

DAYS of War

By Motti Lerner

Translated by Roy Isacowitz

New version written following the 2023 Gaza war

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The play was originally written in 2015 under the title "After the War", and its plot took place after the Second Lebanon War of 2006. In 2016 it was performed at the Mosaic Theater in Washington DC, directed by Sinai Peter. In the summer of 2024, it was rewritten under the title "Days of War", and its plot was moved to the days of the Gaza war, that broke out on October 7, 2023.

The Characters

Joel (52) -	A pianist of international reputation who lives in the United States
Bella (75) –	His mother, a music teacher
Freddie (48) –	His brother, a businessman
Natalya (38) –	Bella’s nurse, an immigrant from Ukraine
Andrei (62) –	Natalya’s former husband, an immigrant from Ukraine
Izzy (23) –	Joel’s son, a student at a musical academy in Jerusalem

The Plot

The play takes place in the living room of Bella’s house in an old, central Tel Aviv neighborhood between December 16 and 18, at the height of the Gaza War. The living room has exits to both the kitchen and the hallway leading to the bathroom, Bella’s bedroom and the two children’s bedrooms. The room has a sofa and an armchair, beside which is a low table. An old music system and CD stand in one corner. In the other is a piano, with a chest of drawers beside it. Above the drawers are shelves of books and sheet music. The furniture is old-fashioned and speaks to the modesty of the house’s residents – despite the value of the property. The house does not have a reinforced room. Whenever sirens are heard, the occupants gather in the stairwell. During the course of the play, Joel plays pieces from Beethoven’s piano sonata no. 8 opus 13, known as the Pathétique.

Playwright’s note

Despite the fact that the play is written realistically, it is essentially a kind of nightmare experienced by Joel, triggered by his re-encounter with his country and family after a prolonged absence.

1. Night. The stage is dark. Sirens blare in the background. After a few seconds the blasts of mid-air interceptions can be heard. Lights up on the living room. Bella is sitting on the sofa, wearing an old bathrobe. Her hair is wild and gives the impression of not having been brushed for a long time. She is very tense. The doorbell rings. She tries to stand but, in her excitement, is unable to do so. She takes an inhaler from her pocket and inhales from it. The bell rings again. She again tries to get up and again is unsuccessful. After a short while, the sound of a key being inserted into the door is heard and the door opens. Joel enters, with a suitcase in his hand.

Joel: Mom? **(Pause)** Hello.
 Bella: **(Barely in control of herself)** Hello.
 Joel: It's me. Joel.
 Bella: I can see.
 Joel: Did you hear the siren?
 Bella: Yes.
 Joel: **(Approaches her)** Why didn't you open?
 Bella: Sit.
 Joel: Do you have a safe room?
 Bella: Sit down already.
 Joel: I got out of the taxi and lay flat on the sidewalk.

She takes another dose from the inhaler. He understands that she is in distress.

Joel: I'm sorry I didn't let you know I was coming. When the war broke out, I tried to call from New York, but your number had changed. Information said the new one was unpublished. After I landed, I went into the police station at the airport. The officer there recognized me and within a minute I had it. **(Smiles)** I've kept the key for eighteen years. I knew you'd never change the lock.
 Bella: What are you doing here? Are you sick or something?
 Joel: I'm fine. I came to visit. Izzy was called up. He spent two whole months in Gaza. He's only been out two days. Has he called you?
 Bella: Who?
 Joel: Izzy. My son.
 Bella: Your son?
 Joel: He lives in Jerusalem. I'll go there tomorrow. How's dad? Is he sleeping? I hope the two of you went into the stairwell during the siren. **(Silence)** And how's Freddie?
 Bella: The police gave you the key to my house?
 Joel: Not the key. The phone number. By the way, I met the manager of the Philharmonic on the flight. He asked me to stand in for an

English pianist who decided suddenly to boycott us because of the war. I'll play Beethoven. The Pathétique for you and the Fifth Concerto for dad. **(Remembers)** I brought you some CDs. **(Opens the suitcase)** Last year I recorded all the Beethoven sonatas. I played them just like you taught me. **(Hands them to her)**

Bella: **(Doesn't look)** Sit down already. Sit down.

Joel returns the CDs to the suitcase.

Joel: How about telling me how you're doing? How you're getting through the war? I hope no missiles have fallen around here. I've been watching on TV. Night after night. Those who were killed. Their families. The hostages. All those who've been displaced. And Gaza, turned into ash. **(Silence)** Who knows what Izzy went through there. **(Sniffs)** You made eggplant, right? I'll never forget that smell. **(He approaches the kitchen door and inhales the smell)** There was a gash in the piano here. Freddy threw a hammer at me. We were kids then. Here it is. And that's your same bathrobe. With some new holes. You would sit on the sofa, listening to music. And the ash from your cigarettes fell on it. Right? And where did you get your hair done so nicely? **(Looks into the kitchen)** Even the fridge hasn't been replaced. See what we've come to? Refrigerators are more faithful than people. **(Laughs)** If you continue with the silence, I'll continue with the talking. **(Points to the wall)** There was a picture of dad here. With the minister of education. At a conference of the teachers union. Right? **(Turns on the radio)** The radio still works. It must be thirty years old already! **(The first part of the Pathétique sonata is playing)** That's me, mom. Listen. Yes. That's me playing.

He turns off the radio, sits at the piano and begins to play the first part of the sonata. Bella is so overwhelmed that she's afraid she'll burst out crying. She hurries out of the room. Joel stops playing. He gets up from the stool as if to go after her. Natalya enters.

Natalya: She went to the bathroom.
 Joel: The bathroom?
 Natalya: That's how she is when she's excited. She'll be back in a moment.
 Joel: And you are?
 Natalya: My name's Natalya.
 Joel: Natalya? Freddie's wife?
 Natalya: No. I'm not his wife. I'm waiting for him. I...
 Joel: You're waiting for Freddie at my mother's?

Natalya: He's on his way. We told him that you're here. He was very happy.
 Joel: He told you that?
 Natalya: Yes
 Joel: And you're not his wife?
 Natalya: I'm a nurse. I look after your mother. I asked her to change her clothes for you. To brush her hair. She was too nervous. She didn't want me near her when you arrived. I've often heard you on the radio.

Bella enters.

Bella: **(In a choked voice.)** Hug your old mother. Your old mother who hasn't stopped thinking of you all these bad years. Who hasn't stopped listening to you playing for her...

Joel moves towards her to embrace her. She wants to embrace him, but the residue of the past holds her back. She turns her back on him, but then, after a few seconds, turns around and slaps his cheek.

Bella: Why didn't you come back while it was still possible to live here?
 Joel: OK. I deserve it. Here's the other cheek.

Shocked by what she has done, Bella rushes to leave the room. Her legs fail her. Natalya supports her and helps her leave. Joel feels his cheek, unsure of whether to go after her. Suddenly, the front door opens. Freddie enters, dressed in a suit, a cigar in his mouth, and he is carrying a briefcase.

Freddie: Hey, Jo-Jo!
 Joel: Freddie!

Freddie put the briefcase on the couch. The two embrace.

Freddie: You look awful. Has old age caught up with you already? You're as pale as a ghost. The siren didn't cause a heart attack, did it?
 Joel: That's what you wish me?

They laugh and embrace again.

Freddie: That's how you arrive, after eighteen years? At midnight? Without letting us know? You could have found the house hit by a missile. We could have been rotting in our shrouds. Even the worms that had eaten us could have been eaten by worms. **(Offers him a**

cigar) You smoke? Havanas. I bought a hundred of these in Cyprus the day before the war broke out.

Joel: You actually look great, Freddie. No worm would dare go near you.

Freddie: I have to fly in the morning. To Italy. I bought car covers from some factory that closed down. The war has screwed up our business. No one wants to sell to us. No one wants to buy from us. You still play? Anyone come listen?

Joel: Apparently they do. Even the Philharmonic invited me.

Freddie: So, we'll finally get to hear you. **(Offers him the cigar again)** Try it. You'll never say no again.

Joel: **(Declines the cigar)** When do you get back?

Freddie: In a couple of days.

Joel: So you'll make it to the concert.

Freddie: As long as they don't cancel the flights because of a few shitty missiles.

Joel: Do you still live here?

Freddie: I don't live anywhere. Always on the go. You bought a house, didn't you?

Joel: An apartment. In New York.

Freddie: Yes, I know. In Manhattan. Fifty-Seventh Street. I almost rang your doorbell once.

Joel: You were in New York and you didn't visit?

Freddie: I was in a hurry. I was buying old batteries. For the lead. How's your wife? Her name's...?

Joel: Ruth.

Freddie: Right. Ruth. I remember her. How is she?

Joel: I hope she's fine. I haven't seen her in months. We got divorced about two years ago. But she's done very well recently. Made a fortune.

Freddie: I'm not surprised you got divorced. You were always unbearable.

Joel: As you should know. **(Laughs)** Do you know how much I've missed arguing with you?

Freddie: You've missed it?

Joel: You may be a bastard, but you have a lot of charm. **(Laughs)**

Freddie: **(Remembers)** You have a daughter as well, don't you? She's probably grown-up already. She has to be twenty-something. She may even have kids. In fact, maybe you're a grandfather.

Joel: I have a son. Izzy. He's twenty-three.

Freddie: Izzy?

Joel: You taught him how to ride a bicycle.

Freddie: Me?! **(Laughs)**

Joel: You don't know that he came back to live here? Five years ago. Did the army. Now he's studying opera at the academy in Jerusalem. He was called up to the war in October. He only got out two days ago. I've come to see him. He never called you?

Freddie: What did you say his name was?

Joel: Izzy. I'm sure he tried. He has no-one else here but you.

Bella enters.

Bella: **(To Joel)** I fixed the bed in your old room.

Joel: Thanks, mom.

Bella: **(To Freddie)** Take off your shoes and clean the mud you left on the floor.

Freddie: **(Takes off his shoes)** So what do you think, mom? Our Jo-Jo is divorced.

Joel: Enough, Freddie.

Freddie: His son's named Izzy. He's studying opera in Jerusalem. **(Laughs)**

Bella: **(To Freddy)** Goodnight.

