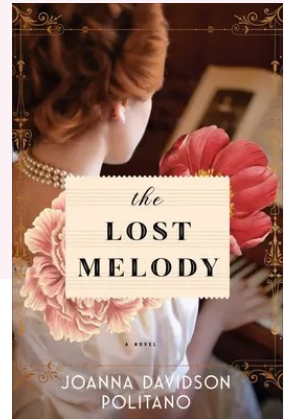




LEADER'S GUIDE

THE LOST MELODY BY JOANNA DAVIDSON POLITANO



“Music opens up what we once believed lost. It penetrates, influences, and restores like nothing in a bottle can.”

FREDERICK HARFORD

THEMES

Beauty Music Redemption Romance Belonging Healing Mystery Surrender
Forgiveness Women's Independence Forgiveness Mental Health Light and Darkness

HEADS UP! (TRIGGERS AND DELICATE TOPICS)

Parental Abuse Father-Hurt 19th Century 'Lunatic Asylum' Treatments
Post Natal Depression Infant Loss Forced Sterilization Murder (past tense)

CHARACTERS

Vivienne Mourdant is a concert pianist who, after the death of her father, is disarmed by increasingly vivid and unexplainable dreams of unknown melodies and an ethereal woman. Uncertain of her ability to bring light to dark places she lives in doubt and fear that she will have a lasting impact on those she cares about. One thing she is certain about is the power and beauty of music to restore and heal.

Marcel Beauchene is Vivienne's long-time career manager. Secretly he is seeking to know the whereabouts of Rosamond Swansea, a musical genius, and uses his connection with Vivienne to his advantage.

Canon Frederick Harford is a man of the cloth, amateur poet, and psalmist, and an associate of the Royal Academy. He is working with Marcel Beauchene and coerces Vivienne to explore Hurstwell in the hopes of finding Rosamond.

Rosamond Swansea is Vivienne's mysterious ward at Hurstwell Asylum. She is the reason Marcel and Frederick coerce Vivienne into going to the asylum, and it's also discovered that she is the same woman from Vivienne's dreams.

Mr Mitchell Turner is a Doctor at Hurstwell Asylum. He is a kind and compassionate doctor, intrigued by Vivienne's musical gifts and rare beauty, but he is also haunted by his past, and the premature death of his wife who was a patient at Hurstwell. Mitchell can see light in others, but none in himself, and in his grief he has trapped himself at Hurstwell believing there is no place for him anywhere else in the world.

Nurse Duffy is a Hurstwell nurse. She is abrupt, bitter, rude, and lacks compassion towards the patients. Not so secretly in love with Dr Turner, she sets herself against Vivienne out of jealousy once she realises Dr Turner's appreciation of her beauty.

Clara is a chatty patient who seems to know the comings, goings, and secret histories of Hurstwell. It's discovered that despite her confidence, she is a compulsive liar who tricks those around her to keep them close and dependent on her.

Bridget Hurley is a patient at Hurstwell, and Vivienne's dearest friend and companion. While she has a sunny disposition and steadfast hope and faith in God, she is also prone to bouts of depression and struggles with her mental health after the birth of her baby.

Dr Thornhill is the villainous superintendent of Hurstwell. He has a callous nature towards the patients and believes his moral duty of containing 'lunatics and hopeless cases' supersedes the law. It's discovered that he once had a family, who were murdered by a patient, and ever since his hardened heart has become more and more vicious towards his patients.

STORYLINE

Vivienne Mourdant is a concert pianist whose passion for music envelops her entire being. Every encounter with sound and vibration is a melody awaiting exploration, but there is one melody - the lost melody - that is connected with the surreal and repeating dream of an ethereal woman that Vivienne cannot place.

After the death of her abusive father, Vivienne decides it's finally time to explore her dreams of helping women trapped in abusive households, however between her debt, the shock of discovering she's now responsible for a ward at Hurstwell Pauper Lunatic Asylum, and her manager Marcel Beauchene refusing to schedule performances during her grieving period, Vivienne feels trapped and helpless to help anyone.

When Frederick Harford arrives out of the blue at one of Vivienne's shows claiming to be seeking a light in the darkness for Hurstwell Asylum, the encounter plants a seed of interest in Vivienne's mind about what she may find there. To her shock, when she enquires about her ward - Rosamond Swansea - she is told there has never been a woman with that name at the asylum.

