

August 2009

In The Dark

A Play in Two Acts

By

Motti Lerner

Translated from the Hebrew by Anthony Berris

©

All Rights Reserved

All dramatic rights in this play are fully protected by copyright and no public or private performance – professional or amateur – and no public readings for profit may be given without the written permission of the author and the payment of royalty. Communications should be addressed to the Author's representative: Susan Schulman A Literary Agency, 454 West 44th St. New York, New York 10036 T: 212 713-1633 F: 212 581 8830 E: Schulman@aol.com

Motti Lerner
5 Massada Street, Ramat Hasharon 47290 Israel
Tel: 972-3-5405295 Fax: 972-3-5491693
E-mail: motti@macam.ac.il

Cast of Characters

Joel	A pianist whose sight is failing (48)
Bella	His mother (70)
Freddie	His brother (45)
Trudi	Bella's nurse (30)
Bernard	Trudi's ex-husband (55)
Izzy	Joel's son (23)

The Set

The action takes place in the living room of Bella's house in an old Tel Aviv neighborhood, where land prices have soared in the 1970s. A door leads to the kitchen, a passage leading to the bathroom, Bella's bedroom and two other bedrooms, and there is the front door of the house. In the room itself there is a couch with an armchair next to it, and a low table next to them. In one corner there is a radio with an old phonograph, and shelves for records. In the other corner stands a piano with a chest of drawers next to it, and shelves containing books and sheet music above it. The furniture is very old and testifies to the modest means of the house's occupants – despite the value of the land on which the house stands.

The Time

The action takes place in early 1977

Playwright's Note

Despite the fact that the play is written as a realistic play, it should be seen as a kind of nightmare experienced by Joel, who takes stock of his relationship with his family after an eighteen-year absence.

ACT ONE

Scene One

Midnight. The living room is empty. In the corner stands an ironing board with an iron on it. On the couch, old, pressed man's clothing and beside it a red dress. Suddenly a sound is heard from the direction of the front door. Somebody is trying a key in the lock. He tries another key. It, too, does not fit. Enter Bella wearing an old nightgown, her hair disheveled. It is clearly evident that it has not been brushed for a long time. She is carrying another pile of men's clothes she has taken from the clothesline. Now she hears the sound from the door. She moves towards it hesitantly.

Bella: Freddie? Freddie? Is that you? Freddie? Freddie?

She puts the clothes down on the couch, peers through the peephole and recoils in fright. She becomes short of breath and hurriedly uses an inhaler she takes from her pocket. Meanwhile, the person outside tries another key and finally manages to open the door. It is Joel, wearing a coat, carrying a suitcase and wearing thick-lensed glasses. A moment later he sees her and is astounded.

Joel: It's after midnight. I was sure you'd be asleep. **(Pause)** Hello.

Bella: **(Controlling herself with difficulty)** Breaking down doors. bursting in. middle of the night.

Joel: Mother, it's me, Joel.

Bella: I hope the lock isn't broken. The people who repair locks are the biggest thieves around.

She goes to the ironing board and starts ironing.

Joel: It's *me*, mother. How are you? **(She remains silent)** I got a call from the Philharmonic yesterday asking me to stand in for a pianist who'd been taken ill. I called you from New York but the number's been changed. Information said the new one's unlisted. Is someone trying to harass you?

Bella: Still talking. So many excuses for so much nothing.

Joel: How's Father? **(She remains silent)** Is he asleep? How's Freddie? **(She remains silent)** I've kept that key for eighteen years. I knew you'd never have the lock changed.

Bella: (To herself) That bastard gave me a new key for the same lock. All swindlers. Soon as they learn to talk they start lying.

Joel: So Freddie hasn't changed, huh? (She does not reply) How about you? How are *you*? How's Father? You both well? I see you're ironing his clothes. Why don't you send them to the laundry? (She remains silent) Mother, it's me, Joel. (Remembers something) I've brought you some records. Bach. The preludes and fugues you love. (Opens the suitcase) One's from a live concert. Live recordings are much more exciting. (He can't find them and is surprised) I don't understand. I put them in here.

Bella: Quiet. I want quiet. Bursts in, middle of the night, thinks if he talks, I won't have the heart to throw him out. But I haven't had a heart for years. For years there's been nothing to talk about.

Joel: (Looks at the music on the piano) I see that your pupils are still playing Czerny's etudes. Something's happened in music over the past few years, Mother. The world has moved over to Japanese etudes. (Sniffs) You've been frying eggplants, haven't you? I'll never forget that smell. You can't get eggplants like yours in America. (She remains silent) There used to be a mark on the wall here. Freddie threw a hammer at me when we were kids. Here it is. My vision's been a bit blurred lately. Just like Father. And that's your old nightgown, but with a few more holes. You were sitting in the armchair listening to music, and the ash from your cigarette dropped onto it, right? The same old armchair. The same radio. Don't you have a TV yet? (Takes her hand. She snatches it away) Where did you get that exclusive hairdo? (Laughs and then falls silent) The eggplant's in the plastic box in the fridge, right? If you tell me how you are, I'll tell you if it needs salt. (Peeps into the kitchen) You haven't changed the fridge either? Look what's happened to us. Fridges are more loyal than people. (Listens) A few years ago I did a concert in Atlanta, Georgia, and I stayed with the conductor. I woke up in the morning with the feeling that I was sleeping right here, on the couch. I lay listening and discovered that his General Electric

makes exactly the same noise as yours. **(Laughs)** If you stay silent, I'll go on talking.

Bella: Talking. As if anyone's listening. Bursts in, middle of the night, listens to the fridge, as if it's been waiting for him!

Joel: **(Points at the wall)** Father's picture was here. Next to the minister of education at the teacher's conference, right?

Bella: And I've got no more room. I've already rented all my rooms.

Joel: You've rented our rooms? You wouldn't even let the mailman in with a telegram, and you're going to take in a lodger? **(She goes on ironing angrily. He switches on the old radio)** The radio still works. It must be thirty years-old. **(A Bach prelude is heard. He is surprised)** That's me, Mother. Listen. **(She goes on ironing. He turns the radio off)** I'll play it for you.

He sits down at the piano and starts playing the same prelude. He plays very well. Bella quickly puts down the iron and flees the room. The surprised Joel stops playing. Enter Trudi from her room. He senses her presence and looks at her.

Trudi: I thought it was Freddie playing.

Joel: Freddie play? Like that?

Trudi: Freddie's full of surprises. Do you know him?

Joel: Who are you? Do you rent a room here?

Trudi: **(Laughs)** Here?

Joel: You're Freddie's wife. I knew someone would manage to marry him one day.

Trudi: No, I'm not his wife, I'm...

Joel: So what are you doing here?

Trudi: My name's Trudi. I'm waiting for him. I...

Joel: **(Interrupting her)** You're waiting for Freddie at my mother's and you're not his wife?

Trudi: **(Confidently)** You're his brother. From New York. The pianist, right? He says you both have exactly the same smell.

Joel: I'm followed by dogs in the street too. **(They laugh)**

Enter Bella

Bella: What are you doing here? Why did you come out of your room? Do you know him that you're talking to him?

Trudi: I thought he was Freddie.

Bella: You don't know him and I don't want you talking to him.

Joel: We've already met. Her name's Trudi. **(To Trudi)** I'm Joel.

Bella: **(To Trudi)** So you knew he was coming, and Freddie knew too.

Trudi: I didn't, and Freddie didn't know either.

Bella: You thought because of all the drugs you stuff into me I wouldn't know him. I know him all too well. And you too. Get your things and get out of here. With him.

Trudi: If you talk to me like that, then you still don't know me.

Joel: Even *I* didn't know I was coming till yesterday.

Bella: And why are you putting a dress into the washing machine? I've done mine three times and haven't got rid of your smell.

Trudi: You took a pill half an hour ago, Bella. You'll pass out in a minute.

Bella: I did? **(Takes a pill from her robe pocket)** The moment I fall asleep you start going through the closets. Who knows what you've already stolen from me.

Trudi: Very funny. **(Turns to exit)**

Bella: **(After her)** Where to?

Trudi: To take a shower. And if you switch off the light again, I'll smash it. **(To Joel)** Goodnight. **(Exits towards the bathroom)**

Bella: Wait! Don't touch my towel. I've seen your hair on my comb. **(To Joel)** And everyone should know this isn't a hotel. In the morning, everyone's out! **(Exits after her)**

Joel is left alone. He sees Trudi's red dress on the couch, picks it up, examines it, and sniffs it. Suddenly he hears a key being turned in the front door lock. He turns, holding the dress. The door opens. Enter Freddie. He is very well dressed. He strides in confidently, a cigar in his mouth and a suitcase in his hand. Joel hardly recognizes him. Freddie lays the case by the chest of drawers.

- Freddie: You look really bad, Jo-Jo. Getting old before your time? You're only three years older than me and you look like you're going to have a heart attack any minute. Maybe you *are* going to have a heart attack any minute? (**Laughs**)
- Joel: (**Identifies the voice**) Hello, Freddie.
- Freddie: This is how you come to visit? Middle of the night? You burst in after eighteen years without letting us know? You could have found us all rotting in shrouds. Even the maggots that ate us could have been food for maggots. (**Offers a pack of cigars**) Smoke? Havanas. I bought twenty thousand last week. In Cyprus.
- Joel: You look great, Freddie. No maggot would dare come near you.
- Freddie: I'm flying to Italy in the morning. I've bought a load of car covers from a company that's closed down. (**Offers him a different cigar**) You prefer Turkish? It's lucky I came to say goodbye to Mother.
- Joel: (**Refuses the cigar**) You're going away?
- Freddie: Just for two days.
- Joel: No problem. If I've managed to survive eighteen years, I'll survive another two days. (**Ironically**) If you really are coming back in two days.
- Freddie: I can't promise anything. Even when I'm sure I'm coming back, I don't always come back when I'm sure. I might get stranded in some crappy airport because of some drunken taxi driver.
- Joel: You still live here?
- Freddie: I don't live anywhere. Always on the road to somewhere. You bought a house, didn't you?
- Joel: I've got an apartment. In New York. But I've also got...
- Freddie: Yes, I know. Manhattan, 57th Street. I almost rang your bell once.
- Joel: You were in New York and didn't come to see me?
- Freddie: I was in a hurry. I'd bought some used batteries for the lead. How's your wife? Her name is...
- Joel: Ruth.
- Freddie: Yes, Ruth. Is that her dress? By the way, I can fix her some jewelry at a good price. I've been doing some business in gold lately.

Joel: **(Throws down the dress)** No, thanks. She's fine. I hope she's fine. I haven't seen her for a few months. We divorced about a year ago. But she's been doing very well recently. Made a fortune.

Freddie: I'm not surprised you got divorced. You always were a pain in the ass.

Joel: Who knows better than you. **(Laughs)** If you only knew how much I've longed to quarrel with you.

Freddie: You longed for it?

Joel: You're a real bastard but you've got a lot of charm. **(Laughs)**

Freddie: Yes, some people actually prefer longing. I once had a partner, in my insurance agency. He didn't divorce his wife because he longed for her ten months of the year. **(Remembers)** That must be your daughter's dress! She must be a woman by now. Twenty-something. Maybe she's even got children. Maybe you're a grandfather already.

Joel: I've got a son. Izzy. Don't you remember? He's twenty-three.

Freddie: And he wears dresses?

Joel: I think it belongs to that strange woman who...

Freddie: You always got involved with strange women. Even Ruth was strange. I'm a simple man. A crust of bread, a little water.

Joel: Don't you remember Izzy? You were always so proud that he looked like you.

Freddie: Me? **(Laughs)**

Joel: He sings with the Los Angeles Opera. They grabbed him the day he graduated from Julliard. If there's another bastard like you in the world, it's him. You've both got that same smile.