She leaves. Joel picks up his suitcase and exits after her. Natalya enters after a few moments.

Freddie: I thought he was going to a hotel.

Natalya: He didn't want to offend her.

Freddie: Sure. I open the door and he's standing there. In front of my eyes. Satisfied. Smiling. No remorse. No apology. The world's at his feet. He just needs to stretch out his hand and take.

Natalya: Why were you so late?

Freddie: I was tied up at the office.

Natalya: I was waiting for you.

Freddie: Here I am. **(He embraces her)**

Natalya: Stop it, Freddie.

Freddie: Don't worry. He's not going to come here in the middle of a war and make himself at home.

Natalya: **(Disengages from him)** I'm not sure I'm staying either.

Freddie: Of course you're staying.

Natalya: This morning I sat for a moment at the piano, and she pushed me off the stool. Why didn't you speak to her?

Freddie: I spoke. **(He embraces her)**

Natalya: You want me to go back to working at the hospital?

Freddie: After the wedding, you'll call her "mom" and she'll love you like her own daughter.

Natalya: **(Disengages from him)** I'm not going to marry you just so she'll teach me, Freddie.

Freddie: You'll marry me for something entirely different. **(He embraces her again)**

Natalya: **(Disengaging again)** Stop playing games with me.

Freddie: I'm dying to play games with you. **(She turns her face away)** What's the problem? I'm only going for a day. I brought you some money. **(Gives it to her)**

Natalya: Why are you so eager to marry someone who doesn't want to marry you?

Freddie: You just say you don't want to. **(He opens a button on her blouse)**

Natalya: Don't. He could come in at any second.

Freddie: He's gone to sleep.

Natalya: He didn't look tired.

Freddie: You spoke with him? I don't believe a word he says. Why would they invite him to play with the Philharmonic? Who exactly wants to hear him here? They don't even want to hear his name. **(He opens another button)**

Natalya: Take your hands off me.

Freddie: I'm going tomorrow.

Natalya: You're not going anywhere until you speak to her. I need to play. At least two hours a day.

Freddie: I keep on telling her, but you can see what a state she's in. The war drove her crazy. I'll ask her to play four hands with you, like she did with him.

He embraces her. A light is suddenly turned on in the hallway. Natalya hurries to the kitchen to arrange her blouse. Joel enters.

Joel: That's it. She went into her room and closed the door. I hope she'll fall asleep soon.

Freddie: Sure.

Joel: What does she do every day? Is she still teaching in the conservatory? Does she have private students? How does she listen to music on this old radio?

Freddie: She's heard enough.

Joel: I'll buy her a new one tomorrow. **(He senses Natalya's perfume)** That woman's smell is still in the air.

Freddie: Which woman?

Joel: Natalya.

Freddie: Look. I've had a long day. Let's talk tomorrow.

Joel: Does mom really need her?

Freddie: Mom is seventy-five. You see how she is. She forgets to take her pills. One of these days she'll have an asthma attack and choke.

Joel: What do the doctors say?

Freddie: Try taking her to a doctor. Go to sleep now. I've got to get up early. Good night.

Joel: She didn't look happy to see me when I arrived.

Freddie: That's how she looks, even when she's happy.

Joel: She's really strange, this Natalya. Her smell is very elusive. She's in dad's study, no? She's not at all bad looking.

Freddie: Goodnight, Jo-Jo.

Joel: Do me a favor. Don't call me Jo-Jo.

Freddie: Goodnight.

Joel: Are you really sure that mom needs a nurse? It's hard to believe that she lets anyone near her. Dad can't look after her anymore?

Freddie: Dad? **(Laughs)** Dad's dead.

Joel: What?!!

Freddie: Two weeks ago.

Joel: Dead?!!

Freddie: Natalya looked after him in hospital and now she's looking after her.

Joel: Dead?! She didn't say anything. I thought he'd gone to sleep. I asked her how he was. Twice!

Freddie: Now he's fine.

Joel: What happened? Was he sick? What did he have?

Freddie: Nothing. The war killed him.

Joel: The war?!

Freddie: Come on, let me sleep. He's dead. It's over. You're lucky you weren't here.

Joel: Why didn't you tell me?

Freddie: Now you remember to ask? Let me go to sleep. I'm flying out in the morning. If I don't get to those covers, someone else will grab them.

Joel: What do you mean the war killed him?

Freddie: You know what? I'll try to fly through Milan tomorrow night. We can meet in the afternoon. I'll call you at one.

Joel: Did he ask about me?

Freddie: Who?

Joel: Dad. Did he ask? Did he remember? Did he want to see me? He didn't deserve to die without seeing me. Without knowing that I thought about him. Without knowing that I didn't hate him all these years.

Freddie: I'll tell you everything tomorrow. Goodnight.

Joel: Do you have a picture of him? Where's the one that used to be here?

Freddie: Mom threw it away.

Joel: Threw it away? Why?

Freddie: Ask her tomorrow. Goodnight.

Joel: Goodnight. **(Remains standing)**

Freddie: You already said goodnight.

Joel: Yes. Goodnight. I knew it would happen. I've had this feeling recently that I wouldn't get to see him. I planned to come in September, but then there was a concert in Washington against the war in Ukraine...

He embraces Freddie and exits. Natalya emerges from the kitchen.

Freddie Fucking jerk. **(Blackout)**

2. Midday the next day. Breakfast is on the table. Natalya is at the piano, practicing the first movement of the Pathétique sonata. Bella enters and looks at her with anger. Natalya senses her and stops playing.

Natalya: I made breakfast. **(Bella sits in the armchair)** You should eat. Before you get dizzy and fall. **(Begins to eat)** He hasn't run away. He's in Jerusalem. At his son's. He left you a note.

Bella: Big mouth and small heart. You eat like a refugee.

Natalya: Maybe you should take some more valium?

Bella: The refrigerator will be empty by this evening.

Natalya: He'll be back, Bella. He'll be back. Like the sun in the morning. He was so worried about his boy, he couldn't sleep.

Bella: This isn't a hotel. He can't come and go whenever he wants. He should have waited for me and had breakfast with me.

Natalya: So now you want to wait for him? **(Bella stays silent)** Did Freddie speak to you this morning?

Bella: He didn't speak. and he won't speak. He proposes to every woman who flirts with him. Two days later he's gone.

Silence. Natalya is hurt.

Natalya: I'm not asking for much. One lesson a week. In Kiev I studied at an excellent conservatory. I'm sure I'll get back to playing as I did.

Bella: I'm not going to teach someone who will never be able to play anything.

Natalya: I don't have to be a great pianist. I can be a teacher. I don't want to spend the rest of my life in hospitals.

The telephone rings. Neither of them answers it. The door opens. Joel enters in a rush and lifts the phone.

Joel: Izzy? **(The call has been cut off)** It was probably Freddie. He should be on his way to the airport by now. **(Sees the coffee on the table)** Can I have some coffee?

Bella: **(Stands)** I'll make you a fresh one. Have you eaten anything? You want some eggplant?

Joel: Sit. **(Drinks from the coffee cup)**

Bella: Did you find the boy? How is he?

Joel: I've got to get to the Philharmonic, mom.

Bella: I'm making you more coffee.

Joel: This is enough. Thanks.

Bella: I see you didn't find him.

Joel: I left a note with the neighbors. I'm keeping him a seat for the concert.

Bella: I'm sure he'll phone today.

Joel: **(In frustration)** He's lived here for five years. I don't understand how you haven't seen him, not even once.

Bella: I haven't seen him because he didn't come here.

Joel: He phoned you dozens of times. Each time you hung up.

Bella: That's not true.

Joel: He was the loneliest soldier in the army. No family whatsoever. He gave up on vacations because he didn't have a home. He went through two months of hell in Gaza. **(Angrily)** And why didn't you tell me that dad was sick? Why didn't you tell me last night he had died?

Bella: I didn't know you were so worried about him. You ran away for eighteen years, and not once did you bother to check he was alive.

Joel: I ran away?!

Bella: Yes.

Joel: He kicked me out of here.

Bella: Of course.

Joel: And you kept quiet. Ruth and I came here twenty-four years ago. We wanted to tell you that we were getting married. Dad sat here, at the table. He had a headache, and you played him Chopin's nocturne in C minor...

Bella: I don't remember.

Joel: When we told you that we were going to a demonstration against the occupation that evening, his face got red with anger, and he

went to his bedroom. You followed him. You didn't come to the wedding. You didn't come to my concerts. When Izzy was born, you didn't come to the bris. After five years, we gave up. Izzy's now twenty-three and you've never seen him.

Bella You know very well why I haven't seen him.

Joel If you really wanted to, you would have seen him.

Bella I wanted to - very, very much.

Silence. Joel regains his composure and regrets what he's said.

Joel: I'm sorry, mom. I didn't sleep the whole night. I'm going back to days that we should forget. I'm sorry I didn't write to you. I'm sorry I didn't come visit. I worked like a slave, those first few years in America. I played in nightclubs. At weddings. You have no idea how hurt I was by dad's hatred. **(Silence)** He was also wrong about Ruth. She was a good wife. We got divorced because I was travelling too much... I wanted to see him and explain it to him... **(Silence)** Now I don't even know where Izzy is. The neighbors said he's fine. I wish I could believe them. **(Silence)** It's time we stopped arguing, mom. You were my only teacher. Everything I know I learned from you. A day hasn't passed since I left that I didn't want to play for you. Now sit and listen. Maybe it will do me good too.

Joel sits at the piano and begins to play the first movement of the Pathétique that he played in the previous scene. Bella can barely contain her emotions. She exits to the kitchen and slams the door shut. Joel stops playing. Natalya serves him coffee.

Natalya: You play so beautifully. In Ukraine I was a pianist. I even got to play a few concerts. But here I had to find work... And I didn't have a piano... **(She goes silent)** Don't worry. She'll be OK in a few minutes.

Joel: And now you're a nurse?

Natalya: Yes.

Joel: Did you look after my father in the hospital?

Natalya: Yes.

Joel: And you know how he died?

Natalya: Yes.

