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FOR LEFT-HANDED PIANO WITH OBBLIGATO
By George Freek

THE CHARACTERS

JACK, In his 40s

DIANE, In her 40s

THE MAN, Perhaps 50

THE GIRL, In her 20s

THE PLACE

A room with a piano

THE TIME

Recently

ACT ONE, Scene 1

(In the dark, the opening of the 'Moonlight' Sonata can be heard. The music fades as the lights slowly come up on a room. It is empty except for a piano with bench in front and chair behind. There are also doors upstage left and downstage right. On the rear wall right is a poster of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers dancing. To the left, an astrological chart with the symbol of The Gemini. Between these posters there is a space, apparently, for a window which has a black shade pulled over it.

As the music ends and the lights come to full, JACK enters from the door UL. He carries a bag of fast food. He crosses to the door DR. He knocks)

JACK

Are you in there? I brought some sandwiches. We haven't eaten. I thought you might like a sandwich. (Pause; He knocks again) Are you there? How about a sandwich? (The lights slowly fade to BLACKOUT).

ACT ONE, Scene 2

(Lights up on the room. DIANE is sitting at the piano. JACK sits in the other chair, staring straight ahead, i.e. at the audience. He doesn't look at DIANE as she speaks)

DIANE

And so I stopped to take a look, and what do you suppose I found? A stone! It was a bit embarrassing! Where do we pick things up, I wondered? All this excess undesired and undesirable baggage we carry around? You'd think it would have fallen out when I took off my shoe!

(She walks to the window and peeks behind the shade. A short silence)

DIANE

And then, after all this trouble, walking halfway there with a stone in my shoe, when I finally arrived at the shop, what do you imagine? Take a guess. (She waits a moment. He does not guess) Instead of a cobbler, I found an ice-cream parlor, with a pet store adjacent and a monkey in its window, playing with himself! No cobbler anywhere, only this obscene monkey! So I had an ice-cream sundae and left. Oh yes, they had some canaries. Actually, I listened to the canaries for a few minutes, while I ate my ice-cream.

(There is another silence, during which DIANE walks over and looks at JACK)

DIANE

It's the shoe with the buckle. The buckle needs to be re-attached to the rest of the shoe. (A pause) I'm sorry if I'm disturbing you. (Another pause) You're a rather queer one, aren't you? Now don't mistake me. I'm not saying that's bad. I'm only saying it's a fact.

(She returns to the window and once again peeks behind the shade)

DIANE

Somebody seems to be coming in here. It looks like they're coming up.

JACK

(Suddenly looks at her) What did you say?

DIANE

I said it looks like somebody's coming up. I can't be sure. It's been a while.

JACK

It HAS happened.

DIANE

I know, but it's been a while.

JACK

I remember when there were three or four a day. We almost had to take on new help. As I recall, a blind fellow came up. He wore a Derby hat. What do you think

you're doing, I asked him. I came to apply, he replied. I heard you needed help. What do you mean apply, I asked him? Man, are you insane? Naturally, I didn't want to hurt his feelings. He came back the next week, too, if I remember correctly.

Did you give him the job? DIANE

No. JACK

Oh. DIANE

I couldn't. By then the business had gone down again. (He looks at her strangely) You must remember him. I mean it wasn't that long ago. JACK

I think I remember the Derby hat. DIANE

Of course you do. JACK

It's just that I don't remember him coming back. DIANE

He didn't have the Derby hat when he came back. JACK

(There is now another silence, during which they do not regard each other)

It looked to me like a girl in a blue dress. A powder blue dress. Cheap. She might have been coming up here. DIANE

Remember the old saying — JACK

(Sharply) Which old saying? DIANE

'Don't count your chickens...' JACK

DIANE

Oh, that one. My father invented that one. He made them up, you know. He invented sayings. Actually, they were more like proverbs.

JACK

There's not much market for those these days.

DIANE

No, not these days. not like the old days. In the old days there were plenty of markets. Dad sold his proverbs to factories, to... companies, to offices even... cities. Oh, he sold his work to a number of places back then.

JACK

The Golden Day of the Proverb! If somebody wrote a book about that period, that is what his title should be! I'll tell you if I didn't have other commitments, I'd write it myself.

DIANE

I remember once we took a vacation. We simply packed up, and the next thing I knew there we were registered at the Ritz in Cincinnati.

JACK

The Ritz! Sounds like quite a place.

DIANE

Men in high collars, with the moon rising over the Ritz. Cauliflower and melted cheese in the tea garden, then a midnight stroll along a flowered path with wild canaries trilling their sweet melodies. It was like a dream. Then the next afternoon we took a bus ride, and what do you think we saw on that bus?

JACK

Your lost sister.

DIANE

My what! What makes you say that?

JACK

These things happen. You read about them in the newspapers all the time. Am I right?

DIANE

No. As we climbed on the bus, right in front of our eyes, we saw this big sign and written on it was one of my dad's proverbs!

JACK

No! And which one was it? Which of dad's many proverbs was on that sign? Was it the one about the chickens? That one would go over really well on a bus.

DIANE

Look, the point is once in a while, somebody would climb aboard the bus and that man or woman would look up at dad's proverb and shake his head as if he were thinking, 'That proverb really hits the nail on the head!'

JACK

Well, that must have been a day to remember.

DIANE

I've never forgotten it. And one more thing happened. As we rode through Cincinnati on that bus, more or less under that sign with dad's proverb on it, what do you suppose we saw next?

JACK

Your long lost sister and brother, strolling down the flowery path.

DIANE

Are you making fun of me?

JACK

Nothing of the sort! I just have this image of a family reunion, right there in Cincinnati. It has a marvelous purity, a balance and symmetry. It could be a beautiful dance routine. Maybe I'll get to work on it.

DIANE

Well, don't expect me to write any music for it.

JACK

You can't kill a guy for trying.

DIANE

My dad said that. That was another saying he coined.

JACK

Those proverbs of his became pretty famous.

DIANE

Anyway, here is what actually happened. As we came to the center of town, we passed this gigantic billboard and on that billboard, strung out in lights... Well, I guess you can imagine what it was.

JACK

I can't believe this!

DIANE

What does that mean? Are you trying to say this story is a lie?

JACK

A lie! I don't know the meaning of the word. It's not in my vocabulary. I'm simply saying that a day like the one you're describing is very rare. It's just hard to believe. And you never told a soul?

DIANE

We told one man, actually. He was sitting on a park bench and he looked a bit down-and-out. So we told him. We wanted to share our joy with some less fortunate member of humankind. We told him about dad's proverb.

JACK

Well, that must have been quite a proverb.

DIANE

They all were. Dad always hit the mark. Back in those days, people appreciated insight and delicacy of expression. The Gemini, as dad called them: Insight and Delicacy of Expression.

JACK

By the way, you didn't tell me, on that billboard, which proverb was it?

DIANE

The same one we saw on the bus.

JACK

They really must have taken that proverb to heart in Cincinnati.

DIANE

Yes, they did. (She then abruptly goes over and once more peeks behind the windowshade). It looks as if I was wrong.

JACK

Nobody coming up?

DIANE

(At the window) It's still light out. The sun has... not quite set. The sky is orange, a very dark orange. It looks the color of a lizard's skin, really.

JACK

A lizard? A giant reptile? Yes, I've seen that. A very ugly color.

(There is another silence, during which DIANE walks to the piano and sits down)

DIANE

So anyway, there it was, splashed all over Cincinnati.

JACK

What! A lizard!

DIANE

Aren't you listening to me? I'm trying to finish my story. That man on the park bench, the one I mentioned before, he had a chalk mark on the right elbow of his jacket. And he was very embarrassed because of that chalk mark. (She pauses) As long as I live, I'll never forget that chalk mark.

JACK

Maybe he was an artist, a painter.

DIANE

I don't know.

JACK

But he must have been nuts! Nobody paints in coat and tails!

DIANE

Are you implying this is a false story?

JACK

Of course not!

DIANE

Because if you are, I suggest you ask anyone in Cincinnati.

JACK

I don't know anyone in Cincinnati.

DIANE

Well, if you did, they would verify my story. In fact, we stayed on for a while as guests of the city, because they had adopted that proverb as the 'Official proverb of the City of Cincinnati!' And dad was given a key to the city, a Golden Key with his image engraved on it, and naturally, we were invited to numerous dinners and parties in dad's honor, dinners with pheasant and champagne. (Pause) Of course after a while, it became a bit boring.

JACK
Yes, I imagine it would.

DIANE
And so we decided to go home.

JACK
You had to get back to more important things.

DIANE
You could say that.

JACK
You had to get back to your piano.

DIANE
I didn't play the piano then.

JACK
And what about the man in the coat and tails, with the chalk mark on his elbow?
Did you take him to those parties with you?

