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## **Liselotte in May** A Tragicomedy in Two Parts

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English Translation by Peter Linka

### Cast of Characters

<u>Liselotte</u> :	An appealing woman, 35.
<u>Karl</u> :	Liselotte's former classmate, 35.
<u>Ludwig</u> :	An accountant, 35.
<u>Henrik</u> :	A man, 35.
<u>Heinrich</u> :	A plumber, 35.
<u>Roland</u> :	A poet, 35.
<u>Nikolaus</u> :	A vagrant, 35.
<u>Man in a black tuxedo</u> :	A man, 35.

**NOTE: The seven male characters are all played by the same actor!**

ACT ONEScene 1

SETTING: *The living room of Liselotte's apartment. The front door, upstage centre, is translucent when backlit. A coat rack stands stage right of the door. A window, and bedroom door, further right. A sofa downstage centre, a table and two chairs down left. Up left, the entrance to the kitchen. A cupboard against the wall, left.*

AT RISE: *The curtain is open while the audience take their seats. Liselotte bustles about the living room. Sometimes she's at the table, at others running across the room towards the bedroom. She tries on several pairs of shoes, finally deciding which ones to wear. The table is set; but still she finds things to adjust on it. She rushes about, back and forth across the room. The doorbell rings. Karl's silhouette appears on the door. It is clearly the outline of a man holding a bunch of flowers. Liselotte heads towards the door but stops halfway. She sits on a chair, lowers her face into her hands, and waits. Karl rings again. She gets up, goes to the door, but doesn't open it. She watches the silhouette. Karl very slowly turns away, as if about to leave. Liselotte quickly steps up to the door and opens it. Karl stands there. Liselotte does too. Silence.*

KARL  
Hello, Liselotte....

LISELOTTE  
Hello, Karl...

*They stand in silence.*

KARL  
It's been a long time...

LISELOTTE  
Very long...

KARL  
I thought... a class reunion perhaps...

LISELOTTE  
Oh, no...

KARL  
That that's why... you called.

LISELOTTE  
It wasn't... much of a class... We don't really... get together...

KARL  
No... not for a while now... But you haven't...

LISELOTTE  
Neither have you... Except your moustache.

KARL  
It just grew... so I left it.

LISELOTTE  
Looks good.

KARL  
Think so?

LISELOTTE  
If it grew, you may as well leave it.

KARL  
Exactly what I thought... Not unbecoming, is it?

LISELOTTE  
Oh, no.

KARL  
Lucky women don't have them... well, not most women... not you...

LISELOTTE  
If they do, they wax them.

KARL  
I'm so pleased to see you, Lisl.

LISELOTTE  
So many years... and just a phone call...

KARL  
That's what it all comes down to, doesn't it... just one phone call... If Alexander Graham Bell had died of some childhood illness, none of this would be happening right now...

*They look at each other, and laugh.*

LISELOTTE  
Come in, Karl.

KARL  
Yes, I thought I might...

*Karl enters. They stop opposite each other, and shake hands. Liselotte awkwardly kisses Karl on the cheek. He smiles, flowers in hand, then looks around.*

KARL  
Nice, this area ... nice street, too... a dead-end...

LISELOTTE  
I love it at this time of year... everything's covered with flowers in May.

KARL  
No through traffic in a dead-end street.

LISELOTTE  
Let's sit down.

KARL  
Why?

LISELOTTE  
Got a better idea?

KARL  
No.

*They sit down. Karl is still holding the flowers.*

KARL  
But... you didn't always live alone here.

LISELOTTE  
No... I used to nurse an old lady.

KARL  
Yes, I remember... after high school... you went to nursing college...

LISELOTTE  
That's right. Actually, that was my first job... looking after this old lady... She was bedridden... I had to come out and visit her... She wouldn't have anyone else, just me.

KARL  
You were always...

LISELOTTE  
What always?

KARL  
You were always so... reliable, Lisl... at school...

LISELOTTE  
You think so?

KARL  
Absolutely...

LISELOTTE  
Anyway, I got stuck here... and I ended up moving in... I nursed her for fifteen years... Then she left me this flat... She had no one else.

KARL  
Some people have all the luck. Not like me...

*He falls silent. Then he pulls himself together.*

KARL  
I'll be paying my mortgage till the day I die.

LISELOTTE

After fifteen years... she felt she owed me this.

KARL

Of course, I didn't mean it like that...

LISELOTTE

Like what?

KARL

I didn't mean to offend you or anything. I just meant that for some people, things fall into their laps, while others have to pay for them... till the end of their lives.

LISELOTTE

Well yes, I suppose I was lucky... but I didn't want her to die... Actually, we became quite fond of each other.

KARL

I'm sure it's not difficult... to become... fond of you, Lisl.

*Silence. Liselotte stands up, bothered.*

LISELOTTE

I cooked for you, Karl.

KARL

Really? Well, that's really...

LISELOTTE

I made all sorts of things... Look... I even made a little menu... for when you... came...

*She enthusiastically goes to the table and places a sheet of paper in front of Karl. He puts the flowers on the chair next to him and picks up the menu. He stares at it.*

KARL

But they're...

LISELOTTE

That's what we're having... They're all... ready... I've been cooking for two days.

KARL

But they're all...

LISELOTTE

Your favourites, Karl.

KARL

My favourites... That means you must have...

*Silence. He looks at Liselotte.*

LISELOTTE

Yes...I must have...

KARL  
You must have... met her...

LISELOTTE  
We went to the same hairdresser's.

KARL  
The same... hairdresser? You both went to the same hairdresser?

LISELOTTE  
Same "hairdresser's"... same place, different people... We often just... bumped into each other there... You know how it is.

*Karl looks at Liselotte, then at the menu. He springs up, turns away, and painfully raises his head.*

KARL  
Sylvia's no longer with us, Lisl.

*Silence.*

LISELOTTE  
She said... you loved eating... and that she was always cooking for you...

KARL  
She complained?

LISELOTTE  
No, she said it with joy... She said that cooking for you was like... giving something of herself to you... and that you accepted it... And that, Karl... is true...

KARL  
True what?

LISELOTTE  
True devotion.... Love...!

KARL  
Sylvia's gone, Lisl.

LISELOTTE  
I'm very sorry.

KARL  
She'll never cook again, and she'll never go to the hairdresser's again. The two things she loved most in life: cooking and going to the hairdresser's.

LISELOTTE  
I'm truly sorry, Karl.

KARL  
No one stood the way she did... so beautifully, in the kitchen... Her hair freshly done... chopping onions and doing whatever she had to... for me... just for me... because we never had...

LISELOTTE

I know...

KARL

We tried having children, twice... but she said that we were just so made for each other... understand, Lisl... so made for each other that God wouldn't let a child come between us... She always said that... and she was right... But, you know... I went and had myself examined... and there's nothing wrong with me... I could repopulate four deserted villages in Carinthia... But it just wasn't to be...

LISELOTTE

Perhaps it's best this way.

KARL

She stood by the stove, with a fresh perm in her hair, and lived only for me... Every evening... because, of course, I worked during the day... She cooked for me every evening... never went out... to a restaurant... never... because it wouldn't have come from her... in a restaurant it just wouldn't have come from her... Understand, Lisl?

*He shakes himself, tries to smile, and picks up the menu again.*

KARL

Amazing... And you made these... all these... yourself...?

LISELOTTE

I can't say they'll be quite the same, but I tried...

KARL (*unexpectedly*)

Why?

*Silence.*

LISELOTTE

Why what?

KARL

Why... did you make them?

LISELOTTE

Because you like them... Sylvia told me... That's all she ever spoke of, every time we...

*Silence.*

KARL

You haven't changed.

LISELOTTE

Neither have you... except for your moustache...

KARL

So, where's that cold melon and dill soup then?!!

*He shrieks loudly, and gives Liselotte a playful slap on the backside. She shrieks, too.*

LISELOTTE

Come, sit at the table. I'll bring you... your cold melon and dill soup!

*She hurries out to the kitchen and comes straight back with a bowl of soup, which she places in front of Karl.*

LISELOTTE

This is my first try... I've never made it before... Please...

KARL

And you?

LISELOTTE

Oh, I'm too anxious to eat.

KARL

You're not eating?!

LISELOTTE

Melon and dill soup??!

KARL

Why not?

LISELOTTE

Because... I can't imagine... that it could possibly be... good... But I know you like it... so I tried to make it... just like...

*She stops. Karl springs up, turns, and looks out the window. Silence.*

KARL

Sylvia would never have done this. We always ate together. It would have been inconceivable that one of us ate while the other just watched... She would have never...

*He lowers his head onto his arm and starts sobbing. Liselotte looks on, awkwardly.*

LISELOTTE

Well... I suppose... I do like dill... and melon, too... I never thought of having them together like this... but if you'd like me to try it... if it makes you happy...

KARL

I'm just asking...

LISELOTTE

I'm not Sylvia, Karl.

KARL

I'm just asking... If she confided her recipes to you, and you called, and made them for me, then she's sending a message through you... She knew she was going die; people feel that, and when a woman feels it, she goes to the hairdresser's and dictates her recipes to her best friend... because you were Sylvia's best friend, weren't you, Lisl?

LISELOTTE

No... we only met once a month...



KARL (*exclaiming*)

You must have been her best friend if she dictated her cold melon and dill soup recipe to you!!

LISELOTTE (*uncertainly*)

Yes... she was, Karl... she was my best friend...

*Karl turns and smiles.*

KARL

I'm sorry, Lisl... I'm a little... that is to say... Her death was very difficult for me... And it's difficult now too that she's not here...

LISELOTTE

I'm amazed that you managed.

KARL

It was easy for her. She died... that's it... But I still have to carry her with me for a long time... for a very long time.

LISELOTTE

Let her go for a little while, Karl... and just eat... If this is her message... then just sit down and eat!

KARL

But...

LISELOTTE

I'll eat with you... of course.

*They go back to the table. Karl leans over his soup bowl while Liselotte fetches herself another. She slowly brings herself to try the soup. Karl swallows the first spoonful. Liselotte looks at him anxiously. Karl looks up.*

KARL

Thank you, Sylvia.

LISELOTTE

So... do you like it...?

KARL

Thank you, Sylvia.

LISELOTTE

You mean, it's as if she...?

KARL

Exactly... exactly the same.

LISELOTTE

That's good.

*She, too, tries a spoonful.*

KARL  
Good, isn't it?

LISELOTTE  
Yes, it turned out quite well. Actually, this is the best cold melon and dill soup I've ever had.

KARL  
So, how did it come about?

LISELOTTE  
How? ... Well, I went and I bought some dill and some melon...

KARL  
No... at the hairdresser's...! How did it come about? Did she just start telling you her recipes?

LISELOTTE  
At first, I thought she was joking... She said she was going to die... She said, "I'm going to die, Lisl, so write down these recipes... and if Karl meets someone after I'm gone... then you give them to her... whoever she is... so she knows what to cook for him".

*Silence. Karl again starts sobbing, inwardly this time, though visibly shaking.*

LISELOTTE  
Shall I bring the mushrooms with cranberry sauce?

KARL  
Yes... Did you... make enough? Because she always said...

LISELOTTE  
You can eat a kilo of them! ... Yes... I made enough...

KARL  
She was a wonderful woman, Lisl.

*Silence. Liselotte smiles. She goes out to the kitchen and returns in a few moments with a dish.*

LISELOTTE  
Mushrooms with cranberry sauce... just as you like them, Karl!

KARL  
Just as I like them.

*He looks at Liselotte.*

KARL  
Do you know when you called me?

LISELOTTE  
The day before yesterday.

KARL  
You called at the very last moment. I went down to the local cafeteria... I ate some pasta... and I went home... And I was miserable...

LISELOTTE

I know the place. You shouldn't go there.