Joel: How?

Natalya: He didn't want to live anymore.

Joel: Why?

Natalya: Because of the war.

Joel: Is that what he told you? **(She is silent)** What exactly did he say?
 Natalya: He said the war showed how weak we are. How easily we can be wiped out.
 Joel: That's what he said?
 Natalya: He said it many times. He said he was not only a teacher of history but also its student. That's why he knew that the war was the beginning of the end.
 Joel: The end of what? **(She stays silent)** Of what?

The doorbell rings.

Joel: It's probably Freddie. You must tell me more. How about coming to the Philharmonic with me? My mother will manage for a few hours without you.

Joel opens the door. Before him is a smiling man in a suit, with a newspaper in one hand and an umbrella in the other. It is Andrei.

Andrei: Sorry. I apologize for the interruption. I was wondering if Natalya is here by any chance. I wanted to have a few words with her.
 Joel: With Natalya?
 Andrei: Yes. My name is Andrei. I'm her husband. Nice to meet you.
 Joel: Natalya's husband?
 Natalya: Her ex-husband.
 Andrei: I came to see how she's doing. I'm staying at her place right now. A missile hit my apartment in Ashdod at the beginning of the war. I brought her the Ukrayinska Pravda.
 Natalya: Thanks.
 Joel: How can I help you?
 Natalya: I have to go, Andrei. I'm taking him to the Philharmonic.
 Andrei: The Philharmonic?
 Natalya: He's a pianist. He hasn't been here in a long time. He doesn't know the city.
 Joel: I'm really in a great hurry.
 Andrei: I'll be happy to show you the way. You look familiar. American, correct? I think I've seen you on TV a few times.
 Natalya: We'll manage without you, Andrei.
 Joel: I'll be right back. **(He exits down the corridor.)**
 Andrei: If you're in such a hurry, I'll finish what you left on the plate. Is there more coffee?
 Natalya: You promised to go back to your apartment today.
 Andrei: **(Sits and eats)** I found a buyer.
 Natalya: You can't stay with me anymore.

Andrei: He won't pay much. Because of the damage. But it's enough for a decent place in Kiev.

Natalya: I'm not going with you, Andrei.

Andrei: When the war broke out, you said you don't want to die here.

Natalya: I feel much safer now.

Andrei: This war is not going to end quickly, Natalya.

Natalya: You look after yourself and I'll look after myself. **(Silence)** You got caught in the rain? Your shirt's dirty. Did you walk the whole way? Take a bus. **(She gives him money)**

Andrei: I'll just drink the coffee.

Natalya: Their mother isn't well. She'll complain that you robbed her.

Andrei: Do you want me to examine her?

Natalya: No. And stop following me around. If you don't go back to your apartment tomorrow, I'm throwing your suitcase into the street. Skoro cherez tebe ya zbozhevoliyu¹.

Andrei: Zavzhdy vse cherez mene.² **(Continues eating)** And before you start making such grandiose plans, I suggest you think a little about what will happen here in the next few months.

She doesn't respond. Joel returns after changing his shirt.

Joel: We're leaving.

Andrei: I'll be happy to accompany you. **(Gets up)**

Joel: Thank you, but there's no need. We'll take a taxi.

Andrei: There are no taxis on this street. I can take you to the main street, where...

Natalya: **(Cutting in)** I know where the taxis are.

Joel: I think I should tell my mother.

Natalya: She's listening behind the door.

Joel: **(To Andrei)** See you later.

He opens the door for Natalya and follows her out. Andrei continues eating. Bella enters.

Bella: What are you doing here?

Andrei: Good afternoon, Madam Bella.

Bella: How did you get in?

Andrei: Your son let me in. I recognized him immediately. He is a great pianist.

Bella: I know.

¹ You'll soon drive me crazy.

² Everything is always my fault.

- Andrei: How are you? You're looking a lot better. I wanted to visit you while you were in mourning, but I had to collect my belongings from the ruins of the apartment.
- Bella: Who gave you permission to eat my food?
- Andrei: I thought it was Natalya's. I always eat her leftovers. I'm not that poor, but I grew up in a poor home. I can't bear seeing food thrown into the garbage.
- Bella: You'll have me in tears in a minute. Get up and get out of here.
- Andrei: Yes, of course. Right away. Do you perhaps have some salt in the kitchen? Regular salt? To sprinkle on the butter? They make butter without salt here. **(She remains silent)** You sure there's no salt there on the shelf? In the cupboard?
- Bella: I don't have salt. And before you go, wash the dishes that the bitch left.
- Andrei: With pleasure. And don't worry about the salt. I think I have some. **(Takes a sachet of salt from his pocket and sprinkles it on the bread)** You won't mind if I take a little more milk from the fridge, will you?
- Bella: There's also no milk. Please eat faster.
- Andrei: It's precisely for such times, I keep some creamer on me. **(Takes another sachet from his pocket and empties it into the coffee)** I got used to it fast enough. Even though I was once a rich man. Doctors have a special status in Ukraine. By the way, I'll be happy to examine you.
- Bella: I don't need an examination. I'll still be around to dance on your grave.
- Andrei: You can rely on me. I ran a department in a large hospital in Kiev. **(She doesn't answer)** Do you perhaps have a little more butter?
- Bella: No.
- Andrei: No problem. When we escaped, I knew we'd have to give up on butter for some time. President Yanukovich had become as paranoid as his idol Stalin. He was sure I wanted to poison him. **(Chuckles)** Of course, Kiev today is a comfortable city. I hope we'll be back there soon.
- Bella: If you want her to go with you, you'd better hurry up and take her. Freddie already slept with her last night.
- Andrei: With her? Impossible. People mistake her friendliness. She's a woman of the world. She makes friends with decent people very easily.
- Bella: There you're mistaken, sir. Freddie is not decent, and he slept with her.
- Andrei: She was very close to your late husband, as well. He was a highly respected teacher. A renaissance man. His heart broke when he saw

the wounded soldiers bleeding in their beds near him. Some of them were his students. **(Clears his throat)** It appears that I ate too quickly. May I rest here for a few minutes? **(Blackout)**

3. Evening of the same day. Andrei is lying on the sofa, with a blanket covering him entirely. Bella enters.

Bella: Get up. It's almost night. They'll be back any minute. **(He pretends to be sleeping)** Who knows what smell you'll leave on the sofa. **(She examines his shoes)** You've got holes in your shoes. Only someone who's homeless can sleep like this in a strange bed. Your slut also sleeps like a log here, as if it was her own house. Get up, already.

He continues "sleeping." Bella hears a key in the door. The key that is already there blocks it. She hears knocks and hurries to open the door. Freddie enters.

Bella: It's you.
 Freddie: Did you think it was him?
 Bella: I thought you'd gone to Italy.
 Freddie: So did I. Why did you leave a key in the door?
 Bella: Whoever wants to come in can knock.

He sees Andrei sleeping but can't recognize him by his naked feet.

Bella: It's her husband. Five hours I've been trying to wake him.
 Freddie: Whose husband?
 Bella: His wife's.
 Freddie: He's not her husband. They divorced a year ago. What does he want from her, the shit?
 Bella: The same as you want.
 Freddie: **(Pulls the blanket off Andrei)** What are you doing here?
 Andrei: **(Sits up)** Hello, Freddie. How are you?
 Freddie: What are you doing here?
 Andrei: I came to see Natalya.
 Freddie: I told you not to come here anymore.
 Andrei: I brought her the newspaper.
 Freddie: She works here and you're disturbing her.
 Bella: **(To Freddie)** And I'm taking what he ate from her salary.
 Freddie: **(To Andrei)** Get out.

Andrei: Yes, of course. Immediately. **(He puts on his shoes)** I hope you don't mind if I visit the toilet for a moment. I don't want to trouble you with the details, but it's a long way to her apartment.

Freddie: No way.

Andrei: We're human beings, Freddie. We must have a certain degree of human kindness.

Freddie: Don't force me to throw you out on your ass.

Andrei: I'm forcing you? It seems to me you're relinquishing the little human kindness that remains in you all by yourself.

Freddie: What? What did you say?!

Bella: You can go to the toilet.

Freddie: He can do it outside.

Andrei: Thank you, ma'am. **(Exits to the hallway)**

Bella: And wash your hands in the bathroom. The sink in the toilet is leaking.

Freddie: Where's she?

Bella: Gone with him.

Freddie: Where?

Bella: To the Philharmonic.

Freddie: What's she doing at the Philharmonic?

Bella: Ask her.

Freddie: Damn right, I'll ask her. **(Opens his briefcase and takes out bottles of medicine)** I brought you your medicines. The garlic extract is in the brown bottle. Three drops a day. The vinegar is in the red. One teaspoon before meals. Everything's written on the bottles. **(He puts the bottles on the chest of drawers)** Is there anything to eat?

Bella: No.

Freddie: Are you sure? I've been lied to enough today, mom. The Italians suddenly have another buyer, and I need to sit on my ass and wait for a call.

Bella: There's eggplant in the fridge.

Freddie: I've been eating eggplant for eighteen years now, just because you're hoping that he'll return, and you can serve him what he likes.

Bella: I like eggplant.

She has a coughing attack. He pats her gently on the back.

Bella: Enough. Thank you. **(He continues)** I said thank you.

Freddie: I'm trying to help you breathe.

Bella: Thank you. I want to go to sleep.

Freddie: I thought you were waiting for him.

Bella: I'm not waiting for anyone.
 Freddie: Except for him. **(Silence)** He's my brother, mom. I'm happy he's come to visit. Very happy. But why did he wait until now? Are you sure he really missed us so much? Maybe he heard that dad had died and wants his share of the house? What do I have apart from this house? Dad promised me the whole thing, right? **(She stays silent)** Answer me! I won't be taken advantage of. Not after all the years I spent looking after the two of you. If the Italians don't call, we'll go to a lawyer tomorrow morning to write a will. Wake me up when he's back.

Exits to the hallway. After a moment the doorbell rings. Bella opens. Joel and Natalya enter in high spirits. Joel is carrying a bunch of lilies.