DIANE
We never saw him again.

JACK
Never!

DIANE
He wasn't exactly our type.

(JACK watches as she walks to the window and again peeks behind the shade)

DIANE
A man is coming in now, a man wearing a dark suit, and rather heavy-set. He looks quite dapper, actually, and I think he's wearing a mustache. What do you think of that?

JACK
A dark suit, heavy-set and dapper, and wearing a mustache?

DIANE
What do you make of it?

JACK

I make nothing of it. I think the situation speaks for itself.

DIANE

You think so?

JACK

He's probably a crank. Not the type you can take seriously. What's he doing now?

DIANE

(She looks) As a matter of fact, he seems to have disappeared.

JACK

I'm an observer, you know. I try not to make judgments.

DIANE

You know sometimes I wonder how I met you.

(A silence, during which they look at each other. Then DIANE returns to the piano)

JACK

There is one thing that surprises me.

DIANE

Only one?

JACK

I'm surprised you didn't know Cincinnati had adopted this proverb of your dad's. Here the entire city of Cincinnati was living by your father's word, so to speak, and none of you realized it. That surprises me.

DIANE

Dad was a modest man.

JACK

Ah. Well, they don't make them like that any more.

DIANE

That's pretty obvious.

JACK

Of course my dad was the same way. (He gets up and walks about, slowly circling towards the window). Oh yes, my dad was exactly the same. I never even knew what color undershirts he wore. I believe he might have taken a drink or

two, but always in secret. Behind closed doors, as it were: Sanctum Sanctorum. He led a private life. (Pause) And another odd thing. When he died, he was wearing a coat and tails. That's right, on his deathbed, dad was immaculately decked out in coat and tails. Have I ever mentioned that to you?

DIANE

No, I don't think you have. And if you have, I've forgotten it.

JACK

Then I must not have mentioned it, because that's not the sort of thing one forgets.

DIANE

But getting back to my story, when we returned from Cincinnati, dad just wasn't... himself. He was a changed man. He began taking long walks late at night, and sometimes he'd spill a cup of tea, and he would leave cigarettes burning everywhere.

JACK

Sounds a bit off. Maybe it was all that fame and glory.

DIANE

Then one afternoon we sat down to tea. We had tea every afternoon. It was a rule we lived by. Had we been witnessing a nuclear explosion, we would have finished our tea before disintegration. And so, anyway, on this particular afternoon, dad managed to spill an entire cup of tea down the middle of his shirt.

JACK

Good Lord! The whole cup!

DIANE

We were all a bit thunderstruck!

JACK

It hardly seems to go with the man's character.

DIANE

That's why we were so shocked.

JACK

Sounds like a few of his gears had slipped. Maybe he needed a mechanic.

DIANE

Then, without a word, he got up from the table and went into the livingroom, and the next thing we knew, he'd broken a vase of flowers.

JACK

And life was never the same.

DIANE

Well, I simply began to sob. I broke down and sobbed.

JACK

And your sister?

DIANE

Who?

JACK

Your sister and brother, how did they received the blow?

DIANE

I don't remember.

JACK

It slips your mind?

DIANE

I was worried about father. I was afraid something had upset him.

JACK

Don't live in the past, my father always said.

DIANE

Tell me something, will you? Did your father often wear coat and tails?

JACK

Oh, he wore white suits, too, and once I remember, he wore seersucker with a panama hat. He had a sense of humor.

DIANE

That panama must have been a riot.

JACK

Of course no more hijinks when he went on tour. But you should have seen the post cards he sent home. His handwriting was the envy of seven continents. He formed an 'M' like he was creating a Himalayan mountain. It was always the bold stroke for him. Exactly the way he played the piano. Did you know there is a certain bird, somewhere in South America, which is named after him?

DIANE

The 'Jackbird?' I'm not sure I've heard of it.

JACK

It was because of his style. They claimed he was the only person whose touch could approach the beauty of that bird's song. (He is at the window, looks behind the shade).

DIANE

Is anybody out there?

JACK

Not a soul.

DIANE

These travels... I thought your father owned a pub. I thought he owned a tavern somewhere in the Middle West. Cincinnati, wasn't it?

JACK

Oh, that was much later. That was when the concert gloves were hanging over the bedroom mirror. By then he was searching for peace and solitude. He was looking for a fireplace to curl up by, a mug of ale, a chapter of Fielding after dinner and a fowling piece over the mantel.

DIANE

A fowling piece?

JACK

Basically, dad was in love with the eighteenth-century. He claimed the eighteenth-century was the last century in which a civilized human being could survive. After that, according to dad, it was all downhill.

DIANE

Then we must be pretty well in the ditch.

JACK

We're right at the bottom of the muckheap.

DIANE

And he was quite a traveler. I mean all those concert tours must have taken him far and wide, hither and yon.

JACK

He was the Mandeville of his day. He welcomed any audience. Hindu, Moslem, Buddhist, pagan. They were all potential converts to the worship of the beautiful. That was his only catechism.

DIANE

He was an atheist then?

JACK

He worshipped beauty. What a virtuoso the man was: a remnant of an age gone by.

DIANE

So different from these days.

JACK

And by the way, you never did tell me which of your dad's proverbs they adopted in Cincinnati.

DIANE

Let me see now, if I can remember the exact phrasing. The language is paramount. The balance of words is what makes a proverb what it is.

JACK

You mean 'Words to Live By'?

DIANE

Dad was a stickler for language.

JACK

Les Mots Justes! Hear, hear for good old dad!

DIANE

You know I don't think I like your tone.

JACK

My Tone! It's inflectionless! It's perfectly equable and unbiased, free from any prejudice. I've been using it for years!

DIANE

No, I really don't like your tone.

JACK

Maybe the problem is with your ears.

DIANE

I don't want you using that tone any more, not when you're speaking about my dad.

JACK

I wasn't talking about the old geezer, you were.

DIANE

The... what! That's a very cheap word, you know!

JACK

What! Geezer? Not at all! It's a term of affection.

DIANE

(She then walks to the door right) I see you're out of control. There is no talking to you when you get like this.

JACK

What a minute! Don't jump the mark! Where are you going?

DIANE

I've got to be alone.

JACK

Listen, is it geezer that bothers you? Come down to earth! I'll tell you something. I always called my dad geezer. And he would laugh. Then, out of affection, he used to clip me behind the ear. That's right. And afterwards, we shared a warm, affectionate laugh.

DIANE

You don't know what it means to laugh. That's your trouble.

JACK

I don't know how to laugh! I'm an expert at it. I'll prove it. Tell me something funny.

DIANE

(She looks at him) You wouldn't find it funny.

JACK

Of course I would! My funny bone is abnormally developed. It's genetic.

DIANE

I'm going out now.

JACK

Out! You can't do that!

DIANE

Of course I can. I can go anywhere I like.

JACK

You know I find that funny. I find that very amusing.

DIANE

It wasn't meant to be funny. You've got no sense of timing. That's your other problem. (She goes out right).

JACK

(He walks to the door, stops, then goes to the window and looks behind the shade) A simple misunderstanding! They occur. And what would life be like without them? A dog cries out in the middle of the night, and suddenly the whole roof caves in. Where's the connection? Who knows? And who is to say, in their own way, they are not a reason for being? An explanation for... (He waves his hand vaguely)... something or other: if, indeed, anything is. (He then goes to the chair, sits and falls silent, staring abstractedly beyond the audience).

(After a moment, THE GIRL, wearing a blue dress, enters. She walks around the room, looking it over, then finally, she approaches JACK. She stares at him)

GIRL

(When JACK does not respond to her presence) Do you belong here? Are you part of the... ambience? Are you... all right? (She walks around the room again, comes to the piano) I'm afraid the piano will have to go. We have to make some room, so the piano will definitely have to go.

(THE GIRL hits a note on the piano and A MAN, with a mustache and wearing a dark suit enters. He stands with his hands behind his back, watching THE GIRL)

GIRL

(To MAN) This is the place. We've found it.

MAN

Well then, shall I get the things? Shall I bring everything up?

GIRL

I suppose so. It seems we've found the right place.

MAN

(He walks around the room) It's not exactly Madison Avenue, is it? It's a bit of an ash heap really, isn't it?

GIRL

Have you ever been to Madison Avenue?

MAN

Haven't you?

GIRL

I was supposed to go there last month, but it didn't come off.

MAN

I think you'd like it. It reminds one of a psychiatrist's office.

GIRL

I've never been in a psychiatrist's office.

MAN

Well, at your age a person can't have done everything.

GIRL

I suppose Madison Avenue is full of psychiatrist's offices.

MAN

(He gestures at JACK) What do you make of him? He's something of an odd one, isn't he?

