pierce enters



PIERCE

Nelie.

Silence

PIERCE

How are you feeling today?

CORNELIA

I'm fine. How are you Pierce?

PIERCE

I've been praying Nelle.

CORNELIA

What about?

PIERCE

Us.

Silence

PIERCE

Nelle. I'm not doing very well. It's a difficult time isn't it?

CORNELIA

Mary Magdalen died September 10th. John Henry died five months later on February 2nd - the Feast of Our Lord's Presentation in the Temple. Not long after that I became pregnant with Pierce Francis, who I called Frank. It was during that pregnancy that Pierce made the observation that it was a difficult time. It it's true that God gives us difficulties to prepare us for disasters, I was certainly armed for the worst. We were walking home from mass on October 13th 1840. And that was the day that the Society was founded....deep within my broken heart.

PIERCE

We have to talk Nelie.

CORNELIA

It was also on October 13th, six years later, that I arrived in Derby with three companions to actually begin our first convent. And thirteen years later Mercer died in New Orleans. From Yellow Fever. October 13th. An impactful date in my past.

PIERCE

He's talking to me Nelle.

CORNELIA

And He tells you to leave us.

PIERCE

We've sought sanctity all our lives. Both of us. It's our chance Nelie. To serve Him. We can both do it.

CORNELIA

How Pierce? How does God want me to serve Him?

PIERCE

I've been offered a job. As a tutor. Traveling. It will give us some time apart. You can examine your faith and your future. And I can....

CORNELIA

What about the cottage?

PIERCE

I'll take Mercer to England. To Stonyhurst. Lord Shrewsbury will pay for his boarding.

CORNELIA

And Adeline?

PIERCE

She'd stay with you of course. We'll put her in school here. There's the bishop's cottage next to the convent. It's small but you and Frank will be quite...

He stops

CORNELIA

I'll do whatever you want. Whatever God wants.

PIERCE

It won't be long. He'll tell us Nelle. He'll tell both of us.

CORNELIA

Yes. That would be nice.

PIERCE

Trust him Nelie. And trust me. We both love you very much.

Pierce exits

THE WOMAN

He's remarkable.

CORNELIA

I made a fool of myself. Begging to a fool.

THE WOMAN

You bowed to God's will.

CORNELIA

God's will can be terribly mischievous.

THE WOMAN

You trusted them all. Your husband. Your God. Your confessors.

CORNELIA

I waited for over a year. With Adeline and Frank. In those two rooms next to the convent. I taught and prayed and waited. Then after consulting with Gregory he came back...to get us. It seemed they need my decision. In person...my consent. We moved into an apartment on the Via Ripetta and we put Adeline in the Sacred Heart Academy at the Trinita dei Monti. And we had time. I knew the church wouldn't rush into anything without investigation, discretion and of course propriety. I was very wrong.

Pierce approaches Cornelia.  
She backs away from him

PIERCE

What's the matter?

CORNELIA

What do you want?

PIERCE

You....What's the matter with you? Come here.

CORNELIA

Just talk to me. What is it you want to say?

THE WOMAN

Hear him out.

CORNELIA

I did. I heard every word.

PIERCE

Come here.

CORNELIA

He would seduce me even now.

THE WOMAN

He loved you.

CORNELIA

Listen. Listen to what he says.

PIERCE

I will not do this like this. You're my wife. This can't be done with anger.

CORNELIA

I'm not angry.

PIERCE

Then what are you feeling?

CORNELIA

Despair.

PIERCE

God was never closer to us than now.

CORNELIA

Where do I go?



PIERCE

The convent.

CORNELIA

And Frank?

PIERCE

He stays with you of course.

CORNELIA

He's only three Pierce.

PIERCE

He'll be with you Nelie.

CORNELIA

Don't take him.

PIERCE

Of course I won't take him. No one is taking anything from you Nelle. We'll still be together. During Minor Orders they're going to allow me to visit you. And you'll be with the nuns for prayers and you'll teach your music and English and be home with Frank at night and we'll be together on weekends. They've said all along that it's your duty to be with them. No one is taking your children from you Nelle.

THE WOMAN

Irony is the spice of life.

CORNELIA

Watch his warmth. His sincerity.

PIERCE

Before I can be ordained you have to take a vow of perpetual chastity.

CORNELIA

When?

PIERCE

Well....(pause) I have Minor Orders.

CORNELIA

When must I take this vow?

PIERCE

I thought if you lived with the Sacred Heart nuns.....and with your devotion to God...You've always talked about the religious life Nelle.

Silence

PIERCE

I realize my actions demand sacrifice my live. But I have no choice in the matter.

CORNELIA

We have no choice.