KARL

I was miserable. Twelve years... twelve times three hundred and sixty-five evenings, and just as many dinners together... Just Sylvia and me... the two of us... What could a cafeteria on the corner possibly offer?! Do they like me there? Do they cook for me with love?!

LISELOTTE

It's just a business, Karl.

KARL

I wanted to end it all... That's when you rang.

*Liselotte looks up, surprised. Karl tastes the mushrooms.*

KARL

Yes. These mushrooms are hers: Sylvia's.

*He looks up at Liselotte. She feels obliged to try the mushrooms too.*

LISELOTTE

How extraordinary... mushrooms with cranberry sauce... They're so delicious.

KARL

She was always proud of them... Do you know... that I'm a tram driver?

LISELOTTE

Of course... she told me.

KARL

She loved boasting about me... "My husband's a tram driver!" She'd always tell everyone – and people were amazed... Often in the afternoon, on my last run, they'd call me over the radio saying that Sylvia has a message for Karl: She's made minty liver for dinner...

LISELOTTE

I made you some, too, Karl.

KARL

That was our other favourite. And these mushrooms that you made... are so scrumptious, so fantastic, Lisl.

*They gaze at each other.*

LISELOTTE

I've always been very lonely.

KARL

I thought so.

LISELOTTE

The old lady gave me a room. I lived here – I nursed her day and night... She paid me well... She was like a mother to me.

KARL  
I see.

LISELOTTE  
Then she died, and I buried her. I gave her a decent funeral. And now, I have this flat, and I realised... that I'm thirty-five.

KARL  
That's life.

LISELOTTE  
Everyone from school has children now, or they've made it somewhere in life... You know, it's better that we never have reunions like other classes – what could I have told everyone? That all this time I just nursed an old lady? Someone I had nothing to do with? What could I have said?

KARL  
That's why you called.

LISELOTTE  
Yes... that's why.

KARL  
Even though I couldn't stand you.

LISELOTTE  
At school, I couldn't stand you either.

KARL  
We didn't get on very well.

LISELOTTE  
We hardly ever said hello.

KARL  
Not even during the breaks.

LISELOTTE  
Never.

KARL  
We never even teased you like the other girls.

LISELOTTE  
I was just a dull little mouse.

KARL  
We didn't even notice you.

LISELOTTE  
No. Never. No one did.

KARL  
Where's that minty liver?!

LISELOTTE

I'll bring you... the minty liver, Karl!

*They look deep into each other's eyes as if making a declaration of love. Liselotte withdraws her hand and goes out to the kitchen. Karl remains seated, staring at his hand. Liselotte returns with a covered dish.*

LISELOTTE

Minty liver!

*She removes the lid. Karl smells it.*

KARL

It smells just right.

*During the following, Karl gorges himself on the minty liver.*

LISELOTTE

So I thought about that, and about how I'm not young anymore, and that I shouldn't be waiting for a Greek god to come up to me in the street, with lightning flashing all around him, saying, "Ah, love has finally arrived, with its sweet scent of youth..." and everything... "Love is here, it is May...", his eyes blossoming, his face a field of flowers, flowers blooming everywhere, and then he embraces me there in the street, as the impulses of our youthful bodies rage within us like lightning bolts, and we yearn for nightfall, for a wondrous, long, glorious night together... No, Karl, that time has passed – I'm certain that will never... However, if we're sober, we can find ourselves a partner: a man, someone; even at thirty-five... once we accept that our bodies can no longer accommodate lightning bolts, that our skin is not so supple any more, and we've started developing quirks, intolerable habits, which we can, of course, accept in one another... but we no longer do so via absolution arising from passion or emotion, but rather through rational evaluation, in the spirit of "we're together, because that's how it's practical"... And, yes, you're right, Karl, Sylvia certainly didn't give the recipes precisely to me by chance... Even though we hardly knew each other – we never got together or anything like that – she nevertheless felt my yearning for her happiness, and she sensed that she was dying, so she wanted to pass on her happiness to me. Can there be any love greater than that, Karl? Can there?

*Karl has been gorging himself during the above. He now looks up.*

KARL

This minty liver's extraordinary! It's even better than hers...

LISELOTTE (*humbly*)

Don't say that.

KARL

But it is! Truly!

LISELOTTE

How could that possibly be? This is the first time I ever made it.

KARL

You didn't make it... She did! She handed herself over to you along with her happiness.

*Liselotte is surprised.*

LISELOTTE

Were you listening to what I said?

KARL

Of course I was listening... She gave herself to you... And I accept you.

LISELOTTE

But I'm not Sylvia, Karl...

KARL

You're right about everything... I accept her decision, and I accept you, Lisl.

LISELOTTE

Good God! What have I been going on about all this time...? You've misunderstood everything!

KARL

You called me, and I came. You cooked all this to let her know that you're taking her place. And I've accepted.

*Silence.*

LISELOTTE

Perhaps it's not quite that simple.

KARL

Yes it is.

*Karl stands and goes to his coat hanging on the coat rack. From inside his coat, he takes out a bag, from which he pulls out a pair of slippers. Liselotte watches in amazement. He takes off his shoes, removes his socks, and meticulously folds them, placing his socks inside his shoes. He puts on the slippers, and begins to unbutton his shirt, revealing an old T-shirt. He then takes off his trousers, beneath which he wears a pair of comfortable tracky-bottoms. He turns and stands in front of Liselotte in his tracky-bottoms, old T-shirt and slippers.*

KARL

I've come to her, Lisl. To her, and to you. Do you accept me?

*Liselotte looks him up and down.*

LISELOTTE

Yes.

*She stands up. They stand there facing each other.*

KARL

You... you are healthy, aren't you?

LISELOTTE

How do you mean?

KARL

I mean... you're not going to die early, are you?

LISELOTTE  
I don't think so.

KARL  
Don't die, please... Don't die early... Let's just live as long as we can... You mustn't leave me here on my own, alright?

LISELOTTE  
Alright. I'll try... I'll try to die as late as possible.

KARL  
It'd be best if I died first.

LISELOTTE  
No, don't! You just live...

KARL  
No! It'd be best if I did... I simply couldn't bear going through all that again... losing my happiness... I couldn't... I simply couldn't...

*He suddenly hugs her tightly, then lets go. They stand facing each other.*

KARL  
At school I never noticed how beautiful you were.

LISELOTTE  
Perhaps I wasn't... maybe just since then...

KARL  
No... you were beautiful then, too... Even back then, you were... Let's have the fish now!

LISELOTTE  
Bream in raspberry sauce... Yes... the time has finally come!

KARL  
Now, I accept it.

LISELOTTE  
I'll go get it. But how you can enjoy such a bony fish?

KARL  
Not many people eat bream. But we like it, though.

LISELOTTE  
So is this now... definite, Karl?

KARL  
Look! I'm in my lazing about the house clothes... I was preparing for this... preparing, but not completely sure... I think I love you, Lisl.

LISELOTTE  
I think I...

KARL  
Bring in the fish!

*Liselotte happily runs out to the kitchen. Karl sits down at the table. He waits. She enters with a dish.*

LISELOTTE  
Bream in raspberry sauce!

KARL  
What bliss!

LISELOTTE  
Indeed.

*She serves him, and herself. Karl gobbles away greedily. Liselotte just smiles and watches him. Suddenly, his face becomes distorted...*

KARL  
Oh... damn...!

LISELOTTE  
What's wrong?

*Karl begins to choke. Liselotte leaps up to hit him on the back.*

LISELOTTE  
It's a very bony fish... It can't even be filleted...

*She mercilessly hits him on the back.*

KARL  
No... my throat... my windpipe... Don't...!!

*Liselotte rushes around him, terrified.*

LISELOTTE  
I'll call a doctor!

*Karl's face begins to turn blue. Liselotte is about to rush to the phone, but Karl grabs her, holding her tight to himself.*

KARL  
She... won't allow this... Sylvia...!!

LISELOTTE  
Breathe evenly, just try to breathe...

KARL  
She... won't... allow... this...

*Liselotte tries to free herself. Karl falls to the ground, pulling her with him. He's now choking to death. With his free hand, he grabs the flowers from the nearby chair, and, with his last ounce of strength, offers them to Liselotte. She looks at them horrified. Karl extends the flowers towards her, then collapses. Liselotte frees herself, runs to the phone, and dials. Blackout.*



Scene 2

*Same place, a few days later. Liselotte is sitting on a chair opposite the door, waiting. The room is dim. The only light filters in through the front door. A man's silhouette appears, flowers in hand. He is clearly very uncertain. The doorbell rings. Liselotte stands, adjusts her clothes, goes to the door and opens it. There's no one there. She steps outside, looks around, and returns. She goes to the window and looks out. The doorbell rings again. The man has re-appeared. Liselotte now tiptoes to the door, and suddenly opens it. Ludwig immediately extends the flowers towards her.*

LUDWIG

I'm "Fatal Swallow". I'm looking for "May Rain".

LISELOTTE

That's me.

LUDWIG

Here, flowers... I brought them for you. Chrysanthemums. I was very worried whether you'd like them or not. If you don't, I'll take them straight back and bring you something else. Do you like them?

LISELOTTE

Well... chrysanthemums are more for... but all the same, it's very kind of you. Thank you.

LUDWIG

Because if you don't, I could... I knew they were wrong. Chrysanthemums are for cemeteries, but I was in such a state in the florist's, I wanted so much to bring you something... something big...

LISELOTTE

Please, come inside.

LUDWIG

I'm... so nervous... coming to a woman's flat like this... I hope you don't misunderstand... I'm a man, and you're a woman, and I'm here... I hope you're not...

LISELOTTE

Well, we did agree... to meet here, and...

LUDWIG

So you haven't misunderstood... I was so concerned, that you might... misunderstand, that is... A stranger, a man, in a woman's flat... That must be nerve-racking, to say the least...

*He looks around nervously.*

LISELOTTE

Where did you go after you rang the doorbell?

LUDWIG

Me? You're saying I disappeared?

LISELOTTE

I went out and there was no one there.

LUDWIG

It couldn't have been me who wasn't there.

LISELOTTE

Yes, I'm quite sure it was you.

LUDWIG

Oh... I had a feeling you'd guess... Yes, I must admit... at least I would if I could... talk, that is... if my lips would just stop quivering...

LISELOTTE

Well?

*Silence.*

LUDWIG

I hid in the utility cupboard.

LISELOTTE

The utility cupboard?!

LUDWIG

I was so nervous... I've never been in a situation like this before...

LISELOTTE

Oh... you mean, the ad... Come on then, just sit down...

LUDWIG

I can't... my legs are shaking... But, if you insist...

*Ludwig sits down, nervously.*

LISELOTTE

Would you like a drink?

LUDWIG

Well, I'm not sure... If I have a drink, you might think: here's this stranger, an alcoholic, here in my flat... If I don't, you might think I don't drink in other people's flats because of some ridiculous hygiene phobia that I have... but...

LISELOTTE

Please calm down... you're shaking all over...!

LUDWIG

Are you surprised? This is my first time... I responded to an ad... about marriage... and... you wanted to... meet me... Right away!

LISELOTTE

I've never done this before either... As for this meeting... well, I thought it wouldn't hurt to see each other before going to the vicar. You're not disappointed, I hope.

LUDWIG

This is awful!

LISELOTTE  
So this isn't what you expected?

LUDWIG  
No, not at all.

LISELOTTE  
And you just... tell me like this, to my face...? We hardly even--

LUDWIG  
Yes. I always speak my mind... I just blurt everything out... because of my high blood pressure... My high blood pressure spurts out through my mouth, if I can put it like that...

LISELOTTE  
So I'm not what you imagined?

LUDWIG  
No, not at all!