GIRL

He seems to be the contemplative type of personality.

MAN

It doesn't look like you'd get much action out of him, does it?

GIRL

I guess thinking is a kind of action.

MAN

Well, they're easy enough to deal with. I've dealt with that kind before. Actually, they're no better than drunks. They're cut from the same bolt of cloth. Shitheads, that's what they are. (Pause) Still, you've got to give them their due. Some of them can be pretty nice guys. Some of them are real peaches. You're safe with them. You know where you are with swine like that.

GIRL

Please watch your language.

MAN

Oh sorry, ma'am. I didn't mean anything.

GIRL

You seem nervous. Are you nervous about something?

MAN

Me! I've never heard of the word. And believe me, I've dealt with thinkers before.

GIRL

You sound like a man of experience.

MAN

Experience! Listen, I've dealt with them. All of them! I've earned my stars. I remember this old Geezer in Cincinnati—

GIRL

Where?

MAN

Cincinnati! I ran into this old geezer—

GIRL

I never knew you'd been in Cincinnati. I never saw you there.

MAN

That's because I saw you first. (He chuckles) Just a joke, ma'am, just a little joke!

GIRL

So you were in Cincinnati. It's a small world. (Pause) Too small.

MAN

Oh, I know Cincinnati. They practically named the place after me.

GIRL

Did they? But they picked Cincinnati instead? They stuck with the Latin?

MAN

I said practically, ma'am. They didn't actually do it. There was a couple of swine I knew on the city council—

GIRL

I thought I asked you to watch your language.

MAN

It's okay, ma'am. They were friends of mine. Anyway, I missed by one stinking vote!

GIRL

Well, that's the breaks.

MAN

What did you say?

GIRL

I said 'That's the breaks.' It's an expression. My father used to say it.

MAN

Well, that's amazing, because this old geezer, the one I was telling you about. He used to say that all the time. You'd think he'd invented the expression! I remember one evening he came into The Racehorse, that was a little tavern, and he was wearing a coat-and-tails! That's right, ma'am, no cheap cotton tuck-into-the-socks for him, a coat and tails! Let me tell you. I'll never forget that coat-and-tails as long as I live! What a striking sight!

GIRL

Maybe if I live long enough, I'll see something like that. Either that, or the Himalayan Mountains. I'd like to see the highest mountains in the world, capped with snow. I'd like to see one of those things. I don't care which.

MAN

Black as coal that coat was, and along with it, setting it off, so to speak, was a white silk shirt.

GIRL

Silk? (Pause) My father had white silky hair: a great head of silken white hair. Sometimes he let me comb it for him.

MAN

Your father was something of a stink, wasn't he, ma'am?

GIRL

My dad? He was the worst.

MAN

A stink with silky white hair. (He shakes his head) I've dealt with them before.

(There is a short silence, during which they are lost in their private thoughts)

GIRL

But what was this affair: the big affair to which this man wore the coat-and-tails?

MAN

I don't recall. I only remember the coat-and-tails, and, of course, the beer.

GIRL

Beer! He was drinking beer in coat-and-tails? What kind of place was this 'Racehorse'? It sounds like a dive.

MAN

It was a bit of a dive. Yes, it was. But it was... an elegant dive. You could call it an elegant dive. And this geezer was just sitting there in his coat-and-tails, minding his own business, drinking his beer, but there was a bit of chalk on his elbow. What do you think of that?

GIRL

Chalk! It sounds odd.

MAN

That's what we thought. So one of the boys asked if he'd been out painting the sidewalks in his coat-and-tails. Well, that brought down the house, let me tell you!

GIRL

Well, that was a funny remark.

MAN

Funny! Listen, the walls were shaking! The room was holding its sides and swaying from east to west!

GIRL

And had he been painting?

MAN

Well, we never found out, because this stink came in, and he knocked the geezer's beer all over that coat-and-tails, soaked it clean through.

GIRL

That was too bad.

MAN

Oh yes! It was terrible.

GIRL

Then what did he do?

MAN

He left without a word. He simply walked out.

GIRL

And you can't remember what the big affair was?

MAN

No, I can't, but it's all over now. It's finished. Ah but I've still got my memory of that coat-and-tails, and that will live with me forever.

GIRL

I guess that helps.

MAN

Yes, it does. And by the way, ma'am, I'm sorry your dad was a stink.

GIRL

Well, I've still got his hair. I mean the memory of it.

MAN

Well then, that's fine. So, what should we do now? Shall I go get the stuff?

(THE GIRL again walks around the room. She then walks to the door down right. She hesitates a moment, staring at the door, then walks back to the piano)

GIRL

Sometimes when he was drunk he used to lock me in the closet. Me and my older sister. That's why I ran away from home. Who wouldn't have?

MAN

You had a sister, did you, ma'am?

GIRL

Yes, but as you said it's all over now. Gone like the wind. (Pause) So I suppose we'd better go get the stuff.

MAN

Then you're sure this is the place, eh?

GIRL

This is the address, isn't it? Of course this is the place.

MAN

What about him? What about 'The Philosopher'?

GIRL

We'll just leave him where he is for the time being.

MAN

Just let him think.

GIRL

We'd better get to work.

MAN

Sometime you'll have to tell me about your family. I'd like to hear something about that sister of yours. I never had a sister myself. No. I just had a pair of red sneakers.

GIRL

Red sneakers? I don't think I've ever seen a pair.

MAN

I doubt that you have. They were unique. Made to order by the little cobbler on the corner. A bent back, a slight limp, bullwhip mustaches, and a smile that would warm the heart of a billygoat. He made them to order for me. They were unique.

GIRL

I'd like to see them sometime.

MAN

I'll make a deal with you. You tell me something about that sister of yours, and I'll show them to you.

GIRL

I don't remember my sister. Nothing about her. In fact, I hardly even remember that she was a sister. She might have been a brother. I was extremely young when I ran away from home.

MAN

Well, that would explain it then, wouldn't it?

GIRL

That cobbler on the corner he must have been quite a fellow. I'd like to meet somebody like that.

MAN

Forget it. They're all gone. (He sighs) Many an afternoon he would close his shop, hang a sign on the door, then take me by the hand and walk me to the candy store for a taffy apple.

GIRL

You must have been quite a bit younger than you are now.

MAN

Oh yes. And I'll tell you something else. It wasn't easy for that man to get around. Not with that limp. What he did was he hobbled. He was the cobbler who hobbled. It caused my heart pain just to watch him do that!

GIRL

And was that in Cincinnati, too?

MAN

That? No, no. That was... somewhere else.

GIRL

I didn't think it was in Cincinnati. I don't remember any cobbler on the corner in Cincinnati. I only remember a tavern with peanut shells on the floor and a woman with a tattoo on her right forearm.

MAN

I knew her! Was it a sailor?

GIRL

She never mentioned if she'd been in the navy.

MAN

I was referring to the tattoo. Was it a tattoo of a sailor?

GIRL

I think it was a hula dancer.

MAN

Oh. Maybe it was a different person.

GIRL

(She looks around) You know this isn't much of a room. It's pretty pitiful, really. But this is the address, so it must be the right place.

MAN

Well, if anything makes sense, that does.

GIRL

The piano has to go.

MAN

(He hesitates) I was married to her, you know. The woman with the sailor tattooed on her right forearm. That's right. We were man and wife. We had a very large apartment in a well-to-do district. Really it was too large. We hardly saw

each other. And we never had any kids. Maybe that was the problem. Still, no matter what you say, we were a pair.

GIRL

Who was the sailor?

MAN

I never asked her. I figured that was her business. We should have had some children to fill up that gigantic apartment. Still, it all worked out for the best. Deep down, she was no good. She was a bitch, really. She was a slut. (Pause) That's probably why I'm in this business.

GIRL

Well, it's a good business. It's very respectable.

MAN

That's why I'm in it! I've been respectable all my life!

GIRL

Shall we move the stuff up now?

MAN

(Darkly) I know my business. Don't let anybody tell you I don't!

GIRL

I won't. I'll be right with you.

(THE MAN exits left. THE GIRL walks around the room once more, stops for a moment by the door right, then she goes up to JACK, and then exits left. A moment or so after she exits, DIANE re-enters from the door on the right)

DIANE

So this is where I stand at the moment. I've got to find a new cobbler. (She goes over to JACK) I don't suppose you'd know any, would you? I don't imagine you could make a suggestion?

(She looks at JACK, who remains as before. She sighs, then walks away from him)

DIANE

You know a few years ago cobblers were a dime a dozen. On every street corner you found one shuffling around in his little shop. They were a rather eery lot, but at least they were easy to find. I wonder what happened to them all?

JACK

(He turns and looks at her) Your sister was here.

DIANE

What are you talking about?