Freddie: It's a shame you didn't bring him.

Joel: I didn't even have time to talk to him. The Philharmonic called me yesterday. Their pianist was taken ill.

Enter Bella, quickly.

Bella: Go to your room, Freddie. And take off your shoes.

Freddie: **(Takes off his shoes)** It's time you knew, Mother. The jerk's gotten divorced. His son's an opera singer. His name's Izzy.

Joel: Cut it out, Freddie.

Bella: (To Freddie) Tell him he can sleep in the room with the sewing machine. And I don't want him nosing around in my closets. And he mustn't go into the kitchen. Rolls up in the middle of the night and talks to the whore. In the morning they're both leaving!

She halts suddenly, goes back to the ironing board and lifts the iron. The dress beneath it is burned. She angrily pulls the iron's plug from its socket. Her breathing becomes labored. She takes the inhaler from her pocket and uses it. As she passes Joel she slaps his face hard.

Joel: Okay, I deserve it. Here's the other cheek. Let's finish with the games, Mother. I came to talk to you.

But she continues on her way without answering him. Joel picks up his case and follows her. Freddie remains alone in the living room. He picks up Trudi's red dress from the couch. He fondles and sniffs it. After a moment, Trudi enters wearing an old bathrobe.

Freddie: When did he get here?

Trudi: A few minutes ago.

Freddie: I open the door and there he is sniffing your dresses.

Trudi: Where've you been?

Freddie: At the office.

Trudi: I've been waiting for you.

Freddie: That's my mother's old robe. **(Embraces her)** It's been years since I put my head inside it like this.

Trudi: Freddie, stop it.

Freddie: Don't worry. He won't stay here. He can't come and go whenever he wants as if it's *his* home.

Trudi: I don't know if I'll stay here either.

Freddie: She can't throw us out. I was at the lawyer's. That's why I was late.

Trudi: She locked me in my room again. Why didn't you talk to her?

Freddie: I did, this morning. By evening she'd forgotten. **(He embraces her)**

Trudi: **(Breaks away)** What exactly did you tell her?

Freddie: What I said I'd tell her.

Trudi: She makes my life a misery, Freddie.

Freddie: If we tell her we're getting married, she'll make you even more miserable.

Trudi: Stop playing games with me.

Freddie: I love playing games with you. **(Kisses her. She does not respond)** What's wrong? I'll only be away two days. I've got some money for you. **(Gives it to her)**

Trudi: I want you to tell her. I'm not prepared to fight with her all day.

Freddie: I'll tell her in the morning. Now you smell just like her.

Trudi: And tell her to stop counting every cup of coffee I drink.

Freddie: I'll tell her everything. **(Embraces her)** You know what? Ask her to teach you to play. She'll love you like a daughter. Just like she loved him. **(Tries to slide his hand under her robe)**

Trudi: Stop it.

Freddie: Don't worry, he's asleep. I don't believe a word he says. Why should they ask him to play with the Philharmonic? Who's ever heard of him? Better pianists than him are a dime a dozen here. **(Tries again)**

Trudi: Take your hands off.

Freddie: I'm going away tomorrow.

Trudi: **(Forcefully)** You're not going before you talk to her. It's been a month already. I don't want any more promises.

Freddie: The lawyer's taking care of it. As soon as I get back I'll be her legal guardian. If she dares open her mouth to you, I'll...

The light in the passage suddenly comes on. Trudi hastily breaks away from Freddie. Joel comes back without his jacket and tie. Because of the semi-darkness he cannot see Freddie and Trudi.

Joel: Freddie? **(He turns on the light and sees Freddie sitting on the couch, but does not see Trudi who has moved into a corner)** She's closed her door. I hope she falls asleep. Tell me, when she hits you, do you still hit her back?

Freddie: Sure.

Joel: What does she do all day? Teach? Play? Fight with the neighbors? How can she listen to music on that old radio?

Freddie: She's heard enough.

Joel: I'll buy her a new one tomorrow. (**Senses Trudi's scent**) That woman's smell is still in the air.

Freddie: Which woman?

Joel: Trudi.

Freddie: Look, I've got a hard day tomorrow. I...

Joel: Does Mother really need her?

Freddie: Mother's seventy. You can see how she is. She even forgets to take her pills. One day she'll have an attack and choke.

Joel: What do the doctors say?

Freddie: You try taking her to a doctor. Go to bed now, I've got an early start.

Joel: She didn't seem too happy to see me.

Freddie: That's how she seems even when she's happy.

Joel: Has she really rented my room?

Freddie: (**Derisively**) Ever since you went away. Goodnight.

Joel: She didn't talk to me. She didn't look at me. But I know she missed me. I felt it all over my face. (**Laughs**)

Freddie: You'll still feel it in the morning when she throws you out.

Joel: (**Again smelling Trudi's scent**) That Trudi's really strange. She has a very subtle smell. Very elusive. Was she sitting on the couch?

Freddie: What are you, a bloodhound?

Joel: I can tell a lot about people just by their smell.

Freddie: Sure.

Joel: She's sleeping so quietly in there. I can't hear her.

Freddie: Who?

Joel: Trudi. She's in the old children's room, isn't she?

Freddie: Goodnight.

Joel: Since I got divorced I've begun taking an interest in women again. As I left the airport a woman came up to me and offered me a bed in her house. She saw me on television a week ago. You're probably the most eligible bachelor in the underworld, aren't you?

Freddie: Goodnight, Jo-Jo.

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

Freddie: Goodnight.

Joel: I talked to her for a few minutes. To Trudi. I understood what she said, but not what she meant. Like notes that didn't form a melody.

Freddie: **(Ironically)** Really.

Joel: Are you sure Mother needs a nurse? I can't believe she lets anyone near her. Can't Father look after her?

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

Joel: What?!

Freddie: A month ago.

Joel: Dead?

Freddie: And then mother took ill, so I got Trudi.

Joel: That's impossible! She was ironing his clothes just now.

Freddie: To sell them.

Joel: She didn't say a word! I thought he'd gone to bed! I asked her how he was. Twice!

Freddie: He's fine now.

Joel: What happened? Was he sick? What was wrong with him?

Freddie: Oh, come on. Let me sleep. He's dead. That's it.

Joel: Why didn't you let me know?

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

Joel: But how did he die? From what? Did he suffer?

Freddie: Let me sleep already. You know what? I'll see if I can go through Milan. Maybe we'll have lunch.

Joel: Fine, we'll have lunch.

Freddie: I'll call you at one. Goodnight.

Joel: Did he ask about me?

Freddie: Who?

Joel: Father. Did he ask? Did he remember? Did he want to see me? He didn't deserve to die without saying goodbye. Without knowing that I thought of him. Without knowing that I hadn't forgotten him all these years.

Freddie: We'll talk tomorrow. Goodnight!

Joel: Do you have a photograph of him? Where's the one that was on the wall?

Freddie: I'll look for it in the morning. Goodnight.

Joel: Goodnight. (**Stays where he is**)

Freddie: You've already said goodnight.

Joel: Yes. Goodnight. I knew this would happen. I've had this feeling recently that I wouldn't get to see him. I bought a ticket in November but then Carter won the presidential election and invited me to play for him.

He embraces Freddie, and exits. Trudi returns to the middle of the room and picks up her dress.

Freddie: What a pest.

Darkness.

Scene Two

Next afternoon. Bella is at the front door, changing the lock, a hammer and screwdriver in her hands. Enter Trudi wearing Bella's old robe. She is carrying a breakfast tray. She sits down at the table. The telephone rings. She does not answer it. It stops ringing.

Trudi: Why don't you let me help you? (**Bella does not reply**) I've made breakfast for us. (**Bella does not reply**) I'm starting.

Trudi starts eating. Bella finishes changing the lock, locks the door and leaves the key in the lock.

Bella: No one's coming into this house anymore unless I open the door. (**She sees that Trudi is wearing her robe**) I've told you a thousand times not to touch my robe.

Trudi: You should have thought of that before you threw mine into the wash.

Bella: Give it here. A big mouth and a small heart. Eats like a refugee. The fridge will be empty by evening.

Trudi: Didn't Freddie talk to you? Didn't he tell you that we... that I want to learn the piano with you?

Bella: He tells every woman he brings home to say that. You'll probably tell me that you want to get married, too.

Trudi: All right. If it's so important to you, I'll wash your stupid robe.

Bella: You won't wash anything, and you won't cook, and you won't eat.
(She moves the tray away from Trudi)

Trudi: **(Loses her patience)** Freddie asked me to take time off from the hospital so I can stay with you until you feel better. I suggest you don't fight with me.

Bella: He wants you to stay with *him*. Since when has he cared about me? When he says good morning, I've got to be careful. If I fell down the stairs in the dark he wouldn't switch the light on for me. **(Trudi rips a button off the robe)** What are you doing?

Trudi: You ruin my appetite and another one comes off.

Bella gives in and returns the tray to Trudi. Enter Joel, wearing a bathrobe.

Joel: Good morning. **(They do not reply)** Was that Freddie on the phone? I couldn't wake up. It's only 6 a.m. in New York.

Bella: I run around all morning on swollen feet and here they sleep until noon. Tell him to take his things and get out.

Trudi: You forgot your pills, Bella. **(Holds out the box. Bella takes it and shoves it into her pocket)**

Bella: I thought I told someone here to get out!

Joel: If I'd known Father was ill, I would have come over right away. I don't even know how to begin apologizing. I should have asked. I should have checked.

Bella: **(Interrupts him)** And that someone shouldn't even think about getting breakfast here. I have a pupil coming and I don't want anyone under her feet. I don't want to count the number of pupils I lost because of him.

Joel: Because of me?

Bella: And that someone shouldn't pretend he's blind, like his father did, so he could look up their dresses.

Joel: What are you talking about?

Bella: **(To Trudi)** And while she's playing, that someone shouldn't go through her purse, just like his brother who stole shamelessly.

- Joel: Father looked up your pupils' dresses?
- Bella: **(To Trudi)** And when I'd finally managed to teach that someone to play the piano, and thought I'd finally have some joy from him, up he got and ran away with a filthy whore, and not once did he try to find out if I was dead or alive!
- Joel: I didn't run away. You know very well why I left.
- Bella: And now that whore has left him and there's nobody to give him a bed for the night, he comes back to his old bed and thinks that somebody will tuck him in when he goes to sleep.
- Joel: Father's dead. I'm trying to grieve for him! Can't you give up your lust to settle scores for a minute? You couldn't even forgive him for being blind. I haven't forgotten him sitting here at this table, his glasses broken, his hands trembling, and you barking at him to look for his cigarettes himself.
- Bella: **(To Trudi)** Tell him to collect his things and leave.
- Joel: You once threw me out. I was standing here in the middle of the room with Ruth. Father sat in the corner and didn't say a word. We'd come to tell you we were getting married, but you saw a bit of mud on her shoes and burst out at her: "Get out! Get out!" When Izzy was born I called. You hung up. We waited five years for you to see him. Then we gave up and left for America. Izzy's twenty-three now.
- Trudi: **(As she eats)** Bella, can I offer him a cup of coffee?
- Bella: No.
- Trudi: **(Offers Joel a cup of coffee)** She says 'no' but she means 'yes'.
- Bella: I mean what I say. **(Snatches the cup)**
- Joel: This time I'm not leaving, Mother.
- Trudi: He certainly doesn't look like someone that a woman would leave. Maybe he left *her*.
- Joel: I didn't leave. Ruth was a good wife. We divorced because I was traveling so much.
- Bella: I don't want to ever hear her name in this house.
- Trudi: Oh, Bella, what will you have left if he goes? What will you wait for? What will you hope for? When you find out he's not coming back, you'll beg me for morphine. **(To Joel)** I've still got some from the

hospital. I was the angel in white for the dying. (**Laughs**) Next day I'd cut out the obituaries from the papers.