Joel: For you, mom. I remembered how you love the smell. I hope you've forgiven me for what I said this morning. I shouldn't have said it. **(Offers her the lilies)**
 Bella: I want to talk to you.
 Joel: I'll be delighted. On the way we saw a bar with a piano. How about we eat something there? I'll play for you. We'll talk the whole night.

Natalya takes the lilies and puts them in a vase.

Bella: I want to talk to you right now.
 Joel: I'll get a taxi. By the way, did you know that the house across the street is for sale? I think I should buy it. I'll renovate. Add another floor for Izzy. The living room is big enough for a grand piano.

Freddie enters from the hallway. His hair is in a net. Natalya notices him and bursts out laughing.

Freddie **(To Natalya)** What's so funny?
 Joel: Hi, Freddie.
 Freddie: I asked what's so funny.
 Joel: I thought you were gone.
 Freddie: I'm leaving in a couple of hours.
 Natalya: With that net on your head?
 Freddie: Sure.
 Joel: So maybe you'll come with us now for something to eat?
 Freddie: **(To Natalya)** I called you. You didn't answer. Where were you?
 Natalya: Wandering around.
 Freddie: Where?

- Joel: After the Philharmonic, we went to the cemetery, to visit dad. There's no gravestone yet, but we stood by the mound with the sign. The sun was still high in the sky, and I'm no longer used to such a dazzling light. Suddenly, there was a siren and there was nowhere to hide. So we lay down on the ground among the graves. As we were lying there, I felt a migraine coming on. Natalya was very kind and massaged my temples. After a moment, I opened my eyes, and the blue of the sky was exactly as I remembered it. And the soil was red, and the cypress trees were green. And suddenly their smell swept over me. This sharp smell of tall cypresses that will be engraved in my nostrils forever... Then the siren went silent and at that very moment everything became clear to me. I have to visit here several times a year. To play. To teach. What do you think, mom? Maybe we'll open an academy for Israeli and Palestinian students? Natalya would teach, too. Things could be a whole lot better here, if we learn to play with them...
- Bella: **(Stubbornly)** I want to explain to you why we didn't tell you that dad had died.
- Freddie: For what? So dad can turn in his grave? **(To Natalya)** I don't understand why you went with him. He needs an escort service?
- Natalya: He didn't remember where the orchestra's offices were. So, I took him there and waited in a coffee shop downstairs.
- Freddie: You waited downstairs?
- Natalya: Yes.
- Freddie: So, if you waited downstairs, maybe his whole story is made up?
- Joel: Which story?
- Freddie: Why would the Philharmonic play in the middle of a war with a pianist who slanders us around the world?
- Joel: I guess the manager has a different opinion of me.
- Freddie: So why didn't you take her to the meeting?
- Joel: Because it would have bored her.
- Freddie: Because you didn't want her to hear what they think of you. They know very well that the moment you step on stage, people will throw rotten eggs at you.
- Joel: They also know very well that many people here need good music like air to breathe.
- Bella: **(Vehemently)** We didn't tell you that daddy was sick because he didn't want us to tell you. Because he didn't want you to come visit him.
- Joel: **(Amazed)** He didn't want?
- Bella: He saw what you said on television.
- Joel: I said it for your sake! So that you'd end the war. I wanted to save the lives of another few hundred people.

Bella: He thought you said it so the anti-Semites would invite you to play for them.

Freddie: He was right.

Bella: He was furious. He wrote letters to the papers. He threw your picture out of his study.

Freddie: He didn't want you to return here at all. He wanted you to vanish into America and be forgotten.

Joel: And you? **(She doesn't respond)** You also didn't want me to return?

Freddie: Dad didn't think you were such a great pianist. Every time he asked you to play for him, you got a headache.

Joel: **(To Bella)** I'm still waiting for your answer, mom. Did you also not want me to return? Why is it so difficult for you to say that you wanted it? You're different from dad. You have feelings, emotions. You cried when he wouldn't let you see Izzy. Didn't you? I'm sure you also understood why we left. You taught me not to fake it when I'm playing, not to separate the person from the pianist. And the person is also his conscience. **(To Natalya)** When the intifada broke out, I was called up to the reserves and refused to serve in the occupied territories. I spent a month in jail. When I was released, I found out that the ministry of culture had pressured the Philharmonic to cancel my concerts. **(To Bella)** I'm sure that deep in your heart you wanted me to continue speaking out, mom. I'm sure that you were even proud of me for being prepared to pay the price. I didn't expect to be greeted here with open arms after eighteen years. I knew my criticism has angered too many people. But when the orchestra's manager sat next to me on the plane and asked me to play with the Philharmonic, I thought something had changed. That maybe people were willing to listen to me, despite everything. That this could be the opportunity to straighten things out. I also hoped that you had changed... that you'd sit in the first row, proud and smiling, calling for an encore. **(He chokes up)** But I guess I was mistaken. I guess that only strangers will be sitting in the first row...

He turns towards the hallway.

Bella: Wait a second.

Joel: I've waited enough.

Bella: I'll come to the concert. I'll sit in the first row. I'll applaud.

Joel: Dad died. You could have told me that you wanted me to return. I guess you didn't want me to return either.

Bella I wanted. I very much wanted. Here, I've said it. I've wanted it for all these years. I've waited for it for all these years. I wanted to see your son, so much wanted to see him, but Daddy was sick. Any irritation was dangerous for his heart. I couldn't argue with him. Now he's dead. And now I'm saying that I want you to stay here. I want to hear you play. I want to see your son.

Joel So why didn't you say so until now?

As he's exiting, he passes Andrei, who is coming out of the toilet.

Andrei: **(After him)** I think I remember where I met you.

Freddie: **(To Andrei)** Get out of here.

Andrei: **(To Bella)** The sink really is leaking. I tried to fix it, but the washer is torn. If you happen to have a washer in the kitchen drawer...

Freddie: Get the fuck out!

Andrei: **(To Natalya)** I sat down on the couch to rest and fell asleep.

Freddie: Out.

Natalya leads Andrei outside and returns after a moment.

Freddie: **(To Bella)** Stop crying. Eighteen years that shit didn't even think of contacting us. When the war broke out, he travelled the world defaming us while our blood flowed in the streets... **(To Natalya)** I had to go to the office this morning. It didn't occur to me that he would harass you like that.

Natalya: He didn't harass me.

Freddie: I'm willing to postpone the trip to Italy for a few days. **(To Bella)** Stop already. You didn't cry enough all these years? **(To Natalya)** Why did you go with him? Who sent you? Why did you even leave the house?

Natalya: What do you mean 'who sent me?'

Freddie: I pay you to look after my mother. Not run around in cemeteries and massage his temples.

Natalya: You won't tell me what to do, Freddie.

Freddie: He's not the great pianist you think he is. And you won't speak to him, and you won't massage his temples.

Natalya: If you think that just because you pay me, you decide what I can and cannot do, you're wrong.

Freddie: Watch it, Natalya.

Natalya: And if you're so worried about your fancy hairdo, then I'm allowed to laugh.

Freddie: **(Removes the net)** Go ahead. Laugh. I'll even laugh with you. **(Turns to Bella)** And you won't go listen to him in any first row.

There's no concert and there will never be. Anyone who hears that he's the pianist will return their ticket.

Joel enters with his suitcase in hand.

Bella: (To Joel) Don't go.
 Joel: (To Natalya) I'll be very happy if you come with me to that bar for dinner.
 Bella: Stay. Play for us here. I'll cook for you.
 Freddie: Hang on. How come you're inviting her to dinner? She's eating with me.
 Joel: (To Natalya) We'll find a taxi outside.
 Freddie: (Takes Joel's jacket off a hanger and presses it into his hands) The concert's over. There's no applause. And we don't want any encore.
 Bella: (To Joel) Wait. I swear that I wanted you to come back. You have to believe me. Every morning, I hoped that in the evening you'd knock on the door. At night, when daddy was sleeping, I searched the radio stations for you. I told myself that if I could only hear you play, I would stay sane. If I could hear you play, I'd be able, one day, to sit with you at the piano and teach you how to touch the hearts of the people trying to live here.
 Joel: I know, mom.
 Bella: Daddy came here from Poland alone. With a single suitcase. Without family. After what he'd been through there, I couldn't hurt him.
 Joel: But me you could?
 Bella: I, too, was hurt. I, too, was angry. I thought that if you had listened to us a bit, it would have been easier. Today I see just how right you were, and I'm angry at myself for getting so angry at you. After daddy died, I wanted to call you. I tried to find your number, your address...
 Joel: I'm also angry at myself, Mom. I should have known it would take time before I'd be forgiven. (To Natalya) Let's go.

Natalya hesitates for a moment, then joins him. Freddie grabs her by the arm.

Freddie: Where do you think you're going?
 Natalya: I want to listen to him play.
 Freddie: Him? Who the hell is he?
 Joel: She'll listen to whoever she wants.

Freddie: She'll listen to me, because she's staying with me and she's marrying me.

Natalya: I'm not so sure, Freddie.

Freddie: Damn right you're marrying me. **(To Joel)** We didn't tell mom, so she'd get used to her first. **(To Natalya)** Tell them.

Natalya: I want to hear him play, Freddie.

Freddie: You want me to tell them?

Natalya: I'll tell them. **(To Joel)** I'm a nurse. I'm taking care of your mother. I heard at the hospital that she's the best teacher in the country. I wanted to study with her. That's all.

Freddie: What's up with you? Have you gone out of your mind? Do you really think I'll let you go with him?

Bella: **(Vehemently)** You're the one who's going, Freddie. I don't want you in my house anymore.

Freddie: Why? Because he came back? Because he's going to play for you?

Bella: Get out of here.

Freddie: I'll go when I want to go. **(To Natalya)** Go to your room.

Natalya: I'll go wherever I want.

Freddie: Sure you can go wherever you want, but if you go with him, you'll never see me again. **(To Bella and Joel)** She says she's a nurse. Which is true. Until two weeks ago she worked at the hospital. But she took no interest in the patients. She was interested in the doctors, which is why she always worked night shifts. And if you want to do with her what the doctors did, you can go with her. **(To Bella)** You'll soon hear from me.

