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**After the War**

A play in 5 scenes

By Motti Lerner

Translated by Roy Isacowitz

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Based on characters and events from the play “In the Dark” (2009)

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**The Characters**

**Joel** – a pianist of international reputation who lives in the United States (50)

**Bella** – his mother (73)

**Freddie** – his brother (46)

**Trudy** – Bella’s nurse (38)

**Bernard** – Trudy’s former husband (62)

**Izzy** – Joel’s son (23)

**The stage**

The play takes place in the living room of Bella’s house in the old center of Tel Aviv. The living room has exits to both the kitchen and the hallway leading to the bathroom, Bella’s bedroom and two additional bedrooms. It also has the entrance door to the house. The room has a sofa and an armchair, beside which is a low table. An old music system and CD stand in one corner. In the other is a piano, with a chest of drawers beside it. Above the drawers are shelves of books and sheet music. The furniture is old-fashioned and speaks to the modesty of the house’s residents – despite the high value of the land on which the house is built.

**The time**

The play takes place on August 16 - 18, 2006, two days after the end of the Second Lebanon War.

**Music**

In the course of the play, Joel plays pieces from Beethoven’s piano sonata no. 8 opus 13, known as the Pathétique.

**Playwright’s note**

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

**Scene 1**

Music. Midnight. Bella is sitting on the sofa in the living room, wearing an old bathrobe. Her hair is wild and gives the impression of not having been brushed for a long time. She is very tense. The doorbell rings. She tries to stand but, in her excitement, is unable to do so. She takes an inhaler from her pocket and inhales from it. The bell rings again. She again tries to get up and again is unsuccessful. After a short while, the sound of a key being inserted into the door is heard and the door opens. Joel enters, with a suitcase in his hand.

Joel Mom? **(Pause)** Hello.

Bella (**Barely in control of herself**) Hello.

Joel It’s me. Joel.

Bella I can see.

Joel How are you?

Bella Sit.

Joel **(Approaches her)** Why didn’t you open?

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

Joel I’m sorry I didn’t let you know I was coming. When the war broke out, I tried to call from New York, but your number had changed. Information said the new one was unpublished. So after I landed I went into the police station at the airport. The officer there recognized me and within two minutes I had it… **(Laughs)** I’ve kept the key for eighteen years. I knew you’d never change the lock.

Bella What are you doing here? Are you sick or something?

Joel I’m fine. I came to visit. Izzy was called up to the war. He was in Lebanon the whole month. He got out just two days ago. Has he called you?

Bella Who?

Joel Izzy. My son.

Bella Your son?

Joel He lives in Jerusalem. I’ll go there tomorrow. How’s dad? Is he sleeping? (**Silence**) And how’s Freddie?

Bella The police gave you the key to my house?

Joel Not the key. The phone number. And guess who I ran into on the flight. Zubin Mehta. He asked me to stand in for an English pianist who suddenly decided to boycott the Philharmonic. Because of the war. I’ll play Beethoven. The Pathétique for you and the Fifth Concerto for dad… **(Remembers)** I brought you some CDs. **(Opens the suitcase)** Last year I recorded all the Beethoven sonatas. I played them just like you taught me… **(Hands them to her)**

Bella **(Doesn’t look)** Sit down already. Sit.

Joel returns the CDs to the suitcase.

Joel How about telling me how you're doing? How did you get through the war? **(She stays silent)** I saw the pictures. Night after night. The missiles on the north. People running from their homes. The dead. Their families. Lebanon’s been turned to ash. Who knows what Izzy went through there… **(Sniffs)** You made eggplant, right? I’ll never forget that smell. **(He approaches the kitchen door and inhales the smell)** There was a gash in the piano here. Freddy threw a hammer at me. We were kids then. Here it is. And that’s your old bathrobe. With some new holes. You would sit on the sofa, listening to music. And the ash from your cigarettes fell on it. Right? **(He takes her hand. She pulls it away)** And where did you get your hair done so nicely? **(Laughs. Looks into the kitchen)** Even the fridge hasn’t been replaced. See what we’ve come to? Refrigerators are more faithful than people. **(Laughs)** If you continue with the silence, I’ll continue with the talking. **(Points to the wall)** There was a picture of dad here. With the minister of education. At a conference of the teachers union. Right? **(Turns on the radio**) The radio still works. It must be thirty years old already! **(The first part of the Pathétique sonata is playing)** That’s me, mom. Listen. Yes. That’s me playing.

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

Trudy She went to the bathroom.

Joel The bathroom?

Trudy That’s how she is when she’s excited. She’ll be back in a moment.

Joel And you are?

Trudy My name’s Trudy.

Joel Trudy? Freddie’s wife?

Trudy No. I’m not his wife. I’m waiting for him. I…

Joel You’re waiting for Freddie at my mother’s?

Trudy He’s on his way. We told him that you’re here. He was very happy.

Joel Really?

Trudy He’s a big fan of yours. He hopes that the two of you still have the same smell.

Joel He told you that?

Trudy Yes

Joel And you’re not his wife?

Trudy I look after your mother. I’m a nurse. I asked her to change her clothes for you. To brush her hair. She was too nervous. She didn’t want me with her when you arrived. I’ve often heard you on the radio.

Bella enters. Trudy stops talking.

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

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

Bella Why didn’t you come back while I was still alive?

Joel OK. I deserve it. Here’s the other cheek.

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

Freddie Hey, Jo-Jo!

Joel Freddie!

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

Freddie You look awful. Has old age caught up with you already? You’re as pale as a ghost. You’re not planning a heart attack, are you?

Joel That’s what you wish me?

They laugh and embrace again.

Freddie That’s how you arrive, after eighteen years? At midnight? Without letting us know? You could have found the house hit by a missile. You could have found us rotting in our shrouds. Even the worms that had eaten us could have been eaten by worms. **(Offers him a cigar)** You smoke? Havanas. I bought a thousand of these in Cyprus the day before the war broke out.

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

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

Joel Apparently they do. Even the Philharmonic invited me.

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

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

Freddie In a couple of days.

Joel So you’ll make it to the concert?

Freddie I’ll even have time to warm your fingers before you get up on stage. As long as they don’t stop the flights for another stupid war.

Joel Do you still live here?

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

Joel An apartment. In New York.

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

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

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

Joel Ruth.

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

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

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

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

Freddie You've missed it?

Joel You’re a bastard with a lot of charm. **(Laughs)**

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

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

Freddie Izzy?

Joel You remember him. You taught him to ride a bicycle.

Freddie Me?! **(Laughs)**

Joel You don’t know that he came back to live here? Five years ago. Did the army. Now he’s studying opera at the academy in Jerusalem. He was called up to the war. His unit just got out. He never called you?

Freddie What did you say his name was?

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

Bella enters

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

Joel: Thanks, mom.

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

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

Joel Enough, Freddie.

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

Bella **(To Freddy)** Goodnight.

She leaves. Joel picks up his suitcase and exits after her. Trudy enters.

Freddie I thought he was going to a hotel.

Trudy He didn’t want to hurt her.

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

Trudy Why were you so late?

Freddie I was tied up at the office.

Trudy I was waiting for you.

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

Trudy Stop it, Freddie.

Freddie Don’t worry. He’s not going to come here two days after a war and make himself at home.

Trudy (**Disengages from him**) I’m not sure I’m staying either.

Freddie Of course you’re staying.

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

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

Trudy What exactly did you say to her?

Freddie What you told me to say.