Bella: I'm not sure that *I* will beg for morphine.

Joel: (**Forcefully**) We're stopping this fighting, Mother. Ever since I left not a day's gone by without me wanting to play for you. And you wanted to hear me. Last year I played before Queen Juliana in Holland. Something in her reminded me of you. After the concert I told her about you. I told her that you're the only teacher I've ever had. Now sit down and listen.

He sits at the piano and plays the same Bach prelude. He plays beautifully. Bella hurries into the kitchen and slams the door. Joel gives up and stops playing. Trudi moves over to him and gives him a cup of coffee. He sips it.

Trudi: You play beautifully.

Joel: Thank you.

Trudi: Don't worry. In a few hours she'll have calmed down.

Joel: (**To Trudi, suspiciously**) Who *are* you?

Trudi: I've told you.

Joel: We've never met, have we?

Trudi: We met yesterday. (**Smiles at him**)

Joel: Why are you smiling like that?

Trudi: You're not at all like Freddie. You don't even have the same smell.

Joel: Do you work here?

Trudi: Yes.

Joel: You're a nurse?

Trudi: Yes.

Joel: And you looked after my father in the hospital?

Trudi: Yes.

Joel: I hope he died a natural death.

Trudi: Of course he did.

Joel: Do you live here?

Trudi: No, but I'm here quite a lot.

Joel: Don't you have a family?

Trudi: You're worried about my family?

Joel: I want to know if you have to be here all the time, if you need to keep an eye on her all the time.

Trudi: Most of the time.

Joel: I have to understand what's happened here. My father died. She won't tell me anything and Freddie avoids me too. You look like an honest woman. You knew my father and you know her, too. They're not the people I left eighteen years ago. Let's find somewhere quiet to sit for a few minutes.

Suddenly the doorbell rings. Joel hesitates. It rings again.

Joel: It's probably Freddie.

He opens the door. Facing him is a man of about 55, wearing a suit and carrying an umbrella in one hand and a newspaper in the other. It is Bernard.

Bernard: Please excuse me. I'm sorry to bother you, but I thought perhaps Trudi was here. I wanted to have a few words with her.

Joel: With Trudi?

Bernard: Yes. You must be Freddie's partner in the store, right?

Joel: No, I'm not Freddie's partner. I'm his brother. I thought you were him.

Bernard: No, no, I'm not Freddie. My name's Bernard, I'm Trudi's husband.

Joel: Trudi's husband?

Trudi: Ex-husband.

Bernard: Yes, of course. I came to see how she is. I've brought her a paper. It's a pity for us both to buy the same paper every day.

Trudi: I asked you not to come here again.

Joel: So how can I help?

Bernard: **(Manages to enter)** I actually thought I might be able to help.

Trudi: I'm leaving, Bernard. I'm taking him to the Philharmonic.

Bernard: The Philharmonic?

Trudi: He's a pianist. He hasn't been here for a long time. He doesn't know the city.

Joel: We're in a terrible hurry.

Bernard: I'd be happy to join you. I know the city very well. Incidentally, you look familiar. I'm sure I've heard you play.

Trudi: We'll manage without you, Bernard.

Joel: I'll be right back.

Joel exits into the passage. Trudi removes her robe under which she is fully dressed.

Bernard: If you're in such a hurry, I'll just finish off what you've left. Is there any more coffee? **(Sits down and eats)**

Trudi: I really do have to leave, Bernard.

Bernard: **(Remains seated)** I only came to see if you need anything.

Trudi: I don't need a thing. Your shirt's dirty. You walked all the way, didn't you? Take a taxi back **(Gives him a bill)**.

Bernard: I'll just finish my coffee.

Trudi: Their mother's not very well today. If she sees you drinking coffee she'll complain that you're robbing her.

Bernard: Would you like me to examine her?

Trudi: No way.

Bernard: **(Eating)** Don't they have any salt here? When we were married you got me used to salted butter.

Trudi: Bernard, I want you to leave! Do you need new shoes? **(Gives him another bill)**

Joel returns wearing a suit. He takes his coat from the hanger and puts it on.

Joel: **(To Bernard)** We're leaving now.

Bernard: I think it's going to rain. If you don't have an umbrella I'll be glad to accompany you with mine.

Joel: Thanks, but there's no need.

Bernard: You haven't been here for some time and you've evidently forgotten that the rain can be very heavy and vicious. In Europe even the rain is more civilized. **(Laughs)**

Trudi: **(To Joel)** We don't have to wait till he finishes.

Joel: I'd better tell my mother.

Trudi: She's listening behind the door.

Joel: **(To Bernard)** Goodbye.

Joel opens the door for Trudi and follows her out. Bernard goes on eating. Enter Bella.

Bella: What are you doing here?

Bernard: Good afternoon, Madame Bella.

Bella: How did you get in?

Bernard: Your son let me in.

Bella: My son?

Bernard: The pianist. He forgot to introduce himself. But I recognized him right away.

Bella locks the door and puts the key into her pocket. Bernard goes on eating.

Bernard: How are you? You're looking much better. Unfortunately I haven't had the chance of offering you my condolences.

Bella: How dare you eat my food?

Bernard: I thought it was Trudi's. I usually eat her leftovers. I'm not all that poor, but I grew up in a poor home and it's hard for me to see food thrown out.

Bella: Get up and get out.

Bernard: Yes, certainly, in a minute. Do you perhaps have some salt in the kitchen?

Bella: Salt?

Bernard: Yes, ordinary salt. To sprinkle on the butter. They make unsalted butter here.

Bella: I haven't got any. You say he let you in?

Bernard: I came in on my own. That is, I rang the bell and he opened the door. You're sure there's nothing in the salt cellar on the shelf?

Bella: No!

Bernard: Perhaps in the cupboard?

- Bella: I haven't got any salt. (**Picks up the robe and that Trudi dropped and takes the button from its pocket**) You clean up those crumbs after you, wash the dishes, sweep the floor, and sew on this damned button too!
- Bernard: With pleasure. And don't worry about the salt. I think by chance I might have some. (**Takes a sachet of salt from his pocket and sprinkles its contents on the bread**) You won't mind if I take a drop more milk from the refrigerator, will you?
- Bella: There's no milk either. Eat faster. This isn't a kitchen for the homeless!
- Bernard: For times like this I keep some creamer in my pocket. (**Takes a sachet from his pocket and sprinkles its contents into his coffee**) I'm not a typical homeless person, madam. I was once a wealthy man. Doctors in Romania enjoy special status. By the way, I can examine you if you want. Asthma can't always be cured, but the symptoms can sometimes be alleviated.
- Bella: I don't need an examination. I'll dance at your funeral.
- Bernard: You can trust me. I was a department head at a Bucharest hospital. I cured thousands of people. Perhaps you have a little more butter?
- Bella: No.
- Bernard: No problem. I was never that much of a gourmet. When we fled I knew we'd had to give up butter for a while. But we had no choice. President Ceausescu was worse than Stalin. He thought that every doctor was out to poison him. Trudi was in danger too. And I promised her parents I would look after her.
- Bella: If you want to look after her, then take her away from here. Freddie slept with her last night.
- Bernard: Impossible. People are wrong about her when they see how friendly she is. She's a woman of the world. She makes friends with decent people very easily.
- Bella: You're mistaken, mister. Freddie is not decent and he slept with her.
- Bernard: She also made friends with your late husband. He was a dear man. A very gentle, very generous man. Despite his terrible suffering, he didn't stop thanking you for fifty happy years of marriage.

Bella lowers her eyes. He clears his throat. She looks at him.

Bernard: I ate too quickly. I'm not used to eating so quickly. Perhaps I might rest for a few minutes? **(Darkness)**

Scene Three

That evening. Bernard is lying on the couch, a blanket over his body and head. Enter Bella, dragging Joel's suitcase. She stands it by the door and addresses Bernard.

Bella: Get up already. It's almost night. **(He pretends to be asleep)** Who knows what kind of smell you'll leave on the couch now. Get up.

He goes on "sleeping". She goes out and comes back carrying some of Joel's clothes. She throws them onto the case and addresses Bernard again.

Bella: Get up. **(Examines his shoes)** You've got holes in your shoes. Only someone who has never had a home could sleep like that in a strange bed. The whore sleeps so well as if the house is already hers.

He goes on "sleeping". She goes to the coat-rack, takes Joel's scarf and jacket, throws them onto the case, and addresses Bernard again.

Bella: When she gets back she'll throw you out even more shamefully.

He goes on "sleeping". She sits down helplessly in the armchair. A moment later a key is inserted into the front door lock. It of course does not fit.

Bella: Who is it?

Freddie: **(Off)** It's me.

She opens the door and returns the key to her pocket. Enter Freddie, his case in his hand and a cigar in his mouth.

Bella: I changed the lock.

Freddie: And a key for me?

Bella: When you want to come in, knock on the door.

He sees the sleeping Bernard but cannot recognize him by his bare feet.

Bella: It's her husband. I've been trying to wake him for six hours.

Freddie: **(Puts out his cigar)** Whose husband?

Bella: The whore's.

Freddie: He's not her husband. She divorced him two years ago. What else did that shit want from her?

Bella: I'd like to know what he wants from me.

Freddie: **(Removing the blanket from Bernard's face)** What are you doing here?

Bernard: **(Sits up)** Hello, Freddie. How are you?

Freddie: What are you doing here?

Bernard: I came in for a minute to see Trudi.

Freddie: I told you not to come here again.

Bernard: She likes to read the paper.

Freddie: She works here and you're upsetting her.

Bella: **(To Freddie)** And I'm deducting what he ate from her wages.

Freddie: **(To Bernard)** Out.

Bernard: Yes. Of course. Right away. **(Puts on his shoes)** I hope you don't mind if I use the toilet? I don't want to bother you with details, but it's a long way back to where I live.

Freddie: No way.

Bernard: We're human beings, Freddie. We must have a certain degree of compassion.

Freddie: Don't make me throw you out.

Bella: You can use the toilet.

Freddie: He can piss in the yard.

Bernard: Thank you, madam. **(Exits to the passage)**

Bella: **(After him)** And wash your hands in the bath. The sink in the toilet leaks.

Freddie: Where is she? **(Opens his suitcase and takes out medicine bottles)**

Bella: She went out with him.

Freddie: **(Derisively)** With the jerk? I've brought you some garlic and vinegar essence, and eucalyptus oil for your nose. **(Puts the bottles on the chest of drawers. He sees Joel's things)** I see he's leaving.

Bella: I shouldn't have let him sleep here. He can go to a hotel. Find a bench in the bus station. Now he remembers to cry over his father.

Freddie: I suggest that you don't throw him out. He'll be gone in two days' time and we'll never see him again. If you throw him out he'll see a lawyer and ask to have your will opened.

Bella: He hasn't said one word of consolation to me. He didn't even ask for forgiveness.

Freddie: Where did they go?

Bella: The Philharmonic.

Freddie: What's she lost there?

Bella: She went with him.

Freddie: She's interested in music all of a sudden?

Bella: Not only music.

Freddie: Fine. I'll wait. My flight leaves in two hours. Maybe I can catch some sleep before they get back. Is there anything to eat?

Bella: No.

Freddie: Where can I go when I'm so tired and hungry? I spend half my life sleeping in stinking trains in faraway countries. The beds are narrow and the sheets smell of bleach.

Bella: There's some eggplant in the fridge.

Freddie: I've been eating eggplant for eighteen years just because you hoped he'd come back and you'd be able to give him something he likes.

Bella: I like eggplant.

She has an attack of coughing. He taps her lightly on the back to ease her lungs.

Bella: Why so hard? Do you want to kill me? **(He stops)** Why have you stopped? You do it much better than her. She's a whore, I tell you. Look at how she eats.

Freddie: **(Continues)** She's not a whore and stop talking about her like that.