*Silence.*

LISELOTTE  
I'm sorry... Well, then, let's not waste each other's time.

LUDWIG  
You misunderstand... Of course this isn't what I expected! Why do you think I'm so nervous? I have my ideas about the kinds of women that place marriage ads, and their reasons why... calculating women who are ugly, unkempt, who nobody wants... who never give romance or emotions a chance... all fat and common, or conniving and ambitious... you can tell at first glance that marriage is a mere cosmetic job for them, nothing more than a perm! ... And then... well...!! Then... here you are!

LISELOTTE  
Here I am?!

LUDWIG  
Yes! Here you are, so exceptionally attractive, a woman in full bloom, with a sweet smile, and orderly surroundings... It's enough to drive the average man around the bend. How could any man be prepared for such a thing? Getting something better than he expected!

LISELOTTE  
Well... let's just say today's your lucky day!

LUDWIG  
Lucky?! That's when I get really nervous...! I don't even play the lottery... if I were ever to win, even something small, they'd have to call an ambulance, that's for sure...

LISELOTTE  
So that means... you like me?

LUDWIG  
Yes!

LISELOTTE  
Just like that... at first sight?

LUDWIG

Yes! Excuse me, I need a glass of water... my mouth's gone terribly dry... and my arm's going terribly numb... but it'll pass.

*Liselotte goes to fetch a glass of water while Ludwig takes a pill. She returns, and he drains the whole glass.*

LUDWIG

I was so nervous about what you'd think of me... when you first saw me... your first reaction... So, what do you think, now that I'm here? Huh?

LISELOTTE

Well, I don't know you yet, but when you stood at the door... apart from the chrysanthemums... you made a very pleasant impression.

LUDWIG

Well, that's very kind... and you, if I may say so... are an enchanting woman... But why would a woman like you need to... I mean... all you'd have to do is go out in the street... and whistle, and--

LISELOTTE

That's what you think! If I whistled out in the street, I'd immediately get accosted, propositioned, or mugged!

LUDWIG

You're right about that.

LISELOTTE

I advertised... because I lived the past fifteen years closed off from the world... I don't have any friends, and I don't really know anyone in town.

LUDWIG

Really?! I know half the town – they're my clients.

LISELOTTE

Half the town are your clients?

*Silence. Ludwig nervously lowers his head.*

LUDWIG

I knew it! I knew I'd have to speak about myself... I break out in a cold sweat every time I do... But how could I have thought that I'd be able to avoid it? ... I'd hoped you'd first get to know me, and only then ask what I did for a living... Because, if I said I were a butcher, you'd jump to the conclusion that I had some kind of blood lust... but if I didn't tell you, and we first went on a picnic and picked flowers together, you'd have gotten to know my sensitive side... and if I'd only revealed my butcher's cleaver later, then you'd have thought entirely differently of me... Who knows what you were expecting, right? Were you expecting an accountant, or a tax adviser? Of course not. You were hoping for a man with a meaningful job, not someone who huddles over invoices and account statements all day... That's it! That's it! It's over! I blew it! I blew it! I knew this would happen! ... I'll be off now. Goodbye.

LISELOTTE

Hold on! Where are you going? You think I'm only interested in what you do for a living?

LUDWIG

No, I don't... but it makes a bad impression... Anyway... I'm an accountant... an accountant and tax adviser.

LISELOTTE

My father was an accountant, too.

*Silence. Ludwig looks at her, surprised.*

LUDWIG

Really...? Your father?

LISELOTTE

Not a chief accountant. Just a run-of-the-mill accountant at a company. All the same, he was the greatest dad and the best bloke in the world. I loved him immensely.

LUDWIG

You've already known... a likable accountant?

LISELOTTE

Yes, I love accountants. And I'm simply mad about tax advisers... I get all worked up every time I lay eyes on an account statement!

LUDWIG

Really... Well... this is... fascinating... And you...? What do you do for a living?

LISELOTTE

Are you sure you want to know?

LUDWIG

Why wouldn't I?

LISELOTTE

Because everything I've said so far has just made you nervous.

LUDWIG

No, it hasn't! It's just the situation...

LISELOTTE

I'm a nurse... Until now I was caring for an old lady, but I'll be working at the local hospital soon... from the first of June... At least I hope so... They're looking for young people, but I'm already...

LUDWIG

A nurse... That's fantastic! ... On the way here I said to myself, please God, let her be a nurse... That's fantastic! I was hoping for a nurse! Tell me it's not true! Really?! You're a nurse? Oh, my heart! My heart...! You're a nurse! That can't be true!

LISELOTTE

Why?

LUDWIG

Because, you see, I'm constantly worried about my health... But that's probably because I live alone... I go to bed alone, and in the dark, and I only have myself to worry about, don't I? "See, Ludwig" I say to myself, "Feel how your heart's beating! It's beating all askew! Is that

normal? And what's that pain around your kidneys... Are you sure everything's alright...?"  
But if there were someone lying next to me... Oh, my goodness, oh, my goodness... Excuse me!!! I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I've blown it! That's it!! Everything's over!!!

*He leaps to his feet and frantically rushes out of the flat. Liselotte watches him, bewildered, then hurries over to the window.*

LISELOTTE (*out the window*)

Hey, come back! ... Where are you going?! Come back here or I'll get furious with you!

*Liselotte comes away from the window, fills a glass with water and waits. Ludwig soon appears, shaking, and stops in the doorway. Without a word, she hands him the glass. He thirstily drains it.*

LUDWIG

What must you be thinking of me? I've only been here five minutes and I'm already talking about going to bed...! What am I, a degenerate? ... That's what you must be thinking. Right? ... That's why I answer ads like this... straight into bed and wham-bam thank you ma'am... a sleazy con artist, a dirtbag, a louse who exploits lonely women... That's what you think of me... and you're right. I fouled up. Thanks for the water. I'll just be gone...

LISELOTTE

No, that's not what I think!

LUDWIG

No?! Why not?

LISELOTTE

Please, stay... and calm down...! Drink something... I thought we might go to a restaurant together... if we felt that we liked each other.

LUDWIG

To a restaurant? I thought we were meeting here because--

LISELOTTE (*suddenly*)

No, I'm not cooking!

LUDWIG (*surprised*)

You're not? I thought, a light fish perhaps--

LISELOTTE

No fish!!!

LUDWIG

Of course, whatever you say... Goodness, my legs are shaking... I'm sorry. Look, I can't move... Well I never... Would you help me to the chair?

LISELOTTE

Don't worry, I've seen people in stressful situations before... Come on, just relax a bit...

*She leads him to a chair. Ludwig sits down.*

LUDWIG

I wish I could just drop dead.

LISELOTTE

Don't you dare! ... Why don't you tell me about yourself instead?

LUDWIG

I'm originally from the Styrian region... That's not a problem, is it?

LISELOTTE

Why would it be?

LUDWIG

Nothing, I was just afraid that... I'm completely stupid, bungling and pitiful, aren't I? Here's a kind, beautiful woman, with wonderfully good intentions, and I behave like an idiot.

LISELOTTE

Maybe you should take a sedative. Are you always like this?

LUDWIG

No, not always... I simply can't cope with stress... At work, at the taxation department, they call me Ludwig the Calm.

LISELOTTE

Your name's Ludwig?

LUDWIG

You see, I even forgot to introduce myself... My nerves cause me to go barmy... I come here, and I forget to introduce myself... I'm so sorry... Ludwig Hegger.

LISELOTTE

Liselotte Maner.

LUDWIG

Liselotte... What a nice name... Do you have any idea how worried I was that you might not have a nice name...? I couldn't marry a woman whose name was woeful or made me laugh... But Liselotte...Yes! That's lovely! ... Take Hilde, for example... If you'd have been Hilde, all my life I would have said, "What a wonderful woman, but what pity her name's Hilde..."

LISELOTTE

I'm not Hilde!

LUDWIG

Liselotte... is absolutely wonderful!

LISELOTTE

I'm glad you like it... And I think you're an exceptionally decent man, Ludwig.

LUDWIG

Well, that's exactly right!

*He stops talking. He drops his head again.*

LISELOTTE

What's wrong?

LUDWIG  
Now there's trouble! Real trouble!

LISELOTTE  
What?

LUDWIG  
I was afraid this would happen... Afraid we'd like each other, at first sight. I longed for this... but I was afraid of it, too! Very afraid!!

LISELOTTE  
But why?

LUDWIG  
Because you placed an ad for a husband... not for someone to take dancing lessons with...! This is about much more than that! ... I imagine... I imagine you'd like children too.

LISELOTTE  
Yes... but I didn't think we'd get down to that right on the first night...

LUDWIG  
Well, that's part of it too... I'm already very fond of you, but I'm afraid of the consequences... Let's suppose we go out to dinner. Let's suppose we have a good time together. Let's suppose meet again... Indeed, and we start planning... and we realise something wonderful is happening between us. And then, later on, after the wedding, supposing we marry that is, it turns out that...

*Silence.*

LISELOTTE  
That what?

LUDWIG  
It'd be sheer madness... it would!

LISELOTTE  
What would?

LUDWIG  
If it turns out that... we're sexually incompatible... That liking each other and everything is pointless... because I can't give you enough sexual pleasure... or our measurements don't match, or something like that... or you require something entirely different from what I can offer...

LISELOTTE  
You're already afraid of that?

LUDWIG  
That spoils every relationship that gets off to a good start! ... Let's make no bones about the importance of sexuality in marriage... How many couples are there who "don't do it" before the wedding... then the first night turns into a mess of disillusionment and inhibitions... See, just talking about it makes me break out in a cold sweat... But I like you so much, and I'm so happy that we met, that I just don't want things to... The man ends up inhibited, or the woman does... and after a few years of anguish the love they initially felt for each other will



be futile... quarrels will lead to divorce, and a broken family... You see the risks that go hand in hand with a relationship like this...?!

LISELOTTE

I think you're right. We'd just get all enthusiastic about it... and then it wouldn't work out.

LUDWIG

That's precisely what I'm afraid of!

LISELOTTE

Thank you for your honesty, Ludwig. And your foresight.

LUDWIG

A realisation like that can poison everything, everything!

LISELOTTE

You're absolutely right. I've heard of that happening... very often... So let's not get enthusiastic about it then...

LUDWIG

How do you mean?

LISELOTTE

You're right. Let's switch the order of things...

*She gets up, seriously, and draws the curtain. Ludwig looks at her, nervous and frightened.*

LUDWIG

What are you doing?

*Liselotte doesn't reply. She smiles and puts on some music. A romantic melody fills the room. She turns to face Ludwig.*

LISELOTTE

Let's try it now. And afterwards... come what may...!

*Silence.*

LUDWIG

Try what?

LISELOTTE

You're not very experienced, are you... sexually?

LUDWIG

Well... I never actually got that far... Well, just once... but she laughed at me... You can imagine how nervous I get ever since... even at the mention of the idea....

*Liselotte laughs.*

LISELOTTE

That's great.

LUDWIG

You think so?

LISELOTTE

Look, I haven't made love for ten years. And even then it was by chance.

LUDWIG

But how could it be by chance?

LISELOTTE

Don't worry 'bout that. You just concentrate on your trial run.

*Liselotte steps close to Ludwig and unbuttons his shirt.*

LUDWIG

You want us to... try...? How right you are... Wow, can you feel... my heart beating...? This is sheer happiness! ... If this works out... if it comes off... if it's good... I won't have lived thirty-five years in vain... because that's how long I've lived without--

LISELOTTE

Don't worry, it'll be over soon. Then we'll know whether or not we suite each other. So we can go out to dinner.

LUDWIG

You're right... but... just like this... all of a sudden...?

*She takes off her blouse. Ludwig sighs quietly.*

LISELOTTE

What do you think... just looking at me... Do you feel anything... anything exciting?