JACK

Your sister was here, and she brought your brother along.

DIANE

You must have been dreaming.

JACK

Think what this means: the old family reunion. The tears, the laughter, the embraces, and all the fond old memories!

DIANE

I don't have any sister.

JACK

You'll see in a few minutes. They just went down to pick up a few things.

DIANE

What things! They have no things because they don't exist.

JACK

I can hardly wait to see the look on your face. So very rarely all the rough edges are rounded. So very rarely life comes full circle! It makes you believe in something.

DIANE

It makes me believe you're round the bend!

JACK

Maybe I shouldn't have said anything to ruin the surprise.

DIANE

There won't be any surprise. There won't be anything.

JACK

I shouldn't have ruined it.

DIANE

(She decides to ignore him) I have really got to find a cobbler. I have to find someone to repair my shoes. Those shoes go back a long way. Those shoes mean a lot to me.

JACK

You want to know where you can find a cobbler?

DIANE

Isn't that what I've been saying?

JACK

I think I can help you out.

DIANE

I hope you can.

JACK

That's what I'm going to do.

DIANE

Listen, what I said before... I didn't mean that.

JACK

You didn't?

DIANE

I think you've got a wonderful sense of humor. I thought the story about the Panama hat was hilarious.

JACK

(Glumly) I understand.

DIANE

I mean it! And I'd like to hear more about your dad's tours. It's a fascinating story.

JACK

He owned a pub, actually, a cheap little tavern. A cheap dive in Cincinnati. That was it.

DIANE

No. I mean before that. I think you said he was in South America. Isn't that where they named a bird after him? I'd like to hear about South America. I'm sure he was there. A person doesn't tour the world and miss an entire continent, does he?

JACK

I suppose not.

DIANE

Of course not! You see what I mean?

JACK

Yes. I see what you mean.

DIANE

So he must have been to South America, isn't that right?

JACK

Look, if you want to know, I'll tell you where you can find a cobbler.

DIANE

That would be very kind of you.

JACK

He's on the corner. He's the cobbler on the corner.

DIANE

Which corner?

JACK

He's the old fellow with the bent back and the bullwhip mustaches, and he limps because one leg is shorter than the other one—

DIANE

Wait a minute!

JACK

And he eats taffy apples. He makes the world very sad because he is addicted to taffy apples. He leads little children down the flowered path and then, at the end of the path, he ends up with taffy stuck in his mustaches!

DIANE

That's MY story! I told you about that myself!

JACK

Anyway, he's the man to fix your shoe.

DIANE

He can't—

JACK

I'd like to watch. I'd like to watch a Master practise his craft.

DIANE

He can't fix anybody's shoe, because he doesn't exist! I made him up!

JACK

And once you get that shoe fixed, you know, you'll feel a world of difference. You'll gain a whole new perspective on reality.

(DIANE looks at him for a moment. Then she turns away and goes to the window)

DIANE

Leave me alone. (She looks out the window. JACK looks at her) You know something? Nobody is out there. Nobody is coming up.

JACK

They said the piano's got to go.

DIANE

Who did?

JACK

Your sister and brother. They claimed the piano had to go.

DIANE

I have had that piano for years! I have had that piano since I was a child!

JACK

Well, then they ought to understand. They must have heard you play it once or twice. Maybe they even hummed along while your fingers blithely danced over the keys. Maybe they were jealous of you, of your talent. On the surface all sugar and cream, but underneath a volcano of jealousy was smoldering. That can lead to problems.

DIANE

I never had a sister or a brother.

JACK

You know I'm going to miss that piano.

DIANE

You what?

JACK

Yes, I'm going to miss it. Listening to you play that piano has meant a lot to me. Your fingers gently strolling over the keys has brought back memories, old memories pulled from the bog of the subconscious mind like dinosaur bones. More than once your playing has brought back to me the image of my old dad, his snow white hair falling on the neck of his coat-and-tails, his fingers turning the

world into a garden of harmonious delights. (Pause) The old bastard could play the piano. And you've brought that back for me.

DIANE

I'm glad.

JACK

It's something to be proud of.

DIANE

Well, you've done the same for me, you know.

JACK

Me! I have? No!

DIANE

It's your words. Your eloquence. They have re-awakened in me memories of my dad, memories of those days of gentleness and dignity. Dad, sitting by the fireplace, a book of poetry in his lap and then, presto! Out came another proverb! Then later at dinner he would try it out on us. At some pause in the rattle of knife and fork, he would surreptitiously toss it into the conversation.

JACK

Surreptitiously, eh?

DIANE

It was like a miracle.

JACK

It WAS a miracle.

DIANE

(Looking behind the shade) That's the way it was.

JACK

I never doubted it for a minute.

DIANE

Then later, after a cup of tea, after the fire died out, we went to bed and slept calmly through the long, dark night.

JACK

Pleasant dreams.

DIANE

Oh yes! Millions of them!

(Silence, and then THE GIRL enters, followed by THE MAN, who is carrying a chair. They all suddenly stop and stare at each other silently)

JACK

Well, well, here they are!

DIANE

What is this! Have you people come for lessons?

MAN

What are you people doing here? We've taken this place over.

DIANE

I'm sorry. No more lessons for today.

JACK

The family reunion! At last, the coming together!

MAN

You people have ten minutes to get the hell out of here! (Then A BLACKOUT, and...)

THE FIRST ACT IS OVER

ACT TWO

(ACT TWO begins where ACT ONE ended and may be played without intermission)

DIANE

There seems to be some kind of mistake.

GIRL

This is our room.

DIANE

This room? No, we have the use of it. In perpetuity. There's a contract. I'll get you a copy, if you wish.

MAN

(To the GIRL, as he sets up the table and chair, ignoring DIANE) Suppose I put this here for now. We can always move things around later.

GIRL

Not too near that door, please. I don't want it too close to that door.

DIANE

You can't put that there! That's a dance floor.

GIRL

Put it in the line of the light, would you? It would be nice to be able to sit in that chair and feel the light on your back.

MAN

I'll see what I can do. (He moves the table and chair slightly).

GIRL

We need a decorator, really.

MAN

To hell with a decorator! You can't trust them. They're always changing their minds. We're better off doing things ourselves.

JACK

Look, why don't we all sit down? I think we should sit down and get acquainted.

MAN

(To GIRL) Listen to that, will you! This swine is a little loose.

DIANE

I'm afraid you have made some kind of mistake. This is a school, a Fine Arts Academy. You have walked straight into a Fine Arts Academy and we, this man and myself, are the instructors. If you'd like lessons, we can accommodate you. (THE MAN and THE GIRL have been moving the table and chair, trying to get it right). Are you listening to me?

MAN

(To GIRL) No, we don't want any decorate in here. I had one once, you know. I hired him. He wanted me to knock out a wall and put in a big window. Well, what do you suppose I told him? I gave him a piece of my mind, let me tell you! Well, he didn't like that. He walked out is what he did. But I never had any wall knocked out. I left it there.

JACK

You've got a mind of your own, I see. You know how you want things done.

MAN

Are you talking to me?

JACK

By the way, how did you know we were here? How did you find us?

GIRL

We used the phone book.

JACK

Good Lord! (To DIANE) They used the phone book!

DIANE

They have got to go!

MAN

(Goes to the door, right) What's this? Where does this lead to?

DIANE

Leave that alone! Get away from there!

MAN

(He opens the door) It's a closet! It's nothing but a puny little closet with a chair in it.

GIRL

A what? Close it!

MAN

What about the chair? Maybe we can use the chair? This place isn't exactly The Ritz, you know. We could use an extra chair or two.

DIANE

Leave that chair alone! Don't touch that chair!

GIRL

Just close the door, please. Close it.

MAN

(Closes the door) how about that! What kind of place is this? What kind of place did we walk into? A chair in a closet!

JACK

(To GIRL) You know you look like a dancer. Yes, you look to me like someone who could be a remarkable dancer.

GIRL

Me? No, I'm afraid not. It just wasn't in the cards.

MAN

(To GIRL) Don't worry, I'll handle him. I'll deal with the loony. I know how to handle loonies.

JACK

(To MAN) You do look fit. You'd look almost athletic, if you dropped a few pounds. You've taken care of yourself, though. Somewhat. They must be pretty proud of you. You must be the pride of the family, the pride of the tribe.

MAN

Who are you talking to? You're not talking to me. I don't have a family. I never had one.

GIRL

(To MAN) You really ought to be more subtle, you know.

MAN

Subtle! I'm sorry, ma'am, but I don't have the time. I just don't have time for that.

DIANE

Listen to me. We pay rent here, so we have the right to this room. To this Academy! I think you had better go now, because we were just closing up for the day.

JACK

Look, is this a reunion? Is this a family coming together or isn't it? What's going wrong?