Under the pseudonym of Cora Fletcher, Vivienne decides to penetrate the asylum as a staff member. Within days of her arrival the sleep deprivation, atrocious conditions, and haunting melodies that only she can hear, begin to drive her crazy and to her horror, she awakes confined within the walls of Hurstwell as a patient.

Vivienne tries unsuccessfully to prove her true identity to Thornhill, the cruel and villainous asylum superintendent, but quickly decides her only way out is to hunt for and find answers to the questions that consume her. Who is this ethereal woman? Where does this lost melody play from, and why is she the only one who can hear it? Will those people she's loved since childhood come to her rescue? Is she truly sane? Is there light to be found in the darkest of places? Befriending fellow patient Bridget, and forming an attachment to the kindhearted and caring Dr Turner, Vivienne continues her search while steadily learning to shine her light in the dark places of Hurstwell.

When Harford visits the asylum to begin his musical experiments, he admits to Vivienne that he was working alongside Marcel Beauchene to try and discover the whereabouts of Rosamond Swansea, but after

Marcel's sudden death, and Thornbill's nefarious actions, he is helpless to get her out. Vivienne also discovers that her ward Rosamond is the composer of the lost melody and the very same ethereal woman from her dreams. Soon after, a chain reaction of events leaves Vivienne imprisoned in Hurstwell's tower, a place where the forgotten patients are cruelly held, and it's there that Vivienne finds Rosamond – her deaf sister – and helps to set her free.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & TALKING POINTS

1

Q. Light and Darkness are important themes in 'The Lost Melody'. How does the novel explore the tension between light and dark? Discuss the various ways in which light is referred to, spiritually, symbolically, and tangibly throughout the novel.

TALKING POINTS

Light and Darkness are explored in various ways;

- Physical (tangible) darkness/blackness of a world without lights; Vivienne is abused by her father in a dark cupboard, left alone in the darkness of the tower, and scared in the darkness of the corridors at Hurstwell.
- Physical (tangible) light; Vivienne is given candles by Mitchell to light up the dark places.
- Symbolically; music is a light to Vivienne while she struggles in mental darkness at Hurstwell. Vivienne is also a light and became of hope to others; while she plays music it brings healing, beauty and peace.
- Spiritually; God is the ultimate light, guiding, and providing hope and assurance no matter the circumstances.

2

Q. In the author's note, Joanna mentions that Canon Frederick Harford was a real man who brought music therapy into hospitals and asylums. Did it surprise you to learn that while this story is a work of fiction, the theme of music as an instrument of healing, is real?

TALKING POINTS

"Music opens up what we once believed lost. It penetrates, influences, and restores like nothing in a bottle can." – Harford.

- As Vivienne plays her music for the "hopeless" patients, a change comes over them. Some of them began to remember forgotten persons or events, non-verbal patients began to make sounds, and ballerinas began to dance again.

3

Q. What did you find most shocking about the Hurstwell Pauper Lunatic Asylum?

TALKING POINTS

Answers may vary and could include;

- The inhumane treatment of the patients who were viewed as subhuman.
- The stigmatism, treatment, and diagnosis of mental health issues.
- The overall dreary and hopeless conditions in which the patients existed.
- The lack of empathy and care from the hospital staff towards the patients.
- The conditions considered worthy of admittance – baby blues, deafness and poverty.

4

Q. A common misconception during the 19th century was that some people were hopeless or beyond help. Frederick says, "There is no such thing as a hopeless case... only those who have lost hope" (p38). How has care for people suffering from mental, physical or emotional illness changed since then?

TALKING POINTS

In the author's note, Joanna mentions some of the common reasons for admittance in an asylum which included; depression (including post-natal and situational), epilepsy, mental illness, children born blind or mute, stroke victims, menopausal women and many more.

In the past, anything that drew attention or was out of the ordinary was thought better to be hidden away. Since we've had huge leaps in mental illness, depression and anxiety treatments, many suffering people can function and live happy lives in society. Children who are born with special needs are loved and cared for, and stigmatism around health (physical and mental) has significantly reduced. Improvements can always be made, but it's encouraging to see the progress that's been made.

5

Q. During Vivienne's imprisonment at Hurstwell, she experiences a crisis of faith and feels abandoned by God. How does God reassure her that she's not alone?