LUDWIG

What a beautiful... and desirable woman you are... very desirable... Well, of course, I feel something... Goodness, my legs are shaking... they're really shaking now... You're the woman... yes, you're the woman I've been waiting for...

LISELOTTE

You're not bad either... You're certainly not carrying any extra weight.

LUDWIG

Squash... in the basement of the taxation department... I always knew I had to watch my condition, because one day there'd be someone who--

LISELOTTE

This music's nice.

*She undresses him. Ludwig tears off her skirt with a single move.*

LUDWIG

Unbelievable... You know... I never... and even then I didn't get this far...!

LISELOTTE

There's nothing to it... it all comes naturally... But let's not rush into it... First we have to see whether or not we desire each other... like this... still dressed.

LUDWIG

Of course, I've seen how to do it in films... make no mistake about that... But all dressed up like this...? Gosh, you're amazing!

LISELOTTE

You've got such a lovely hairy chest... I like that!

LUDWIG

Really? I thought about shaving it. I was worried that I might get hot out on the terrace, and if I unbuttoned my shirt, you'd notice how hairy I was... I was so worried about that.

*They lie down on the bed.*

LUDWIG

My goodness, I'm happy! Just so happy!

*They kiss each other.*

LISELOTTE (*gently*)

Oh shut up! Tell me...What do you feel...?

LUDWIG

Bliss! I would never have believed it... never... I don't deserve such happiness... What do I feel? ... I'm shaking all over... For years, this is what I've longed for... Hey, world! Gather round! The taxman is happy. Gather round, world...!! I can't bear it, I simply can't... all this happiness is crushing me...

LISELOTTE

I think we'll... make a good match.

LUDWIG

Yes! We can do it like this... only... oh, my heart... sometimes... my heart hurts...

LISELOTTE

Don't worry about it... Don't stop now... just hold me tight!

LUDWIG

There's a pain in my chest...

LISELOTTE

Don't stop... this is just right... I can feel you...

LUDWIG

Like this, through our clothes...? You're right... yes, let's do it like this...!

LISELOTTE

First like this... and if we really want each other... then later on we can...

LUDWIG

I can't bear it... I can't...! Let go... let go... something's hurting... in my chest... it hurts... let me go...

*He suddenly stiffens, and collapses on top of Liselotte.*

LISELOTTE  
Hey, what's up?

*She climbs out from underneath him. Ludwig rolls off the bed.*

LISELOTTE (*terrified*)  
Ludwig! Hey, Ludwig!

*Ludwig lies motionless. Liselotte runs to the phone and dials.*

LISELOTTE  
Liselotte Maner... 10 Berggasse... a male... heart attack... What? I'm a nurse...! Hurry...!!

*She runs back to Ludwig and turns him over on his back. She desperately tries to bring him back to life, pressing down his chest, blowing into his mouth. Her efforts seem increasingly futile. The lights slowly fade. Before it becomes completely dark, Liselotte stops and looks at Ludwig with a grieving expression.*

### Scene 3

*Same place, a few days later. Liselotte, obviously happy, is busying herself around the room, humming a tune. The silhouette of a man, flowers in hand, appears on the front door. The doorbell rings. Liselotte hurries and opens the door. Henrik just stands there, with a sad expression on his face.*

HENRIK  
Here you are, flowers. I brought them for you.

LISELOTTE  
Thank you. They're beautiful.

HENRIK  
Wait... Don't smell them so closely... they've been sprayed with thousands of different chemicals. They shouldn't even be blooming at this time of the year, in May! They must be genetically modified. And genetically modified plants are dangerous... We don't know anything about their effects on us... Not yet, that is...

LISELOTTE  
Oh, Henrik, you mustn't think like that.

HENRIK  
I don't do it out of fun, believe me... I love you, Lisl.

*Liselotte is surprised.*

LISELOTTE  
I love you, too, Henrik, but...

HENRIK  
Let's drop it then.

LISELOTTE  
Let's.

*He looks around, and enters the flat.*

HENRIK  
So, this is where my poor aunt lived...

LISELOTTE  
You wouldn't recognise it now... I've changed a lot of things.

HENRIK  
Yesterday I hardly had time to look around...

LISELOTTE  
And it was dark, too...

*Silence. Henrik sits down, seriously.*

HENRIK  
What happened yesterday, Lisl?

LISELOTTE  
What do you mean?

HENRIK  
I'd like to know... Unfortunately, our drinking water is lacking in bromine nowadays, hence mankind's memory is getting weaker and weaker.

LISELOTTE  
Don't you go blaming it on bromine--

HENRIK  
It's not just the bromine... Our environment is oxygen deficient, and that further increases our forgetfulness.

LISELOTTE  
You came here last night, rang the doorbell, and asked if you could stay the night...

HENRIK  
Tell me the truth... was I drunk?

*She laughs.*

LISELOTTE  
You were plastered! ... You muttered something about not being able to drive home in your condition, and could you please sleep in your auntie's flat...

HENRIK  
Aha... it's all coming back now.

LISELOTTE  
And don't tell me you don't remember what happened in the early hours of the morning... or I'll throw you out of here right now!

HENRIK  
That I remember... the early hours of the morning... yes...

LISELOTTE

You simply strolled into my room and lay down next to me.

HENRIK

Simply... Was it really that simple?

LISELOTTE

Well, not quite that simple... because you probably showered beforehand... and sprayed yourself with my deodorant.

HENRIK

Well... I couldn't find a men's deodorant in the bathroom.

LISELOTTE

I don't use men's deodorants!

HENRIK

From there on, I remember... It wasn't unpleasant, the early hours of the morning... nor the morning itself, was it?

LISELOTTE

I don't want to remind you, but you did ask me to marry you, at half past six in the morning. Then you jumped out of bed, and ran away... And I know why!

*Silence. They look at each other.*

HENRIK

Lisl... There's something I need to tell you... I didn't go to buy a ring.

LISELOTTE

You didn't? ... Well, never mind... that can wait... I don't insist on a ring anyway...

HENRIK

I went to the park... to the lake... and had a think...

*Silence. Liselotte turns her head away sadly.*

LISELOTTE

Aha... I understand.

HENRIK

You don't understand anything... I thought about the two of us.

LISELOTTE

I'm telling you, I understand.

HENRIK

Lisl, we hardly know a thing about each other... I know a little more about you, because whenever I visited my aunt, you were always so kind and considerate... And I was so pleased that she left you her flat... You truly deserved it... if anybody did, you did.

LISELOTTE

And you didn't fight for it... even though you would have inherited--

HENRIK

That's exactly the problem, Lisl. I don't need this flat any more!

LISELOTTE

Any more?

HENRIK

This flat is the future...If I'd have accepted it, then I would have been saying there's a future.

*Liselotte stares at him, astonished.*

LISELOTTE

What are you talking about?

HENRIK (*very seriously*)

There is no future, Lisl.

*He's so serious about the above that tears even swell in his eyes.*

LISELOTTE

But of course there's a future... even our language is full of the future tense.

HENRIK

I sat by the lake and thought through everything... Have you ever heard of the Deadly Dusk Society?

LISELOTTE

That's... some kind of environmental thing, isn't it?

HENRIK

Let me explain... Last night, I met some friends that I haven't seen for ages, and the guys from Deadly Dusk... and I got drunk... and that single ray of moonlight that still shone in the night, in the darkness of my mind; that solitary pinhead of silver light... was a memory, a radiant memory – it was you, Lisl! I still had to say goodbye to you. That's why I came to see you... We lied to each other in the early hours of the morning. We lied with our bodies.

LISELOTTE

I didn't lie.

HENRIK

Yes, you did. Because all such intimate encounters are lies; they lie about the fact that there is a future.

LISELOTTE

And isn't there?

HENRIK

No, Lisl. There's isn't.

LISELOTTE

But of course there is.

HENRIK

No, there isn't!

LISELOTTE  
Yes, there is!

HENRIK  
No! You want to know the equation? Our equation?

LISELOTTE  
Yes... I'm curious about the philosophy you've come up with that allowed you to just walk out my door without any feeling of responsibility or guilt. I'm damn curious!

HENRIK  
I love you.

*He kisses a confused Liselotte.*

HENRIK  
And I thank you for allowing me to finish it all with this expression of my love.

LISELOTTE  
What the hell are you finishing?! Don't you dare go finishing anything here in my flat!

HENRIK  
Listen...

*Silence. Henrik stands.*

HENRIK  
I imagine, you've heard about global warming.

LISELOTTE  
Yes... I felt it running through my body in the early hours of the morning.

HENRIK  
This is no laughing matter, Lisl... I have in my possession a report by the Smith-Graves Committee; the one and only truly genuine assessment of the situation. Thirty-five years. That's all we have. When the polar icecaps melt, the water level of the seas and oceans will rise.

LISELOTTE  
We're not on the seashore...

HENRIK  
This is not merely about water gaining ground... Everything in a thirty-mile belt along the coast will be washed away. In Europe alone millions of tons of hazardous waste stored underground will be washed to the surface: radioactive wastes! Islands, like Japan, will disappear. The population will be evacuated, but what they leave behind will start a chain reaction. Nuclear power plants will be flooded. Irreversible processes will commence that will change even the chemical stability of water.

LISELOTTE  
Those are just theories, Henrik.



HENRIK

Climate change will upset mankind's fluid balance. Our ability to perform will deteriorate. The calcium in our bones will run out, burn up, vanish, as if it simply evaporated. Do you know what that means?

LISELOTTE

I haven't got the foggiest...

HENRIK

Our bone structure won't be able to bear the weight of our bodies any more. To ensure that we don't collapse, we'll have to change the way we move to safeguard our bones from the ensuing effects...

LISELOTTE

Listen to me, Henrik. Let's talk seriously.

HENRIK

I am talking seriously, if only you knew how seriously! We'll only be able to endure the increased load on our spine by going down on all fours... and that will go hand in hand with our arms transforming into forelegs... but because of the increased contamination of the soil, we won't be able to live close to the ground any more... so we'll have to climb the remaining trees to survive... But the trees themselves will be infected...!!

LISELOTTE

You think we'll be... walking on all fours?

HENRIK

I definitely I won't... but you will be... if you wait...

LISELOTTE

Stop this, Henrik. Stop it now.

HENRIK

No, Lisl. You must know the precise reason for my decision.

LISELOTTE

Just tell me you don't fancy me.

HENRIK

Ultra violet radiation will multiply thirty fold. This, together with the chemical transformation of the water supply, will lead to death and diseases that produce mutations... Hordes of mutants will emerge, already on all fours. The increased water-mass will destroy the earth's lower strata; the number of earthquakes will increase eight-thousand fold, and the current seismic scale of ten will have to be increased to fifteen... The magma will rise closer to the earth's surface, creating new volcanic effects... and wherever mankind manages to survive, wherever he's retreated to, new fault lines will develop and cracks will appear, and the crust of the earth will undergo a complete transformation!

LISELOTTE

There have been prophecies like this before, Henrik... and somehow we always got by.

HENRIK

But now we know too much! We know too much, and we can see that there's no getting around it this time. And there's nothing we can do to dampen the effects. You must understand this, Lisl. You must understand this in the early hours of the morning when you

tell me with your body that there is hope, that you would gladly bear children for me. Well, there is no hope, Lisl. None. Unfortunately... If only you knew how much I regret this. If only you knew how I curse everything, because this earth did not give birth to me earlier – you and me – because it didn't err retroactively by a few hundred years... or at least fifty, or forty... But no! That's how it happened, this is how it is, and there's nothing more that can be done.

*He turns away, as if crying. Liselotte watches him, stunned.*

HENRIK

You want to bring children, life into a world like that? Where the human race, contaminated by radiation, chases each other on all fours, crawling all over one another, helter-skelter, gabbling in various languages, while scrabbling for paltry scraps of food among mutants and the sick...? Is that the world you want to bring new life into?!