GIRL

I'm really afraid you people are suffering from delusions. (She sits in the chair) Yes, this will be fine here.

MAN

(To DIANE) So you pay rent here, do you, lady? Who do you pay? By cash or by check! By the month? Quarterly? Yearly? (He turns to GIRL, laughing) She says they pay rent here!

DIANE

We pay cash! We pay cash by the, uh, month!

MAN

(To GIRL) She says they pay cash by the month! (To JACK) You got your receipts, pal? Let me see your receipts.

JACK

Receipts? I never keep them. I find them a bit vulgar. I mean they get dirty and then they begin to stink. They're just a little sordid, don't you agree?

MAN

You never keep them, do you? (He walks around, becoming animated) You know you people give me the creeps! (He gestures at the back wall) Look at this junk! What is this junk? (He looks closely at the astrological chart) I've seen one of those before!

GIRL

It's an astrological chart. It's the sign of The Gemini. The Twins. The Gemini they call them. They're stars.

MAN

Yes, I've seen them before. My mother had one in the kitchen.

JACK

I thought you never had a family?

MAN

You give me the creeps, pal. Yes, you really do. (He looks back at the chart) Yes, my mom kept one of these in the kitchen. She used to sit in the kitchen and stare at it like she was trying to figure out what it meant. She had only one eye, you know. Just one good eye. The right one. The left one was absolutely useless. It was missing, actually. It gave her some problem with her vision, but it wasn't hereditary.

JACK

What happened to the left eye?

MAN

She never told us. She was very close-mouthed about it. But I think she sold it. I think she sold it to a sailor.

JACK

Did she know quite a few sailors?

GIRL

Who'd want to buy an eye! Is that what sailors are like?

DIANE

(To GIRL about MAN) He doesn't know what he's talking about. I think he's delirious! You'd better get him to a hospital.

MAN

No, mom never talked much. She knew how to keep her mouth closed. But she was a looker. Even with that one eye. She knew how to wear clothes, you see. She had class.

JACK

Well, some women are like that. I've seen them, sitting there, with their heavy eyes, staring at you.

DIANE

Don't let the eyes fool you. They might look dead, but they're full of something.

MAN

(To DIANE) Lady, I'm afraid you don't know what you're talking about. I thought maybe you had a touch of good sense, but I can see I was wrong. I can see now that you're as disturbed as he is.

GIRL

Look, I think we should get the rest of our stuff now. We don't really have time for all this talk, as pleasant as it might prove to be.

MAN

Maybe you're right, but I'll tell you something. It's a sad world, things have come to a sorry state, when four civilized people can't sit down and have a discussion together. When they can't sit down and discuss poetry or art or the beauties of nature. (To DIANE) Don't you agree, lady? Wouldn't you agree?

DIANE

You don't belong here. You're an intrusion. It's as simple as that.

JACK

I really wonder what it means any more to be a family? Is this what it means?

MAN

(He walks over to the poster) And who are these characters, huh? They look familiar. I think I've seen them before. Who are they?

JACK

That's your mother and father. That's who they are.

MAN

No. No chance.

DIANE

They are Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. They were dancers in the movies. They used to dance in the movies on marble floors.

MAN

The movies! Who could afford to go see them? Not me! I never had the spare time or the spare change to go see any movies. If I had a couple extra minutes, I had to go down to the corner with my shoe shine kit. Shine shoes for a nickel. A nickel, if I could get one! Otherwise, a penny! And it was usually a penny! The movies! Who had the time?

DIANE

Who ARE these people! I don't know these people. (To JACK) Did you invite them up here? Is this one of your practical jokes?

JACK

I think we need some coffee. Should I put on some coffee?

GIRL

Look, you people are obviously suffering from some kind of delusion. You don't rent this building. We do. And as you can see, we're in the process of setting up a makeshift office. This, of course, isn't our permanent set-up. Oh no! We've got some very nice furniture on the way. Victorian furniture, with wall-to-wall carpeting, some original oil paintings and a few pieces of sculpture. Some really amazing works. The two of you, since you both appear to be interested in art, you will have to come up and have a look, when everything comes in. We could have lunch sent up.

MAN

And in the meantime I've got to get all this junk out of here, so we have some room. This place is littered with crap and it's got to go, so we can start bringing new things up. (He walks over and reaches up to pull down the poster).

JACK

(Menacing) You don't want to touch that poster. No, you don't want to put your hands on that.

MAN

(To GIRL) What the hell is he going on about? Do you know?

GIRL

Why don't we just bring the things up first?

JACK

(To MAN) You don't want to touch that poster. That's your mom and dad up there.

MAN

Huh! That's not my mom and dad. My mom and dad never went dancing in their lives. They couldn't, not in the neighborhood we lived in!

JACK

Oh yes, that's your mom and dad. When you were asleep, they used to sneak out of the house and go dancing. You must have figured that out. Didn't you ever wake up in the middle of the night and discover nobody was home?

GIRL

Not in a closet, you didn't. You didn't wake up in a closet. You just kept your eyes closed until somebody let you out.

MAN

(To JACK) You're crazy, pal. My mom and dad didn't even know how to dance. (He approaches JACK) You after some trouble, is that it? Well, if you are, I'm your man!

JACK

Is that so? Well, let me tell you, we get all kinds up here. We once had a fellow up here wearing a hat. It was a Derby hat, a genuine derby! But his shoes needed shining. (He looks at MAN) Tell me. Did you ever hear of a fellow like that?

MAN

(Backs off slightly) A fellow in a Derby hat with dirty shoes? What do you take me for? I've never seen anybody like that in my life! He sounds like a pig! I don't know him.

JACK

Never heard of him?

MAN

What are you up to, pal? What's your game? Are you looking for a bit of trouble, is that it? (He gives JACK a shove).

GIRL

(To MAN) Look, it's time we brought up some more stuff. We're not on vacation, you know.

MAN

You're right. This isn't a holiday, is it?

DIANE

Now I'LL tell you ALL something! My parents ALWAYS took me with them when they went dancing.

MAN

Huh? The hell they did, lady! You don't know what you're talking about! (He looks at her) Am I getting through to you?

GIRL

Come on, please, let's go get some more of our stuff.

MAN

(To DIANE) Look, I'm trying to be your friend. Do you understand that? You look to me like somebody who could use a friend.

JACK

How can you tell something like that?

(THE GIRL then walks out the door on the left. After a second, THE MAN follows)

DIANE

(Pause) Have they gone?

JACK

They said they were coming back.

DIANE

(She walks to the window, looks behind the shade) I don't see anything. It's too dark now. (She looks at JACK) How did they get here? Did you invite them?

JACK

I don't know how they got here.

DIANE

Do you think they'll come back?

JACK

Oh well, I suppose eventually they would have found us. They always do.

DIANE

I don't like that dress she's wearing. It's a bit cheap. There's nothing worse than a cheap dress.

JACK

She's got nice legs, though. You've got to give her that.

DIANE

Oh yes, beautiful legs. And what about her dress? How do you like that?

JACK

I don't think much of her dress.

DIANE

Maybe you'd like to take a look out the window? Come on over, if you want to take a look.

JACK

No, thanks.

DIANE

You don't want to come over and have a look out?

JACK

Maybe later.

DIANE

Suit yourself.

JACK

All right, I could come over and have a look if you want.

DIANE

(She turns away from the window) Forget it.

(There is another silence, during which JACK does go to the window, as DIANE sits at the piano. After a moment, the MAN and GIRL re-enter. She carries a tall hat-and-coat rack. He has an old-fashioned calendar, looks for somewhere to put it)

GIRL

I'll put this hat-and-coat rack by the door. That seems like a good place for it.

MAN

(He is looking at the door on the right) Well! Here's a bit of luck!

GIRL

What's that?

MAN

There's already a nail in this door. (He hangs the calendar on the door).

DIANE

Get that off there!

JACK

(He walks over and looks at the calendar) This thing is a little out of date, isn't it? It's a few years behind the times.

MAN

Don't you believe it! This is right up-to-date! They don't make them like this any more!

JACK

That's from a bar! That's a bar calendar! What do you think this place is? A bawdy house. Why are you putting that up here?

MAN

This is no ordinary calendar, pal. Look here. You see what it says here: 'October: A miss is as good as a mile.' This is a calendar with sayings on it!

DIANE

Get it out! I don't want it in here!

MAN

I've had this with me as long as I can remember. I brought it all the way from Cincinnati. Losing this would be like losing my best friend. I've lived by the sayings on that calendar. They have been a philosophy of life to me. I've followed them all.

DIANE

This is a Fine Arts Academy, not a pigsty!

JACK

(To GIRL) You ought to dance more. It would do you good. It would improve your outlook.