He throws the net on the floor and leaves the house in a rage. Silence.
Natalya is hurt.

Natalya: I think it's best if I leave.

Joel: Why?

Natalya: Do you want to hear more things about me?

Joel: From him?

Natalya: Andrei isn't working. I had to work nights. There was a piano at the nurses' club. I stayed there to practice.

Joel: You don't have to explain anything. I'll call us a taxi.

Bella: Don't call a taxi. **(To Natalya)** Stay. If you're good enough for him, you're good enough for me, too. **(To Joel)** I'll make something to eat. And you'll play for us here. **(Exits to the kitchen)**

Joel: **(To Natalya)** I believe everything you say.

Natalya: And I believe you. **(They embrace)** When I saw you on TV, I hoped that if people like you speak out, the war might finally end.

The door opens suddenly and Freddie enters with Andrei.

Freddie: Look Jo-Jo. Look who I've brought you. He was sitting in the entrance and waiting for her.
 Andrei: I was on the way to the bus, Natalya. He dragged me here against my will.
 Natalya: Idy dodomu, Andriyu!³
 Joel: Leave him, Freddie.
 Freddie: **(To Andrei)** Tell them why you were waiting. Before I smash your face.
 Natalya: Leave him.

Bella rushes back into the room after hearing the shouts.

Bella: You leave now, Freddie!
 Joel: **(To Freddie)** Let him go.
 Freddie: **(To Natalya)** You thought you could spit in my face, and I'd dry it off with a hair dryer?
 Bella: Get out!
 Freddie: First he's going to tell us why he was waiting outside.
 Andrei: I was not feeling well.
 Freddie: He was feeling fine. But he knows who she is. That's why he follows her wherever she goes. That's why he won't leave her alone with anyone else. And she thinks I'm going to marry her!
 Bella: If you don't get out of here, Freddie, I'm passing out!!
 Freddie: **(To Joel)** She's all yours.

Freddie lets go of Andrei, raises his hand and slaps Joel's face. Joel is stunned.

Freddie: Dad's dead. No-one tells me what to do in this house now. No-one tells me to come, and no-one tells me to go. **(Exits)**
 Andrei: Good night. **(Leaves after him)**

Bella shuts the door and locks it. Joel sits on the couch.

Bella: Take a pill. You'll have a headache soon. **(Gives him a pill)**
 Joel: **(Swallows the pill)** Freddie somehow always manages to drive me to the edge.

³ Go home, Andrei!

Bella: Me, too. Whenever I sat with you at the piano, he would break a neighbor's window. **(Silence)** Daddy was angry with you mainly because I loved you.

Joel gets up and embraces her. She embraces him.

Joel: I'd love to play for you.

He sits at the piano. Suddenly the doorbell rings.

Joel: It's him again.

Bella: The key's in the door. He won't be able to open it.

The doorbell rings again. The person outside manages to insert a key into the lock, open the door and enters. He's a young man of about twenty-three. His face is pale. His hair is cut short.

Joel: Izzy?! **(Gets up and goes to him)** Is it you?

Bella: **(Approaches him)** Izzy? How did you open the door?

Izzy: Hi, Grandma.

Bella: Grandma! He recognizes me! He called me grandma.

Joel: How are you? I've been looking for you. I was at your apartment. I tried to call you from America. Are you OK? For a moment I didn't recognize you without your curls. Why did you cut them? **(He tries to hug him. Izzy avoids him)** What happened?

Izzy: Nothing.

Joel: Did you get the note I left you?

Izzy: Yes.

Joel: I hope you're coming to the concert.

Izzy: Yes. Sure. I tried to call you, but my phone broke.

Bella: Come inside. Stand in the light here a moment. I want to see who you look like. **(He hesitates)** How did you know where I live?

Izzy: I've always known.

Bella: How come you had a key?

Izzy: He gave me one.

Joel: Me? When?

Izzy: A long time ago. **(To Bella)** When I came back from the war I saw the obituary about grandpa in the paper. I wanted to call you. But I didn't have the number. I'm sorry I couldn't come to the funeral.

Bella: It doesn't matter. What matters is that you're here now. That I see you at last. You look so much like your grandfather.

Joel: I left you dozens of messages over the past week.

Izzy: I'm fine. Licking my wounds.

Joel: What wounds? I missed you so much. **(Hugs him)**
 Izzy: No! No! **(Groans)**
 Joel: Izzy? Izzy? He's bleeding!
 Natalya: **(Examines him)** Water! **(To Bella)** Bring a glass of water!

A siren sounds. They all go to the stairwell. Darkness. After a moment, the booms of mid-air interceptions are heard. The siren fades.

4. The next day. Noon. Joel is sitting at the piano and playing the second movement of Beethoven's Pathétique. Natalya enters and approaches him. He stops playing.

Natalya: He's still sleeping.
 Joel: Twelve hours already.
 Natalya: It's a good sign. Play. I've never heard anyone play like this.
 Joel: I called him the day the war broke out. He left for his base before he was even called up. Friends of his were killed. Some were taken hostage. They're still there. It looks like he really is licking his wounds.
 Natalya: I don't think it's serious.
 Joel: Ten days ago I suddenly had a weird feeling. A sort of anxiety. I phoned him but he didn't answer. I phoned the neighbors. Two days ago they told me he had returned to his apartment.
 Natalya: I'll check him when he wakes up.
 Joel: For the last year or so he's seemed to be avoiding me.
 Natalya: He said he's coming to the concert.
 Joel: I hope so. I hope there won't be too many disturbances when I play. **(Pause)** I asked the management to add security.
 Natalya: I'm sure they will.

She caresses him. He seats her on his lap. He grows lustful.

Natalya: Your mother will be back any moment.
 Joel: Come to bed.
 Natalya: You want me like we'll never see each other again.
 Joel: I've been alone too long. **(They kiss)**
 Natalya: She'll kick me out if she finds me in your lap.
 Joel: She needs you. She knows it. I'll be very grateful if you'd continue caring for her. **(She is silent)** I'll pay you double what Freddie pays. **(She is silent)** She's a difficult woman. I know. She suffered a lot from my father. Maybe she'll soften a bit now.
 Natalya: I agreed to care for her, so she'd teach me.

Joel: She'll be happy to. When she visits me in New York, you can come with her.
 Natalya: To New York?
 Joel: I'll arrange her a master class. She knows that good music can change the world.
 Natalya: I have to think about it.
 Joel: We've been thinking about it the whole night. **(They embrace)**

Izzy appears in the hallway. Joel let's go of Natalya.

Joel: Good morning. How are you?
 Izzy: Good, thanks. **(To Natalya)** Good morning.
 Natalya: Good morning. You're looking a whole lot better. I'll make something to eat. **(She exits into the kitchen)**
 Joel: **(To Izzy)** How did you sleep?
 Izzy: Fine. **(He starts searching through the drawers)**
 Joel: What are you looking for?
 Izzy: Do you have any gum?
 Joel: No.
 Izzy: Maybe grandma?
 Joel: She's out. She'll be back soon. How were you wounded? **(Tries to check Izzy's shoulder)**
 Izzy: **(Stops him)** I already told you. Shrapnel.
 Joel: When did you tell me?
 Izzy: I told you.
 Joel: The stitches have opened. You lost a lot of blood. You must go to hospital.
 Izzy: I must have gum.
 Joel: You want me to go and get you some? **(Izzy doesn't respond)**
 How did it happen?
 Izzy: I told you.
 Joel: How?
 Izzy: In the war.
 Joel: Your voice has also gone hoarse. Can you sing like this?
 Izzy: Yes.
 Joel: Did that also happen in the war?
 Izzy: Yes.
 Joel: I hope it sorts itself out. You have no idea how worried I was. I was glued to the news. I followed the names of the dead.
 Izzy: I'm absolutely fine.
 Joel: So why didn't you call? Why didn't you send a message? Why didn't the army inform me you'd been wounded? **(Izzy is silent)** It

will take at least a month until the academy resumes. Do you want to come to New York?

Izzy: No.

Joel: Why?

Izzy: Because.

Joel: Did something happen?

Izzy: Are you interrogating me?

Joel: I just want to know. I get the feeling you're hiding something from me.

Izzy: I'm not hiding anything. **(To Natalya in the kitchen)** Any chance you have some gum?

Natalya: I'll get some from the store.

Izzy: Thanks.

Joel: I want her to check your shoulder.

Izzy: I don't need to be checked.

Joel: Are you sure? Maybe we'll go to the hospital anyway? I'll cancel my meeting at the Philharmonic.

Izzy: I'm not going to any hospital.

Joel: OK. I'll phone the hospital and get them to send a doctor here.

Izzy: I don't need a doctor.

Joel: Your stitches have opened, Izzy.

Izzy: What do you care? Why are you picking on me?

Joel: I don't understand. You're wounded. Someone needs to treat you.

Izzy: The army's treating me.

Joel: Do you need something for the pain?

Izzy: I need gum.

Joel: You'll have some in a minute. **(Izzy is silent)** When did you get wounded? When did you get out of the army? What have you been doing since then?

Izzy: I told you. I've been in hospital. With the wounded from my unit. I look after them.

Joel: When did you tell me?

Natalya enters carrying a tray with breakfast. Izzy sits at the table and eats.

Natalya: Bon appetite.

Joel: I'd still like a doctor to see him. Can we get someone to come here?

Izzy: I told you that's not necessary. I feel absolutely fine.

Joel: It doesn't sound like it, Izzy. I've also fought in wars. I can imagine what you went through.

Izzy: If you could imagine, you wouldn't have said the things you said about us.

Joel: What did I say? **(Issy is silent)** What did I say?

The door opens and Bella enters and locks the door behind her. She is wearing a suit, has high heels on her feet, and she has had her hair done.

Natalya: Bella!

Joel: Mom?!

Bella: I was widowed, but I didn't die. I will sit in the first row at your concert. And everyone will see how proud I am.

Joel: The prima donna at the Metropolitan looks like a choir girl next to you.

Bella: I see the young man is awake.

Izzy: Good morning.

Bella: Excellent morning. **(Excited to Joel)** He's got your father's eyes.