LISELOTTE

Well... I'd like to try.

*Silence. Henrik thinks, and then makes a decision. He takes out an astrology map and places it in front of Liselotte.*

HENRIK

Our organisation hacked into the database of the Alabama Astronomic Research Center... Even if we managed to live through all this... even if we managed to survive... there's still XC2113.

LISELOTTE

What's that?

HENRIK

An asteroid. It's not very big. About sixty kilometres in diameter. But it's heading straight for the earth. Forty-one years, two months, eleven days and thirty-five minutes. By galactic respects, it's very close. Its course will not change and cannot be altered. It is a rock, the likes of which have already destroyed the earth's civilization several times before... yet those were only half as big as this one. I know this sounds like a fairytale, Lisl, but if globalisation were to cease... globalisation, which is built purely on a monetary basis, and has no vision of the future, no vision whatsoever of the future of life on earth, and doesn't even allow people think in that context... if globalisation were to cease and a new redistribution was created in all social relations of the entire earth, then, and only then, perhaps... perhaps it could be avoided... We've known this for years, decades, yet still nothing happens... and I don't see that anything will... You can't bring children into this world, Lisl – I'll have no part in it... and I don't want to marry you because in thirty years' time we'll all have to live through the most horrid decrepitude that man has ever had to endure... gibbering in the trees...

LISELOTTE

Maybe there's more time, Henrik... Maybe they're mistaken and there's still a hundred or two hundred years to go... and maybe--

HENRIK

There are no more "maybes", Lisl... All those who refute this destruction will be imprisoned. Protesters will be bombarded with water cannon and tear gas. Lisl, I've been in protests like that before, and I've been thrown me in jail many times... And let me tell you, I've had enough... There is no future. None...! Thank you for this last fantastic night, because that's what it was; it embodied the past, the entire history of humankind... because you showed me love, Lisl, I felt it... and love is the past itself, love is mankind's most sensational discovery.

The past is amazing, it's in your body, your embrace, your loving thighs, your questioning breasts, in everything... and they all contain poetry, eras, cultures, civilizations: Christian blessings, Mayan kisses, everything... everything that is the past and everything that is a wonder itself. Thank you, Lisl. When we made love, we experienced the past together; the whole history of humankind, because it's all there, believe me, it's all present in a single passionate, loving encounter... and that's what we had in the early hours of the morning... You're the most extraordinary being I've ever met.

*He smiles, moves closer to an astonished Lisl, and kisses her... a long, loving kiss.*

LISELOTTE

What do you plan to do, Henrik?

*Henrik is still smiling as he watches Liselotte. He then goes to the window, looks out, and turns back.*

HENRIK

It's a pity... because the earth truly is wonderful... and life could be wonderful, too... as it was till now... But now, they're taking it from us... Now, there's no tomorrow.

*He again turns to the window, suddenly takes out a pistol, and shoots himself in the head. The shot rings out. Liselotte runs to him, horrified. Henrik falls into her arms, his eyes open.*

LISELOTTE

HENRIK!!!!!!!

*She weeps as she holds his bloody head tight to her body.*

End of ACT ONE

ACT TWOScene 4

*Same place, a few days later. Evening. Liselotte is sitting next to the window looking out, with a glass and a bottle of booze on a small table next to her. She takes a long swig from the bottle. A silhouette appears on the front door. It is the shadow of a man wearing a beret pulled down over his ears. He's holding something flower-like in his hand, at least the outline suggests so. Later it turns out that it is a cluster of tools that he holds up like this, ready for work. Liselotte looks at the bottle, her watch, and then the silhouette. Clearly, she doesn't understand who it could be, but goes to the door anyway. She is somewhat tipsy. She opens the door. There stands Heinrich, a plumber, in overalls.*

HEINRICH

Oops! Good evening! I'm here! Oops!

*Liselotte tries to remember.*

LISELOTTE

Who are...?

HEINRICH

Just say, "Oops!" and it'll come to you. Oops!

LISELOTTE

Oops! ... Oh, yes... we talked on the phone this morning...

HEINRICH

I'm the plumber! Oops! How do you do. Well, ma'am, where's the drip? Where's the seepage?

LISELOTTE

You said... you'd come over... this evening...

HEINRICH

Because I was so busy during the day... everything's dripping, you've got no idea... This whole town's just one great drip! Drip, drip, drip!!

*He offers his hand.*

HEINRICH

Oops!

*Liselotte extends her hand and shakes his.*

LISELOTTE

Oops...

*She momentarily loses her balance. Heinrich catches her, dropping his tools to the floor.*

HEINRICH

Oh, I'm sorry... I'm awfully clumsy... I'll pick them right up.

*Liselotte tries to help, but again, her head swims.*

HEINRICH  
Take it easy, ma'am.

LISELOTTE  
Sorry... I totally forgot... I just had a drink or two... Would you like one?

HEINRICH  
While I'm working? Never before a job! Maybe after... I'm a bit late, 'cause I had an accident on the way... Ran into a dustbin...

LISELOTTE  
How... unpleasant.

HEINRICH  
You're not kiddin'. So then, where's the drip? What's drippin'? Drip, drip!!

LISELOTTE  
What's dripping? ... The tap, that's what...! The kitchen tap... and I can't turn it off... I think...

HEINRICH  
Don't worry about a thing, ma'am. You might be a bit tipsy, but I can fix a tap anytime! Oops!

*He laughs loudly. Liselotte laughs with him. Heinrich sets off and bumps into the small table, sending everything flying.*

HEINRICH  
Oops!

LISELOTTE  
Oops!

HEINRICH  
I'm sorry... I'm awfully clumsy... but not at my job... only otherwise.

LISELOTTE  
Your... overalls are all dirty down the back... Wait, I'll get a brush...

HEINRICH  
'Cause I tripped on the stairs as I was comin' up. Went for a purler! Oops! ... That always happens to me on stairs, unfortunately... But when it comes to plumbing, there's never a problem! Everything's always spot on!

LISELOTTE  
You know what... You go fix the tap... and I'll lie down a bit.

HEINRICH  
Okey-dokey... Whatever you say... Just point me towards the kitchen.

*Liselotte shows him.*

HEINRICH  
Now, that's some kitchen! ... But what's that curtain there?

*A dividing curtain made of colourful woven cord hangs across the kitchen doorway.*

LISELOTTE

Just... a decoration...

HEINRICH

Looks good....

*Heinrich heads off with great strides and immediately gets tangled in the curtain. He falls, dragging it to the ground with him.*

HEINRICH

I'm sorry... not too practical this...

*Liselotte looks at him, and laughs.*

LISELOTTE

Oops!

HEINRICH

Oops! Oops!

LISELOTTE

Don't worry about the curtain... I inherited it... Didn't really like it anyway.

HEINRICH

So... shouldn't I put it back up then?

LISELOTTE

It'd be best if you don't touch anything... just the tap... that's if you're sure you can fix it....

HEINRICH

You're looking at the king of taps! If I may say so myself... Nothin's ever drippin' after I've been round. You can bet on that.

*He disappears into the kitchen. Only his voice can be heard during the following. Liselotte goes to the window and takes a swig from the bottle.*

HEINRICH *(from the kitchen)*

A worn out washer's the cause of every drippin' tap. And then along come the amateur know-it-alls or the man of the house who think they can fix it themselves, without even knowin' what size or how many washers they need, 'cause it certainly does make a difference! Oops! Of course, you can force the wrong washer into the tap, and it'll work for a while, but then it just cracks 'cause it's the wrong type! That's what this job comes down to – knowing what size washer goes where! And when you think about it, that's also true for male-female relationships, if you'll pardon me bein' so coarse... See, here's this rubber washer... it snapped because it was poor quality... and the water just seeped past and escaped everywhere. 'Cause water's thin, you see, so thin that there's no hole so small that it can't find its way through... It's like Aladdin's lamp: a small lamp with a great big genie livin' in it... If you get my drift... There you go... almost done.

*A loud noise, then suddenly a jet of water gushes from the kitchen into the living room.*

HEINRICH

Oops! Didn't count on that... Sorry.

*Liselotte laughs loudly. With the bottle in hand, she stands under the shower of water, raising her face to it.*

HEINRICH

There must be a master cock here somewhere... Ouch...!

*A loud thud from the kitchen as he falls.*

HEINRICH

Slippery in here... Lucky I didn't hit my head on the sink... If I had, I'd be leaving here in a box... Oh, here we are... the master cock.

*A loud noise again.*

HEINRICH

Nope, that's not it... Sorry 'bout that... Afraid the knickers on the line here got a bit soaked... These sure are cute little panties you wear, if you don't mind me sayin' so... But don't worry, once I'm done I'll wash 'em for you again... then they'll be right as rain... But I could sure use a pair or two now to stuff the leak.

*He steps out of the kitchen with several pairs of panties in his hand.*

HEINRICH

Could I... borrow a few of your knickers?

LISELOTTE

Whatever you want!

HEINRICH

I'm sorry the water got you...

*He shrugs his shoulders, goes back into the kitchen, and turns off the master cock. Liselotte stands in the middle of the room, drenched, but smiling.*

LISELOTTE

Do you like fish?

HEINRICH *(from the kitchen)*

Me? Fish?! Hell no! I'm a plumber! I'm happy dealin' with water and anythin' that goes with it while I'm working, but not afterwards! Oh, no! I can't face nothing that's got to do with water after that. And certainly not fish! No way! Not fish!

LISELOTTE

That's terrific... And tell me, are you the worrying type?

*Heinrich looks in from the kitchen for a moment, surprised, then disappears.*

HEINRICH

Why should I worry? I got a good job, earn a good crust, and people like me... What should I be worried about?

LISELOTTE

Well... the end of the world, perhaps.

*Heinrich looks in again and laughs heartily. Liselotte laughs with him. He's still laughing as he shakes his head and disappears again.*

HEINRICH

Done! That's got that fixed! This tap sure won't be drippin' no more... Knowing me though, it might have other problems, but it certainly won't be drippin', that's for sure.

*He comes out of the kitchen, fully satisfied, with a cord, which he hasn't noticed, around his neck. He's inadvertently pulling something with him. There's a loud crash from the kitchen again.*

HEINRICH

Oh, I'm sorry... What'd I do now?

LISELOTTE

Don't worry... that was just my washing drying in the kitchen... probably all over the floor now.

HEINRICH

Oh, I'm really sorry about all this.

LISELOTTE

Don't be... I'll take care of it.

HEINRICH

I'll do it... I'll hang everything back up for you.

LISELOTTE

It'd be best if you didn't touch a thing from now on... Come on, just sit down and have a drink. A toss of gin... no... er... a tit of gin... a titty of gin... no, a totty of jon... no...

HEINRICH

A tot of gin. That's what you mean... A "tot" of "gin"...

LISELOTTE

Yes, you're right... Come on, then... but you don't have to if you don't want to... you're probably in a hurry, or your wife's waiting for you, or something...

HEINRICH

Me? ... No, I don't have a wife. I still live with my parents. Oops!

*After a short silence, Liselotte looks deep into his eyes.*

LISELOTTE

And... don't you want one?

HEINRICH

Of course, I do. I'm just waitin' for the right woman... to come along.

LISELOTTE

Oops! And how long... do you want to wait?

HEINRICH

Not long. I'm sure she'll be along soon enough.



*He sits on the chair, but immediately jumps to his feet.*

HEINRICH  
Oops, I sat on something.

LISELOTTE  
My hat.

*Heinrich lifts up a woman's black hat.*

HEINRICH  
Oh, I'm really sorry... I really am.

LISELOTTE  
Rip it to shreds.

HEINRICH  
What? Deliberately?