Trudy You want me to go back to working at the hospital and find another teacher?

Freddie After the wedding, you’ll call her “mom” and she’ll love you like her own daughter.

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

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

Trudy **(Disengaging again)** Stop playing games with me.

Freddie I’m dying to play games with you. **(He tries to kiss her; she turns her face away)** What’s the problem? I’m only going for a day. I brought you some money. **(Gives it to her)**

Trudy Why are you so eager to marry someone who doesn’t want to marry you?

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

Trudy Don’t. He could come in at any second.

Freddie He’s gone to sleep.

Trudy He didn’t look tired.

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

Trudy Take your hands off me.

Freddie I’m going tomorrow.

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

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

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

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

Freddie Sure.

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

Freddie She’s heard enough.

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

Freddie Which woman?

Joel Trudy.

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

Joel Does mom really need her?

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

Joel What do the doctors say?

Freddie Try take her to a doctor. Go to sleep now. I’ve got to get up early.

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

Freddie That’s how she looks, even when she’s happy.

Joel She’s really strange, this Trudy. Her smell is very elusive. **(Sniffs the couch)**

Freddie Are you a sniffer dog?

Joel She’s in dad’s study, no?

Freddie Goodnight.

Joel She’s not at all bad looking.

Freddie Goodnight, Jo-Jo.

Joel Do me a favor. Don’t call me Jo-Jo.

Freddie Goodnight.

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

Freddie Dad? **(Laughs)** Dad’s dead.

Joel What?!!

Freddie Two weeks ago.

Joel Dead?!!

Freddie Trudy looked after him in hospital and now she’s looking after her.

Joel He’s dead?! She didn’t say anything. I thought he’d gone to sleep. I asked her how he was. Twice!

Freddie Now he’s fine.

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

Freddie Nothing. The war killed him.

Joel The war?!

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

Joel Why didn’t you tell me?

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

Joel What do you mean the war killed him? How?

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

Joel Did he ask about me?

Freddie Who?

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

Freddie I’ll tell you everything tomorrow. Goodnight.

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

Freddie Mom threw it away.

Joel Threw it away? Why?

Freddie Ask her tomorrow. Goodnight.

Joel Goodnight. (**Remains standing**)

Freddie You already said goodnight.

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

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

Freddie Fucking jerk. **(Blackout)**

**Scene 2**

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

Trudy I made breakfast. **(Bella sits in an armchair)** You should eat. Hunger increases the blood pressure; you’ll get dizzy and fall. **(Begins to eat)** He hasn’t run away. He’s in Jerusalem. At his son’s. He left you a note.

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

Trudy Maybe you should take some more valium?

Bella The refrigerator will be empty by this evening.

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

Bella This isn’t a hotel. You can’t come and go whenever you want. He should have waited for me and had breakfast with me.

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

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

Silence. Trudy is hurt but manages to control herself.

Trudy I’m not asking for much. One lesson a day. In Bucharest I studied at an excellent conservatory. I’m sure I’ll get back to playing as I did.

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

Trudy Try me. I don’t have to be a great pianist. I'll be happy to be a teacher. I don't want to spend the rest of my life in hospitals. **(Imploringly)** I'm trying out for the radio orchestra next week.

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

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

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

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

Bella Did you find the boy? How is he?

Joel I’ve got to get to the Philharmonic, mom.

Bella I’m making you more coffee.

Joel This is enough. Thanks.

Bella I see you didn’t find him.

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

Bella I’m sure he’ll phone today.

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

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

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

Bella That’s not true.

Joel He was a lone soldier in the army. No family whatsoever. He gave up on vacations because he didn’t have a home. **(Angrily)** And why didn’t you tell me that dad was sick? Why didn’t you tell me last night he had died?

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

Joel Ran away?

Bella Yes.

Joel He kicked me out of here.

Bella Of course.

Joel And you kept quiet. Ruth and I came here in 1982, on the day the first war in Lebanon began. We wanted to tell you that we were getting married. Dad sat here, at the table. He had a headache and you played him Chopin’s nocturne in C minor…

Bella I don’t remember.

Joel When we told you that we were going to a demonstration against the war that evening, he got up and went to his bedroom. You went straight after him. You didn’t come to the wedding. When we signed a petition for withdrawal from Lebanon, he banned you from coming to my concerts. When Izzy was born, he wouldn’t let you visit. After five years, we gave up. Izzy’s twenty-three and you’ve never seen him.

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

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

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

Trudy You play so beautifully. In Romania I was a pianist. I even got to play a few concerts. But when I got here I had to find work… (**She goes silent**) Don’t worry. She’ll be OK in a few minutes.

Joel And now you’re a nurse?

Trudy Yes.

Joel Did you look after my father in the hospital?

Trudy Yes.

Joel And you know how he died?

Trudy Yes.

Joel How?

Trudy He didn’t want to live anymore.

Joel Why?

Trudy Because of the war.

Joel Is that what he told you? **(She is silent)** What exactly did he say?

Trudy He blamed himself for bringing the family here.

Joel No way! He fought to get here. He sat in a Polish jail for teaching Hebrew.

Trudy He said it many times.

Joel To you?

Trudy At night, he would talk to himself. He said he was not only a teacher of history but also its student. That’s why he knew that the war was the beginning of the end.

Joel The end of what? (**She stays silent**) Of what?

The doorbell rings.

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

The bell rings again. Joel opens the door. A smiling man of about 62 is standing there, wearing a suit. He has a newspaper in one hand and in the other a handkerchief with which he is wiping his sweaty face. It is Bernard.

Bernard Sorry. I apologize for the interruption. I was wondering if Trudy is here by any chance. I wanted to have a few words with her.

Joel With Trudy?

Bernard Yes. You’re Freddie’s business partner, correct?

Joel No, I’m not his partner. I’m his brother. For a moment I thought you were him.

Bernard No, no, I’m not Freddie. My name is Bernard. I’m Trudy’s husband.

Joel Trudy’s husband?

Trudy Ex-husband.

Bernard Of course. I came to see how she was. I’m staying at her place right now. A katyusha hit my apartment in Haifa at the beginning of the war. I brought her a Romanian newspaper.

Trudy Thanks.

Joel How can I help you?

Trudy I have to go, Bernard. I’m taking him to the Philharmonic.

Bernard The Philharmonic?

Trudy He’s a pianist. He hasn’t been here in a long time. He doesn’t know the city.

Joel I’m really in a great hurry.

Bernard As it happens, I know the way. I’ll be delighted to show you. You look familiar. American, correct? I think I saw you on TV a few times.

Trudy We’ll manage without you, Bernard.

Joel I’ll be right back.

He exits down the hallway.

Bernard If you’re in such a hurry, I’ll finish what you left on the plate. Is there more coffee?

Trudy You promised to go back to your apartment today.

Bernard **(Sits and eats)** I found a buyer.

Trudy You can’t stay with me anymore.

Bernard He won’t pay much. Because of the damage. But it’s enough for a decent place in Bucharest.

Trudy (**Strongly**) I’m not going with you, Bernard.

Bernard When the war broke out, you said you don’t want to die here.

Trudy The war’s over.

Bernard The next is on its way.

Trudy You look after yourself and I’ll look after myself. (**Silence**) You’re really sweating. Your shirt’s dirty. Did you walk the whole way? Take a bus. (**She gives him money**)

Bernard I’ll just drink the coffee.

Trudy Their mother isn’t well. She’ll complain that you robbed her.

Bernard Do you want me to examine her?