GIRL

Is that what it's done for you?

JACK

Good Lord yes! It's been my life. It's made me everything I am today. Dancing has made me the man that I am.

MAN

I knew a dancer once.

JACK

I don't doubt it.

MAN

Oh yes, I knew a dancer. He used to dance around the city park all by himself. He wore an old tuxedo, a coat-and-tails, an old cutaway model. It was coming apart at the seams and it had chalk all over the elbows, but he wore it anyway. Maybe he didn't have anything else, or he just liked to wear it, but whatever the reason, that was all he ever wore. Then, when he'd get himself all stunk up, he'd go to the park and he'd dance around all by himself. In fact, I knew a kid who used to take people there to watch him.

DIANE

I don't think you even know what a coat-and-tails looks like.

MAN

I know what a coat-and-tails looks like. Don't worry about that. This was in Cincinnati.

JACK

It sounds like quite a place. The coat-and-tails capitol of the world!

MAN

You see what it was this kid used to take people to the park to watch this stink dance around by himself. He charged people a quarter. A quarter, this kid would tell them, if you want a good laugh. Well, naturally, everybody always wants a good laugh, and a quarter's not much to pay for it, so he'd take these people to the park, and there was the stink, blind on bourbon, drowning in moonlight, and dancing round the park all by himself.

DIANE

But who was he?

MAN

Who knows who he was, lady?

JACK

It sounds to me like a case of mistaken identity. I don't think even he knew who he was. Or else he thought he was somebody else. Definitely a case of mistaken identity. Or dementia praecox. He may have been manic.

DIANE

Well, I'm glad I've never known anybody like that.

GIRL

(She walks to the window) I knew somebody like that.

MAN

You did? At your age! No.

GIRL

This one I knew had been a sailor, I think. Actually, I didn't exactly know him. I just heard about him.

JACK

I've never met a sailor myself. I'd like to sometime, though. They sound like an interesting group of characters.

MAN

They're a bunch of stinking swine is what they are! Most of them! Until they get a few years on them. After a few years, they mellow out and turn into a pretty decent sort. But it takes a little time.

JACK

They mature slowly. That's probably it.

MAN

Hunh! Who's got the time for it!

GIRL

Well, anyway, the one I... heard about. He met this woman in a bar. She was quite a large woman, and I think she had one bad eye. Nevertheless, I think they had a child in spite of that. But then, suddenly, the sailor disappeared. I guess he went back to the sea, and after he'd gone, the woman had his image tattooed on her arm. And there it was, for the world to see, this sailor tattooed on her arm. (Pause) It looked a bit odd, really.

JACK

I suppose it would.

MAN

(Storms around the room energetically) Yes, I'm going to start tearing all this shit down shortly. In just a few minutes, I will be removing all this rubbish, and then we can start putting something up in its place!

GIRL

But the point is after the sailor had gone and there was nothing but that tattoo to remember him by, the woman met another man.

JACK

Aha! And did she meet him in the bar, too?

GIRL

Maybe so. I'm afraid I've forgotten that part.

MAN

Don't worry, ma'am. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter at all!

GIRL

Honestly, I just don't remember. I only remember that the lady with the sailor tattooed on her arm met another man.

JACK

This is an old story, a very ancient story.

DIANE

That is why we can't quite forget it.

GIRL

Yes, she met this other man, but what I'm getting at is this other man used to dance by himself in the park.

JACK

I knew it!

GIRL

He used to dance by himself in the park and he wore a black coat-and-tails. Of course this woman didn't know that when she met him.

JACK

It must have come as a surprise to her.

GIRL

Yes, it was quite a shock.

MAN

The swine was off his nut, wasn't he?

GIRL

Probably so, and what could she do? I mean what would you have done? She gave him the heave-ho, the old bootheel! She tossed him out and his coat-and-tails with him.

JACK

That sounds rather severe to me. I mean let the punishment fit the crime, but dancing in the park? That's not exactly a crime, is it?

DIANE

I knew somebody like that myself.

MAN

What! You, too! My God! Isn't this cozy! Isn't this quaint! What is this, for God's sake, one big happy family!

JACK

He's finally figured it out! The light breaks!

MAN

Watch your tongue, pal! (He takes a deep breath) I know your type! I've met them before! I've seen your type crawling under rotten logs! I've lifted rocks and seen your type burrowing into the muck! The light would kill you, my friend! (He turns away, breathing heavily) I don't think I like you.

JACK

You're a bit hasty to judge, aren't you? A bit in a hurry to jump headlong into a pit. You'd better watch that or you'll crack your head open.

GIRL

Actually, she didn't chuck him out at once. I mean she gave him a warning and waited to see how he'd take it.

JACK

How did he take it?

MAN

(Snorts disgustedly) There's no warning that type. What they require is a fist to the groin!

GIRL

He didn't take it. He laughed it off. He said, and these are his exact words, 'What's wrong with dancing? I guess I'll dance if I want to.' Well, what do you think of that?

JACK

But he had a point, you know.

DIANE

And so he moved to the park and he took his coat-and-tails with him. And that's where they found him.

JACK

(To GIRL) Tell me. When the warning fell on deaf ears, did she try the fist to the groin?

MAN

(Shakes his head in despair) Many a time even that fails. Many a time even the fist to the groin has no effect.

JACK

Then perhaps she tried a kiss, a kiss and a bit of sympathy?

GIRL

I don't remember. I just remember he didn't change.

DIANE

And a few years later they found him there in the park. He was sitting upright on a bench and he was wearing his coat-and-tails. But he wasn't dancing.

GIRL

I remember he had this long white hair growing out of his ear and hanging halfway down his neck, a silky white hair. What do you think about that?

MAN

That kind ought to be locked in a cage. No, a cage is too good for them. They should be put in a deep hole! I know the type, believe me. That's the only thing that makes them happy. They're never really satisfied until you put them in a deep, dark hole.

JACK

(To MAN) You're quite a man of experience. You seem to learn something new every day. Tell me. Just what have you learned today?

MAN

Today! Nothing! I haven't learned a thing today. I'm working today. I do my learning in my spare time. (He walks to the piano) And now I've got to get this piano out of here.

JACK

Do you play? Is that your instrument? Why don't you try it out?

MAN

Me! Play the piano? Who had time to play the piano? I played the drums. When I was a kid I had a little drum. I used to beat on that for a while. But I never got to be much good at it.

DIANE

You don't look much like a drummer.

JACK

Anyway, we don't have a drum up here, only a piano.

GIRL

I knew someone once who had a drum. He broke it. He was playing it one afternoon and he stuck the drumstick right through it, so he just quit. For the rest of his life he never picked up another drumstick. For some reason, I think he called the drumsticks bones.

JACK

I'll bet that was in Cincinnati.

DIANE

(To MAN about the piano) Look, I could teach you how to play that.

MAN

So you're a piano player, are you?

DIANE

(To MAN) Oh yes. I'm a perfectionist when it comes to the piano. I think everything has to be just right, otherwise there's no point in it at all.

MAN

Well, well. I'll bet you're quite a piano player at that.

DIANE

I am. I gave a concert once. In a large hall, filled with people who'd come to hear me play. They were dressed for a gala evening, the women draped in pearls and the men in coats-and-tails, and when I came out, it was so bright, the light clung to my neck like a string of diamonds. I had no idea where I was! I became dizzy with the excitement.

MAN

That sounds like one fantastic evening all right.

DIANE

It was a turning point in my life.

MAN

That's understandable.

JACK

(He walks to the window and looks behind the shade) There's going to be about a quarter of a moon tonight. No more than that, nothing more than a fingernail paring of a moon.

DIANE

(To MAN, sitting at the piano) What shall I play for you? I'll play whatever you like. What would you like to hear?

MAN

Play anything. I'm a piano man. The piano has always been my instrument. I'm happy just to hear it played. (He sits beside her on the piano bench).

DIANE

Would you like anything before I play? A glass of water? A cup of tea? Is there anything you want?

MAN

I'm fine, just fine. (He takes her hand) You know you've got lovely hands. You have really lovely hands.

GIRL

(Uneasily, to MAN) Look, I think we'd better get back to work now. Let's start hauling the rest of our stuff up here.

DIANE

(To MAN) Oh, I don't just play the piano, you know. I'm versatile. I know how to plant rose bushes in autumn, and I know how to polish exquisite antique silver, and I can make omelettes. French, Greek, Spanish, any kind of omelette. In fact, when I was just a girl I won an omelette prize. Hands down. The judges claimed there was no competition.

MAN

(He touches her hair) My old mom was a first-rate cook. Oh, the things she could do with just a slab of beef and some raw onions were pure heaven! They made you dizzy. She was a high altitude cook mom was! And then put a tomato in her hands and see what happened! It would blow the top right off your head!