PIERCE

Pierce moves into the shadows

CORNELIA

I couldn't hear people when they spoke to me. I couldn't comprehend situations. I was incapable of holding a single thought. My soul was dying. And I was loosing God. I asked Him to reveal His will. But there was silence.

CORNELIA (continued)

And Pierce moved quickly. The Jesuits didn't accept him, so they can't be all bad, but that only sped things up. We met again and I gave him one last chance. For Ady and Frank and Mercer.

Pierce comes up behind  
her

THE WOMAN

He'd already been accepted as a diocesan.

PIERCE

You look wonderful Nelle.

CORNELIA

Thank you. We're fighting colds at the moment and Ady's going through some growing pains but all in all we're managing the days.

PIERCE

You aren't joining the Sacred Heart convent?

CORNELIA

No.

PIERCE

Why?

CORNELIA

They aren't settled on their rule. There's too much confusion.

PIERCE

I see.

Silence

CORNELIA

I heard about the Jesuits.

Silence

CORNELIA

I know how much that hurts you.

Silence

CORNELIA

Pierce.....take us back.

He holds her. Gently at  
first. Then with some  
passion

Silence

Pierce moves down-left.  
Cornelia down-right

CORNELIA

On June 18, 1845 I took a vow of chastity.

Silence

CORNELIA

Three weeks later Pierce was ordained. (Pause) A priest.  
He was ordained a Catholic priest.

Silence

CORNELIA

At his ordination.....I was in the choir. One of the phrases I sang was....."Thou art a priest forever."

Silence

CORNELIA

Three days later.....I walked to the communion rail with Ady. And we received Holy Communion. Together....From a priest who looked down at us and smiled.....with love....It was nice that he still loved us.

Silence

Pierce exits

THE WOMAN

But he came back. Why did he come back for you?

Cornelia walks down-left

CORNELIA

John Henry Newman and his Oxford chums had been received into the church and they established the Oratory of English male converts. Bishop Wiseman wanted a similar institute for female converts. So in 1846 Adeline and Frank and I left Trinita dei Monti and set out for England. We spent the summer in Spetchley Park in the southwest. Merty, on holiday from Stonyhurst, joined us. He was fifteen now and he and Adeline and Frank and I fed deer and rode ponies and we talked about the past and shared a British summer and life actually looked simple. Under English skies. Among flowers so beautiful they would inspire poets and bring peace to an aching heart.

She stops to reflect



CORNELIA

Then. On October 13th we arrived in Derby. To open a school for the education of Catholic girls. The Society of the Holy Child Jesus had begun.

THE WOMAN

And Pierce?

CORNELIA

He wanted a post in the diplomatic corps of the Vatican. Apostolic Nuncio to Ireland. He didn't get it. So he took a chaplaincy in England. At Alton Towers...an estate owned by Lord Shrewsbury.

THE WOMAN

So you were both in England.

CORNELIA

And Wiseman knew Pierce would want to see me.....In Rome these visits would not be scandalous. But in England with so much anti-Catholic sentiment.....

THE WOMAN

And the children?

CORNELIA

Adeline went to boarding school. Frank....who was five, went to Mrs. Nicholson's school at Hampstead. Just a year they said. While I completed my novitiate. In the slums of Derby. In a huge Gothic house with a basement filled with large rats and a school to run with two hundred pupils. We worked and prayed and slowly our community began to grow. And through the days I became a nun. I wrote to the children of course and they wrote to each other.....Ady once wrote to Mercer that it was "so hard to be without Mama".....And once she copied out the words of "The Boy Stood on the Burning Deck" and sent it to me with a note at the end saying "copied for my dearest darling Mama by Adeline Connelly." Merty's work at school suffered. He was the only American and surely the only boy whose father was a priest and mother a nun. And Frank

CORNELIA (continued)

missed me of course, although they tell me he didn't cry much anymore. They told me it was for only a year. One year.

Silence

CORNELIA

Oh my God.

THE WOMAN

That's over now Cornelia. That's all over.

Pierce steps into a light.  
Cornelia sees him.....

CORNELIA

I don't understand you. You know you shouldn't be here.

PIERCE

It's Wiseman isn't it?

CORNELIA

Not only Wiseman. This isn't Italy. You've been told not to see me. England is very different. Any scandal here is a very real threat to not only the church itself but.....

PIERCE

You're my wife.

CORNELIA

I haven't taken my final vows Pierce. Wiseman asked that we don't do anything that.....It's forbidden Pierce. You have to leave.

PIERCE

What's happened Nelle? Why have they turned against me?

CORNELIA

Who?

PIERCE

Everyone. Wiseman. And I didn't get the post in Ireland you know.

CORNELIA

When Pope Gregory died Pierce you lost some influence. But no one has turned against you.

PIERCE

I'm all alone Nelle. At Alton Towers. The Shrewsbury's are never there. I'm cut off. I asked Wiseman if I could be chaplain here. He respectfully declined. Said I wasn't 'suitable'.