Trudy No. And stop following me around. If you don’t go back to your apartment tomorrow, I’m throwing your suitcase into the street. *Imediat inebunesc din cauza ta[[1]](#footnote-2).*

Bernard *Totdeauna eu sant de vina[[2]](#footnote-3).* (**Continues eating**) And before you start making such grandiose plans, I suggest you think a little about what will happen here in the next war. This one was just the appetizer.

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

Joel We’re going now.

Bernard I’ll be happy to accompany you. **(Gets up)**

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

Bernard You haven’t been here for a long time, and you’ve forgotten that there are no taxis on this street. I can take you to a nearby-by street, where taxis occasionally…

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

Joel I think I should tell my mother.

Trudy She’s listening behind the door.

Joel (**To Bernard)** See you later.

He opens the door for Trudy and follows her out. Bernard continues eating. Bella enters.

Bella What are you doing here?

Bernard Good afternoon, Madam Bella.

Bella How did you get in?

Bernard Your son let me in. I recognized him immediately. He really is a great pianist.

Bella I know.

Bernard How are you? You’re looking a lot better. I very much wanted to visit you while you were in mourning, but I had to collect my belongings from the ruins.

Bella Who gave you permission to eat my food?

Bernard I thought it was Trudy’s. I always eat her leftovers. I’m not that poor, but I grew up in a poor home. I can’t bear seeing food thrown into the garbage.

Bella You’ll have me in tears in a minute. Get up and get out of here.

Bernard Yes, of course. Right away. Do you perhaps have some salt in the kitchen? Regular salt? To sprinkle on the butter? They make butter without salt here. (**She remains silent**) You sure there’s no salt there on the shelf? In the cupboard?

Bella I don’t have salt. And before you go, wash the dishes that the bitch left.

Bernard With pleasure. And don’t worry about the salt. I think I have some. **(Takes a sachet of salt from his pocket and sprinkles it on the bread)** You won't mind if I take a little more milk from the fridge, will you?

Bella There’s also no milk. Please eat faster.

Bernard It's precisely for such times, I keep some creamer on me. **(Takes another sachet from his pocket and empties it into the coffee)** I got used to it fast enough. Even though I was once a rich man. Doctors have a special status in Romania. By the way, I’ll be happy to examine you.

Bella I don’t need an examination. I’ll dance on your grave, yet.

Bernard You can rely on me. I ran a department in a large hospital in Bucharest. (**She doesn’t answer**) Do you perhaps have a little more butter?

Bella No.

Bernard No problem. When we escaped, I knew we’d have to give up on butter for some time. President Ceausescu had become worse than Stalin. He was sure I wanted to poison him. **(Chuckles)** Of course, Bucharest today is a comfortable city. I hope we'll be back there before the next war.

Bella If you want her to go with you, you’d better hurry up and take her. Freddie already slept with her last night.

Bernard With her? Impossible. People mistake her friendliness. She’s a woman of the world. She makes friends with decent people very easily.

Bella There you’re mistaken, sir. Freddie is not decent and he slept with her.

Bernard She was very close to your late husband, as well. He was a highly respected teacher. A renaissance man. His heart broke when he saw the wounded soldiers bleeding in their beds near him. Some of them were his students. **(Clears his throat)** It appears that I ate too quickly. May I rest here for a few minutes? **(Blackout)**

**Scene 3**

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

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

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

Bella It’s you.

Freddie Did you think it was him?

Bella I thought you’d gone to Italy.

Freddie So did I. Why did you leave a key in the door?

Bella When you want to come in, you knock.

He sees Bernard sleeping but can’t recognize him by his naked feet.

Bella It’s her husband. Five hours I’ve been trying to wake him.

Freddie Whose husband?

Bella His wife’s.

Freddie He’s not her husband. They divorced a year ago. What does he want from her, the shit?

Bella The same as you want.

Freddie **(Pulls the blanket off Bernard)** What are you doing here?

Bernard **(He sits up)** Hello, Freddie. How are you?

Freddie What are you doing here?

Bernard I came to see Trudy.

Freddie I told you not to come here anymore.

Bernard I brought her the *Ultima Oră*.[[3]](#footnote-4)

Freddie She works here and you’re disturbing her.

Bella (**To Freddie)** And I’m taking what he ate from her salary.

Freddie **(To Bernard)** Get out.

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

Freddie No way.

Bernard We’re human beings, Freddie. We must have a certain degree of human kindness.

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

Bernard I’m forcing you? You’re relinquishing the little human kindness that remains in you all by yourself.

Freddie What did you say?! What did you say?!

Bella You can go to the toilet.

Freddie He can do it outside.

Bernard Thank you, ma’am. **(Exits to the hallway)**

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

Freddie Where’s she?

Bella Gone with him.

Freddie Where?

Bella To the Philharmonic.

Freddie What’s she doing at the Philharmonic?

Bella Ask her.

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

Bella No.

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

Bella There’s eggplant in the fridge.

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

Bella I like eggplant.

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

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

Freddie What’s the problem?

Bella Maybe it would be better if you went to Italy.

Freddie I’m trying to help you breathe.

Bella Thank you. I want to go to sleep.

Freddie I thought you were waiting for him.

Bella I’m not waiting for anyone.

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

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

Joel For you, mom. I remembered how you love the smell. I hope you’ve forgiven me for what I said this morning. I shouldn’t have said it. (**Offers her the lilies)**

Bella I want to talk to you.

Joel That’s just what I was about to suggest. On the way we saw a bar with a piano. We’ll eat something. I’ll play for you. We’ll talk the whole night.

Trudy takes the lilies and puts them in a vase.

Bella I want to talk to you right now.

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

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

Freddie (**To Trudy**) What’s so funny?

Joel Hi, Freddie.

Freddie I asked what’s so funny.

Joel I thought you were gone.

Freddie It looks like I’ll leave in a couple of hours.

Trudy                With that net on your head?

Freddie Sure.

Joel So maybe you’ll come with us now for something to eat?

Freddie (**To Trudy**) I called this afternoon. Where were you?

Trudy Wandering around.

Freddie Where?

Joel After the Philharmonic, we went to the cemetery, to visit dad. The sun was still high in the sky and I’m not used to such dazzling light. Suddenly, I got a migraine. Trudy was very kind and massaged my temples. After a moment, I opened my eyes and the blue of the sky was exactly as I remembered it. And the soil was red and the cypress trees were green. And suddenly their smell swept over me. This sharp smell of tall cypresses that will be engraved in my nostrils forever… And at that very moment everything became clear to me. I have to live here for a few months a year. To play. To teach. What do you think, mom? Maybe we’ll open an academy for Israeli and Palestinian students? Trudy would teach, too. Things could be a whole lot better here if we learn to play with them…

Bella (**Insisting**) I want to explain to you why we didn’t tell you that dad had died.

Freddie For what? So dad can turn in his grave? (**To Trudy**) I don’t understand why you went there with him. He needs an escort?

Trudy He didn’t remember where the offices were. So, I took him there and waited in a coffee shop downstairs.

Freddie You waited downstairs?

Trudy Yes.

Freddie So, if you waited downstairs, maybe his whole story is made up?

Joel Which story?

Freddie Why would the Philharmonic play with a pianist who slanders us around the world?

Joel I guess Zubin Mehta has a different opinion of me.

Freddie So why didn’t you take her to meet Zubin Mehta?

Joel Because I met with the management.

Freddie And you didn’t want her to hear what they think of your concert. They know very well that the moment you step on stage, people will start whistling and throwing rotten eggs at you.