Izzy: I have your eyes, grandma.

Bella: "Grandma!" Again he said "grandma".

Joel: He always wanted you to be his teacher. He's a wonderful singer. Last summer he sang Papageno in the "Magic Flute" at Juilliard.

Bella: **(Even more excited)** You sang Papageno? I want to hear.

Joel: **(Looking at Izzy)** You have a cut here. And a scar. Also shrapnel?

Izzy: No.

Joel: It's a burn. Just like mine.

Izzy: It's nothing.

Joel: I hope you know what you're talking about. I don't understand how I let you come back here and sign up.

Izzy: I don't remember asking you.

Joel: We spoke about it for hours.

Bella: What does it matter what we remember? We won't let memories confuse us. Now stand by the piano and sing.

Joel: I'll accompany you. **(Approaches the piano)** You remember Papageno's aria from the end of the first movement?

Izzy: I'm not sure. I just got up. I haven't even had coffee.

Bella: **(To Joel)** You didn't give him coffee?

Joel: I've been trying to understand what happened to him in this damn war.

Izzy: You'll never understand what happened. You'll never understand, because you don't want to understand. Because you've already decided what happened. You've already told the entire world.

Joel: I came to see you so I could understand.

Izzy: **(Angrily)** Who asked you? That's why I didn't tell you I'd been wounded. So you wouldn't come here. And you came and you even want to play here?!

He exits to the corridor. Joel starts going after him. Suddenly, Freddie is heard trying to open the locked door. He inserts the key, but the key already in the door blocks it. He rings the bell.

Freddie **(From outside)** Mom! Mom!

While Bella is hesitating, the door is shoved open. It splinters. Freddie storms in. Joel returns.

Freddie **(To Bella)** I've been to the Philharmonic. He doesn't have any concert tomorrow.

Bella: You broke the door! Go get someone to fix it!

Freddie: I spoke with the musicians. They refuse to play with him.

Joel: We're not kids anymore, Freddie. If you have any complaints, I'm happy to hear you.

Freddie: You'll hear me alright. **(To Bella)** I don't understand how you let him into the house. Dad would have slapped him around and thrown him out.

Bella: He came home, Freddie. He'll stay here. And he'll play here.

Freddie: No way he'll stay here, and no way he'll play here. How come you're dressed like that all of a sudden? For his concert? I'm telling you, there's no concert. Ask the manager's secretary. Here's her number. Call her. **(To Trudy)** I wanted to buy you flowers, but the store was closed. I'm sorry about what I said yesterday.

Bella: Fix the door, instead of being sorry.

Joel: Why are you so angry, Freddie? I didn't come here to rob you of anything. If you need help, I'm willing to help you.

Freddie: I've heard that too many times already.

Bella: Go fix the door!!

Freddie: In a minute. **(To Natalya)** I can imagine what he's already promised you. Call the Philharmonic and hear for yourself. **(She remains silent)** OK. I'll call them. **(Takes out his phone and dials)** What do you want with him anyway? I promised to marry you, didn't I? I'm willing to have a child with you... **(To the phone)** Hi, Sarah. It's Frederick.... Yes, Frederick. The one whose mother named him after Chopin... I wanted to be certain that I understood you correctly. Will the board be meeting today to cancel my brother's concert? ... For sure? ... Thanks a lot, Sarah... Thanks a lot... **(Turns off)** You see?

Joel: Stop this nonsense, "Frederick."

Freddie: **(To Joel)** And I'll tell you something else. Dad told mom that this house is mine and mine only. I recorded him.

Bella: Dad said what he said. Now he's dead. Now the house is mine.

Joel: I don't need the house, Freddie. I'm returning to America in two days.

Freddie: You won't stay here even one day!

Joel: I didn't ask for your permission.

Freddie: **(Gesturing towards Natalya)** And you won't go near her, either. I have a room here and I'll put in another bed for her. **(To Natalya)** You hear? No more games. Take your things and move them to my room.

Natalya: Enough, Freddie. Calm down.

Freddie: I am calm!

Joel: So let's go together to the Philharmonic and ask them if I have a concert tomorrow.

Freddie: You go. Go and don't come back.

Bella: Now I decide who goes and who comes back.

Freddie: You've already decided. I can see it in your eyes. **(Painfully)** Always him? Only him?

Freddie now sees Izzy, who has entered from the corridor.

Freddie: What is that?

Joel: **(To Izzy)** This is your uncle Freddie, Izzy.

Freddie: You're his son?!

Joel: **(To Izzy)** I'm sure you remember him. He hasn't changed much.

Freddie: You've also come to take something from me?

Bella: If you want your share of this house, Freddie, you'd better start fixing the door.

Freddie: I don't want a part of this house. I want the whole of it! **(To Joel)** I'm prepared to forget everything you've done to me, Jo-Jo. I'm prepared to apologize for everything I've said. On condition that you go to America tomorrow and never come back.

Bella: He'll be back, because there's nothing there for him anymore. Because even in America they hate us these days. Because we need him here to build what the war has destroyed.

Freddie: We've been doing very well here without him. **(To Natalya)** I think I asked you to take your things to my room.

Natalya: I don't work for you anymore, Freddie, and I don't take instructions from you.

Freddie: You don't work for me?

Natalya: No.

Freddie: So who do you work for?

Natalya: Whoever I want to.

Freddie: You can't work for him. He's leaving tomorrow!

Joel: I'll leave and come back.

Freddie: Over my dead body.

Joel: Why, Freddie? You can have the house. I don't need it

Freddie: You brought it on yourself, with your own hands. **(Opens a page on his phone)** His interview with CNN on December 4th.

Bella: We've already heard that, Freddie. Too many times.

Freddie: Then listen again. **(Reads)** "Until now, twenty thousand people have been killed in Gaza. The majority are women and children. These numbers are shocking. What sort of country kills eight thousand children? Killing civilians has become the IDF's permanent mode of operation. Therefore, it is a war crime." **(To Joel)** If you don't take your luggage right now and get the hell out of here, I will show this to the Philharmonic and you'll never, ever play here again.

Joel: It's a direct quote from a UN report.

Freddie: I don't believe a word of it.

Bella: Perhaps you should check before you deny it?

Izzy: There's nothing to check, grandma. It's Hamas propaganda. I was there and I saw.

Joel: And you didn't see the air force dropping half-ton bombs? One-ton bombs? You didn't see artillery firing indiscriminately at entire neighborhoods?

Freddie: We only bombed military targets.

Joel: Sixty percent of the buildings in Gaza have been destroyed, Freddie. Office buildings. Schools. Hospitals. Universities...

Bella: **(To Freddie)** The entire world knows it, and you don't believe.

Freddie: You believe?

Bella: Yes.

Freddie: When dad was alive, you didn't believe.

Bella: And how I believed. In his last days so did he.

Izzy: There were rockets in every place we attacked, Grandma.

Joel: That doesn't justify the killing of non-combatants.

Izzy: There aren't any non-combatants in Gaza. You know that. Yet you still call us war criminals.

Joel: I said that if the army doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants, it is committing war crimes.

Freddie: **(To Bella)** He said that we should have let them massacre us.

Bella: He never said that.

Joel: I said that whoever is responsible for the killing of so many civilians should be brought to trial.

Izzy: We are not war criminals!

Joel: The court in The Hague will decide that. And there's something else I said: Even though I haven't been here in eighteen years, I'm also responsible for what happens here. Our wars are also my wars, and therefore I won't stay silent in the face of your cruelty. I also said that thanks to you I became a pianist, and therefore I need to continue playing for you until your cruelty abates. Until a little compassion is aroused within you.

Freddie: Who do you think you are? Your playing won't move a single leaf on a tree here.

Joel: When you hear me play tomorrow, you'll know who I am.

Freddie: I already know. You say that we're war criminals, murderers of women and children. You're the murderer. You. You murdered dad.

Joel: I did what?

Freddie: The day you started slandering us was the day he began to die.

Bella: Enough, Freddie.

Joel: Because of me?

Bella: Daddy died because he was ill, Freddie. You know that his heart was weak.

Freddie: That night, when dad saw him on CNN, he lost his will to live. He told me.

Joel: **(Angrily)** Until now, they called me a traitor here. Now I'm also a murderer. This is how you want to shut me up? Well, no-one has been able to do it yet. **(In fury)** I murdered him?! I argued with him! I tried to persuade him that our military power has limits, and it won't protect us forever. When the war broke out, he understood it. That's why he wanted to die. Because he realized that even a victory won't guarantee us life. That missiles from the entire Middle East will continue to explode here. Ask Natalya what he said to her. "This war is the beginning of the end." **(To Natalya)** Tell him.

Natalya: I told him.

Joel: Had I been able, I would have convinced him that things aren't fated to be like this. That compassion can bring hope. Come with me to the Philharmonic and see for yourselves that compassion can stop a war... **(Exits)**

Freddie: Why are you looking at me? He comes here to rob me, and I'll just scratch my balls and shut up? **(To Natalya)** It's not only the house he wants. He's taking you too, and he's still complaining. Do you know how much business I've lost because I'm his brother? **(To Bella)** I went bankrupt because of him. And if he thinks he can now

go to the Philharmonic and massage them with words, he's mistaken. No-one is waiting for him there.

Bella: They're waiting for him. They're all waiting. Just like I waited. When he was only seven, everyone already knew what a pianist he would become. People came from all over the world to hear him. From the moment you realized it, you wouldn't let him be.

Freddie: And he let me? From the moment I was born, everyone pissed on me because of him.

Bella: They pissed on you because you were spoiled. Because you were lazy. Because you didn't even try to play music.

Freddie: So everything is permitted to him because he knows how to play? He already left you once and he'll do it again. Who stayed here all these years looking after you and dad? **(Calms down)** OK. I'll go to the Philharmonic. If he has a concert tomorrow, I'll cut off my own dick.

Freddie passes Izzy on his way out, takes hold of him and kisses him on both cheeks. Then he exits. Izzy struggles with the pain.

Natalya: **(Examining him)** He has a fever. But the bleeding's stopped. **(To Bella)** Cut up a sheet. We need to make him a sling.