Bella: I shut myself into the kitchen because I didn't have the heart to see them doing it here on the couch.

Freddie: **(He stops)** What were they doing on the couch?

Bella: They were doing it.

Freddie: Who?

Bella: Her and him.

Freddie: They didn't do anything. I don't believe a word you're saying. You'll do anything to make me think you're crazy.

Bella: He's already asked her about the house.

Freddie: I'm warning you. I've just seen the lawyer. You've got to keep your mouth shut for a few days. The jerk will grab any chance to stick his dick in.

He picks up Joel's things and exits to the passage. The doorbell rings. Bella opens the door. Enter Joel and Trudi. They are in high spirits. Joel is carrying a bouquet of lilies.

Joel: For you, Mother. You can't find lilies like these anywhere in America. Only four months ago an anonymous farmer planted bulbs in a distant valley near the sea just so I could bring you these flowering, fragrant lilies. **(She does not reply. Trudi takes the lilies and puts them into a vase)** I hope you haven't had dinner yet. I thought we'd all go to a restaurant. **(Bella remains silent)** I was just telling Trudi how you used to sit here at night in this armchair and listen to music on the radio. I'd come home after the broadcast had ended and find you snoring. Then I'd sit at the piano and play. Jazz. Remember how much you hated jazz? After the first note you'd wake up in a panic, run to the radio, switch it off and you couldn't understand why the music didn't stop. **(He laughs. Bella remains silent)** I saw a French restaurant on the way.

Freddie enters from the passage. He has a hairnet on his head. Trudi sees him and bursts out laughing.

Freddie: **(To Trudi)** What's so funny?

Joel: Hello, Freddie.

Freddie: I asked you what's so funny.

Joel: I thought you'd gone abroad.

Freddie: I'm leaving in two hours. I called here at one.

Joel: So maybe you'll join us. We're going out to eat. Are you coming, Mother? **(She does not reply)**

Freddie: **(To Trudi)** What's so funny? Where were you?

Trudi: Here and there.

Freddie: Where?

Joel: After the Philharmonic we went to the cemetery to look for Father's grave. The sun was still high and I'm not used to such dazzling light. And then suddenly, an attack of migraine. Trudi was very nice, and massaged my temples. A moment later I opened my eyes and the blue of the sky was just as I remembered. And the cypresses were green and the soil was brown. And I suddenly saw a fly. Gray, with tiny antennae and transparent wings, sitting on my hand. I haven't been able to see a fly for years. A second later it flew away, frightened. He couldn't have imagined how happy I was to meet him. **(Laughs. To Bella)** By the way, I ordered a headstone for Father.

Freddie: **(To Trudi)** I can't understand why you went out with him at all.

Joel: Why not?

Freddie: **(To Trudi)** He needs a guide dog?

Trudi: He didn't remember the way to the Philharmonic. I took him and waited for him in the coffee shop downstairs.

Freddie: You waited downstairs?

Trudi: Yes.

Freddie: I knew it!

Joel: What?

Freddie: You didn't go inside with him?

Trudi: No.

Freddie: **(To Bella)** You see? I'm not at all sure about his story.

Joel: What story?

Freddie: The whole story. **(To Bella)** Why did they have to invite him to replace a sick pianist? Do you know how many healthy pianists there are in this country? Ten thousand!

Joel: It seems that Zubin Mehta has a different opinion of me.

Freddie: Zubin Mehta, no less! If she didn't go into the meeting with you, perhaps there was no meeting at all!

Joel: He wasn't in the office, but the secretary fixed an appointment for tomorrow.

Freddie: **(To Bella)** You see?

Joel: What does she see? I hadn't made an appointment, so he wasn't expecting me.

Freddie: If Zubin Mehta *had* invited him, he would have booked a hotel room for him. I don't believe that after eighteen years he suddenly began missing us.

Joel: So don't believe it.

Freddie: **(To Bella)** I tell you he's fooling you. Even when he lived here nobody gave a damn about him. I played better than him.

Joel: You?

Freddie: Don't you remember how he used to cry because of the reviews? What happened? In America he learnt to play?

Joel: In America they listened to me. **(To Trudi)** Here nobody wanted to believe that a little boy with glasses from an immigrant block was a pianist. Here they were far more impressed by my brother, who at sixteen was already a famous motorcycle thief.

Freddie: Ha, ha, ha. Well, if he's such a great pianist, why have I never seen a record of his? Why have I never read about him in any of the papers?

Joel: They don't mention me that often in the sports pages.

Freddie: Every time I asked about him nobody knew what I was talking about.

Joel: **(Derisively)** I'm prepared to give you my résumé. Ten pages, with reviews, with my picture on the cover of Time Magazine.

Freddie: Do you want me to call the Philharmonic?

Joel: You want my permission? **(To Bella)** What do you say, Mother? Maybe he hasn't gotten any smarter, but he's definitely more polite. Perhaps he's beginning to grow up.

Freddie: Call your wife in New York. Ask *her* when I grew up.

Joel: **(Derisively)** She's sure to know.

Freddie: Ask her.

Joel: I don't think she'll remember you.

Freddie: I'll remind her. You lived on Allenby Street, facing the sea. When I came to visit she'd hide your glasses, come into the shower with me, lock the door and turn on the water, so you wouldn't be able to hear her moaning. And between her moans I'd hear you stumbling around mumbling, "Ruth, my glasses! Where have you put my glasses?"

Joel: **(Laughing)** Go on, Freddie. Even a deaf person can hear the despair of a chained dog in your barking. **(To Bella)** And you sit there gurgling, waiting to lick the blood off the floor. **(Painfully)** I came here to forgive you for everything you did to me. **(To Trudi)** In a minute she'll say that when she came to this country she knocked on every door and wasn't given an opportunity to play. That's why she devoted her whole life to me. So that I'd get a chance. **(To Bella)** Millions suffered more than you and not one of them is as bloodthirsty as you. **(To Trudi)** When I was first invited to play with the radio orchestra, she called the conductor and told him I wasn't mature enough. After the second concert she told me that only the deaf applauded. In the third she left in the intermission and dragged my father out with her. **(To Bella)** I was a twelve-year-old kid! **(To Trudi)** When I was seventeen we went to Paris to record Tchaikovsky's concerto in C minor. In the middle of the recording she stopped me and said: "You don't have a drop of sensitivity. You play like a bull in a china shop." **(Angrily)** She threatened to kill me if I didn't play the way she wanted to in her dreams. **(To Bella)** I'll tell you how this visit came about. A few months ago I met Zubin Mehta in New York. I told him that my parents are old and I wasn't sure how long they had to live. That I wanted them to hear me play one more time. I wanted them to sit in the first row. Smiling and proud, together with this bastard, so that there would be a little joy in their lives. That they would applaud at the end.

He stops abruptly and hurries towards the passage. Bella turns to Freddie.

Bella: **(Forcefully)** Tell him I'll go to the concert. Tell him I'll sit in the first row.

Joel: It's too late.

As Joel exits he passes Bernard who is coming out of the toilet.

Bernard: **(After him)** I think I remember where I saw you.

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

Bernard: **(To Bella)** The sink really does leak. I tried to fix it, but the washer is torn.

Freddie: Get the hell out!

Bernard: **(To Trudi)** I stayed to rest a while on the couch and fell asleep.

Freddie: Out! **(He leads him to the door, slams it after him, goes back to Bella and sees she is crying)** Stop crying, you hear? Stop it. In eighteen years that shit didn't even send a card. We went through two wars here. He didn't call to see if we were still alive. **(To Trudi)** I had to go to the office this morning. I never imagined he would harass you.

Trudi: Nobody can harass me.

Freddie: I can put my trip off for a few days. **(To Bella)** Stop it already. Haven't you cried enough all these years? **(To Trudi)** Why did you go with him? Who sent you? Why did you leave the house at all?

Trudi: What do you mean, who sent me?

Freddie: I pay you to stay here and look after my mother, not to run around cemeteries and massage my brother's temples.

Trudi: Don't you tell me what to do. You should know by now that I do what I want.

Freddie: You won't talk to him and massage him.

Trudi: If you think that because you pay me, you know what I'm allowed and what I'm not, you're wrong.

Freddie: Just a minute, Trudi.

Trudi: And if you come in with an idiotic rag on your head, then I'm allowed to laugh.

Freddie: **(Removes his hairnet)** Go ahead. Laugh. Laugh all you want. I'll even laugh with you. **(Laughs. To Bella)** And you're not going to hear him in any first row at any concert. There's no concert. It's all lies.

Enter Joel, carrying his suitcase.

Bella: **(To Freddie)** Tell him not to go.
 Freddie: He's going and he's not coming back.
 Joel: **(To Trudi)** I'd be happy if you'd come for a meal with me.
 Bella: **(To Trudi)** Tell him I'll cook for him.
 Freddie: Just a moment! How dare you ask her out? She's staying with me and eating with me.
 Joel: We'll find a taxi outside.
 Freddie: I told you she's staying here. **(Takes Joel's coat from the hanger and shoves it into his hands)** The concert's over. No applause. No encore either.
 Bella: **(To Freddie)** Tell him that all those years I heard him on the radio. I'd search for stations at night and listen. I'd know it was him even if they didn't say.
 Freddie: It was never him.
 Joel: **(To Bella)** If you had really heard me, you'd be able to talk to me.
 (Putting on his coat) Come on, Trudi.

Trudi picks up her coat. Freddie snatches it from her.

Freddie: **(To Joel)** She's not going with you. She's staying with me. And I'll tell you all why. Because she's my lover and she'll do what I say.
 Trudi: I'm not your lover and I won't do what you say.
 Freddie: Oh yes you will. That's why I brought you here. And don't deny that you're my lover after you begged me to tell her all night. **(To Joel)** Ask her if she's not my lover.
 Joel: I already have. She's Mother's nurse.
 Freddie: **(Angrily)** She's not. She's my lover. I brought her here as a nurse so that Mother wouldn't throw her out.

Trudi: You'd better stop, Freddie.

Freddie: Tell them what you are before I tell them where I brought you from.

Trudi: I'll tell them, alright. I've got a bigger mouth than you and I can spit further. I'm not your lover. I'm your mother's nurse.

Freddie: Last night you completely forgot that you're only her nurse.

Trudi: And you completely forgot that I remembered it very well.

Joel: I see she's your lover just like Ruth was. **(To Trudi)** If he hasn't got anything else to say about you we'd better get moving.

Freddie: I said she's staying!

Bella: **(Forcefully)** You're going, Freddie. Right now. You're going and not coming back. I don't want you in my house anymore. I'm not cooking for you and not doing your laundry and not sewing up any more holes in your underpants.

Freddie: I told you to shut your mouth, right?

Bella: If you don't leave now I'll tell them why you're not in such a hurry to catch your plane that's taking off for Italy in an hour.

Freddie: You can tell them whatever you like. **(To Trudi)** There's no need for them to see how far you can spit. Go to your room. I'll be with you in a minute.

Bella: If you don't leave I'll tell them about your office too, and what exactly you do there.

Freddie: You can tell them whatever you like. **(To Trudi)** I told you to go to your room!

Joel: She's coming with me, Freddie.

Trudi: **(To Joel)** I'll just change my dress.

Freddie: You'll just change your dress? I hope you've got one that fits.
(Angrily) If you go with him you'll never see me again. **(To Joel and Bella)** I won't lick her filthy ass. She says she's a nurse. That's true. A month ago she was working in a hospital. But she wasn't interested in the patients. She was interested in the doctors. That's why she always worked night shifts. And if you want to do with her what she did with the doctors, you can take her wherever you want. **(To Bella)** You'll hear more from me soon.

He throws the hairnet onto the floor and angrily leaves the house. Silence. Trudi has indeed been hurt.