Joel They also know very well that many people here need good music like air to breathe.

Bella **(Vehemently)** We didn’t tell you that daddy was sick because he didn’t want us to tell you. Because he didn’t want you to come visit him.

Joel (**Amazed**) *He* didn’t want?

Bella He read the things you said in the papers during the war.

Joel I said those things for your sake! So that you’d end it. So the lives of another few hundred people would be saved.

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

Freddie He was right.

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

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

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

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

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

He turns towards the hallway.

Bella Wait a second.

Joel I’ve waited enough.

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

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

As he’s exiting, he passes Bernard, who is coming out of the toilet.

Bernard (**To his back**) I think I remember where I met you.

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

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

Freddie Get the fuck out!

Bernard **(To Trudy)** I sat down on the couch to rest and fell asleep.

Freddie Out.

**Trudy leads Bernard outside and returns after a moment.**

Freddie **(To Bella)** Stop crying. Eighteen years that shit didn’t even send a postcard. We’ve been through three wars here. He travelled the world defaming us while our blood flowed in the streets… **(To Trudy)** I had to go to the office this morning. It didn’t occur to me that he would harass you like that.

Trudy He didn’t harass me.

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

Trudy What do you mean ‘who sent me?’

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

Trudy You won’t tell me what to do, Freddie.

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

Trudy If you think that just because you pay me, you decide what I can and cannot do, you’re wrong.

Freddie Watch it, Trudy.

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

Freddie (**Removes the net**) Go ahead. Laugh. I’ll even laugh with you. (**Turns to Bella**) And you won’t go listen to him in any first row. There’s no concert and there will never be. Anyone who hears that he's the pianist will return their ticket.

Joel enters with his suitcase in hand.

Bella (**To Joel**) Don’t go.

Joel **(To Trudy**) I’ll be very happy if you come with me to that bar.

Bella Stay. Play for us here. I’ll cook for you.

Freddie Hang on. How come you’re inviting her to eat with you? She’s eating with me.

Joel (**To Trudy**) We’ll find a taxi outside.

Freddie (**Takes Joel’s jacket off a hanger and presses it into his hands.**) The concert’s over. There’s no applause. And we don’t want any encore.

Bella (**To Joel)** Wait. I wanted you to come back. I swear it. Every morning I hoped that in the evening you’d knock on the door. At night, when daddy was sleeping, I searched the radio stations for you. I told myself that if I could only hear you play I would stay sane. If I could hear you play, I’d be able, one day, to sit with you at the piano and teach you how to touch the hearts of the music lovers who're trying to survive here.

Joel I know, Mom.

Bella Daddy and I came here from Poland alone. With one suitcase. Without family. After what we’d been through there, I couldn’t hurt him.

Joel But me you could hurt?

Bella I, too, was hurt. I, too, was angry. I thought that if we could have been together it would have been easier. Today, I’m angry at myself that I got so angry. After daddy died, I wanted to call you. I tried to find your number.

Joel I'm also angry at myself, Mom. I should have known it would take time before I'd be forgiven. **(To Trudy)** Come, Trudy.

He turns to leave. Trudy hesitates for a moment but then walks after him. Freddie grabs her by the arm.

Freddie Where do you think you’re going?

Trudy I want to listen to him play.

Freddie Him? Who the hell is he?

Joel She'll listen to whoever she wants.

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

Trudy I’m not so sure, Freddie.

Freddie Damn right you’re marrying me. **(To Joel)** I brought her here as the nurse so mom wouldn’t get rid of her. (**To Trudy**) Tell them.

Trudy I want to hear him play, Freddie.

Freddie You want me to tell them?

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

Freddie You forgot it entirely last night.

Trudy You forgot that I remembered it very well.

Freddie Hang on, Trudy. Hang on. I don’t understand what’s going on here. Do you really think I’ll let you go with him?

Bella (**Vehemently**) You’re going, Freddie. I don’t want you in my house anymore.

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

Bella Get out of here.

Freddie I’ll go when I want to. **(To Trudy)** Go to your room. I’ll be there soon.

Trudy I’ll go wherever I want.

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

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

Trudy I think it’s best if I leave.

Joel Why?

Trudy Do you want to hear more things about me?

Joel From him?

Trudy Bernard doesn’t work. I had to help him. I worked nights. There was a piano at the nurses' club. I stayed there to practice.

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

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

Joel (**To Trudy**) Stay. I believe everything you say.

Trudy I never promised Freddie anything.

**He embraces her. The door opens suddenly and Freddie enters with Bernard.**

Freddie Look Jo-Jo. Look who I’ve brought you. He was sitting in the entrance and waiting for her.

Bernard I was on the way to the bus, Trudy. He dragged me here against my will.

Trudy *Dute acasa*, Bernard![[4]](#footnote-5)

Joel Enough, Freddie.

Freddie (**To Bernard)** Tell them why you were waiting. Before I smash your face.

Trudy Leave him.

**Bella rushes back into the room after hearing the shouts.**

Bella You leave now, Freddie!

Joel **(To Freddie)** Let him go.

Freddie (**To Trudy**) You thought you could spit in my face and I’d dry it off with a hair dryer?

Bella Leave!

Freddie First he’s going to tell us why he was waiting outside.

Bernard I was not feeling well.

Freddie He was feeling fine. But he knows who she is. That’s why he follows her wherever she goes. That’s why he won’t leave her alone with anyone else. And she thinks I’m going to marry her!

Bella Leave! Both of you!

Freddie (**To Joel**) She’s all yours.

Freddie suddenly lets go of Bernard, raises his hand and slaps Joel’s face. Joel is stunned.

Freddie Dad’s dead. No-one tells me what to do in this house now. No-one tells me to come and no-one tells me to go. (**Exits**)

Bernard Good night.

Bernard leave. Bella closes the door after him and locks it. Joel is sitting on the couch. Bella approaches him, takes a pill out of her pocket and gives it to him.

Bella Take a pill. You’ll have a headache soon.

Joel (**Swallows the pill**) Freddie somehow always manages to drive me nuts.

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

Joel gets up and embraces her. She embraces him.

Joel I'll be happy to play for you now.

He sits at the piano and begins to play the first part of the Pathétique sonata. After a few notes, the doorbell rings.

Joel It’s him again.

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

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

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

Bella **(Approaches him)** Izzy?

Izzy Hi, Grandma.

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

Izzy Nothing.

Joel Did you get the note I left you?

Izzy Yes.

Joel I hope you’re coming to the concert.

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

Bella How did you open the door? **(He hesitates)** How did you know where I live?

Izzy I always knew.

Bella How come you had a key?

Izzy He gave me one.

Joel Me? When?

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

Joel I was so worried about you.

Izzy I'm fine. **(Giggles)** Licking the wounds.

Joel **(Shocked)** Wounds? **(Touches him)**

Izzy **(Screams)** No. Don't! Don't!

**Izzy faints. Joel kneels beside him.**

Joel Izzy? Izzy? He’s bleeding!

Trudy **(Examines him)** Water! **(To Bella)** Bring a bottle of water! **(Blackout**)

**Scene 4**

**The afternoon of the following day. Joel is sitting at the piano and playing the second movement of Beethoven’s Pathétique. Trudy enters and approaches him. He stops playing.**

Trudy He’s still sleeping.

Joel Twelve hours already.

Trudy It’s a good sign. Play. I’ve never heard anyone play like this.