DIANE

I'll play something for you now. I'm still a wonderful pianist. I just need everything to be perfect. (She begins playing Chopin's 'Nocturne in B flat Major').

MAN

(He slams his palm on the piano) Hold on! What's that you're playing? I don't want you playing that.

GIRL

We don't really have time to listen, anyway. We have work to do.

DIANE

Well, if you don't like that, I'll play a different piece. There's a lot to choose from.

MAN

(He again touches her hair) Well, why don't you just surprise me then? Give me a surprise. (He kisses her neck, but she seems almost unaware of his presence) I think I'd like a little surprise.

JACK

Surprise! That reminds me of a fellow from down the block. He used to wear unmated shoes. He did it on purpose. That's what was so surprising, but he said he was a grown man, he could wear whatever shoes he wanted. He was a lawyer.

GIRL

And he used to appear that way in court?

JACK

In court! He used to walk down the middle of the street that way. Unfortunately, he had a weakness. He smoked. He was a human incinerator. He was a slave to tobacco. All his life he tried to be a free man and what happened? He didn't live to be fifty!

DIANE

(Who has been thinking, to MAN) You want a surprise? All right, I'll surprise you. (She starts to play the 'Moonlight' Sonata).

MAN

No, I don't think so. That just doesn't seem to summarize the mood in a nutshell, would you say?

DIANE

(Stops playing) Maybe not.

MAN

You're not doing very well, are you?

DIANE

I don't know what's wrong. Maybe I need some encouragement.

MAN

Maybe you're just not trying hard enough. (He kisses her lightly on the neck) You want to try again? It's up to you.

DIANE

I'm a left-handed piano player, you see. It takes me a little longer to warm up. (She plays 'Chopsticks').

GIRL

(She walks to the door right, looks at it for a moment, then turns away) Once we get all this stuff out of here, we'll really be able to make it look like something. You really have to see the furniture we have coming up here. It's all hand carved. Swans gliding on smooth lakes, unicorns grazing on roses and hyacinth. I always say if you're going to do something at all, you should do it right. I learned that from my father. He always said that. He said it if he was sober. When he was drunk, he usually didn't say anything at all.

JACK

You don't see many unicorns any more. I saw one once hiding in a basement. Years ago.

DIANE

(Stops playing) That's the end of it. Well, technically, it doesn't actually have an end. That's one of the strange things about that piece. You can go on playing it like that forever, if you've got the time.

MAN

Well, that's a bit odd. What's it called? What's the name of that little piece?

JACK

(He walks over and stands by THE GIRL, and they both watch THE MAN and DIANE sitting on the piano bench) It's called 'Chopsticks.' It has an Oriental title.

GIRL

(Vaguely, to MAN) Isn't it about time we got back to work?

MAN

(To DIANE) Tell me. Who taught you how to play? I'll bet you picked it up on your own. You strike me as somebody who knows which end is up. Am I right?

DIANE

You like my playing then?

MAN

Oh yes. Let me tell you. It's much better than I ever did on that drum of mine.

DIANE

What you need is a place to practice. Don't you have a house?

MAN

A house? Me? Oh yes, I've got quite a few of them. I'm something of an expert when it comes to houses.

JACK

(To GIRL) Unicorns and centaurs, the sad fact is they are disappearing, all gone up in smoke.

GIRL

I don't think they ever existed. I think you've got them confused with something else.

DIANE

(Coyly, to MAN) And I suppose these houses of yours are loaded with fireplaces.

MAN

(Wary) Fireplaces?

DIANE

That's right. Large, stone fireplaces in the eighteenth-century style. Fireplaces that still burn real logs and take you into another world, a world of white wigs and golden buckles and hot-buttered rum and harpsichords and hounds, itching for the hunt. (She plays a quick 'Baroque-style Chopsticks.')

Do you have a fireplaces?

MAN

Oh yes, sure I do. In fact, I've got them in every room.

JACK

(To GIRL, who is fidgeting) You know you really ought to learn how to dance. It would teach you how to relax.

GIRL

Oh no, I don't have any desire to relax. If I relax, I'm completely useless.

JACK

You've got the wrong idea. I don't think you understand what dancing's all about. It's architecture is what it is. It's where we live. (He points to the poster) There it is. That's what real dancing is all about.

GIRL

That? Just what is that, anyway?

JACK

(As they watch DIANE and THE MAN) I can show you, if you really want to learn.

MAN

(To DIANE) Yes, ma'am, I'm a fireplace man. You hit that right on the nose. I guess I picked it up from my dad. He was a fireplace man before me. He knew all about them.

GIRL

(To JACK) I don't know. I don't think I've got the time.

JACK

You've got the time. You're made of time.

GIRL

Made of time! That's a funny thing to say.

DIANE

(To MAN) I'm getting a vision, a picture in my mind's eye. It's after dinner. The plates are cleared. The goblets have been removed, and the hounds are curled by the fireplace as its flames delicately lick the walls. Outside a large window, the moon hangs like an egg, and in the corner the velvet couch, the leather slippers and a decanter of exquisite brandy...

MAN

(Growing unsettled) Hounds?

DIANE

... as I softly play on the golden harpsichord, ancient dances, almost forgotten...

MAN

Wait! What is this?

DIANE

Are you still with me?

MAN

What is this! What are you trying to pull!

DIANE

And the stillness of the past settles like ashes from the fireplace...

MAN

Now wait a minute! Is this a trick! Is this one of your left-handed piano player tricks!

DIANE

And I play the antique instrument until the brandy and the moonlight have completely vanished...

MAN

You do, do you! (He rises abruptly) You think you do that? Well, let me tell you something, you don't play anything! You don't play a god damn thing! (He stands staring furiously at her. She sits impassively at the piano with, perhaps, even a slight smile on her face).

JACK

(To GIRL, who is staring at MAN) You don't have to watch this if you don't want to.

MAN

(To GIRL) Now don't worry, I'll handle this! I'll take care of it! I've done it before!

DIANE

And through the vast front window, the grass can be seen, rolling out like a carpet, spread at the feet of the moon with a couple of ancient trees, weeping willow trees, standing like lamp posts lighting the way home for the frolicking hounds...

MAN

Hounds! Just what the hell are hounds, anyway? I trusted you, but you showed me! Listen, you don't know what hounds are! Nobody knows what they are!

DIANE

(She looks at MAN) I don't think I got through to you, did I?

MAN

You've been trying to seduce me, haven't you? That's what you've been trying to do!

GIRL

Well then, is it over? Have you learned your lesson? Now can we get back to work?

MAN

(To JACK, as if flabbergasted) She was trying to seduce me! Did you see it? Did you witness that stinking exhibition? How about that! The world turns! It spins around and around, but they stay in their stinking holes!

JACK

Look, I think you're jumping to conclusions. I think you're butting against a brick wall. It's a little disgusting.

MAN

No, I'm not butting against anything! I'm right here! Just where are you? You've got your head in the clouds, pal, that's your trouble! Well, I'll tell you right now, I don't go in for that sort of thing. No, sir! I've led a clean life. Oh, I won't say I haven't had a bit of fun! I'm no Little Lord Fauntleroy! But I've been respectable. I put on a clean shirt every morning, and it's clean every night when I take it off!

GIRL

Well, I hope you've learned your lesson, so we can get some work done now.

JACK

(Ruminatively, to MAN) Personally I think you've lowered your head and charged into a brick wall, and I think it must hurt.

MAN

Look, I'm telling you I don't go in for that sort of thing. That's all. Other people can do what they want, all right? I don't care what the rest of them do! Oh, I've seen all kinds. You name a kind! I've seen it. And there's too many of them to try and tell them all what to do. Live and let live that is the rule I go by.

DIANE

But somebody taught you that proverb, didn't he!

MAN

Taught me! Listen, I read it on a bathroom wall! And I'll tell you something else, I've seen sluts before, I have dealt with—

GIRL

(Interrupting) Stop it! I don't think you ought to say that in front of me. I don't appreciate you saying that where I can hear it.

MAN

That's all right, ma'am. At your age, you're too young to believe me. (He walks around the room, very upset) I want you to know I have asked for nothing but a quiet life. I have only wanted peace and quiet. A life dedicated to serenity. That's it. A few fireplaces, a carpet of grass, a couple of weeping willows and, perhaps, a velvet couch and a decanter of ancient brandy! Now what is wrong with that? You tell me what is wrong with that?

JACK

You forgot the piano. You've got to have the piano in there or it doesn't hold up.

MAN

(Looks fiercely at him) What did you say?

JACK

You forgot the piano. That's what I said.