Bella exits into the hallway. Natalya and Izzy remain alone. She examines him again.

Natalya: The wound is swollen. It needs to be treated.

Izzy: I've got more urgent stuff to do.

Natalya: You don't have to be so angry with your dad. He came here because he was worried about you.

Izzy: That's what he told you? That he was worried? You have no idea how much shit I've eaten from him my whole life.

Natalya: Really?

Izzy: He's fooling you, too.

Natalya: Maybe it's you who's trying to fool me?

Izzy: He really isn't the great pianist he says he is.

Natalya: He plays beautifully. He played for me this morning.

Izzy: I know him like a hunchback knows his hump. He built his whole career on his opposition to the occupation. Now he's building it on comparing us to Nazis. That's why my mother left him. He betrayed her from the day they were married. In every city he plays, he finds himself a cute violinist, tells her that he has a migraine and asks her to massage his temples.

Natalya: Really?

Izzy: And the next day he's forgotten what he promised, and he moves on to the next city. After the concert, he'll get on a plane. We'll never see him again.

Natalya: He wants to buy the house across the road and add a floor for you.

Izzy: That's what he told you? His life is a lie. When I was a kid, I used to pass by here. I saw it from the outside. I knew that I had grandparents here. I couldn't understand why they didn't want to see me. I was certain that I had done something wrong... **(She is silent)** He probably went to the Philharmonic to tell them that after the concert he'll give a speech about "war crimes" in Gaza. That's why I came here. If he doesn't cancel the concert, I'll bring my company to block the entrance. The wounded will come in wheelchairs and in beds with their IV stands. We'll put the dead on the stage... **(She remains silent)** And I don't need a hospital. Our doctors will stitch me up. If you're looking for work, I can arrange something with the wounded. If you want, you can live in my apartment.

Unaware that Bella has returned with a strip of sheet in her hand, he kisses Natalya on the mouth.

Natalya: What do you think you're doing? **(Pushes him away)**

Izzy: I saw your face when you kissed him. You can't fool me, sweetie. As soon as you get to America, you'll leave him for someone who offers you more.

Natalya: And don't call me sweetie. I see in your eyes what you and your company did there in the war. You won't vomit it on me. I know exactly where to shove the enema. **(She exits, passing the stunned Bella)**

5. The same day. Evening. Darkness. A siren is heard outside, followed by the echoes of a hit. The door opens and Joel enters. He turns on the light and is surprised to see Natalya sitting at the piano.

Joel: Why're you sitting in the dark? **(She doesn't respond)** Did the missile fall nearby? Are any windows broken? **(She shakes her head)** Did they hear what I said at the press conference? **(She nods)** Where are they?

Natalya: He's sleeping.

Joel: And her?

Natalya: In her bed. She took fright and had trouble breathing. I gave her a shot.

He wants to embrace her, but she stops him.

Natalya: Are you sure it's really such a good idea?
 Joel: Why not?
 Natalya: You haven't been here a long time. Things change.
 Joel: The humanitarian situation in Gaza is awful, Natalya. There are thousands of injured children. They need doctors. Medications. Operations. They need bandages. Perhaps their parents didn't get them out of the bombed areas. Perhaps Hamas used them as human shields. Perhaps our pilots weren't cautious enough. It makes no difference.
 Natalya: If you donate to them, you won't be able to play here.
 Joel: If I donate to them, perhaps a little compassion will sprout here. And maybe others will donate. Maybe the air force will stop bombing. Maybe the war will end, and the hostages will be released. Someone has to get it rolling.
 Natalya: Meanwhile, people are returning their tickets to the Philharmonic. They're expecting a protest in the auditorium.
 Joel: The security guards will kick out anyone who makes trouble. **(She remains silent)** You're not going to return your ticket, are you?
 Natalya: No, but I have to be careful. I want to go on living here.
 Joel: Those children need help, Natalya.
 Natalya: Wait a few days. Maybe you'll understand us a little better. People are being killed every day. Soldiers. Civilians. We don't even count the wounded anymore. We need you here to play for **us**.
 Joel: Of course I'll play for us. I have a concert in Chicago on Saturday. I'll be back in a month for another one.
 Natalya: In a month?!
 Joel: I can't cancel concerts that have already been scheduled.
 Natalya: That's why you allow yourself to donate your fee to those children in Gaza. Because in America no-one will boycott you.
 Joel: I'm paying a heavy price for it. In America too.
 Natalya: If you are so insistent on being hated here, then you probably don't intend to return. You won't buy a house. Won't renovate it. Won't add another floor. Won't teach here with your mother. The whole thing is a lie.
 Joel: Hang on, Natalya. Hang on a minute. Has something happened? What happened?
 Natalya: I'm not one of those cute violinists who wait for the day you'll deign to play with them.

Bella enters. Her hairdo has fallen apart. She is wearing her old robe and worn slippers. Natalya exits. Joel is stunned to see the change in his mother.

Joel: Mom?!

Bella: Sit.

Joel: How are you feeling?

Bella: Sit.

Joel: I asked you something.

Bella: I want you to play here tomorrow.

Joel: Of course I'll play here tomorrow.

Bella: I want you to return here again and play here again and again.

Joel: Me, too.

Bella: So go to the Philharmonic right now and take back everything you said.

Joel: Let me explain, mom.

Bella: Now I'm explaining.

Joel: I don't need the fee from the concert, and I'll donate it to someone who needs it. For those wounded children in Gaza, it's a matter of life and death.

Bella: Donate the fee to our wounded children.

Joel: Here, they are taken care of. Who takes care of the children in a place that has been totally devastated?

Bella: That's not my business.

Joel: You're a mother. You can understand the suffering of a child wherever it is.

Bella: I understand the suffering of our own children better.

Joel: If we heal those children, maybe they'll hate us less, and perhaps they'll understand that it's possible to live with us.

She coughs deeply. After a few seconds she recovers and sits in the armchair.

Bella: I'm not sure I'll go to your concert tomorrow.

Joel: Of course you will.

Bella: I'm not sure I want to hear you.

Joel: Of course you do.

Bella: In normal days I'd go, but now we're at war.

Joel: I know.

Bella: You don't know. When you came here, I hoped that you'd be able to open your heart to us and to feel us when you play. But I was wrong. You don't feel us. Not our pain, not our fear and not our despair. If you donate your fee to children in Gaza, it's their pain you'll be feeling and their pain you'll be playing.

Joel: A great pianist can feel the pain of every human being in the world, mom.

Bella: But if he's honest with himself, the pain of those closest to him hurts him more. It runs in his blood. It suffuses him through the light of the sky, through the air that he breathes, through the walls of his home.

Joel: Home is every place I play in.

Bella: If you play the pain of the children of Gaza, then you can't play for us.

She coughs again. The doorbell rings. The door opens and Andrei enters.

Andrei: Good evening. The door was open.

Joel: It's broken. The carpenter will be here soon.

Andrei: There's no need. **(To Bella)** If you have a hammer and a screwdriver, I'll...

Joel: It's not a good time to visit, Mr....

Andrei: Andrei. I brought Natalya the newspaper.

Joel: She's busy right now.

Andrei: I'll wait until she's free.

Joel: I'm not sure it's the right time. My son has arrived and he's ill.

Andrei: Then it's good I came. I'm a doctor. I'll be happy to examine him.

Joel: He's sleeping. He'll probably sleep for a few more hours.

Andrei: Excellent. In the meantime, I'll fix the sink in the toilet.

Joel: Thank you, but there's no need.

Andrei: I promised to fix it and I will. I happened to find a washer. **(Takes it out of his pocket)**

Joel: That's very kind of you, but I'd just like you to leave and close the door after you.

Andrei: The sink is leaking! I came to fix it. I walked all the way. I won't stand such rudeness. Even a great artist has to be a decent human being. **(Angrily)** My home was destroyed. I don't even have a passport left. And you look down from your ivory tower and think that your handouts to miserable children over the border will change the world. I've seen greater artists than you who couldn't tell right from wrong. Whose naiveté played into the hands of the most evil dictators in history. I got to know that evil in all its monstrousness, and I recognize it whenever it raises its head. You'll learn too late that the monstrous murderers in Gaza are using you to mask their monstrousness... **(Peers at him)** Now I remember where I met you. In Kiev. You played Beethoven's Fifth Concerto. I sat next to President Yanukovich. You played so badly he refused to shake your hand.

Joel: He refused to shake my hand? I refused to shake his hand! That corrupt dictator ordered the police to kill people demonstrating against him.

Andrei: The most provincial orchestra in Ukraine wouldn't play with you.

Izzy enters the living room. His arm is in a sling. Andrei becomes calm and courteous.

Andrei: And this young man must be your son. **(To Izzy)** It's my pleasure. My name is Andrei. Natalya's husband. Ex-husband, that is. What happened to your shoulder?

Joel: It's fine, sir.

Andrei: You're pale, son. You have a fever. You need to be checked by a doctor.

Izzy: I don't need a doctor.

Andrei: I ran a department in a large Kiev Hospital. Despite your patriotic pride, you suffer from the same illnesses as everyone else. **(Checks him)** You were wounded. Shrapnel. The stitches opened. I see it's already inflamed.

Joel: Inflamed?!

Andrei: You need a hospital, my young friend. In fact, I may just have some antibiotics in my pocket. **(Pulls a packet from his jacket pocket and gives it to Izzy)** Three a day. I'll come see you again tomorrow. **(To Bella)** And now with your permission I'll go fix the sink.

He exits towards the toilet. Silence.

Joel: I'm taking you to hospital, Izzy.

Izzy: I'll go myself. The moment you cancel your concert.

Joel: If we don't go now the infection will spread.

Izzy: Then cancel the concert! **(To Bella)** When I heard that he was going to play here, I thought I was going crazy. How could people listen to him? He has no idea what's going on in this war.

Joel: If you think I don't understand, then explain it to me.

Izzy: What's there to explain? We want to live. Therefore, the planes drop one-ton bombs. Therefore, the artillery fires everywhere. Without that, our losses would be terrible. Look what happened to me when the air force came late ... **(He shows a scar on his chest)** Yes. You're right. It's a burn. My tank got hit by a missile.