CORNELIA

Here?

PIERCE

Yes. Naturally. Why are you surprised? I want to be near my wife. I thought we could continue our work on the Rules.

CORNELIA

What work?

PIERCE

On the Rule Nelle. For the Society.

CORNELIA

You never worked on the Rule. I created the Rule.

PIERCE

Certainly I did. I was there for every bit of it.

CORNELIA

Pierce. Please. This is not a.....

PIERCE

Don't do it Nelle. Don't you turn against me as well.

CORNELIA

I'll write to you and we'll sort all of this out. But you have to leave.

PIERCE

I love you Nelle.

CORNELIA

Pierce. It has been difficult to retain logic let alone sanity during the adventurous years with you. But those years are finished. By your doing. I'm not yours anymore. I belong to God. And His church has forbidden us to see each other at this time. So I must insist that you leave.

PIERCE

You don't love me Nelle?

CORNELIA

That isn't pertinent.

PIERCE

I still think of you. Especially at night.

Silence

PIERCE

I won't believe that you don't still feel me.

Silence

CORNELIA

I do. I feel you very deeply.

PIERCE

My Nelle. My darling Nelle.

CORNELIA

Why are you doing this?

He approaches her. She  
allows him to get close  
to her

PIERCE

Nelle.

He leans in and kisses  
her gently. He stays very  
close to her

PIERCE

Remember me Nelle? Remember?

CORNELIA (coldly)

How are the children?

Pierce steps back



CORNELIA

Have you seen them lately? I think it's important Pierce. They need us both. I hope you're spending time with them.

Pierce stares at Cornelia.  
The look on his face is  
frightening

CORNELIA

You mustn't come back here Pierce. And you have nothing to do with this community. In any way. You never did. Good-bye Pierce. Go away.

Pierce backs away. Then  
exits

CORNELIA

Everyone who enters the Society of the Holy Child Jesus will have to rid herself of all carnal affection and live only for God. Placing Him above all. Including father and mother, brother and sister....and husband....and children.

THE WOMAN

So he stole them. He took Mercer out of Stonyhurst. The Adeline from Newhall and he went to London and picked up little Frank. He took them all. To get you back. He thought you'd come after them. They were your children.

CORNELIA

He didn't want me as much as the Rule of our convent. He went to Rome and told everyone he was the founder of our Society. He said God had inspired him to create this small congregation. God and a holy woman who was most docile to him.

THE WOMAN

Then he came back. To see his docile woman.

CORNELIA

Yes. As though nothing had happened.

THE WOMAN

And you refused to see him.

CORNELIA

Yes. Until he returned the children.

THE WOMAN

How did he react?

CORNELIA

The first thing he did was remain in the convent parlor. For six hours. He threw himself on our already fragile sofa and cried. We couldn't get rid of him. We were all huddled upstairs like frightened children. Terrified that he'd kill us all. Or himself. But he just moaned for awhile and finally stumbled off, weakened by his performance. I think we might have even applauded a bit as he left. What had begun as a frightening display of passion had diluted into the pitiable deterioration of a crumbling man. But I had no idea how demented my husband had become.

Pierce steps into a light

PIERCE

I come before this court to make a simple request. I love Cornelia Connelly with all my heart. She is my wife and I believe that she belongs with me and her children. Yet I am prevented from even speaking with her. I believe that my wife is being held prisoner. It is even possible that she is under some spell which turns her against me. It is absolutely clear that she is not being allowed to behave freely. So I come here in an effort to restore my conjugal rights. I want my wife returned to me. And rescued from that Papist Prison in which they are obviously distorting her mind. No one should be able to keep a husband from his wife. And her children are being deprived of their mother. I present to you a most hideous scenario

PIERCE (continued)

created by the Roman Catholic Church which seems to me more influenced by devils than saints. I know Cornelia Connelly. And I know that she would never abandon her children. Never. And I know she loves me. We are not just husband and wife. We are lovers of our Lord Jesus Christ. Help me to free my wife and restore our rights. Her husband's rights. Her children's. Help us. In the name of God. In the name of compassion. I stand before you a devout Protestant. Returned now to our beloved Church of England. I myself escaped from the Romans and I beg you to help me free my wife. For God. For myself. And most of all.....for our children.

Pierce walks into another light. Cornelia walks down equal to him

CORNELIA

We did all we could at Derby.

PIERCE

If I fail in the courts I'll take it to the House of Commons. Or to America.

CORNELIA

So Wiseman found us St. Leonards. In Sussex. Our host, Reverend John Jones, welcomed us with open arms.

PIERCE

I will not stop until my wife is back with me. In my control.

CORNELIA

Reverend Jones carried a silver ear trumpet. And he called us Dame instead of Sister.