LISELOTTE  
Yes, deliberately!

HEINRICH  
Whatever you say.

*He rips the hat to pieces.*

LISELOTTE  
It's much better like that... I bought it for a funeral.

HEINRICH  
I'm sorry... Close relative?

LISELOTTE  
No. And I don't care any more. Drink up!

HEINRICH  
Cheers, then! Oops!

*He downs the drink.*

LISELOTTE  
Tell me... something about yourself.

HEINRICH  
About me? Well, there's not a lot to tell really... But I could tell you about my uncle, now he's an interesting chap.

LISELOTTE  
Who cares about your uncle?! I'm interested in you.

HEINRICH  
Wow... this is strange... no one's ever been interested in me before... I was engaged once... but even my fiancée always used to say, "Shut your gob. No one's interested. Who the hell cares about you?!"

LISELOTTE

Must have been some love affair!

HEINRICH

Brought on purely by necessity.

LISELOTTE

And... what happened?

HEINRICH

She bolted two days before the wedding.

LISELOTTE

It's such a pity... that there are women like that.

HEINRICH

Yeah... but that's not typical of most women... And it didn't leave me with a bad opinion of women or nothin'. Oops!

LISELOTTE

Oops! So what is your opinion of us?

HEINRICH

Women are fine. They're sturdy; you know, well put together. You could say: "all their washers fit". Take my mother: a marvellous woman, worked all her life like a forty-watt motor. Raised us kids, even raised my father, and never broke down. Show me a tap set with a built in a shower head that can handle a load like that! ... And there's a whole lot of other good women, too... Yeah... I like women.

LISELOTTE

Yet you still haven't found the right one.

HEINRICH

No, I haven't. They don't want to marry me. Most reckon I'm too primitive.

LISELOTTE

You don't say!

HEINRICH

I do. That's what they all say. "You're too primitive! A primitive plumber!" Well, I could list a whole lot of refined people in history who wiped out entire nations, causing death and destruction. They weren't primitive, they were cultured! But what happened? What happened's what happened. That's what happened!

LISELOTTE

You've no idea just how right you are.

HEINRICH

You say, you're really interested in me? Me?

LISELOTTE

Yes. In what you feel. How you live. That sort of thing... Here, have another drink.

HEINRICH

I'm a qualified plumber, second class, with a permit to make public utility connections.

LISELOTTE

That's not what I mean.

HEINRICH

I love my Mum and Dad. I love 'em very much... I live with 'em an' I help support 'em.

LISELOTTE

Have you got any brothers or sisters?

HEINRICH

I got two brothers, but we haven't seen 'em for yonks... I'm all my parents got now. Could I have another drink?

LISELOTTE

Of course. Give me your glass...

*Heinrich leans forward in the chair, but it wobbles and breaks into pieces. He falls to the floor. Liselotte laughs heartily. Heinrich looks up at her and starts laughing too. She likes the idea, and deliberately falls off her chair onto the floor. Heinrich moves to stand up.*

LISELOTTE

Don't get up. Let's just stay here. This is fine.

HEINRICH

Whatever you want...

*Silence.*

HEINRICH

Your clothes are soakin' wet. Shouldn't you get changed? You'll catch a cold.

LISELOTTE

No I won't.... Well, actually... you're probably right... I will catch a cold.

*She removes her top and throws it away. She sits there topless. At first, Heinrich stares at her, but then tries to look away.*

HEINRICH

I'll turn my back... until...

LISELOTTE

You get around, don't you? Because of all the drips and seepages... Do women ever flirt with you?

HEINRICH

You mean sexually?

LISELOTTE

Yes.

HEINRICH

They do. Sometimes. There are lots of women in their forties who stay at home just to wait for the plumber... And they deliberately open the door wearin' nothin' but a flimsy dressing gown, expecting somethin' to happen... Some of 'em even lunge at me...oops!

LISELOTTE

And... do you take advantage of them?

HEINRICH

Not me! I'm no animal. I can't do it like that... not just like that.

LISELOTTE

So I shouldn't even try then?

HEINRICH

Well, you can try.... At worst, things won't turn out how you expected.

LISELOTTE

I still feel... that I'm young.

HEINRICH

Well, now... lookin' at you... I'd say you were.

*Silence.*

LISELOTTE

I've never been happy before. I want to be happy.

*She tries to stand, but she can't, so she gives up.*

LISELOTTE

Don't get me wrong... just bring me a T-shirt from the wardrobe.

*Heinrich stands up, confused. He slips on the carpet, falls, and laughs awkwardly.*

HEINRICH

Oops!

*Liselotte also laughs, watching him.*

LISELOTTE

Oops!

HEINRICH

Oops!

*He goes to the wardrobe and opens it.*

LISELOTTE

You'll find one down the back... doesn't matter which...

*Heinrich reaches to the back of the wardrobe, slips and falls on the shelf, breaking everything. He emerges triumphantly holding a T-shirt.*

LISELOTTE  
Throw it over here.

*Heinrich throws the T-shirt to Liselotte. She puts it on. Silence.*

LISELOTTE  
Now get out of here. I'm drunk and stupid. Go on! Get out while you still can.

*She sits on the floor, miserable, and starts crying. Heinrich stands next to her, confused.*

HEINRICH  
Oops...

*Silence.*

LISELOTTE  
Can you dance?

HEINRICH  
No, but I'll try... I couldn't always fix taps, but now I can... My fiancée, the one who bolted on me, always said, "Who cares about you, you can't even dance, thickhead"... See, I never learnt.

LISELOTTE  
I'll teach you.

HEINRICH  
I'm so happy... that I came... Oops! I said it! I said it! But if only you knew how shy I am... My mates at work say they've never met a plumber as shy as me.

*Meanwhile, Liselotte switches on a standing lamp and turns on the stereo. Romantic music begins to play.*

LISELOTTE  
This lamp is very old... It gives off such lovely light... light to dance by...

HEINRICH  
A lovely old lamp.... with lovely old light... like something shining from the past.

LISELOTTE  
I simply love it.

HEINRICH  
I'll bet...

LISELOTTE  
Will you ask me to dance?

HEINRICH  
Nope.

LISELOTTE  
Why not?

HEINRICH

This music's no good... You were cryin' before... now you want to dance... You'd cry while we're dancing, too... to this music... And you'd be miserable.

LISELOTTE

You're right. Put something else on.

*He goes to the stereo cabinet and searches through the CDs. He drops them all to the floor. He continues searching, and eventually finds one.*

HEINRICH

A polka. That'll do. A polka!

LISELOTTE

I'm so glad... you came.

HEINRICH (*self-consciously*)

People are usually glad... to see a good plumber... Oops!

LISELOTTE

Oops!

*The polka starts. Heinrich takes hold of Liselotte and they immediately begin leaping around the room.*

HEINRICH

I thought... I'd never dance with a woman again... But here we are... Oops!

LISELOTTE

Oops! Oops!

HEINRICH

There's happiness all around us! I can hear it drippin'... Can you hear it, too? Happiness, just drippin' away?!

LISELOTTE

Yes, I can hear it! Don't turn it off!

HEINRICH

I couldn't if I wanted to... Now there's no washer here any more... this happiness is just gonna keep on dripping... unless we open the tap right up, and then it's just gonna come gushing out!

LISELOTTE

Oops! Oops! You dance really well!

*Heinrich is enjoying himself more and more, moving increasingly extravagantly to the music.*

HEINRICH

That woman was a fool! A complete idiot! To say I can't dance?!... I couldn't dance with her 'cause she didn't love me! That's why! 'Cause you can only dance with someone who loves you! Isn't that right?

LISELOTTE

Yes, you're so right! So very right!



LISELOTTE

To be honest... no... You said you'd come after me in a few minutes, and told me not to open the door.

ROLAND

Precisely.

LISELOTTE

And that you wouldn't ring the doorbell.

ROLAND

Precisely.

LISELOTTE

But the door would open anyway.

ROLAND

And? Did it?

LISELOTTE

Yes... Where did you get those lovely flowers?

ROLAND

Take some posies to your dearest,  
So your virtue she not fearest.  
When she sees them, she'll believe you...  
Through your heart she'll then perceive you.

LISELOTTE

That's... very nice... but there are... no florists around here.

ROLAND

Hush, little one! Don't ruin the magic. Seek not the reason why the door opened, the provenance of the flowers, or their purpose... This moment is yours; so accept it with all its secrets... For you.

*He hands her the flowers.*

LISELOTTE

But these are real.

ROLAND

As is poetry... So, you live here?

LISELOTTE

Yes... Shall I put on some coffee?

ROLAND

I don't consume it. I require nothing, save the lyricism that gave me life and shall take me to the grave. Nothing more.

LISELOTTE

But... how did you find me...? This is just so incredible... that you, of all people, came here, of all places... like this...!



ROLAND

You go to the town library... every day...

LISELOTTE

That's right.

ROLAND

And you spend hours there... reading poems...

LISELOTTE

Yes... and those poems...

ROLAND

... are my poems.

LISELOTTE

Yes. Your poems! Only your poems!

ROLAND

Do you work?

LISELOTTE

Well... from June I will ... at the hospital, I'm a nurse... but May is still mine. This May is still mine, all mine, along with all its poetry and rhyme... See, I've turned into a poet by reading your work.

ROLAND

And you wish to spend May among poems...?

LISELOTTE

Partly... yes... But how did you know, that of all things... it's precisely your poems that I...

ROLAND

Silly little girl... Of course I know. I phone the library every day to enquire who's asked for my books. They said there's this one sweet woman, every day... So I got your address... and I hid in the entrance way... waiting for you to come home... The librarian told me what you looked liked.

LISELOTTE

You've got such amazing eyes... As I read your poems... don't laugh... I saw these exact same eyes...

ROLAND

Look deep into them ... What do you see?

*Liselotte looks deep into his eyes.*

LISELOTTE

My gosh!

ROLAND

What do you see?

LISELOTTE

I see myself in your eyes! My own face!

ROLAND

See! That's the essence of poetry.

LISELOTTE

You waited for me here... I hope you don't mind me saying... in these strange clothes...

ROLAND

There's nothing strange about these. Everyone in the psychiatric has pyjamas like these... But you recognised me... and you weren't afraid... nor are you now that I tell you that these are government-issue pyjamas from a psychiatric ward... You recognised me... and you knew who I was, even like this.

LISELOTTE

Because there's a photo of you on all your books. I recognised you immediately... even in these pyjamas.

*She suddenly bursts into tears.*

ROLAND

What's the matter, little one? What's troubling your tender-heart?

LISELOTTE

Well... I've been through some fairly tough times recently... and I thought I'd spend these two weeks before I start work... just escaping.

ROLAND

Escaping? From what?

LISELOTTE

The truth is... my life's been a series of tragedies lately... I simply couldn't stay at home anymore... I don't like strolling about town... and I've got no friends... So I thought I'd seek comfort in books.

ROLAND

And that's precisely what happened, isn't it?

*He slowly moves towards her. She just stands there, spellbound.*

LISELOTTE

Yes. Your poems comforted me. But... they also mad me sad.

ROLAND

Why?

LISELOTTE

Because they made me think like I'd never thought before... and I didn't understand them all.

ROLAND

Really? And would you like to?

LISELOTTE

Yes, I would.

ROLAND

No, you wouldn't... You see, I, who wrote them, am not understood either. Neither are my poems.

LISELOTTE

That means you're--

ROLAND

No.

LISELOTTE

You don't even know what I wanted to say...

ROLAND

I'm not insane. Just a poet. There's nothing I can do about the fact that the two are one and the same in this world. But you're not afraid. You're looking at me and you're not afraid... You're not afraid of me, because you understand me.

LISELOTTE

But... won't they be looking for you... in the hospital?

ROLAND

Does that matter?