Joel Ten days ago already I had a feeling that he was wounded. I phoned his neighbors every day. They didn’t know anything.

Trudy I don’t think it’s a serious injury.

Joel He usually visits me in the summer. This year he decided to stay here. He didn't say why. Then the war broke out. Maybe he *is* licking his wounds.

Trudy I’ll examine him when he gets up.

Joel In the last few months he’s done everything to avoid me.

Trudy But he's coming to your concert.

Joel I hope so. I hope there won’t be too many disturbances when I play. **(Pause)** I asked the management to add security.

Trudy I’m sure they already have.

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

Trudy Your mother will be back any moment.

Joel Come to bed.

Trudy You want me like there’s no tomorrow.

Joel Don’t blame me.

Trudy Only if you don’t blame me.

Joel I’ve been alone far too long. **(They kiss)**

Trudy She’ll come in any second.

Joel Let her come.

Trudy She’ll kick me out if she finds me in your lap.

Joel She needs you. She knows it. I’ll be very grateful if you’d continue caring for her. **(She is silent)** I’ll pay you double what Freddie pays. **(She is silent)** She’s a difficult woman. I know. She suffered a lot from my father. Maybe she’ll soften a bit now.

Trudy I agreed to care for her so she'd teach me.

Joel She’ll be happy to teach you. When she visits me in New York, you’ll come with her.

Trudy To New York?

Joel My apartment’s big enough. We’ll live there for a few months and here for a few months. I’m seriously thinking of buying the house across the road.

Trudy Have you discussed it with her?

Joel She’ll teach wherever we go. She knows that good music can change the world.

Trudy I need to think about it.

Joel We’ve been thinking the whole night. **(They embrace)** I'll help you with the radio audition.

**Izzy appears in the hallway. A bloodstain is still visible on his shirt. Joel let’s go of Trudy.**

Joel Good morning. How are you?

Izzy Fine thanks. (**To Trudy**) Good morning.

Trudy Good morning. You’re looking a whole lot better. I’ll make you something to eat. (**She exits into the kitchen**)

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

Izzy Fine. **(He starts searching through the drawers)**

Joel What are you looking for?

Izzy Do you have any gum?

Joel No.

Izzy Maybe grandma?

Joel She’s out. She’ll be back soon. How were you wounded? **(Tries to check Izzy’s shoulder)**

Izzy **(Stops him)** I already told you. Shrapnel.

Joel When did you tell me?

Izzy I told you.

Joel It looks like the stitches have opened, right?

Izzy I don’t know.

Joel You lost a lot of blood.

Izzy Maybe

Joel You need to go to hospital.

Izzy I need gum.

Joel You want me to go and get you some? **(Izzy doesn’t respond)** How did it happen?

Izzy I told you.

Joel How?

Izzy In the war.

Joel Your voice has also gone hoarse. Can you sing like this?

Izzy Yes.

Joel Did that also happen in the war?

Izzy Yes.

Joel I hope it sorts itself out. You have no idea how worried I was. I watched the news day after day. Followed your regiment’s battles. The numbers of dead. When the war ended, I called your neighbors.

Izzy I’m absolutely fine.

Joel So why didn’t you call? Why didn’t you send a message? Why didn’t the army inform me? **(Izzy is silent)** You have another two months until the semester begins. Do you want to come with me to New York?

Izzy No.

Joel Why?

Izzy Because.

Joel Did something happen?

Izzy Are you interrogating me?

Joel I just want to know.

Izzy What do you want to know?

Joel I get the feeling you’re hiding something from me.

Izzy I’m not hiding anything.

**Trudy peeks in from the kitchen.**

Trudy Izzy, do you want cheese with your omelet?

Izzy Yes, please.

Trudy Do you want me to wash your shirt?

Izzy Thanks. Do you have any gum?

Trudy I’ll get you some from the store.

**Trudy returns to the kitchen**

Joel I want her to check your shoulder.

Izzy What shoulder?

Joel The injured one. Don’t worry, she’s a nurse.

Izzy I’m not worried.

Joel So, why won’t you say how you got wounded?

Izzy I told you.

Joel You told me? What did you tell me? When? (**Pause**) Why don’t you answer?

Izzy I don’t have anything to say.

Joel Maybe we’ll go to the hospital anyway? I’ll cancel my meeting at the Philharmonic.

Izzy I’m not going to any hospital.

Joel Why?

Izzy Because.

Joel OK. I’ll phone the hospital and ask them to send a doctor here.

Izzy I don’t need a doctor.

Joel Your stitches have opened, Izzy.

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

Joel I’m picking on you? (**Izzy doesn’t respond**) If you need something, tell me.

Izzy I need gum.

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

Izzy I told you. I’ve been in hospital. With my friends from the unit. The wounded. I look after them.

Joel When did you tell me?

Izzy I told you.

**Trudy enters carrying a tray with breakfast.**

Trudy Bon appetite.

**Izzy sits at the table and eats.**

Joel (**To Trudy**) I don’t think he’s feeling well.

Izzy I feel perfect.

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

Izzy I told you I feel perfect.

Joel It doesn’t sound like it, Izzy. I know what war’s like. Believe me, I’ve been there. I still wake up from nightmares. I can imagine what you went through.

Izzy If you could imagine, you wouldn’t be in such a hurry to say the things you said about us.

Joel What did I say?

Izzy Have you already forgotten?

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

Trudy Bella!

Joel Mom?!

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

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

Bella I see the young man is awake.

Izzy Good morning.

Bella Excellent morning. (**Excited to Joel**) He’s got your eyes.

Izzy I have your eyes, grandma.

Bella “Grandma!” Again he said “grandma.” You hear?

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

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

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

Izzy No.

Joel It’s a burn. Just like mine.

Izzy It's nothing.

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

Izzy I don’t remember asking you.

Joel We spoke about it for hours.

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

Joel Can you? **(Izzy hesitates)** If you want, I'll accompany you. (**Approaches the piano**) You remember Papageno’s aria from the end of the first movement?

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

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

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

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

Joel I came to see you so I could understand.

Izzy **(Angrily)** Who asked you? That’s why I didn’t tell you I’d been wounded. So you wouldn’t come here. So you wouldn’t want to stay.

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

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

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

Freddie (**To Bella)** I’ve been to the Philharmonic. Just like I told you. There won't be any concert tomorrow.

Bella You broke the door! Go get a carpenter.

Freddie I spoke with the musicians. They won't play with him.

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

Freddie You’ll hear me alright. (**To Bella**) I don’t understand how you let him into the house. Dad would have slapped him up and thrown him out. (**Notices her fancy clothes**) How come you’re dressed like that all of a sudden? For his concert? I’m telling you, there’s no concert. Ask Zubin Mehta’s secretary. Here’s her number. Call her. (**To Trudy**) I wanted to buy you flowers, but the store was closed. I’m sorry about what I said yesterday.

Bella Instead of being sorry, go bring a carpenter.

Joel I didn’t come here to rob you of anything, Freddie. If you need help, I’m willing to help you.

Freddie I’ve heard that too many times already.

Bella You broke it. You fix it.

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

Joel Stop speaking garbage, “Frederick.”

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

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

Freddie You won't stay here even one day!

Joel I didn’t ask for your permission.

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

Trudy Enough, Freddie. Calm down.

Freddie I am calm!

Joel I have a suggestion, Freddie. Let's go to the Philharmonic and ask Zubin Mehta if I have a concert tomorrow.

Freddie I’ll be happy if you go and I’ll be even happier if you never return.