Trudi: I think I'd better leave.
 Joel: Why?
 Trudi: You want to hear more about me?
 Joel: From him?
 Trudi: Bernard couldn't get a medical license. He hasn't worked for five years. I had to work night shifts.
 Joel: You don't have to explain. I don't believe a word he says. I'll just call a taxi.
 Trudi: In the morning he'll come with flowers and beg me to open the door for him.

Joel picks up the telephone directory, while removing his glasses to read the fine print

Bella: Tell him he shouldn't call any taxis. Sit down with him while I heat something up. And after we've eaten he'll play for me.

She exits to the kitchen.

Trudi: I'd better go.
 Joel: Wait a minute.

He puts his glasses on the couch, gets up and grasps her hands. After a moment he embraces and kisses her. She responds. The door opens suddenly with a bang. Enter Freddie together with Bernard. Joel and Trudi break apart. Joel goes back to the couch and sits down, searching frantically for his glasses.

Freddie: Look, you jerk! See who I've brought you.
 Joel: Just a minute. **(Cannot find his glasses)**
 Freddie: He was sitting the entrance waiting for her.
 Joel: **(Still looking for his glasses)** Just a minute.
 Bernard: I was on my way to the bus, Trudi. He dragged me here.
 Trudi: Enough, Bernard!
 Freddie: You were waiting for her!
 Joel: My glasses, Trudi. Where have I put them?

Bella, who has heard the shouting, hurries back from the kitchen.

Bella: Get out of here, Freddie!

Freddie: Tell them why you were waiting. Before I smash your face in.

Trudi: Stop it. Please stop it.

Freddie: What did you think? That you could spit all over my face and I'd dry it off with a fan?

Bella: Freddie, out!

Freddie: Let him tell her why he was sitting outside waiting.

Joel: Where are my glasses, dammit?

Freddie: Why were you waiting for her? **(Hits him)**

Bernard: I wasn't feeling well.

Freddie: **(Hits him)** He felt fine. He knows very well she's not just a nurse. He follows her everywhere to keep an eye on her! So he could come in at the right moment and stop her. And she thinks I'm going to marry her and give her half this house! She'll get fuck-all from me!

Bella: Get out of here, both of you!

Freddie: She's all yours. **(To Bella)** And you can take care of yourself, do you hear? I'm not bringing you any more medicine. And I won't lay a finger on your back ever again, even if you choke. Stupid cow. **(Exits)**

Bernard: Goodnight.

Exit Bernard. Bella slams the door behind him and locks it. Joel finds his glasses on the couch, but discovers that they are broken.

Joel: Dammit! I sat on them. They're broken! **(Holds the broken glasses)** I don't have a spare pair with me.

He sits down helplessly on the couch. Bella moves over to him. She puts her hand on his shoulder. He takes it. She strokes his head. He hugs her arm. Now, for the first time since he came into her house, she speaks to him directly.

Bella: I'll take them to be fixed in the morning. Your father's glasses also got broken sometimes. **(Takes the broken glasses from Joel's hands)**

Joel: Thank you, Mother.

Bella: And take this pill. You'll probably get a headache soon. **(Takes one from her pocket and hands it to him)**

Joel: Thank you.

He gets up and hugs her.

Joel: I'm sorry about what I said to you. Freddie always managed to drive me crazy.

Bella: And me. Every time I sat down at the piano with you, he would break a window at one of the neighbors. And the stories about doing business in all kinds of countries – it's hot air. I lend him money; he loses it. Now he's working at some old-age home. In maintenance. When someone dies, they give him a room for a few days and then he tells everyone he's flying to Italy to buy ships. Liar. He puts on his suit and goes off to pick up whores near the port. When Father was in the hospital he didn't even ask how he was. After the funeral he went off to play cards. I walked all the way home from the cemetery alone.

The doorbell rings.

Joel: It's him.

Bella: He hasn't got a key.

The doorbell rings again. Now the person outside tries to insert a key into the lock. He tries several keys. In the end he opens the door. To their astonishment, it is not Freddie, but a tall, well-built young man of about twenty-three years old. His head is almost clean-shaven and his shirt is torn.

Bella: **(Approaches him)** Who are you?

Man: Grandma?

Bella: What?

Joel: **(Identifies the voice, astonished)** Izzy? Is that you? **(Gets up and hurries towards him)** What are you doing here? Shouldn't you be in Los Angeles? **(Touches him. Runs his fingers over him)** Where are your curls? You've cut them off? **(Hugs him. Izzy grunts with pain)**

What's happened? My glasses are broken. What are you doing here?

Haven't you got any performances?

Izzy: Performances?

Joel: At the opera.

Izzy: Not at the moment. **(Silence)**

Joel: Has something happened? Have they fired you? Who fired you?

Izzy: I don't know what you're talking about.

Joel: Aren't you singing with the opera?

Izzy: Not exactly.

Bella: How did you open the door? How did you know where I lived?

Izzy: I knew.

Bella: Where from?

Izzy: He told me.

Joel: **(Amazed)** Me?

Izzy: A few years ago. **(To Bella)** I didn't have your phone number. I saw in the paper that Grandpa died, so I came to be with you. **(Darkness)**

End of Act One

ACT TWO

Scene Four

Late morning the next day. Joel, wearing a robe, is sitting at the piano playing the same Bach prelude he played at the beginning of Act One. He plays well, even without his glasses. Enter Trudi, carrying a suitcase. She puts the case down and caresses Joel's head. Joel, who has not seen the suitcase, finishes the prelude and turns to her.

- Joel: I hope nothing's wrong with him. He's been asleep for twelve hours.
- Trudi: It's still the middle of the night in Los Angeles.
- Joel: He's been very busy this year. I haven't seen him for a few months. I called now and again, but he's hardly ever in his apartment.
- Trudi: If he sleeps so soundly, then there's not much wrong with him.
- Joel: I didn't sleep very well. I had this pressure in my temples. Because of this fog. I can't suppress the desire of my eyes to see. Even if I close them, they continue feeling their way in the dark under my eyelids.
(She hasn't taken the hint) The massage you gave me yesterday was so soothing.
- Trudi: I'm leaving.
- Joel: Leaving?
- Trudi: I've already packed. When your mother gets back, I'll tell her.
- Joel: Why? We had an amazing night.
- Trudi: Now it's morning.
- Joel: Is it because of Freddie? He's just a pathetic janitor at a seedy old-age home.
- Trudi: He's not. Your mother made that up. He has an import-export office on Allenby Street.
- Joel: She wouldn't make up a story like that.
- Trudi: He might have worked at an old-age home once and she's got the times mixed up.
- Joel: Freddie's a crook. When he was ten he was already robbing collection boxes.
- Trudi: I'm not interested in Freddie anymore. My leave from the hospital is over. I've got to get back to work.
- Joel: And what about my mother?

Trudi: She doesn't need me.

Joel: Of course she needs you. **(He gets up)** She's not the easiest of women. She's bitter. She hasn't had much joy in her life, but if she's happy she'll change. I've been thinking about buying a house here. By the sea. I want her to live with me. She deserves it. And you do, too.

Trudi: What do I deserve?

Joel: To live in a better place. Work in a better place.

Trudi: Which is where?

Joel: Sooner or later she'll need you much more. When she comes with me to New York, you'll join us.

Trudi: **(Laughing)** To New York?

Joel: I've got quite a big apartment. Overlooking the ocean. We'll spend a few months there; a few months here. Perhaps a few months in Europe. You'll come to concerts with me. Devoting yourself to music can be very moving.

Trudi: You want me to go with you to America?

Joel: Why not?

Trudi: Just like that?

Joel: I'm American. I'll arrange a visa for you.

Trudi: Does your mother know about this?

Joel: My mother's no fool. She knows what side her bread's buttered.

Trudi: I've got to think about it. On the other hand, America's America.

Joel: We'll spend a few weeks here in the summer. I want to teach here. She can teach with me. Good music can change the world.

He gets up. Embraces her. Kisses her. Now the contact between them quickly heats up. Suddenly, Izzy appears in the passage, wearing pants and an undershirt. Joel hears him and lets Trudi go.

Joel: Izzy?

Izzy: Yes.

Joel: **(Turns to him)** Good morning. How're you feeling?

Izzy: Fine. **(To Trudi)** Good morning.

Trudi: Good morning. **(To Joel)** Your mother will probably be back in a few minutes. I should fix her something to eat. **(She picks up the case and exits into the passage)**

Joel: **(To Izzy)** How did you sleep?

Izzy: Okay.

Joel: Where are you going?

Izzy: The shower.

Joel: Wait a minute. **(He moves closer to see him better. He touches his arm. Izzy recoils)** What happened?

Izzy: I told you, I hurt my arm.

Joel: When did you tell me?

Izzy: I told you.

Joel: Your arm?

Izzy: Yes.

Joel: **(Touches it carefully)** It's broken, isn't it?

Izzy: I don't know.

Joel: It's broken. I can feel it.

Izzy: Maybe.

Joel: You should go to the hospital.

Izzy: It'll be all right.

Joel: How did it happen?

Izzy: I fell.

Joel: How?

Izzy: I fell down the stairs.

Joel: **(Finds this hard to believe)** And you're hoarse as well.

Izzy: It's no problem.

Joel: Can you sing like that?

Izzy: Yes.

Joel: Are you sure?

Izzy: Yes.

Joel: So what are you doing here? Don't you have performances? Rehearsals? Has the opera suddenly taken a break in the middle of the season?

Izzy: Are you interrogating me?

Joel: I just want to know.

Izzy: What?

Joel: Something's happened. Have you left the opera? Have they fired you?

Izzy: Nothing's happened.

Joel: Who fired you? The director? The conductor? I want to know why. You're a wonderful singer. They can't fire you without good reason. Do you want me to call them?

Izzy: No.

Joel: Why not?

Izzy: Because!

Joel: I hope you're not in any kind of trouble.

Izzy: Of course not.

Joel: Then what are you doing here?

Izzy: What do you care?

Trudi peeks in from the kitchen

Trudi: Do you want coffee?

Izzy: Yes, please.

Trudi: Something to eat?

Izzy: Yes. Sure. **(She returns to the kitchen)**

Joel: You can speak freely. I've nothing to hide from her.

Izzy: Neither have I.

Joel: So talk. What's happened?

Izzy: What do you want me to say? Nothing's happened.

Joel: Do you want me to call Los Angeles? The police? It's happened before. **(Pause)** Why don't you answer?

Izzy: I've got nothing to say.

Joel: We should go to the hospital. I'll cancel my meeting at the Philharmonic.

Izzy: I'm not going to any hospital.

Joel: Why not?

Izzy: Because.

Joel: All right. I'll call and ask them to send a doctor. When Grandma gets back with my glasses we'll call a taxi and get your things.

Izzy: What things?

Joel: Your suitcase.

Izzy: I don't have any suitcase.

Joel: **(Feels his clothes)** You came from America like this?

Izzy: Leave me alone. Why are you hassling me?

Joel: I'm hassling you? **(Izzy is silent)** If you need anything, just say so. You've got money?

Izzy: I don't need anything.

Izzy moves away from him. Enter Trudi carrying a breakfast tray.

Joel: **(To Trudi)** I don't think he's feeling well; we should get him a doctor. Do you know anyone who would come now?

Izzy: I feel fine.

The sound of a key being inserted into the front door lock is heard. The door opens. Enter Bella, locking the door behind her. She is wearing high heels, her hair is beautifully styled and her clothes elegant.

Trudi: **(Surprised)** Bella!

Bella: **(To Joel)** Here are your glasses. **(Gives them to him)** I was lucky to get a discount. They thought they were your father's who had risen from the dead.

Joel: **(After putting on his glasses)** Mother!

Bella: Yes, I'm a widow but I'm not dead yet. I'll be in the front row at your concert, and everyone will see how proud I am.

Joel: Compared to you the prima donnas at the Metropolitan look like chorus girls.