LISELOTTE

No, not really.

ROLAND

Yes, they're bound to start looking. Maybe not now, but tonight, definitely... They are only people. People may look for me. I've got nothing to do with them any more.

LISELOTTE

I... won't give you away. I promise.

ROLAND

You won't give me away, because it's not me who's ill... it's you... Just close your eyes... Can you feel the pyjamas on your body...? Can you feel the stigma of society...? Can you?!

LISELOTTE

As I close my eyes... yes... it's as if I'm in pyjamas... I can feel a breeze blowing through the buttons... caressing my skin, and my breasts... so gently, caressing...

ROLAND

Only someone with troubles can feel that; someone with serious troubles.

LISELOTTE

Yes... I've been haunted by nightmares... Strangers follow me in my dreams, strangers who are no longer living...

ROLAND

And since you've been reading my poems...?

LISELOTTE

They've... mellowed since then... They don't shout at me any more; they just smile... they sit next to me, smiling... not cursing, just watching...

ROLAND

They smile because the poems are now part of you. Now no one can hurt you. Not even in your dreams.

LISELOTTE

You're right... now they surround me, smiling and embracing me.

ROLAND

Dream you are infinity, like the stars upon high...

LISELOTTE

Moonbeams fill your eyes, rainbow hues brilliantly shine...

ROLAND

Though earthly woes may afflict you, forever will you be mine...

LISELOTTE

For your faith again did grow...

ROLAND

Your soul, now pure as snow...

LISELOTTE

Even if, from your path you stray...

ROLAND

To infinity, you'll find your way...

LISELOTTE

You are a star, and you'll shine...

ROLAND

Immortal, for all time.

*Silence.*

ROLAND

You know my poems word for word.

LISELOTTE

That's what's so wonderful... I've only read them once, yet I know them... by heart!

ROLAND

Because you're related to death... Only death truly knows poems. What's your name?

LISELOTTE

Liselotte.

ROLAND

My mother was called Liselotte, too... That's no coincidence.

LISELOTTE

My father was called Roland, just like you. Just like you!

ROLAND

Do you believe in resurrection?

LISELOTTE

Should I? I should, shouldn't I?

ROLAND

In the resurrection of the soul at any rate.

LISELOTTE

Do you?

ROLAND

I've just been resurrected... resurrected in you, Liselotte... I was no longer living... I was just a body, making a phone call every day... searching for my soul in the library.

LISELOTTE

And do you think... it's in me?

ROLAND

You didn't cast aside my poems; you didn't cast aside my soul.

LISELOTTE

Because my pain subsided as I read them.

ROLAND

They locked me up, Liselotte. Locked me up among madmen... I hear them whining all day, I take my medication, and I smile, yet I should scream... or kill someone.

LISELOTTE

What fiends... what scoundrels...!

ROLAND

They locked me up, because I became a poet... I was schizophrenic, they said, because I was searching for souls. I created souls with my poems, and I knew they could inhabit people's hearts, every heart that opened up to them. Do you believe me?

LISELOTTE

Yes, with all my heart!

ROLAND

I stopped people in the streets and shops... I recited my poems... That's why they took me away... because I wanted to give people something... and anyone that wants to give in this world must be deranged, a pitiful cripple; only people who ask and who take are normal... Do you believe me?

LISELOTTE

I do! Yes, I do!

ROLAND

Because I saw what was lacking in them... I saw that they were full of everyday worries, pathetically feeble, crammed full of pretences, without a moment to spare... searching for companionship, but finding only enemies... Do you understand?

LISELOTTE

If anyone does, I certainly do.

ROLAND

Long ago, people's souls were aflame with poetry ... Rural folk created rhymes, folk songs, and ballads... And we believed that was art, folk art or something like that...

LISELOTTE

And isn't it?

ROLAND

No! They were driven to poesy by the desire to create! Does anyone whose soul is full of poetry commit a crime? Do they kill and rape teenage children, break shop windows and mug old people? Do they?

LISELOTTE

No, I don't think so.

ROLAND

Because poetry opposes all crime! Poetry is without sin, and if you open up to it, you too will be sinless.

LISELOTTE

That's what I feel, too... ever since I've been reading your poems...

ROLAND

I thought I was going to die in a ward reeking of faeces... You must have been through the valley of suffering if you found me, Lisl... You must have encountered a thousand deaths, a thousand disappointments...

LISELOTTE

Yes, a thousand deaths...

*Roland falls to the floor in front of Liselotte and embraces her legs.*

ROLAND

I must write more, I must write in you, I must write with you.

LISELOTTE

I'm ready...

ROLAND

First I'll move in here.

LISELOTTE

Yes! There's plenty of room for the two of us.

ROLAND

I'll hide here and write... and you'll take my work to wherever it needs to be taken...

LISELOTTE  
Gladly.

ROLAND  
They won't find me here... No one will come looking for me here.

LISELOTTE  
They'll never get you, I swear.

ROLAND  
You'll secretly belong to me and my poems... and I'll be able to write and live again.

LISELOTTE  
Yes... you'll write and live again.

ROLAND  
The two of us, in our own little world... You'll go to work... and I'll wait here, as I dip my quill  
in your soul... alive once more!

LISELOTTE  
Happily!

ROLAND  
Don't let them take me back, I beg you. It was simply horrid there.

*Liselotte embraces him.*

LISELOTTE  
I won't give you up to anyone.

*She begins kissing his head.*

ROLAND  
I've arrived. I'm finally home...!

LISELOTTE  
Yes, you've come to me. You're home now.

ROLAND  
Were you waiting for me?

LISELOTTE  
Yes! Ever so much! Death followed me everywhere, and I had no idea who I was waiting for.

ROLAND  
What happiness! The poet and the untainted girl.

LISELOTTE  
Yes, happiness! You can't imagine how long I've been longing for this...

ROLAND  
You'll learn the poems I write... You'll walk the streets and shops, reciting them to  
everyone... everyone that comes your way....

*Liselotte lifts her head.*

LISELOTTE

Me?! ... Oh, no... I couldn't do that.

ROLAND

But you must.

LISELOTTE

That's what you did and look where it got you!

ROLAND

You don't trust me, do you? You don't believe in me.

LISELOTTE

You can hide here and write, and I'll take your poems wherever... to newspapers... and publishers...

ROLAND (*yelling*)

Newspapers?! Have you read the poems they publish in newspapers? Didn't you feel their artificiality, their pandering to the reader? Where in newspapers do you find poems that have been written in us by nature? Where?!... What do you want? Books? Volumes of poetry? Who reads them? Someone walking down the street, busy and unhappy; do they? Does the breadwinner read them?

*Liselotte gets up and thinks.*

LISELOTTE

I should recite them to everyone, I know... but I can't... I'm simply incapable.

ROLAND

Didn't the door, opening by itself convince you? And the flowers that came out of nowhere? Well, if they didn't convince you, then look here... I'll show you... If you come with me, I'll show you... everything! ... Come...!

*He goes to the window and opens it. Liselotte looks alarmed.*

ROLAND

What floor is this?

LISELOTTE

The fifth... Come away from there!

*Roland steps up onto the window ledge and looks down.*

ROLAND

Do you believe me? Will you come with me?

LISELOTTE

I want to live, Roland! I want to live with you! Get down from there!

ROLAND

This is how you can truly live with me – if you come with me now... You must believe, Lis!  
You must believe in me!



LISELOTTE

I'll care for you, I'll live with you, I'll love you... Just get down from there!

ROLAND

You don't understand a thing.

*He jumps out. Liselotte runs to the window in horror and looks down. Then she races to the phone, picks up the receiver and dials.*

LISELOTTE

Ten Berggasse... A man just jumped out a fifth-floor window... Hurry, please! Hurry!!

*She hangs up the phone. She is about to rush outside when the silhouette of a gnome-like figure appears on the front door. Roland falls against the door, crashing to the floor inside the flat. He drags himself across the floor towards Liselotte, groaning loudly.*

ROLAND

You didn't come with me... I'm dying... If you'd have come with me, we'd both still be alive now... You didn't believe me, you didn't believe in me... Damn you, you wretched soul, you deceived me, damn you... I could have soared with you... Damn you, damn you, damn you...

*He collapses in front of Liselotte. She leans down to him, puts his head in her lap and kisses it.*

ROLAND

I hear the whistle of infinity ... time is pain... my limbs are numb... sages are calling from the other side... I hear their dirges... See?! Candles and songs of time igniting in the wind... Until now, I wrote; but that's all finished... From now on, I'll just remain quiet...

*His head drops. Liselotte clasps it in despair. A siren can be heard from outside. Slow fade to darkness.*

### Scene 6

*Same place, a few days later. The flat is empty. Liselotte enters through the front door dragging with her an unwashed man with greasy hair, dressed in a filthy, threadbare winter coat. The man just grins. Liselotte is not the well-dressed woman she was earlier. Her clothes are creased and she appears generally dishevelled. Nikolaus, a vagrant, just grins.*

LISELOTTE

Here are the flowers... Get it? Flowers!

*She takes a bunch of withered flowers from a vase and shoves them in his hand.*

NIKOLAUS

Ha-hah...

LISELOTTE

Now go outside and ring the doorbell! Understand?

NIKOLAUS

Aha...

*But he just stands there holding the flowers.*

LISELOTTE

Go outside the front door! Ring the doorbell and I'll let you in!

NIKOLAUS

Oher..... err.....

*Nikolaus thinks long and hard, and then heads off towards the front door. Liselotte opens it, lets him out, then closes it behind him. We see his silhouette on the door. He just stands there holding the flowers. However he doesn't ring the doorbell.*

LISELOTTE

Ring it. Press the button!

*Nikolaus moves his hand, feeling around uncertainly. But he doesn't press the doorbell. Liselotte becomes angry. She opens the door, and wrenches him inside. Nikolaus sprawls across the floor.*

LISELOTTE

Ungrateful pig! That's all I asked of you! Just this one thing! That you ring the bloody doorbell with that filthy hand of yours, so I can let you in like a gentleman who brings flowers to a lady. Is that so difficult?!

*Nikolaus simply stares at her from the floor. She takes pity on him.*

LISELOTTE

Want a coffee?

NIKOLAUS

Er... um....

LISELOTTE

Look at you... Straighten up your coat!

*Nikolaus looks at himself, grins, and tries to pull his coat up higher. Liselotte shouts at him.*

LISELOTTE (*shouting*)

Sit down!!!!

*Surprised, Nikolaus sits down. Liselotte paces back and forth, then sits opposite him.*

LISELOTTE

Listen... I found you, and in return, you're going to be grateful to me. Understand?!

*Nikolaus nods.*

LISELOTTE

Until now, you slept under a bridge, right?

*Nikolaus nods.*

LISELOTTE

Well, from now on, you don't have to... From now on, you'll be sleeping here.

*Nikolaus looks around the room suspiciously.*

LISELOTTE

I trust you. You're a filthy bum, but I trust you.

*Nikolaus starts to pay attention.*

LISELOTTE

I'll call you, Nikolaus... That will be your name until you tell me your real one... Nikolaus. That's what I'll call you, and you'll live here. I start work at the hospital the day after tomorrow. So I won't be home during the day. But I'll tell you exactly what you have to do, okay?

*Nikolaus nods uncertainly.*

LISELOTTE

I assume you've got no one...

*Nikolaus slowly shakes his head.*

LISELOTTE

And you've been homeless for ages.

*Nikolaus slowly nods.*

LISELOTTE

And you'd like to sleep in a proper bed, watch TV... find a woman, that sort of thing. Am I right? Right?!

*Nikolaus nods slowly.*

LISELOTTE

Then I'll give you the chance. I'll give you a chance to live a normal life. At first you won't even have to work, just watch, and learn.