Bella It’s still my house, Freddie, and I’ll decide who goes and who returns.

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

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

Freddie What the hell is that thing? What’s he doing here?

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

Freddie You’re his son?!

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

Freddie You’ve also come to take something from me?

Bella What do you want from him, Freddie? This house will be yours. You want me to write a will tomorrow?

Freddie I want to start living! **(To Joel)** I’m prepared to forget everything you’ve done to me, Jo-Jo. I’m prepared to apologize for everything I’ve said. On condition that you go to America and never come back.

Joel Of course I’m coming back.

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

Trudy I don’t work for you anymore, Freddie, and I don’t take instructions from you.

Freddie You don’t work for me?

Trudy No.

Freddie So who do you work for?

Trudy Whoever I want to.

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

Joel I’ll leave and come back.

Freddie Over my dead body.

Joel I’ve heard that already, Freddie.

Freddie You’ll regret it for the rest of your life.

Joel Thank you.

Freddie Fine. You’ve brought it on yourself, with your own hands. (**Takes a newspaper cut from his pocket**) His speech at the UN Human Rights Council on the 4th of August. Listen, mom. (**Reads**) “In the house hit by the air force bombardment of Kafr Kana, not a single Hezbollah fighter was struck. Each of the twenty seven fatalities was civilian. Women, the elderly and children. It had no military equipment and no missiles.” And he concludes: “The Israeli Defense Forces failed to distinguish between fighters and civilians. The killing of civilians has become its routine mode of operation. The fatal hit on this house was not an accident, but a war crime.” (**To Joel**) If you don’t take your suitcase and get out of here right now, I’ll go to the Philharmonic and you’ll never play here again your whole life.

Joel Everything I said is quoted from the UN observers' report.

Freddie I don’t believe a word of it.

Joel Have you checked?

Izzy There’s nothing to check. I was there.

Joel You were there?!

Izzy My regiment was destroying missile launchers in the area.

Joel And the air force didn’t attack that house?

Izzy There were arms and ammunition bunkers in that village. Hezbollah fired rockets at the whole country from there.

Joel UN observers didn’t find any sign of a military presence in the house.

Izzy The bastards ran away before the UN got there.

Joel I saw the list of the dead, Izzy. Among them was one crippled man in his thirties. The rest were old people, women and children. If Hezbollah were there, how come none of them were killed?

Freddie (**To Bella**) And he believes their lists.

Joel They checked the graves.

Izzy Our airplanes dropped pamphlets on that village every day for a whole week before they hit it. And a day later, I hear you saying on the radio that we’re murderers.

Joel I didn’t say you were murderers. I said that if the number of civilians killed in the fighting is close to that of the fighters killed, it seems that the army doesn't distinguish between civilians and fighters.

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

Joel I said that soldiers who fire knowing that they’re killing civilians should be put on trial. The court will decide if they’re murderers.

Izzy We’re not murderers!

Joel I didn’t say you’re murderers. I said that I lived here most of my life and, even though you drove me out, I am still responsible for what happens here. I said that your wars are also my wars, and so I won’t keep quiet about your cruelty in these wars. I said that this cruelty of yours generates even greater cruelty, and I said that you have made me the pianist I am, and I will play for you until your cruelty softens.

Freddie Who the hell do you think you are? Your playing won’t move a leaf on a tree here.

Joel When you hear me play tomorrow, you’ll know exactly who I am.

Freddie I already know. You say we’re murderers. You’re the murderer. You. You murdered dad.

Joel I did what?

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

Bella Enough, Freddie.

Freddie Every day you spoke, he died a little more.

Joel Because of me?

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

Freddie That night, when dad saw him on TV speaking at the UN, he lost his will to live. He told me.

**Joel loses his cool.**

Joel Until now, they called me a traitor here. Now I’m also a murderer. This is how you want to shut me up? Well, no-one has been able to do it yet. **(In fury)** I murdered him?! I argued with him! I tried to persuade him that our military power has limits, and it won't protect us forever. When the war broke out, he understood it. That’s why he wanted to die. Because he realized that even a victory won't guarantee us life. That missiles will continue to explode all around us. Ask Trudy what he said to her. “This war is the beginning of the end.” Had I been able, I would have convinced him that it’s not true. That it’s possible to prevent wars. That compassion can bring hope. If he had heard me, he would have felt the same compassion for the miserable people of Kafr Kana that I feel. Come with me to the Philharmonic and you’ll see for yourselves the power of compassion. **(Exits)**

Freddie Why are you looking at me? He comes here to rob me and I’ll just scratch my balls and shut up? (**To Trudy**) It’s not only the house he wants. He's taking you too, and he's still complaining. Do you know how much business I’ve lost because I’m his brother? (**To Bella**) I went bankrupt because of him. Only because of him. And if he thinks he can now go to the Philharmonic and massage them with words, he’s mistaken. No-one is waiting for him there.

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

Freddie And he let me? From the moment I was born, everyone pissed on me because of him. So what if he knows how to play? Does that mean he’s allowed to do everything? He already left you once and he’ll do it again. Who stayed here all these years looking after you and dad? Me. Only me. (**Calms down**) OK. I’ll go to the Philharmonic. If he has a concert tomorrow, I’ll cut off my own dick.

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

Trudy (**Examining him**) He has a fever. (**She checks the wound**) But the bleeding’s stopped. (**To Bella**) Cut up a sheet. We need to make him a sling.

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

Trudy The wound is swollen. You don’t complain, do you?

Izzy No.

Trudy A few more hours and we’ll have to call an ambulance.

Izzy I’ve got some more urgent things to do now.

Trudy You don’t have to be so angry with your dad. He was worried about you. That’s why he wanted the war to end.

Izzy It’s not only because of the war. You have no idea how much shit I ate from him my whole life.

Trudy Really?

Izzy He’s fooling you, too.

Trudy Maybe it’s you who’s trying to fool me?

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

Trudy He plays beautifully. He played for me this morning.

Izzy I know him like a hunchback knows his hump. He built his whole career by comparing us to the Wehrmacht. That’s why my mother left him. He betrayed her from the day they were married. He didn’t even bother to hide it. In every city he plays, he finds himself a cute violinist, tells her that he has a migraine and asks her to massage his temples.

Trudy Really?

Izzy And the next day he’s forgotten what he promised and he moves on to the next city. After the concert, he’ll get on a plane. We’ll never see him again. But we’ll still hear his preaching, of course.

Trudy You’re wrong. He wants to live here. He wants to buy the house across the road and add a floor for you.

Izzy That’s what he told you? You'll soon see. His life is a lie. When I was a kid, I used to pass here, looking in the windows from the street. I always knew that I had grandparents here. I couldn’t understand why they didn’t want to see me. I was certain that I had done something wrong… **(She is silent)** He probably went to the Philharmonic to tell them that after the concert he'll give a speech about “war crimes” in Kafr Kana. That’s why I came here. If he doesn’t cancel the concert, I’ll bring my company to block the entrance. The wounded will come in wheelchairs and in beds with their IV stands. We’ll put the dead on the stage… (**She remains silent**) And I don’t need a hospital. One of our doctors will stitch me up. If you’re looking for work, I can arrange something with us. The wounded need you more than he does. If you want, you can live in my apartment. (**Kisses her suddenly on the mouth**)

Trudy What do you think you’re doing? (**Pushes him away**)

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

Trudy (**Angrily**) And don’t call me sweetie. You still have a lot to learn before you can lie to me. You think I don’t see why you stick a finger down your throat and vomit on me? You'd better be careful. I know exactly where to shove the enema. **(She exits. Blackout)**

**Scene 5**

**The same day. Evening. The living room is dark. The door opens and Joel enters. He turns on the light and is surprised to see Trudy sitting at the piano.**

Joel Why’re you sitting in the dark? **(She doesn’t respond)** Did something happen? Did they hear what I said at the press conference? **(She nods)** Where are they?