Bella: **(To Izzy)** I see the young man is up, too.

Izzy: Good morning.

Bella: A very good morning. **(To Joel)** He doesn't look a bit like you. Perhaps around the eyes. I hope **you** won't need glasses.

Izzy: My eyes are fine, Grandma.

Bella: “Grandma”! He said “Grandma” again. Did you hear?

Izzy: I told you I’ve come to be with you for a while, Grandma.

Joel: He always wanted you to be his teacher. He’ll sing something for you and you’ll hear what a voice he has. In the summer he sang Papageno in The Magic Flute.

Bella: **(To Izzy)** You sang Papageno? I want to hear. **(To Joel)** Sit down and play for him.

Joel: **(Looks at Izzy)** What’s happened to you? You’ve lost weight. You’re pale. You’ve got rings under your eyes. **(To Bella)** I haven’t seen him for six months.

Izzy: A year.

Joel: I saw you in The Magic Flute.

Izzy: I don’t know what you’re talking about.

Joel: **(Stunned)** I went to Los Angeles especially to hear you.

Izzy: That was *two* years ago.

Joel: It was last summer. In July. The Bicentennial celebrations had just started.

Izzy: Maybe.

Bella: Perhaps it was a year ago. What does it matter? What matters is that he’s here. What matters is that his grandma will hear him .

Joel: Why are you saying it was two years ago? You must remember. There were fireworks all night long.

Izzy: You didn’t remember giving me Grandma’s address.

Bella: What does it matter who remembers what? We won’t let our memories confuse us. Now, you stand by the piano and sing.

Joel: I’ll accompany you. **(Moves to the piano)** Do you remember Papageno’s aria from the end of the first act?

Izzy: I’m not sure I can sing right now.

Joel: I’m leaving for the Philharmonic in a few minutes.

Izzy: I just got up. I haven’t had breakfast yet. I haven’t even had a cup of coffee.

Bella: **(To Joel)** You didn’t give him something to eat?

Joel: And how could you have forgotten that you sang it last summer? And why are you scared of telling me how you broke your arm?

Bella: He'll have something to eat, he'll drink and he'll remember.

Bella pours a cup of coffee and offers it to him. Suddenly, someone trying to open the front door is heard. He inserts a key, but it does not fit. He rings the bell.

Joel: It's him again.

Bella: **(To Trudi)** Don't open it.

The door is suddenly kicked open. Enter Freddie. He is obviously a little drunk. In his agitation, he does not see Izzy. He addresses Bella.

Freddie: I checked with the Philharmonic. Nobody there even knows his name.

Bella: We heard you. Now go get a carpenter.

Freddie: I'm telling you that nobody invited him to play here.

Joel: We're not kids anymore, Freddie. If you've got something to say, I'm listening.

Freddie: I don't want to listen any more. **(To Bella)** Open your eyes. He wasn't a pianist there and he isn't a pianist here. **(He sees her hairdo)** What's this idiotic hairdo? For his concert? I'm telling you that there's no concert. **(To Trudi)** I spoke with Zubin Mehta's secretary. Here's her number, call her. **(She does not reply)** I went to buy you some flowers but the shop was shut. I'm sorry I said those things yesterday. I'm sorry I ever brought you here. I'm sorry I ever asked you to take care of her.

Bella: Instead of being so sorry, go get a carpenter.

Joel: I haven't come to rob you of anything, Freddie.

Freddie: I've heard that too many times. **(To Bella)** Call the Philharmonic! Do you want me to do it?

Bella: You're drunk, Fredkeh.

Freddie: I'm not Fredkeh! **(To Trudi)** Don't you want to know who he is and what he is?

Bella: In another minute you'll throw up on the carpet, Fredkeh!

Freddie: I'm not Fredkeh! **(To Trudi)** I'm telling you he's not who he says he is. He's always been a liar. **(She remains silent)** Okay, I'll call them. **(Dials)** I don't understand what you see in him. Look, I promised we'd

get married. That we'd live in this house. And you promised you'd move your things in. We agreed, didn't we? **(On the phone)** Yes. Maestro Mehta's secretary, please... Yes, hello Sarah. It's Frederick. I was in your office this morning... Yes. Frederick... with the red tie... tell me, honey, are you sure you haven't invited an American pianist for tomorrow's concert?... Are you sure?... Yes, thank you, honey... Of course I'll come. And I'll bring you some flowers. **(Slams the phone down)** You see?

Joel: Stop talking crap, 'Frederick'.

Freddie: **(To Bella)** And I'll tell you something else about him. He came back here because he's flat broke. He heard that Father died and he thinks that if he stays with you for a few days, he'll have a claim on the house. **(To Trudi)** This house is mine. I'll move my office into here. I'll stop traveling abroad. Anybody wanting to do business with me can do it here.

Joel: I don't need the house. I'm going back to America in two days.

Freddie: **(To Bella)** He's not going back to America in two days. He's going to stay here until you die. But he's forgotten that I have a say. **(To Joel)** And I won't let you stay here for another day!

Joel: I haven't asked your permission.

Freddie: And you're not going anywhere near her **(Trudi)** again. I've got a room here, and there's a bed in that room, and I'll put in another bed, and she'll live with me. **(To Trudi)** We've finished playing games. Go move your things into my room!

Trudi: Enough, Freddie. Calm down.

Freddie: Don't tell me "calm down".

Joel: I've got a suggestion, Freddie. I'm meeting Maestro Mehta in less than an hour.

Freddie: I'm not interested in your meetings. You can get out of here right now!

Bella: This is still my house, Freddie, and I will decide who goes.

Freddie: You shut your mouth.

Bella: One more word and you won't get a brick from this house.

Freddie: One more word and I'll throw you into an old-age home! Hear me?
An old-age home! (**Addresses her directly**) And tomorrow I'm becoming your legal guardian. If you open your mouth one more time, I'll have you committed to a closed ward.

Shocked, Bella retreats before him. Izzy sticks out his foot to trip Freddie. The surprised Freddie falls to the floor. Only now does he see Izzy.

Freddie: (**Leaps at him**) Who's this animal?
Joel: (**To Izzy**) This is Freddie, Izzy.
Freddie: His son? You're here too?
Joel: (**To Izzy**) I'm sure you remember him. He hasn't changed much.
Freddie: He doesn't remember anything, the bastard. There's nothing worth remembering. (**Tries to hit Izzy**) Do you want to steal something from me too?
Joel: Leave him alone!
Freddie: He did that on purpose. (**Izzy defends himself with ease**)
Joel: He's got a broken arm! (**Izzy groans in pain**)
Freddie: His arm's broken and his eye's swollen. This animal's an opera singer?
Joel: Have you ever seen an opera singer?
Freddie: And the boy isn't his either. His wife probably slept with some sailor and then told him he was the father.
Joel: We've heard that too many times, Freddie.
Freddie: (**Gives up and turns to Trudi**) Please, Trudi!
Trudi: After what you said about me yesterday you can't ask anything of me. (**Derisively**) Go to Italy and buy car covers. You've probably got a plane to catch.
Freddie: One more word, Trudi, and I'll belt you.
Trudi: You're not belting anyone because you won't see me again. I'm going to America with him. In two days I won't be here.
Freddie: You're going to America with him?
Joel: Yes.
Freddie: I didn't ask you.
Trudi: Yes, I am.

Freddie: But I'm telling you that he's not going to America. He's not a pianist. He's a liar. He's got no concerts. You heard me speaking to the secretary.

Joel: And the secretary realized right off that you're a janitor at an old-age home and cut you off.

Freddie: What old-age home? Is that what she [Bella] told you? That I work at an old age home? She doesn't know what she's talking about.

Joel: She knows a lot better than you.

Freddie: **(To Trudi)** Are you stupid or what? Can't you see she's senile? Can't you see he's a liar? If what you heard from the secretary wasn't enough, then take a look at this. I went to the biggest music store in town. I took some record catalogs, look. **(Takes a sheaf of catalogs from his pocket)** For two hours I searched for one word about him. There's nothing. There's not even a hole in a record under his name. And I'll show you something else.

Freddie throws the catalogs onto the floor and exits into the passage. Joel leaves through them.

Joel: These are local company catalogs. I work with CBS, EMI, Deutsche Gramophone. There isn't a music lover anywhere in the world who would buy records of this quality.

Freddie returns with Joel's suitcase and empties its contents onto the floor.

Freddie: **(To Trudi)** What is there here that proves he's a pianist? What? A pianist wears a tuxedo at concerts. A long jacket with tails, right? Where's his tuxedo? Where's his music? He memorizes everything? He rents a second-hand tuxedo at the flea market?

Joel: Tuxedos are very expensive, Freddie. You don't fold them up in a suitcase next to your toothpaste and shaving foam.

Freddie: What tuxedo? Let him tell us. I want to know what tuxedo he'll be wearing at the concert.

Joel: I will wear one of the three that I had sent to the Philharmonic from New York in a special case, with my music.

- Freddie: (To Trudi) And you believe him? (To Bella) Anyone can say he's sent a suitcase with three tuxedos to the Philharmonic. (**Continues rifling through the case**) Here, look. See his passport? He says he travels all over the world. So where are the stamps? Where are the visas?
- Joel: In every civilized country, your passport is changed every ten years.
- Freddie: And just now you had to change it?
- Joel: What are you trying to prove, Freddie? That your jealousy has pushed you over the edge? (To Trudi and Bella) This nothing who repairs dripping faucets at a broken-down old-age home can't admit that his brother is doing something a little more important.
- Freddie: Look at his airline ticket! The famous pianist flies economy class!
- Joel: I bought my ticket at the last minute and that's all there was. When I boarded the plane, there was a seat available in business class.
- Freddie: My God! He hasn't got a return flight. He never intended to go back, see? He's got no concerts here and he's got no concerts there. Open your eyes. This man is a fraud. He heard that Father died and he wants the house. (**Waves the ticket**)

Joel loses some of his self-assurance. He takes off his robe, under which he is wearing underwear, picks up a pair of pants, a shirt, and a jacket that Freddie had thrown on the floor, and starts to dress.

- Joel: I don't need to explain to this idiot how you buy airline tickets today. (To Freddie) By phone. And if you're really flying to Italy tomorrow, go into any music shop in Rome and you'll find a list of my recordings, the reviews, and the concert schedule for the next five years. (To the two women) But he'll discover everything tomorrow when he sees me walk onstage, when Zubin Mehta raises his baton. Then he'll see exactly who I am and who he is. And if you can't wait until tomorrow, "Frederick", then come to the Philharmonic with me now. (**He exits**)
- Freddie: Why are you looking at me like that? Anyone can send me to check music shops in Rome. He came here because he's broke. (To Trudi) And he doesn't only want the house. He's taking you too. He's

robbing me of everything, and he's still not satisfied. I've never met a shit like him in my life. And his son? I'm not blind. This is an opera singer? This is a crook. He won't take him to the hospital because he'll have to explain how his arm got broken. **(To Izzy)** Right or wrong? **(Izzy remains silent)** And he didn't go to the Philharmonic. There's no one waiting for him there, certainly not Zubin Mehta.

Bella: They are waiting for him. Everyone is waiting, like I did. When he was seven everyone knew what a great pianist he would become. No one played like him. People came here from all over the world to hear him. From the moment you realized it, you didn't let him live.

Freddie: I didn't let him live?

Bella: Yes, you.

Freddie: Okay, I didn't let him live. Did he let me? Did I have a life? Did anybody ever put me onto their list? From the day I was born, everyone's pissed on me because of him. **(Calms down)** All right. I'll go after him to the Philharmonic. I want to see him going into Zubin Mehta's office and talking to him with my own eyes. If he's got a concert tomorrow, I'll cut off my prick.