Joel: My God!

Izzy: For once in your life, just do what I ask. Just once. Cancel the concert. You have another hundred this year. Cancel it, so my friends and I will know that we did there what had to be done.

Joel wants to give in to Izzy, but he hesitates. Izzy turns to Bella.

Izzy: You probably don't know, but last summer, he told the president of Julliard that I would sing Papageno in their summer production. I implored him. I wasn't ready for a role like that. But he insisted. The moment I opened my mouth, people started to cough. To giggle. When the curtain came down, he went straight to the airport. I remained alone in the dressing room. At midnight, I slit my wrists...

Joel: You did what?!

Izzy: **(To Bella)** Look. **(He holds out his arms)**

Joel: You sang so beautifully. Everybody praised you. I was so proud.

Bella: He slit his wrists, and you didn't know?

Joel: Show me.

Izzy withdraws his arms. The door opens. Freddie enters.

Freddie: You haven't run away yet? I thought you'd be on the plane already. By the way, if you want your suitcase to arrive in New York, you should take your name off it.

Joel: What do you want, Freddie? You were at the press conference. You heard the director. He'll conduct the concert himself.

Freddie: That's what he said today. But you don't know what he'll say tomorrow. I saw how you begged them to add more security. **(To Bella)** He was as white as a ghost. **(To Joel)** You thought you'd announce a donation to Hamas, and everyone would applaud?

Joel: Do you really think we don't need to do anything for children who've been burned, blinded, whose limbs have been torn off, whose insides have been shredded?

Freddie: Do you really think that anyone here cares about them?

Joel: We'll see what the audience will say after they've heard me.

Freddie: So why're you so scared? Why do you need so many guards? **(To Bella)** I don't think he'll be able to play tomorrow. He'll sit down at the piano and suddenly have a headache. His hands will shake. His heart will flutter.

Joel: I've already played much more difficult concerts.

Freddie: This isn't America, Jo-Jo. Here they'll tear you to shreds.

Natalya and Andrei enter and stand at the entrance to the hallway.

Joel: A pianist like me has long forgotten his fears, Freddie. Ask mom. When I was fourteen, I played at Carnegie Hall. When I was seventeen, I played with the Berlin Philharmonic. When I was twenty-two, I won the Chopin piano competition. I won the Rubenstein competition when I was only twenty-six. Tell him!

Bella: He knows it.

Freddie: I'm not sure that will be enough tomorrow. You're not sure either. That's why you're afraid. You're so petrified, you can't even play here.

Joel: Why would I want to play here?

Freddie: To prepare for tomorrow. To be certain you'll come out of there alive.

Joel: I'm pretty sure I will.

Freddie: If you're so sure, then show us.

Joel: I already played here today, Freddie. You can ask her. **(Indicates Natalya)** She heard.

Natalya: When did I hear?

Joel: This morning.

Natalya: I don't remember.

Joel: I sat here, on that stool, and I played you the adagio of the Pathétique!

Freddie: She doesn't remember.

Joel: So she'll hear me tomorrow at the Philharmonic.

Natalya: I'll come hear you with the Philharmonic, only if you show me you can play.

Joel: This morning you said that you'd never heard anyone play like me.

Izzy: She wants you to play. So play.

Freddie: Play!

Bella: He'll play when he wants to. A pianist like him doesn't need to rehearse before this kind of concert.

Izzy: Show us what makes you the best in the world. Show us why the Philharmonic even wants to play with you.

Freddie: We all want to hear.

Bella: I think you should stop this game you're playing, Freddie, before you regret it.

Joel: What's going on here, mom? Can you tell me what's gone wrong?

Izzy: Play!

Freddie: Play what you have to play with the Philharmonic.

Joel: What I have to play with the Philharmonic, I'll play with the Philharmonic.

Freddie: So play something that doesn't need an orchestra.

Bella: Don't listen to them.

Freddie: You don't want to show us that you're able to play?
 Joel: Why should I want to show you? Who are you?
 Bella: I've been listening to him since the day he began to play. He doesn't have to prove anything to anyone.
 Freddie: Even he doesn't think he's worth much.
 Bella: That's enough, Freddie. I want you to leave ... and don't come back. **(To Izzy)** You, too. I've already seen who you are, and who you take after. **(To Natalya)** And you also. Out. Go with him. I don't need you anymore. **(She breaths heavily.)**
 Joel: **(To Natalya)** I've proved my worth in hundreds of concerts. My only sin is that I insist on being a decent person.
 Natalya: You won't play tomorrow because you know your playing won't save you.
 Joel: It has always saved me.

He approaches her to take her hand. To his amazement, she slaps his cheek hard.

Freddie: **(Impressed)** Son of a bitch!
 Joel: **(Regains his composure)** When someone hits me, I know it's because he doesn't have an answer. He's scared of what I'm telling him. You're all scared. A lot more than me.
 Freddie: We're quaking in fear. **(Laughs)**
 Joel: You're scared because if I play, you'll have to open your eyes and see what the army is doing in our name in this war. How our soldiers have killed. How they've expelled. How they've destroyed. How they've starved two million people. If I play, you'll have to see how you've been fooling yourselves that it's possible to stay silent and remain decent human beings.
 Freddie: So play already!
 Natalya: Play.
 Joel: Fine! I'll play!

Joel opens the lid of the piano, sits and again begins to play the opening of the second movement of the Pathétique. After a few notes, he experiences a sudden headache. He stops playing.

Freddie: Is this all you can do? **(Laughs)**
 Joel: **(To Natalya)** This is what I played for you this morning. Izzy was sleeping. My mother had gone to the hairdresser.
 Natalya: I don't remember.
 Joel: And how you remember!
 Freddie: She said she doesn't remember.

Joel: Fine. I'll play the whole movement, and you'll remember.
(Continues) There's perhaps one other pianist in the world who plays Beethoven like me. God, what a headache. **(Stops)** Now I see what happened to us. Until now, we've won all our wars. We'll probably win this one as well. But the victories are just illusions. Inside ourselves we've been beaten. Defeated. Our hopes have been dashed. Our dreams crushed. That's why we're so desperate. That's why we are so cruel.

Freddie: If you want applause, you'd better start playing.

Joel: I've just played.

Natalya: When?

Joel: Right now.

Natalya: I can play like that too.

She exits to the hallway with Andrei following.

Freddie: Now I'm going to bring your suitcase, and you're going to take it and get out of here without leaving a trace behind.

Freddie exits. Bella rises from the armchair and leads Joel to the piano.

Bella: Come with me. Sit by the piano. I want to teach you how to listen to yourself when you're playing.

Joel: I've got a headache, mom.

Bella: You'll only be a truly great pianist when you're carefully listening to yourself.

Joel: I'm great enough already.

Bella: A great pianist has suspicious hearing. He knows how to avoid the honeytraps the music sets for him. He's able to listen to himself with open ears and hear the sounds of his soul. If he's wary enough, he can discover where they come from. What they demand from him. If he's sufficiently wary, he is able to hear his own pain and play it...

Joel: I always hear the sounds of my soul, mom.

Bella: If you really listened to them, you would hear our lamentations for the dead, the groans of the wounded, the cries of the hostages, the widows, the orphans. You would hear our rage, our despair.

Joel: I hear them.

Bella: If you heard, you would be wary of the cursed urge to be the most righteous in the world, and you wouldn't destroy our hope. You wouldn't make us loathe ourselves. You wouldn't make us hate this place, which is the only place we have. In your naiveté, you've

forgotten what we've already been through in other places. You've forgotten what happened to us there.

Joel: I haven't forgotten anything. That's why I played across the world. That's why I travelled from country to country. From city to city. I saw the evil lying in wait for us. And I saw the evil within us. I heard the sound of both of them. I played for both of them. My entire life, I have played to save us from ourselves and from our enemies. Listen.

Joel sits at the piano and plays the third movement of the Pathétique in all its glory. Bella and Izzy listen in wonder. After a moment, Natalya and Andrei enter, followed by Freddie. They listen too. Suddenly, Izzy approaches the piano and, in a single motion, closes the piano lid hard on Joel's fingers. Joel screams in agony.

Bella **(Outraged)** Why? He's never played like that before. He finally heard his own voice. He could have played tomorrow. He could have played like no-one in the world has ever played before. He could have saved us...

She has a coughing fit and collapses into the armchair. Joel recovers and turns to Izzy.

Joel: Are you the child I played to from the moment he was born? The child I taught to play? The child who sang to me before he went to sleep about love and compassion... and when I covered him with a blanket said that music makes people better?

Izzy: You can chuck your music in the garbage.

Natalya enters the living room, carrying a suitcase. Andrei follows her.

Andrei: Farewell. It was nice meeting you. **(To Bella)** Unfortunately, I didn't manage to fix the sink. Here's the washer. **(To Joel)** And here's a ticket for your concert. I hope you find someone who wants to hear you.

He places the ticket on the table. Freddie returns with Joel's suitcase and turns to Natalya.

Freddie: Wait. Don't go. Put the suitcase in my room. My mother will teach you as much as you want.

Natalya: Thank you. I've learnt enough. **(Turns to leave)**

Andrei: Adieu.

She exits. He follows her.

Freddie: **(To Joel)** Take the suitcase and go.

Bella: **(Rises from the armchair)** I won't allow you to leave.

Joel: Mom...

Bella: **(Grasping him)** He can't evict you. He knows that it won't do him
any good. He knows we need you here. I need you. And you need
me ...

Freddie: Hurry up.

Joel: I'll return, mom. I don't know when, yet.

Bella: No, you're staying. I'll carry on teaching you. When you learn how
to play for us, you'll be the best pianist in the world. Please, in the
name of all our dead. I, too, will die if you leave.

Freddie: Let's go.

Joel turns to Izzy.

Joel: If you need anything, Izzy, I...

Freddie: Go already!

He grabs Joel by the arm. Joel escapes from his grasp

Joel **(To Bella)** I'll be back when I'm able to play... When you're able to
hear.

He takes the suitcase and exits.

END