Trudy He's sleeping

Joel And her?

Trudy In her bed. She couldn't breathe. I gave her a shot. Hope she’s OK now.

**She stands up. They kiss. After a few seconds, she stops and looks at him.**

Trudy Are you sure it’s really such a good idea?

Joel Why not?

Trudy You’ve been away for a long time. Things have changed.

Joel I know. But These wounded kids in Kafr Kana are in terrible condition. They need doctors. Medications. Bandages. Prostheses. Perhaps their parents didn’t get them out of the bombed areas. Perhaps Hezbollah used them as human shields. Perhaps our pilots weren’t cautious enough. It doesn’t matter.

Trudy If you help them, you won’t be able to play here. You won’t be able to live here. They won’t even let you visit.

Joel Who won’t let me? Freddie?

Trudy It’s not only Freddie. People are already returning their tickets

Joel Very few.

Trudy There’s going to be a demonstration outside the entrance tomorrow night. Maybe inside the hall as well.

Joel The security guards will kick out anyone who makes trouble. **(She remains silent)** You're not going to return your ticket, are you?

Trudy Of course not. But I have to be careful. I’m still new here. I want to play. I want to teach. I can't start all over again in another country.

Joel Those children need help, Trudy.

Trudy Wait a few days. Maybe there’s still something you don’t see. We live here in great fear. We want to be sure you're with us.

Joel You're not sure? I have a concert in Chicago on Saturday. I’ll be back in December and...

Trudy In December?!

Joel Don’t worry. Your salary will be in the bank every month.

Trudy **(Insulted)** That’s what you think I want? A salary?

Joel Of course not. But…

Trudy If I wanted a salary I would have stayed at the hospital.

Joel I know. But I can’t cancel concerts that have already been scheduled.

Trudy That’s why you allow yourself to donate to those children. Because in America no-one will spit at you in the street. No-one will ostracize you.

Joel I'm paying a heavy price in America too, Trudy.

Trudy If you are so insistent on being hated here, then you probably don’t intend to return. The whole thing is a lie. You won’t buy a house. Won’t renovate it. Won’t add another floor. Won’t teach here with your mother…

Joel Hang on, Trudy. Has something happened? What happened?

Trudy I’m not one of those cute violinists who spend their whole lives waiting for the day you’ll deign to play with them.

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

Joel Mom?!

Bella Sit.

Joel How are you feeling?

Bella Sit. **(He sits)** I want you to play here tomorrow.

Joel Of course I’ll play here tomorrow.

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

Joel Me, too.

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

Joel Hang on, mom. Let me explain it.

Bella Now I’m explaining.

Joel **(Getting up)** I don’t need the fee from the concert and I’ll donate it to someone who needs it. For those fourteen wounded children in Kafr Kana, it’s a matter of life and death.

Bella Donate the fee to our wounded children.

Joel Here, they are taken care of. Who takes care of the children in a country that has been devastated by war?

Bella That’s not my business.

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

Bella I understand the suffering of our own children better.

Joel If we heal those children, they’ll hate us less.

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

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

Joel Of course you will.

Bella I’m not sure I want to hear you.

Joel Of course you do.

Bella A great pianist opens his heart to the pain of those around him and feels it when he plays. You closed your heart to ours. You play with the pain of strangers in your heart and pretend that it’s yours.

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

Bella A pianist who ran away from his mother and father, his brother, from his wife and child, who doesn’t have a home, who forgot what a home is, who thinks he can live without a home, who believes he can play without a home, has no greatness in him.

Joel Home is everywhere I play. Everywhere people listen to me.

Bella: **(Angrily)** Are you sure? Are you?

**She coughs again. The doorbell rings. The door opens and Bernard enters.**

Bernard Good evening. The door was open.

Joel It’s broken. We haven’t found a carpenter yet.

Bernard There’s no need. (**To Bella**) If you have a hammer and a screwdriver, I’ll…

Joel It’s not a good time to visit, Mr.…

Bernard Bernard. I brought Trudy the newspaper.

Joel She’s busy right now.

Bernard I’ll wait until she’s free.

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

Bernard Then it’s good I came. I’m a doctor. I’ll be happy to examine him.

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

Bernard Excellent. In the meantime, I’ll fix the sink in the toilet.

Joel Thank you, but there’s no need.

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

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

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

Joel He refused to shake my hand? I refused to shake *his* hand! That man threw dozens of writers and musicians into prison.

Bernard The most provincial orchestra in Romania wouldn’t play with you.

**Izzy enters the living room. His arm is in a sling. Bernard instantly changes his tone and is once again calm and courteous.**

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

Joel It’s fine, sir.

Bernard You’re pale, son. You have a fever. You need to be checked by a doctor.

Izzy I don’t need a doctor.

Bernard: I ran a department in a large Bucharest Hospital. Despite your pride, we all suffer from the same illnesses. (**Checks him**) You were wounded. Shrapnel. Right? The stitches opened. It’s been bleeding. I see it’s inflamed already. You need a hospital, my young friend. In fact, I may just have some antibiotics in my pocket. (**Pulls a packet from his jacket pocket and gives it to Izzy**) Three a day. I’ll come see you again tomorrow. **(To Bella)** And now with your permission I'll go fix the sink.

**He exits towards the toilet. Silence.**

Joel I’m taking you to hospital, Izzy.

Izzy I’ll go myself. After you cancel your concert.

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

Izzy First cancel the concert. (**To Bella)** He has no idea what the fighting was like there. When I saw his note in my apartment, I thought I was going crazy. How could he be playing here? How could people listen to him?

Joel If you think I don’t understand something, then explain it to me.

Izzy We called for the airstrike on that village. We did it. Because we couldn't get there. Because we were ambushed on the way… (**He shows the fresh scars on his body**) You’re right. Yes. These are burns. My tank got hit…

Joel My God…

Izzy **(To Bella)** After what happened to us there, we don’t care anymore. If he gets up on that stage, we’ll pull him right down off it. (**To Joel**) You’ll pay for what you did to me my entire life.

Joel What did I do to you?

Izzy You’ve forgotten already?

Joel What have I forgotten?

Izzy (**In tears**) For once, just do what I ask. Just once. Just one thing. Cancel the concert. You have another hundred this year. Cancel it, so I know that I did what I had to do there. That I’m not a murderer…

**A long silence. Joel hesitates. He wants to give in to Izzy but can't do it. Izzy turns to Bella.**

Izzy Last summer, he told his friends at Julliard that I wanted to sing Papageno. I asked him. I begged him. I wasn’t ready for the role. But he insisted. The moment I opened my mouth, people started to cough. To clear their throats. To giggle. When the curtain came down, he went straight to the airport. I remained alone in the dressing room. At midnight, I slit my wrists…

Joel: You did what?!

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

Joel Why?! You sang so beautifully. Everybody praised you. I was so proud…

**Izzy holds out his arms to Bella. She refuses to look. The door opens. Freddie enters.**

Freddie You’re not gone yet? I thought you’d be on the plane already. By the way, if you want your suitcase to arrive in New York, you should take your name off it.