Freddie turns to leave. He makes a threatening gesture towards Izzy. Izzy recoils and lets out a groan. Freddie exits. Izzy is in great pain. Trudi examines him.

Trudi: He's burning up. **(Touches Izzy's arm)** The bone should be set. **(She presses on the site of the fracture. Izzy groans)** It's all right now. **(To Bella)** Have you got any bandages? **(Bella shakes her head)** Cut up a sheet. I've got to splint it.

Exit Bella to the passage. Trudi and Izzy remain. She examines him again.

Trudi: A car accident, right? Don't worry, I won't tell anybody. You seem pretty tough to me. Most men faint when they have a bone reset. You've got a bruise here. You don't complain, do you?

Izzy: No.

Trudi: You don't look like anyone in this family.

Izzy: I know. (**Pause**) Freddie's just a jerk, but my father's a real bastard. He'll drive you out of your mind and then make you beg his pardon.

Trudi: Really?

Izzy: He's fooling you too.

Trudi: Maybe you're trying to fool me.

Izzy: I got your number right away. I could see you don't talk too much about the weather.

Trudi: And I got yours. I can see why they threw you out of the opera in your eyes.

He laughs. Bella returns holding some strips of sheet. She stops in the doorway. They do not see her.

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

Trudi: He's gone to a meeting at the Philharmonic.

Izzy: He probably met Zubin Mehta in New York and wouldn't leave him alone. He could fix a meeting with God himself.

Trudi: He's very good.

Izzy: That's what you think. I know him like a hunchback knows his hump. Every place I run to, he follows me. He tells everyone that he's played at the White House and had his picture on the cover of Time Magazine. It's all lies. He accompanied a children's choir from a Washington temple when the president came to light a Hannukah candle. And his Time cover; you can see him in the audience applauding Leonard Bernstein. He can't fix me a role at any opera house. Only *he* thinks he's a great pianist. Even his "charm" is a lie. You're not the first he's asked to live with him. He tells every woman he meets, that he has a migraine, and then asks her to massage his temples.

Trudi: Is that right?

Izzy: And that shit still thinks the whole world owes him something. America was hell for us. Do you know what he did to my mother when she left him? Sold their apartment and blew the money on a record no one bought.

Trudi: But he's *got* money.

Izzy: No, he doesn't.

Trudi: He offered me a ticket.

Izzy: He'll offer you the world, but he can't give you a damn thing. Ten years ago he spent eight months in jail.

Trudi: He was in jail?

Izzy: He went to Paris. He stole a Barenboim recording and tried to sell it in New York as his. It was in all the papers.

Trudi: Well if it was in the papers, then he must be famous .

Izzy: The story wasn't about him. It was about Barenboim.

Trudi: I don't believe you.

Izzy: Freddie's right about one thing. He came here to cheat Grandma and sell her house.

Trudi: That's impossible.

Izzy: Why? Because he told you a different story? Lying's in his blood. That's why I came. If he sells her house, I'm left with nothing. But I'm not a guy who gives up. When I was a kid, I used to walk in this street. I'd peep in through the windows. I always knew that this was my house. Nobody will get me out of here. Just as soon as my arm gets better, I'll start doing business. An offshore casino. With a bar. Music. Dancers. I've got some investors from Florida. With a body like yours you'd make millions with me. **(He slips his hand into her blouse)**

Trudi: **(Angrily)** Take your hands off me! **(Slaps him)** I don't even listen to such propositions.

Izzy: Really? And what kind of a proposition did he make you? I saw your face while you were kissing him.

Trudi: You didn't see anything!

Izzy: And once you got to America and gotten citizenship, you'd leave him for the first guy to make you a better proposition.

Trudi: That's not true!

Izzy: You can't fool me, honey.

Trudi: Don't you call me "honey". A casino. Don't make me laugh. You talk like you've got a blank check in your pocket. You look like lying is in your blood. I suggest you be careful. Don't open an account with me,

because in the end I settle all my accounts. I know exactly where to stick an enema.

Trudi turns to leave through the passage. She sees Bella, passes her and exits. Darkness.

Scene Five

That evening. Bella is sitting crossly in an armchair. She is wearing a pair of old slippers, her hairdo is a mess and her dress is disheveled. Joel is heard from the passage, knocking on the bathroom door.

Joel: But why don't you sit down and tell us what happened? (**Trudi does not reply**) And we've got to fill in your visa application. The ambassador said we should bring it in the morning. (**He knocks again**) Why don't you answer? Don't you feel well? (**She does not reply**) Afterwards we'll have lunch with Maestro Mehta. He was very happy to hear that you'll join us. (**She does not reply**) If you don't tell me what happened I can't help you.

She does not reply. Joel gives up, comes out of the passage and addresses Bella.

Joel: What have you done to her? Did you hit her? Insult her? Have you dirtied her so much that she's got to lie in the bath for three hours?

Bella: I hope she's already drowned.

Joel: Mother, I'm forty-eight years old. You can't drive away every woman I want.

Bella: She's not for you. She's Freddie's whore.

Joel: She's not a whore.

Bella: She sleeps with him every night. Here. I'll never sit on this couch for the rest of my life.

Joel: She doesn't sleep with him.

Bella: And not only with him.

Joel: You believe Freddie?

Bella: I've seen it with my own eyes. In the hospital too. She's not only a whore, she's a murderer. She murdered your father too.

Joel: (Angrily) She's not a murderer. I asked her. Father died of natural causes.

Bella: And you believe her?

Joel: Yes.

He sits down on the couch. Bella gets up and moves towards him.

Bella: A great pianist needs a wife who'll believe in him. Who'll encourage him. Give him strength. He needs to know that if he climbs mountain peaks to play he'll still have enough air to breathe. That if he can't hang on by his fingernails and slips into the abyss, he won't be shattered into smithereens. In the long nights I sat here listening to you, the notes told me everything. If you'd had a good wife you really would have been a great pianist.

Joel: Ruth was a wonderful wife.

Bella: So wonderful that I don't even want to hear her name.

Joel: In our first years in America she supported me devotedly.

Bella: She didn't support you. She ruined you. (**He remains silent**) The day you sat down at the piano I knew that you could become the greatest pianist in the world. I went on believing, even after you left. And now you're back, and what do I see?

Joel: What do you see?

Bella: I see what I've been hearing all these years. Your playing is exactly like your life.

Joel: What's so bad about my life?

Bella: Nothing at all. Just that you haven't got a wife. You haven't got a home. And you don't have any concerts. That way you'll never be able to touch the stars.

Joel: I haven't got a home?!

Bella: You sold it.

Joel: And I bought the apartment in Manhattan.

Bella: Not true.

Joel: Just a minute. How do you know I sold my house?

Bella: I know all kinds of things.

Joel: What things?

Bella: That you went to jail.

Joel: I went where?

Bella: To jail.

Joel: Me? **(Laughs)** Are you crazy? Who told you this rubbish? **(She does not reply)** I asked you a question!

Bella: He told her.

Joel: Izzy? Now I understand why she's hiding in the bathroom. How could he tell her such a thing? I've got a home. I'm one of the world's best pianists. I have hundreds of concerts to play. I'm divorced, that's all. Forty percent of American couples get divorced. If he thinks he can say I was in jail and go to sleep, he's mistaken.

He turns towards the passage. The doorbell rings. He stops. The door opens and Bernard enters.

Bernard: Good evening. I rang the bell and no one answered. The door was open, so...

Joel: It's broken. We haven't managed to call a carpenter.

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

Joel: This isn't a good time for a visit, Mr...

Bernard: Bernard. I've brought the paper for Trudi.

Joel: She's busy at the moment. She's in the bathroom. And my son has just arrived and he's ill.

Bernard: Then it's a good thing I'm here. I would be happy to examine him.

Joel: He's asleep. He'll probably be asleep for another few hours.

Bernard: Excellent! In the meantime I can repair the sink in the toilet.

Joel: Thank you very much, but there's no need. We've called a plumber.

Bernard: I promised to fix it and fix it I will. **(Takes out a rubber washer)** I found a spare washer at home.

Joel: My dear sir, I'm asking you to leave and close the door behind you.

Bernard: **(Firmly)** The sink is leaking! I walked a long way from home and I won't accept such rudeness! Even a great artist should behave

decently. **(Looks at him)** Now I remember where I heard you. Bucharest. You played Rachmaninov. You're not such a great pianist at all. I was sitting next to President Ceausescu. You played so badly that he refused to shake your hand at the end of the concert.

Joel: He refused to shake my hand? I refused to shake his! That bloody tyrant threw scores of writers and musicians into jail.

Bernard: The most provincial of Romanian orchestras wouldn't play with you.

Izzy comes into the living room. His arm is bandaged with strips of sheet. He is in great pain. Bernard immediately changes his tone and again becomes amazingly calm and polite.

Bernard: And this young man must be your son. **(To Izzy)** A pleasure. My name is Bernard. Trudi's husband. Former husband, that is. What happened to your arm? Who bandaged it so sloppily?

Joel: Please leave!

Bernard: You're pale, young man. You've got a fever. You should see a doctor. I was a department head at a big hospital in Bucharest. Despite your pride, you people suffer from exactly the same illnesses as everybody else.

Izzy: I don't need any doctor.

Bernard: **(Touches him)** The arm is broken. You might have some internal bleeding or an infection. You should have it X-rayed. **(Looks at him)** A car accident, yes? You should be taken to hospital, my young friend. Actually, I might just have some antibiotics with me. **(Searches his pocket, finds a pack of pills, and gives it to Izzy)** For any kind of infection you might have. Three a day. I'll come back and examine you again tomorrow.

Joel: Thank you very much, sir.

Bernard: Bernard.

Joel: I must insist that you leave. We are in the middle of a small family discussion.

Bernard: I promised your mother that I would repair the sink, and my word is my bond. **(Exits towards the toilet)**

Izzy: **(To Joel)** Who locked my door? You?

Joel: Which door?

Izzy: Of the room I slept in. Nobody locks me in, don't you remember?
Nobody locks me in because there isn't a lock I can't open.

Joel: Since when have I locked doors?

Izzy: Since always.

Joel: Me?

Bella: I locked it.

Izzy: You? But Grandma.

Bella: And don't call me 'Grandma'.

Joel: Don't I have a home? I want to know. Don't I have concerts?

Izzy: You haven't got a home. You haven't got any concerts. You always follow me. You sit in rehearsals, make comments to the singers, criticize the orchestra, argue with the conductor. Because of you, they threw me out of the opera.

Joel: They took you *in* because of me. If I hadn't spoken to the director, he would have thrown you out before you even opened your mouth.

Izzy: And no other opera will even look at me because they all know you'll be there right after me. Now you heard that I was coming to visit Grandma, so you followed me here too.

Joel: I followed you here?!

Izzy: I got held up on the way, so you got here before me.

Joel: Who could have told me you were coming here?

Izzy: I did.

Joel: I don't understand. Is this some kind of game? When did I speak to you?

Izzy: **(To Bella)** He knows very well when he spoke to me. He doesn't want you to know. He doesn't want you to know anything. But I'll tell you. Maybe here they think he knows how to play. Maybe he really did once. But when he got to America he discovered that what's good enough for here isn't good enough there. He discovered that there he wasn't worth a damn. That he was just a little tiny zero. And once he discovered how little he was, he decided to climb on me so people would think he was big. That's why he forced me to become an opera singer.

Joel: I forced you?

Izzy: Now you'll probably say that you don't remember this either. **(He shows him his wrists and addresses Bella)** After the premiere of The Magic Flute in Los Angeles, I slashed my veins. I was not the only one who realized during the applause that. that I'd never be able to sing Papageno.

Joel: It's not true.

Izzy: And that night you went back to New York.

Joel: That night you came to my hotel. We had a drink in the bar. Then we went up onto the roof to watch the fireworks.

Izzy: **(To Bella)** Look.