PIERCE

I am only serving the church. And of course.....truth!!

CORNELIA

Our first Christmas was wonderful. Three of our novices were professed.

PIERCE

Even if I break up every convent in England. For the next fifty years.....

CORNELIA

In general things were looking very hopeful.

PIERCE

I won't stop. I am dedicated to this mission.

CORNELIA

But eventually Pierce's actions began to take their toll. The trials went on for years. And the newspapers had a field day. The London Times carried every detail and the country followed our lives 'religiously'.

PIERCE

I want my wife. I want her back. She's my wife.

CORNELIA

Needless to say the Protestant Alliance was most amused.

PIERCE

It's the Catholics. The Catholic Church.

CORNELIA

Even Catholics found the circus distasteful and I became infamous and very unpopular.

PIERCE

And there's property involved. Worth a substantial sum. Left to this nun...my wife. Due to my children. They must be protected. I will not be defeated. Listen to me and you'll hear only the truth.

CORNELIA

I lost the case.

PIERCE

The decision is in...She has to come back to me. That is the court's decision.

CORNELIA

They told me to return to my husband...to his bed. It was the law.

PIERCE

We've trounced them. We've beaten the Romans. There is justice in this most equitable court. I thank you for your knowledge, your fairness and most importantly....your insight into my humanity. And, of course my wife's...Cornelia Connelly, my beloved wife.

Pierce exits

CORNELIA

We were afraid he'd come for me. So I kept a disguise ready for my escape. My friends wanted me to leave the country. We were terrified. But my lawyers appealed. And we waited for another verdict. It's amazing how deceitful hope can be.

THE WOMAN

It also nurtures dreams into reality. You did win the appeal.



CORNELIA

And it meant I didn't have to go back to Pierce. But we were in England and according to British law a man's children were his property. I never saw Mercer again. I eventually heard that he died of yellow fever. He was twenty-one. Adeline stayed with Pierce. She was devoted to him. So she left Catholicism. I only saw her once. She stayed with him until he died. However years later, long after I'd gone, she returned to the church. Frank never did. He kept in contact with our nuns and sent his daughter to one of our schools but he blamed the Catholic Church for ruining his parents lives and his childhood. He became a successful sculptor and artist.....my little Frankie.

THE WOMAN

And you never saw Pierce again.

CORNELIA

No. I let him go. Like the children. And my mother and father.

THE WOMAN

"Memento mori."

CORNELIA

The anguish of Pierce and the children - the pulverizing loneliness - then the slow dying. Among my sweet sisters.

The voices of her nuns come  
in softly. They sing one  
of her favourite hymns

CORNELIA

They sang to me every night.

THE WOMAN

A telling diptych of misery and joy.

CORNELIA

I don't know how they could look at me.

THE WOMAN

They loved you.

CORNELIA

Even my face. It even reached my face. The burning, scalding redness covered my whole body and I remembered John Henry. We were both disfigured by the same pain. Our flesh was the same in dying.

THE WOMAN

And you cried out.

CORNELIA

In this flesh....I shall see my God.

THE WOMAN

Three times. Striking one hand with the other.

Cornelia strikes her hands together three times. She does it slowly as though remembering the pain

Then she stands quietly for a moment listening to the voices. Suddenly she remembers something

CORNELIA

Violets. Wild violets.

THE WOMAN

They loved you Cornelia.

CORNELIA

They draped them on my grave.

THE WOMAN

In small bunches.

Silence

CORNELIA (in a whisper)

They loved me.

THE WOMAN

Indeed they did.

CORNELIA

And I loved them. Every last one of them. I always will.  
But that's easy. There is no test in loving those  
near....those who love us. We all love when there's no  
labour, no bitterness. But love must knoweth no measure.

The Woman starts to walk  
into the shadows

THE WOMAN

That's right Cornelia. No measure.

CORNELIA

Where are you going? Don't leave me.

The Woman is gone. Leaving  
Cornelia alone. The  
EMPERORS WALTZ comes in  
SOFTLY

Pierce enters. She turns  
to him. After a long  
moment he smiles at her  
warmly. She returns his  
smile slowly

PIERCE

Hello Neelie.

CORNELIA

Hello.

PIERCE

It's been awhile.

CORNELIA

Yes. It has.

PIERCE

And so it ends like this.

CORNELIA

Like what?

PIERCE

You look glorious.

CORNELIA

Thank you Pierce. I am glorious. You just never knew it.

Silence

PIERCE

Oh yes, Neelie. I knew it. Everyone knew it. (pause) We still do.

THE MUSIC SWELLS and the  
LIGHTS FADE SLOWLY.  
Pierce's light goes out  
first, leaving Cornelia in  
a small pin spot. Then we  
fade to black.

A.M.D.G.