MAN

You think I forgot the piano? No, I didn't forget the piano at all! (He takes a switch-blade knife from his pocket and flicks it open) I haven't forgotten about that piano. In fact you'll find I have a pretty good memory when it comes to pianos. (He walks over to the piano).

DIANE

What are you doing! (To GIRL) What is he doing?

GIRL

Don't you know? Haven't you ever had a brother or a sister? What do the people you love do when they're upset? I don't know what he's doing.

MAN

(He carves something (his name?) into the piano) See, pal, I didn't forget about the piano! (He looks at them all, now suddenly a bit sad) You made me do that. I hope you understand that.

DIANE

You're a pig, with a curly little tail and a blunt snout. That piano is worth a hundred like you.

GIRL

It's just that he's so restless. Sometimes I don't think he knows what he wants.

MAN

Anyway, now you know all about the piano.

JACK

If you think that changes the piano, you're up a tree, out on a very far limb.

DIANE

(To JACK) Yes, that piano is worth a million of him because that piano has the potential for beauty, whereas he only has the potential for filth and desecration!

JACK

(Rather sadly) Sometimes that's what it means to be human.

MAN

(To DIANE) Don't tell me about beauty, lady! Don't give me any of your rubbish about beauty because I know what beauty is! Yes, and I know what kindness is, too!

GIRL

(Becoming impatient) Let's get back to work. We've got an empty closet here, and we have things to fill it with, so let's get it filled!

MAN

Oh yes, I know about beauty and kindness! I once knew a man. He was a cobbler. That's right, a lowly cobbler, but that man was a prince! He may have been a lowly cobbler, but his heart was made of pure gold. (He begins to founder) And that man used to hold my hand when I was a child! And that... that is what I want to tell you about beauty and kindness! (Pause, to GIRL) Okay, now, let's get back to work.

DIANE

I just hope you realize you've overstayed your welcome.

MAN

(He tries to move the piano) This bastard is heavy!

GIRL

You want me to help?

MAN

No, no, you've had a pretty rough day. Why don't you sit down and have a rest?

GIRL

But you don't want to strain yourself. Who will you get to help?

MAN

(He looks at JACK) How about you, pal? You want to make a few bucks?

JACK

I'm afraid I'm busy.

MAN

We'll give you five bucks. How about it? Five bucks just to help me get this damn piano out the door. Just to the other side of the door, then I don't give a shit what happens to it.

JACK

You're barking up the wrong tree.

MAN

I'm not barking, pal, I'm paying. Okay, I know the game. You want more? I'll give you ten. How does ten bucks sound?

JACK

I'm a dancer. That's the only thing I know.

MAN

You won't strain your back. All right, I'll give you fifteen bucks. And if you strain your back, with fifteen bucks, you can buy yourself a brace. How about fifteen?

GIRL

(To MAN) Forget it. We'll just hire somebody else.

MAN

I don't want somebody else. I want him. Okay, pal, twenty bucks. That's probably more than you've ever seen in your life, right? (JACK pays no attention to him) Okay, we'll say fifty. How about it?

DIANE

(To JACK) Go ahead, do it. Now that he's touched that piano it's ruined.

MAN

(He spits on the piano) I didn't like to do that! But you forced me to act that way! You are making me act against my better nature. That's the way you two affect people!

DIANE

You're out of your mind. Your brain is a blank page.

MAN

(He turns back to JACK) Okay, pal, seventy-five bucks. That's tops. Seventy-five bucks! If you put a few bucks with it, that's a trip around the world! Seventy-five now, and more later. That's a promise. Seventy-five now. Later, all you want. I give you my word, and my word is always good.

JACK

(He walks to the window and looks behind the shade) You don't want to take that piano out of here because, the fact is you've got nothing to put in its place. You'd just be left with a blank space. You wouldn't want that, would you?

DIANE

(She laughs) He doesn't know what you mean. Look at him. He thinks you're making that up. (She laughs quietly, perhaps sadly, then exits through the door right).

GIRL

(To MAN) You don't need him. There are plenty of people crying for seventy-five dollars.

MAN

(Looking after DIANE) What's this! What the hell is this?

GIRL

(She walks around the piano) After all, it's only a piano. It's not like moving a whole house.

MAN

(He walks to the door right, tries to open it. It's locked) What's she doing? She's locked herself in the closet! That's nothing but a stinking little closet! Why is she doing that? She's got to get out of there. We've got things to put in there!

JACK

Now with me it's different. If I find a blank space, I simply dance in it.

MAN

(Motioning to JACK) Is this some of your work? Are you responsible for this? You don't really know what you're about, do you! (JACK turns away and walks to the window).

GIRL

What's she want to do in the closet? There's nothing to do in a closet! (She suddenly kicks the piano angrily) Let's get this bitch out of here! Right now!

MAN

(He walks up to JACK at the window) What do you see out there?

JACK

Things. I see the moon wearing a mourning dress and a black veil. I see a pigeon feather balanced on a cloud. The sort of things a person always sees if he looks out a window.

GIRL

(Sits on the bench and hits a couple random notes on the piano) It's out of tune. It's no good anyway.

MAN

You ought to get a better view. You ought to take a closer look. (He pulls the shade from the wall, revealing bricks inside the window frame) You really need a better view. (He walks over and addresses the GIRL) I'll tell you what we'll do.

We'll go out and bring up the rest of our things; then we'll worry about getting this junk out of here.

GIRL

You want to do it that way? You think that will work?

JACK

You've got nothing to bring up. It's a farce.

MAN

(To GIRL) Sure. It will work out just dandy. (He walks over to JACK) You don't see anything out there, pal. Not a thing!

(JACK stares at the bricks as if he were looking out a window. After watching him a moment, the MAN jabs JACK in the gut. JACK doubles over and falls to the floor, breathing heavily. Then, on all fours, he slowly moves towards his chair. The MAN walks beside him, while the GIRL hits random keys on the piano)

MAN

(To JACK) I knew a man once who saw a dog crawling like that down the street, an old sick dog. One of his eyes had popped out and he was losing his hair, and something was eating his face away. He was a sick dog. But this man I knew he had an answer for that. (The MAN kicks JACK in the belly. JACK grunts and collapses to the floor) This man said, 'I'll just put that dog out of his misery. That's the most humane solution to the problem.' So that's what he did. He put that dog out of its misery. And I'm sure anyone would say he did the right thing. (He walks to the GIRL) I'm going down now. I'm going to start bringing up the rest of our things. Then we'll get rid of this junk. (He exits left).

GIRL

(She rises and walks to the 'window') He gets very upset sometimes. That's the way he is. He starts thinking about his father and that upsets him. You see he loved his father very much, but his father was a famous man. He was world famous and he didn't have much time for his family. Of course he always sent them photos. He sent them some really marvelous photos from all over the world. (As she continues to speak, apparently staring out the 'window,' JACK pulls himself to his chair and sits there, slumped over, until the end of the play). He has a photo of his father from Africa or Arabia or some place where there are camels, because it's a photo of his father, sitting on a camel. Well, I have seen him look at that photo until tears came into his eyes. What do you think of that? (She pauses) Of course he and his father were fantastic pals. He used to call his father the old geezer. When he told me that I nearly died laughing. You can't imagine how that cracked me up. So you see he and his father were the best of friends. The only problem was he was afraid, deep down, his father didn't actually like him. Whether he really liked his father or not, I couldn't say. My guess,

though, is that he didn't. It would be my calculated guess that he didn't really like his father at all. The problem, you see, is that they lived in two different worlds. They couldn't ever get in touch with each other. (She pauses and shakes her head sadly) Anyway, that was the problem. So I hope you understand. (She then touches the bricks with her hand, looks briefly at JACK, and then exits).

(A few seconds after she leaves, DIANE re-enters. She goes to the piano)

DIANE

Would you like some tea? (Pause) They've gone, haven't they? It's better that way. It's for the best. They're not our kind. They don't know what they're after. There's nothing you can do with people like that. Absolutely nothing. (She pauses, sighs) There's always Cincinnati, isn't there? They've forgotten all about Cincinnati. They don't even know where it is any more. Look, how would you like a cup of tea? (She now walks to the 'window' and picks up the shade) What happened? Did you see this? Oh, it doesn't matter. It's all right. I can fix it. (She appears to be looking out the 'window'). The sky seems to be full of wings tonight. Everything is flying! The moon is just hanging on by her teeth and all around the sky is full of beating wings. What do you make of that? (She pauses) Listen, I'll make you a cup of tea. Wouldn't you like that? I'll take care of you. It will be all right. I'll make you a nice hot cup of tea. (Another pause, then she walks towards JACK, who is still slumped over, looking tensely at him) But they aren't coming back again, are they? You don't think they're coming back? (She looks at JACK, as the lights slowly fade to A BLACKOUT, and...)

THE PLAY IS OVER

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