TALKING POINTS

When Vivienne feels utterly alone, scared for her life, and hopeless, God provides the unmistakable comfort of His presence.

- While God doesn't change her circumstances, He reminds Vivienne that He is with her in the darkness.
- God provides friends like Bridget who encourage Vivienne to remain faithful.
- God cares about the small details of our lives, and while Vivienne is desperate for a piano to play, God provides for this need too.

6

Q. Vivienne desires to help oppressed women. Discuss Vivienne's journey from grief and despair at her entrapment in Hurstwell to realising that God had answered her prayers but in a challenging and unexpected way. What may have happened to Rosamond if Vivienne had never walked into Hurstwell?

TALKING POINTS

Vivienne's music lights up the dark places in Hurstwell. Vivienne knew that God's plans were for her to help women, however, she assumed it would be from the comfort of her home. She never anticipated that she would be entrapped in an asylum, tortured, starved and left nearly hopeless. Bridget, Mitchell and Frederick help Vivienne see the good she can do, and Bridget's faith encourages Vivienne when she's ready to give up.

- On pages 312-314 Vivienne discovers true surrender to God's will.
- God's plans are often challenging, mysterious, a test of our faith, and confronting, but always He cares for us and desires what's best for us.
- We can trust that no matter our circumstances God's plans for our lives are good. He promises this to us in His Word; "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" Romans 8:28. This is not a promise for wealth, prosperity or worldly comfort, but a reassurance to those who love God and follow His commandments, that He is working behind the scenes for their spiritual good.

7

Q. On page 75, Vivienne discovers that she is deeply interested in people's stories and wonders how a soul could end up in a place like Hurstwell. Discuss some of the characters from the story. Which Hurstwell patient or staff member were you most interested in? Why?

TALKING POINTS

See character profiles for details on Mitchell, Bridget, Clara, Nurse Duffy, Rosamond and Thornhill Pages 1-2

Other characters include;

- Anna, the ballerina and her husband Philippe.
- Lew Wiggims, the young boy working at the asylum because he would not leave his sister Violet, who is a Hurstwell patient.

8

Q. Many characters in the novel struggle to know where they belong or have a deep desire to be home. Can you relate to this yearning? What kind of emotions do these words evoke in you?

TALKING POINTS

Home can be a place where we live, or a feeling of belonging, safety and acceptance. Homes are not always safe and comforting places – and if they are, we may still experience the sense that we don't belong.

Answers may vary and could include;

- I had a home that was warm, loving and safe while growing up.
- I moved around a lot as a child and didn't have a house to call home, but I had a family which made me feel like I belonged.
- My home was not a safe place, or somewhere I felt accepted.
- I grew up without a home or anywhere to belong.

As sojourners in this world, the longing for wholeness and our heavenly home will not be complete on this side of eternity. We dwell in the "now, but not yet"; where the promises of God are ours to have and hold, but not all are yet fulfilled.

9

Q. Mitchell struggles to overcome grief and his inability to save his wife's life. While he is not a patient at Hurstwell, he is just as trapped as the women he cares for. How does Mitchell find the courage to leave Hurstwell?

TALKING POINTS

- On page 304, Mitchell says to Vivienne, "I'm the one who belongs here. The one who's broken, and quite beyond repair."
- After Vivienne's attempted escape, Mitchell is told by Thornhill that she has been captured and transferred to another asylum.
- During Philippe and Anna's escape to London, Mitchell's desire for freedom is awakened when Philippe says, "She [Anna] moves, so has my home" (p334). Mitchell suddenly realises that with Vivienne gone, maybe nothing is keeping him captive at Hurstwell.
- The pivotal point for Mitchell's decision to leave Hurstwell is when he hears the melody of Amazing Grace (p335).

10

Q. Thornhill is both a victim and a villain. At what point does a person become responsible for the harm they cause others?

TALKING POINTS

“Do you think we should look at people in light of their actions or in light of what they have suffered?”
(Sara Brunsvold)

- Suffering can beget action.
- We all have subconscious or conscious ways we interact with what’s around us, informed by what’s happened to us.
- Perhaps a person is responsible for their own actions (and can no longer blame their behaviour on their suffering), once they understand the connections or the Holy Spirit reveals it to them.



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