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

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

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

Freddie Do you really think that after what their parents did to our children, there’s anyone in this country who cares about them?

Joel Yes. Maybe today, after they’ve heard me, they’ll dare to say it.

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

Joel I’ve already played much more difficult concerts.

Freddie This isn't America, Jo-Jo. Your greatest fans will tear you to pieces here.

**Trudy and Bernard enter and stand at the entrance to the hallway.**

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

**Bella remains silent. Freddie laughs.**

Freddie I’m not sure all that will get you very far tomorrow. And you aren’t sure either. That’s why you’re afraid. You’re so petrified, you can't even play for us here.

Joel Why would I want to play here?

Freddie To prepare yourself for tomorrow. To be sure you’ll play there and come out alive.

Joel I’m pretty sure.

Freddie If you’re so sure, then show us.

Joel Come tomorrow and you’ll see.

Freddie Is it dad who still scares you? Did you bump into his ghost floating through the rooms?

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

**Trudy hesitates. Everyone is looking at her.**

Trudy When did I hear?

Joel This morning.

Trudy I don’t remember.

Joel You don’t remember?

Trudy I forgot. Play again.

Joel This morning, I sat here, on that stool, and I played you the adagio of the Pathétique.

Freddie She doesn’t remember.

Joel So she’ll hear me tomorrow at the Philharmonic.

Trudy I’ll come hear you with the Philharmonic, only if I’m certain you can play.

Joel You’re not certain?

Trudy No.

Joel This morning you said that no other pianist in the world plays like me.

Izzy She wants you to play. So play.

Freddie Play!

Izzy Show us you’re the best in the world. Show us why the Philharmonic even wants to play with you.

Joel And you’ll judge me?

Freddie We’ll all judge you.

Izzy Just like you judge us.

Joel What’s going on here, mom? Can you tell me what’s gone wrong? Has everyone gone out of their minds?

Izzy Play!

Freddie Play what you have to play with the Philharmonic.

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

Freddie So play something that doesn’t need an orchestra.

Izzy Play the Pathétique.

Joel I don’t think I want to play for you.

Freddie You don’t want to show us that you’re able to play?

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

Freddie If you don’t play, I’ll break your fingers. You won’t leave here until you show us what you’re worth.

Joel You’ve known for a long time what I'm worth. (**To Trudy**) I’ve proved it in hundreds of concerts around the world. My only sin is that I insist on being a decent person.

Trudy If you don’t play now, I won’t know if you’re able to play tomorrow.

Joel First, explain to me how you don’t remember I played for you this morning.

Trudy What’s to explain? Play again.

Joel I’ll play when I want to play.

Trudy You're afraid to play because you know that your playing won't save you from the hatred you arouse.

Joel I'm afraid? Of who? I don’t understand. Are you blind?

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

Trudy I’m blind?!

Freddie (**Impressed**) Son of a bitch!

Joel (**Regains his composure**) When someone hits me, I know I’m right. I know he can't listen to me, because he doesn’t have an answer to what I’m saying. Because he’s scared of what I’m saying. Yes. You are scared. A lot more than me.

Freddie We’re quaking in fear. **(Laughs**)

Joel You’re scared because if I play, you’ll have to open your eyes and see what our soldiers did in your name in this war. How they expelled. How they killed. How they destroyed. If I play, you’ll have to see how you’ve been fooling yourselves that it’s possible to stay silent and remain decent human beings.

Freddie So play already!

Trudy Play.

Joel Fine! I’ll play!

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

Freddie: Is this all you can do? **(Laughs)**

Joel **(To Trudy)** This is what I played for you this morning. Izzy was sleeping. My mother had gone to the hairdresser.

Trudy I don’t remember.

Joel And how you remember!

Freddie She said she doesn’t remember.

Joel Fine. I’ll play the whole movement and you’ll remember**. (Plays a few more notes)** There’s perhaps one other pianist in the world who plays Beethoven like me. God, what a headache. (**Stops and rises from the stool**) Now I see what happened to us. We may have won all our wars, but those victories were just illusions. Inside ourselves we had been beaten. Defeated. Our hopes were dashed. Our dreams crushed. That's why we're so desperate. That's why we are so cruel.

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

Joel I’ve just played.

Trudy When?

Joel Right now.

Trudy I can play like that too.

**She exits to the hallway with Bernard following. Joel feels dizzy. His legs give way. He falls. Freddie helps him get up.**

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

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

Bella Come sit by the piano. I want to teach you something.

Joel I’ve got a headache, mom.

Bella When you know it, you’ll be a truly great pianist.

Joel I’m great enough already.

Bella A great pianist is very wary. He knows how to discover the traps the music sets for him. He knows how to keep away from the devious notes that try to trip him up, to conquer them and soar on their backs to the peaks of human genius.

Joel I'm not interested in the peaks of genius, mother. I'm interested in human beings here on the ground.

Bella We are also human beings here on this ground. If you are wary, you will be able to hear the sound of the evil that lies in wait for us.

Joel I hear its sound very well, mother.

Bella If you could hear it, you would be careful of it. You wouldn’t destroy our faith in our own lives. You wouldn’t make us loathe ourselves. You wouldn’t make us hate this place, which is the only place we have. In your naiveté, you’ve forgotten that we’ve already been in other places. You’ve forgotten what happened to us there.

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

**Joel sits at the piano, opens the lid and plays the third movement of the Pathétique in all its glory. Bella and Izzy listen in wonder to the beautiful playing. Trudy and Bernard appear in the corridor. Freddie follows them. They listen too.**

**Suddenly, Izzy approaches the piano and, in a single motion, closes the piano lid hard on Joel’s fingers. Joel screams in agony. Izzy stands over the piano, breathing heavily. Bernard, Trudy and Freddie watch in silence.**

Bella Why? He's never played like that before. He could have played tomorrow. He could have played like no-one in the world has ever played before…

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

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

Izzy You can chuck your music in the garbage.

**Trudy enters into the living room, carrying a suitcase. Bernard follows her. She takes her sun hat from the hanger and puts it on.**

Bernard Farewell. It was nice meeting you. **(To Bella)** Unfortunately, I didn’t manage to fix the sink. Here’s the washer. **(To Joel)** And here’s a ticket for your concert. I didn’t want Trudy to go without me. I hope you find someone who wants to listen to you.

**He places the washer and ticket on the piano. Freddie returns with Joel’s suitcase. He sees Trudy heading for the door.**

Freddie Wait. Don’t go. Put the suitcase in my room. My mother will teach you.

Trudy Thank you. I've learnt enough. Let's go home, Bernard.

Bernard Adieu.

**She exits. He follows her.**

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

Joel Mom…

Freddie Make it fast.

Joel I’m leaving, mom. I don't know when I'll see you again.

**Bella nods her head. Joel turns to Izzy.**

Joel If you need anything, Izzy, I…

**Izzy bursts into tears. Joel approaches him in order to embrace him. Izzy recoils and distances himself.**

Freddie I said make it fast!

**He grabs Joel by the arm to walk him to the door. Joel escapes from his grasp, goes back to Izzy, but Izzy avoids him. Joel looks again at Bella**

Joel I'll be back when I'm able to play... When you're able to hear.

**He lifts the suitcase and exits. Blackout.**

**THE END**

1. You'll soon drive me crazy. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Everything is always my fault. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Romanian newspaper published in Israel. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Go home, Bernard! [↑](#footnote-ref-5)