*On hearing the word "learn", Nikolaus seems to shudder and wants to stand up.*

LISELOTTE

Not like that... not like at school... I don't care about your education. I don't need that, and neither do you, nor anyone else. Our place in society is what's important, not how well educated we are.

*Nikolaus sits down again, watching Liselotte.*

LISELOTTE

You know, there were others before you... with flowers in their hands, just like you. And I thought they'd stay, and we'd form our own little country together; a little republic. Are you listening?

*Nikolaus nods slowly.*

LISELOTTE

But they're incapable... They were all incapable. Or maybe it was my fault, maybe the fault's in me... Things got muddled up, inside, and I was late: I missed myself, like you miss a bus. I was running after myself, trying to catch up, but no matter how fast I ran, the distance just

grew and grew, and I was falling further and further behind, and in the end I was so far behind that all I could do was scream at myself from a distance. Do you understand?

*Nikolaus nods hesitantly.*

LISELOTTE

You stink to high heaven, Nikolaus.

*Nikolaus sniffs himself, then laughs in an odd voice.*

LISELOTTE

When did you last wash?

*Nikolaus thinks hard.*

LISELOTTE

You'll have your own room and a bed. I'll buy you clothes. I don't know if you deserve this, but that's not important right now. You'll be clean and you'll smell good. You'll stare out the window all day, watching to see when I get home from work.

*Nikolaus nods firmly.*

LISELOTTE

I'll bring you food or I'll cook for you. I'll cook, and we'll eat together. Then we'll go to bed.

*Nikolaus grins.*

LISELOTTE

We'll sleep separately at first. Then we'll see how you cope with this lifestyle... And once I see that you respect it, I'll let you into my bed, and we'll make love. We'll make love together, Nikolaus. You'll make love to me, understand?

*Nikolaus becomes serious again. He puckers his lips.*

LISELOTTE

Have you ever made love properly...? I mean, like civilised people do.

NIKOLAUS

Errr.... aaaaahhh....

LISELOTTE

Don't worry. I don't want anything emotional; there'll be no poetry, or any of that. The important thing is that we make love when I ovulate. Do you understand?

*Nikolaus looks at her very seriously.*

LISELOTTE

So that we can have children... a child! Get it?

*Nikolaus grins. Now he understands.*

LISELOTTE

And who knows... perhaps one day... in a few years time... we might even hit it off together. Perhaps we'll be able accept each other by then. What do you think?

*Nikolaus nods seriously.*

LISELOTTE

And you'll be grateful to me. Your entire life will be ruled by your gratitude to me. Gratitude because I didn't leave you to rot, alone and hungry, in that shit and filth under the bridge. Because I gave you a chance at a meaningful life. I demand this gratitude from you in return, Nikolaus. ... And you will raise our children... however you like.

*Nikolaus grins, nodding repeatedly.*

LISELOTTE

I don't want them to be thinking intellectuals. I don't need that. They should be just like you.

*Nikolaus looks at her, amazed.*

LISELOTTE

Yes, just like you... That's what I want to see when we go on an outing together: you, ahead of me, with our two children, just like you... who can't talk, only nod, and who'll be forever grateful to me, just like you. That's what I want! That's why I brought you here!

*Silence. Nikolaus and Liselotte look at each other seriously.*

LISELOTTE

Do you want that too?

*Nikolaus nods very slowly.*

LISELOTTE

And you'll be grateful to me in return... as long as we live?

*Nikolaus nods.*

LISELOTTE

And then in ten... maybe fifteen years time... there'll be nothing to tell us apart from other couples... You'll be smarter, I'll be dumber. We'll adapt to each other. That will be our true happiness.

*Nikolaus nods again, very seriously.*

LISELOTTE

Do you have any illnesses?

*He starts scratching.*

LISELOTTE

I don't mean lice... that's not an illness... Something they treated you with in hospital... or maybe didn't treat you with, but you know you've got... something that hurts or bleeds somewhere?

*Nikolaus has a long serious look under his coat. He thinks, then looks up, and slowly shakes his head.*

LISELOTTE

Any problems with... your manhood...?

*Nikolaus grunts something indignantly.*

LISELOTTE

Alright, alright... I'll look you over later... Now I'll run a bath. You just sit in it and soak yourself thoroughly. Then we'll continue, and we'll discuss everything: like how the two of us are going to be happy in this lousy world, how we're going to manage to achieve our happiness together. We'll discuss everything. Just as we've done until now. We're going to be happy here, Nikolaus, because our happiness depends on us... on us untainted people, understand? And you're going to take great care of yourself from now on, because now you're doing everything for me... So don't grab hold of any wires hanging out of the wall, don't eat fish, don't stand on the window sill just because you're tempted to fly, don't do anything that could spoil this relationship... Ours will be the purest relationship, Nikolaus ... especially if you wash yourself thoroughly beforehand...

*She smiles.*

LISELOTTE

If you want... I'll even help you... I'll wash you, as if you were my child... my own child...

*She bursts into tears. Nikolaus looks at her curiously. Slowly, he reaches towards her, touches her head, and strokes her hair. Liselotte grabs his hand and kisses it.*

LISELOTTE

I don't know whether it's you that I've been waiting for, but we will make our lives together... Yours and mine, we'll make them together!

*She springs up, wipes her eyes, and goes to the bathroom. Nikolaus is left alone. He looks around the room. He slowly stands and shuffles towards the cupboard. He pulls out a draw, tips out the contents, and rummages through it. He picks out a bracelet and puts it in his pocket. He moves on, taking a small clock from the table, and putting that in his pocket too. He goes to the wardrobe and opens it. He tosses out a few dresses, and then searches through the pockets of a coat. He finds a few banknotes and pockets them too. Liselotte enters. She looks at him, stunned.*

LISELOTTE

What the hell are you doing?

*Nikolaus doesn't pay her any attention. He's in the process of emptying the contents of her handbag. Outraged, she rips it from his grasp.*

LISELOTTE

You can't do that! That's not right!

*Nikolaus grins at her. He then wrenches the necklace from her neck.*

LISELOTTE

That's enough! What a fool I've been! Get out of here, you ungrateful pig. Get out!

*Nikolaus grabs Liselotte, forces her onto the settee, grins, and produces a huge knife.*

LISELOTTE

I offered you the chance of a life with purpose and meaning, understand?!

*Nikolaus laughs. He undoes his fly. His trousers drop. He approaches Liselotte with the knife.*

LISELOTTE

Don't you dare... Don't you dare!!

*She leaps for the phone, but Nikolaus is faster. He grabs the phone and slams it against the wall. He whacks her across the face, and she falls to the floor. She backs away across the room, trembling. Nikolaus goes after her, growling, with the knife in hand. He jumps on her, and they grapple on the floor. Nikolaus grunts loudly. Liselotte tries desperately to defend herself. She grabs his knife-holding hand, and, with great effort, slowly turns the knife towards him. Nikolaus screams out, and falls chest first onto the knife. Liselotte leaps up in horror. Nikolaus looks up. He wrenches the knife from his chest. She heads for the door, but he beats her there. He stands there with blood on his clothes, holding the bloody knife. He moves towards her. She is trembling. His movements are becoming increasingly uncertain. He collapses and sprawls out on the floor. Liselotte, shaking against the wall, slips to the ground and trembles. Darkness.*

### Scene 7

*Same place, a few days later. Liselotte is packing, throwing her things into a large suitcase. She's in a hurry. She looks around to check what she may have forgotten. The silhouette of a man appears on the front door, flowers in hand. Liselotte notices him.*

LISELOTTE

Coming!

*A quick application of lipstick, a final check in the mirror, then she opens the door. A man in a black tuxedo stands there.*

MAN IN A BLACK TUXEDO

Liselotte Maner?

LISELOTTE

My name's on the door.

MAN IN A BLACK TUXEDO

I'm sorry. I can't read.

LISELOTTE

How convenient.

MAN IN A BLACK TUXEDO

Everything packed?

LISELOTTE

What a lovely bunch of roses... For me?

MAN IN A BLACK TUXEDO

Yes... That's customary nowadays.

LISELOTTE

You came sooner than I expected.

MAN IN A BLACK TUXEDO

After three bottles of pills... I always arrive "soon".

LISELOTTE

That's not to say I'm not ready... Man, am I'm ready!

MAN IN A BLACK TUXEDO

I can see that.

*Liselotte looks around.*

LISELOTTE

Okay... What else can I take?

MAN IN A BLACK TUXEDO

Whatever you want. Just don't take too long.

LISELOTTE

Who will I see there?

MAN IN A BLACK TUXEDO

Who do you want to see?

LISELOTTE

My mother, for sure.

MAN IN A BLACK TUXEDO

Fine.

LISELOTTE

I s'pose I'll bump into some old acquaintances sooner or later, too.

MAN IN A BLACK TUXEDO

That's how it usually is.

LISELOTTE

I'm all packed... but still, it's not easy... leaving like this...

MAN IN A BLACK TUXEDO

That's how it usually is.

*Suddenly, he staggers.*

MAN IN A BLACK TUXEDO

Damn...

*He reaches for his heart and massages it.*

LISELOTTE

What's wrong? Can I help you?

MAN IN A BLACK TUXEDO

I'll just sit down a bit... Could you... get me a glass of water...?

*Liselotte hurries to the kitchen and returns with a glass of water.*

LISELOTTE

Here you are... Don't do this to me... You can't get sick here!



MAN IN A BLACK TUXEDO

It's over now. Thank you... Just a passing ailment... It gets me every time the traveller doesn't really want to accompany me.

*He looks at her searchingly. Liselotte sighs. Silence.*

LISELOTTE

The truth is... I really loved living.

MAN IN A BLACK TUXEDO

I understand.

LISELOTTE

Really, I did!

MAN IN A BLACK TUXEDO

But?

LISELOTTE

I had no one to live with.

MAN IN A BLACK TUXEDO

Aha... That's tough... Did you try everything?

LISELOTTE

Yes... but nothing worked out.

MAN IN A BLACK TUXEDO

Well, you can't go it alone. That's certainly true. I'm sorry.

LISELOTTE

Really... I absolutely just loved living...

*Silence. The man in a black tuxedo slowly gets to his feet.*

MAN IN A BLACK TUXEDO

I'm feeling better now... So, are you sure there's no one else who might "come along"?

LISELOTTE

If there is, he missed the boat.

MAN IN A BLACK TUXEDO

How true... I don't like travellers who are young and beautiful as you. You know, you're a very attractive woman.

LISELOTTE

Thank you. You're very kind. Really.

MAN IN A BLACK TUXEDO

Shapely hips, nice legs... Overall, you're a shapely, desirable creature.

LISELOTTE

Oh, get off it!

MAN IN A BLACK TUXEDO  
Shall we go?

LISELOTTE  
Could you give me a hand?

MAN IN A BLACK TUXEDO  
What should I take?

LISELOTTE  
That suitcase and my make-up bag... I'll manage the rest... Are we going far?

MAN IN A BLACK TUXEDO  
No. It's quite close actually.

LISELOTTE  
Good.

*The man in the black tuxedo picks up the suitcase and make-up bag. Liselotte picks up her own things, and they set off. She stops and turns around for a final look. She sighs. The man in the black tuxedo is in no hurry. He waits patiently.*

MAN IN A BLACK TUXEDO  
Don't cry. Most people spoil the end by crying.

LISELOTTE  
You're right. I'll be strong.

MAN IN A BLACK TUXEDO  
After you.

*He allows Liselotte to leave first. He too leaves, closing the door behind him. Music. A few moments of music, then silence. The silhouette of a man appears on the front door, flowers in hand. He rings the doorbell. Nothing. The flat is silent and empty. The man rings again, and looks at his watch. He stands there with the flowers. He rings the doorbell again, and waits.*

The End

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