He holds out his hands to her. She refuses to look at them. The door opens. Enter Freddie.

Freddie: You still here? I thought that after your visit to the Philharmonic you'd sneak home, take your case and leave quietly so that nobody would see the disgrace.

Joel: What disgrace? The meeting was postponed till tomorrow because Zubin Mehta's unwell.

Freddie: **(To Bella)** Zubin Mehta is as healthy as an ox.

Joel: You heard me talking to him on the phone. Do you want a note from his doctor?

Freddie: You tried to talk to him. The secretary wouldn't put you through. **(To Bella)** When he argued with her she called the police.

Joel: What police?

Freddie: Lucky for you the cop was polite and didn't beat up on you.

Joel: It was a security guard who asked me to identify my case with the music and tuxedos from New York.

Freddie: I saw it with my own eyes. The cop thought you were a loony so he let you go.

Joel: **(To Bella)** This man is out of his mind.

- Freddie: And on the way home I stopped to buy a paper, and by chance I found the Philharmonic's program. **(Shows Bella)** Who's playing tomorrow? Him? No, not him! You won't find a single letter of his name here.
- Bella: I don't care what the papers say, Freddie. I know that he's a great pianist. You know it too.
- Joel: **(Looks)** These programs are given to the papers a month in advance.
- Freddie: And it's impossible to make last minute changes?
- Joel: What are you arguing about? Come to the concert tomorrow and hear me.

Trudi and Bernard appear at the end of the passage and observe what is taking place. Joel does not see them

- Freddie: I'll be happy to, but I'd be even happier to hear an answer to another question first. When a pianist appears with an orchestra, he has to rehearse with it, doesn't he? He doesn't just sit down at the piano and begin playing before the audience. So when are you rehearsing with the Philharmonic? **(To Bella)** If he's got a concert tomorrow, why is he sitting here scratching his balls?
- Joel: Answer him. You know very well that when a pianist like me comes to play with the Philharmonic, he doesn't need to rehearse. **(To Freddie)** In thirty minutes I'll explain to the orchestra how I want them to play.
- Freddie: You're so great? I never imagined.
- Joel: I never imagined you could.
- Bella: He's a great pianist, Freddie. He always was.
- Freddie: So how is it that only you and he know it?
- Joel: What do you want, Freddie? What's the matter with you? I don't remember you being such a fool eighteen years ago.
- Freddie: I don't think I heard an answer. How is it that nobody in the world knows how great you are?
- Bella: **(Angrily)** He's the greatest pianist in the world. When he was seventeen he played with the world's greatest orchestras. All the famous conductors came to hear him.

Trudi takes a step into the room.

Trudi: If you want us to know what a great pianist you are, then show us.

Joel: Trudi.

Trudi: Show us how you play.

Joel: You already know. You heard me.

Trudi: When?

Joel: Yesterday and this morning.

Trudi: Then play again.

Joel: This morning I sat here on this stool, at this piano, and played Bach for you.

Freddie: She doesn't remember.

Joel: Of course she does.

Trudi: If you play it again, I'll remember.

Joel: After I'd played we decided to go to America together.

Trudi: I'll go to America with you only when I'm sure that you play the way you say.

Joel: Aren't you sure?

Trudi: No.

Bernard: You decided to go to America? **(Laughs)**

Joel: Yes.

Bernard: **(To Trudi)** Only yesterday I was at the American embassy to apply for a visa. **(To Joel)** Just imagine us meeting on the plane. **(Laughs)** or at the airport. or in the Subway. New York may be a big city but people don't disappear in it.

Izzy: She wants you to play, so play.

Freddie: Play!

Izzy: Let him show us he's the greatest. Let him show us why the Philharmonic has to play as he wants.

Joel: And you're going to test me?

Izzy: We all will.

Freddie: Come on then, let's hear you.

Joel: What happened here, Mother? Maybe you tell me what's gone wrong?

Freddie: Play!

Joel: And you'll judge my playing? Can you tell the difference between a military band and a string quartet?

Izzy: I can.

Joel: I know exactly what you can.

Freddie: She knows. She's the best piano teacher in the country.

Izzy: Play what you're going to play with the Philharmonic tomorrow.

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

Freddie: He's right. He can't play it without the Philharmonic. **(To Joel)** So play something you don't need an orchestra for. Whatever you like.

Joel: I don't think I want to play for you.

Freddie: Don't you want to show us you're a pianist?

Joel: Why should I want to show you anything? Who are you?

Freddie: **(Loses his patience)** Play!! If you don't play right now, I'll break all your fingers! You're not leaving here before we all know how good you are. I'm not going to live all my life in the fear that maybe one day you'll come back, and we'll all have to bend our knee again and admit how great you are.

Freddie grabs Joel by the collar and threatens him with his clenched fist, but Joel is unmoved by his threats.

Joel: You know exactly how great I am. **(To Trudi)** I'm one of the best pianists in America, Trudi. I'm a wealthy man. I've got a penthouse on 57th Street in Manhattan. I have a summer home in Connecticut, with a lake and a boat. I didn't want to tell you because I didn't want to sound arrogant. **(To Bella)** And I wasn't in any jail. Ten years ago I spent one night in a police cell because I took part in a demonstration against the Vietnam War. Two days later I gave a concert in New York.

Izzy: He didn't give any concert in New York. He played at weddings and funerals. Sometimes he'd get work in some temple on Independence Day.

Trudi: If you don't play right now I'm taking my case and leaving.

Joel: Don't you remember the Bach prelude?

Trudi: So play it again.

Joel: I'll play when I want to play.

Izzy: And you think that if you play you'll be forgiven?

Joel: Who has to forgive me? For what?

Trudi: **(To Joel)** I wasn't born yesterday and you can't fool me with Chanel perfume on your collar and a few dollars in your wallet. Tomorrow you'll tell me that the concert was cancelled because the conductor died. And when we get to America you'll tell me that the orchestra has closed down. That your house has been destroyed in an earthquake, your boat has sunk and the lake dried up.

Joel: I don't understand. Are you blind? Can't you see who I am?

Trudi: **(Angrily)** Am *I* blind? Me?

She moves closer to him and without warning tears the glasses from his face, throws them down, and stamps on them.

Freddie: **(Admiringly)** Son of a bitch.

Joel: Where are my glasses? Where are they? **(Feels around on the floor)**
They're broken.

Trudi: ***I'm*** blind?

Joel: **(Still on the floor)** Why did you break them? Did you think I wouldn't be able to see without them? I see much better now. Now you can't deceive me with appearances. I can see how afraid you are.

Freddie: You can't even swat a fly. **(Laughs)**

Joel: But if I play, you'll see who you are, how your hatred has poisoned you.

Freddie: If you can, then play.

Joel: All right! I'll play!

Joel opens the piano lid and begins to play the Bach prelude he played earlier. After a brief moment, he stops.

Joel: (To Trudi) I played it for you this morning, Trudi. We were alone.
My mother had gone to have my glasses repaired.

Trudi: I don't remember.

Joel: Of course you remember!

Freddie: She's saying she doesn't remember.

Joel: I didn't ask you. (To Trudi) You're still here?

Trudi: Yes.

Joel: All right, I'll play and you'll remember. (**Plays a few notes**) There are only two other pianists in the world who can play Bach like me. God, what a headache. (**Stops and turns to them**) I really see you much better now. You've failed. All of you. You've been defeated. That's why you're so desperate. (To Trudi) You're still here, aren't you?

Trudi: Yes.

Joel: And you, Mother?

Freddie: We're still sitting waiting and we'll applaud in a minute.

Trudi: Play already.

Joel: I've just played!

Trudi: When?

Joel: A minute ago!

Freddie laughs.

Joel: All right, all right, I'm playing. (**He sits at the piano, but suddenly closes the lid and turns to Trudi**) You broke my glasses because you too have been poisoned here too.

Freddie: Are we going to wait all day for you to play?

Trudi: I broke your glasses because you're not a pianist. You can't even play something simple.

She leaves through the passage. Bernard hurries after her. Joel gets up and strides towards the passage.

Joel: Wait. Don't go. Don't give up so quickly. (**She does not come back**)
I'm giving you the chance of a lifetime.

He bumps into the door jamb, gives up and comes back to the middle of the room, but cannot find his way to the piano. Bella gets up from the armchair and blocks Joel's way to the piano.

Bella: Don't lay a finger on this piano again.
 Joel: Have you got any aspirin?
 Bella: And I thought I could still teach you a few things you don't know.
(Firmly) Get out of this house.
 Joel: I've got a headache, Mother.
 Bella: I wish I'd died before seeing you like this.
 Joel: I won't play with a gun to my head.
 Bella: A great pianist can't be so naïve. A great pianist can't allow a woman like that to trample him.
 Joel: I am a great pianist.
 Bella: This was the only thing that kept me going in this filthy life. That I thought you were the best in the world.
 Joel: I am.
 Bella: If you were a great pianist you wouldn't need glasses to see. You'd see what she is without them . You'd see what your brother and your son are. and if you're unable to see them, you can't play.
 Joel: I can see them, and I can play.
 Bella: Not your eyes are blind. Your heart is blind.

Bella has a violent attack of coughing and collapses into the armchair. Joel sits at the piano. Freddie hurries to Bella, takes an inhaler from her pocket, sticks it into her mouth and puts in the medication.

Freddie: No, you're not going to die before he leaves. **(To Joel)** And you get your suitcase and get the hell out of here.. **(Exits to bring the suitcase)**
 Joel: First I'll play.

He opens the keyboard lid, overcomes his hesitancy and plays with all his genius. Bella stops coughing. She looks at him and listens. After a moment she lowers her eyes and starts weeping. After another moment Izzy moves quietly to the piano and slams the lid down on Joel's fingers. Joel yelps in pain.

Joel: Who did that? **(Focuses on Izzy)** It's you, Izzy. I can hear you breathing. That soft breathing I heard in your room every night after I put you to bed. Even then I could see how evil you were. I thought music would change you.

Izzy: You can shove your music up your ass.

Joel: That's all?

Izzy: That's all.

Joel is silent. Trudi enters carrying her suitcase, followed by Bernard. She stops by the door to put on her coat. Bernard helps her.

Bernard: Goodbye, it was nice meeting you. **(To Bella)** By the way, the sink has been resurrected. A little surgical experience, a little knowledge of draining fluids, and it's alive and kicking. **(To Izzy)** And don't forget, three tablets a day. I've just remembered that I read in this morning's paper about a car accident. Yesterday a young man stole a car at the airport, smashed another and left the scene.

Exit Trudi followed by Bernard. Freddie returns carrying Joel's suitcase and an old pair of glasses. He sees Trudi leaving and calls after her.

Freddie: Wait a minute. He's leaving. **(But she has gone. Freddie turns to Joel)** I found an old pair of Father's glasses. **(Joel refuses the glasses)** You don't want them? Don't take them. Take your case and get out of here.

Joel picks up his suitcase. He hesitates for a moment and turns to Bella.

Joel: Mother?

Freddie: **(Mockingly)** "Mother".

Joel: I must go. Thanks for everything. I hope that. I don't think I'll play here tomorrow. I don't think I'll visit here any time soon. I have to get back to New York. I've got a concert on Saturday. If there's anything you need...

Freddie: Leave already.

Joel: **(To Izzy)** If you need anything, then I'll...

Freddie: Get out!

He gets hold of Joel. The door suddenly opens. Enter Bernard.

Bernard: **(To Joel)** Excuse me, but about your concert tomorrow. I bought a ticket. I didn't want Trudi to go without me. Now I find that she's not going. So here you are. **(Puts the ticket on the table)** You look much better in that poster of yours they hanged all over the city. **(Laughs)** Break a leg.

Bernard and exits. Silence. Joel hesitates for a moment. Then he turns, picks up his suitcase and coat, and exits. Darkness.

CURTAIN