

SONGS FROM BEHIND THE CURTAIN

AN OPERA IN THREE ACTS

A DISSERTATION IN
Music Composition

Presented to the Faculty of the University
of Missouri-Kansas City in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS

by
RYAN JESPERSON

A.D., University of Hartford, 2007
M.M., University of Hartford, 2006
B.A., Washington State University, 2004
B.M., Washington State University, 2004

Kansas City, Missouri
2011

© 2011

RYAN JESPERSON

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

SONGS FROM BEHIND THE CURTAIN

AN OPERA IN THREE ACTS

Ryan Jespersen, Candidate for the Doctor of Musical Arts Degree

University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2011

ABSTRACT

Songs from Behind the Curtain is the story of Pascal Baur, a damaged composer in 1980's Hartford, who, as the musical director of the Hartford Opera Company, is encoding Soviet messages into his operas. Within the operas he writes, the audience gets an understanding as to what past events (the murder of his fiancée, the accidental bombing of his Swiss relatives in WWII by American planes) led to his treasonous choices. But Pascal's life becomes reinvigorated when he falls in love with Claudia, a young singer. What will he choose: his torturous past, or Claudia and the possibility of a happy future?

The opera is in a three-act structure. Motives and accompaniment figures (eventually also orchestration) are used as metaphoric underpinning throughout the work. Central throughout is the interval of a third. Although not used tonally, the harmonic third creates the "soft" sound that allows the voice to find its footing, also exploiting

traditional major/minor interpretations for dramatic effect. The melodic third, and its inversion the sixth, are consistently developed whenever a character is experiencing heightened emotions having to do with love or duty. Certain other figures, developed throughout the work, represent the changing emotional states of the characters internally and toward one another.

Each act is divided into scenes. These sections are created organically by the drama, rather than as individual set pieces for singers. The first act is about finding love, with Pascal as the centerpiece. The second act is about discovery, with all characters finding out devastating news. The third act is about understanding love, and is centered on Claudia deciding whether to stay with Pascal or to turn him in. At the end of each act there is a portion of one of Pascal's operas. These works psychologically explain Pascal's understanding of the world, and inside each there are motivic correlations to "real" characters in Pascal's life.

Songs from Behind the Curtain takes as its subject the actual institution of opera, allowing convention and innovation to blend together into a work that is both traditional in form, but contemporary in design.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the Conservatory of Music, have examined a thesis titled “Songs from Behind the Curtain, an Opera in Three Acts” presented by Ryan Jesperson, candidate for the Doctor of Musical Arts Degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

Supervisory Committee



Chen Yi, DMA, Committee Chair
Conservatory of Music

Zhou Long, DMA
Conservatory of Music

James Mobberley, DMA
Conservatory of Music

Marcie Bazell, BM
Conservatory of Music

William Everett, DMA
Conservatory of Music

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
PLOT SUMMARY.....	viii
CHARACTERS/VOCAL RANGES	xi
PERFORMANCE NOTES.....	xii
INSTRUMENTATION	xiii
Songs from Behind the Curtain	
PROLOGUE.....	1
ACT I	9
SCENE 1.....	11
SCENE 2.....	43
SCENE 3.....	89
ACT II.....	105
SCENE 1.....	107
SCENE 2.....	123
SCENE 3.....	143
SCENE 4.....	179
INTERMEZZO.....	193
ACT III.....	207
SCENE 1.....	209
SCENE 2.....	229
SCENE 3.....	237

SCENE 4.....	253
EPILOGUE.....	293
Appendix	
A. LIBRETTO	297
B. ORIGINAL STORY	337
VITA.....	736

SYNOPSIS:

Songs from Behind the Curtain is an original story about Pascal Baur, a damaged composer in 1980's Hartford, who, as the musical director of the Hartford Opera Company, is encoding Soviet messages into his operas. Within the operas he writes, the audience gets an understanding as to what past events (the murder of his fiancée, the accidental bombing of his Swiss relatives in WWII by American planes) led him to his treasonous choices. But Pascal's life becomes reinvigorated when he falls in love with Claudia, a young singer at the opera company. What will he choose: his torturous past, or Claudia and the possibility of a happy future?

THE PROLOGUE (video) - 4 minutes

An ominous scene where Pascal tells (through video) about Diane's death, his involvement with his aunt and the Soviets, the messages, and his love for Claudia. It ends suddenly and mysteriously.

ACT I (Hartford, 1985) - 43 minutes

Scene 1

Nancy Warren, a reporter, arrives to cover the opening of *Orphée Redux*, a new opera by the composer Pascal Baur. She meets Franklin Pettricone, the lead tenor, and Rebecca Olundsen, the famous soprano. Pascal Baur and Claudia Ingrassia arrive (they are carrying on a secret romance), and Rebecca demands that Claudia get her some tea. While Claudia's gone, Pascal laments the choices he has made. Claudia returns with the tea and Rebecca takes it and dumps it on her chest. Claudia runs off, but Pascal does not follow her. Instead, he talks with Barbara Urlington, the costume mistress, who knows about the secret messages Baur is placing in his operas.

Scene 2

Claudia waits for Pascal. She is angry at his timidness and when he arrives they argue. Pascal apologizes, and in a tender moment he opens up about the murder of his fiancée. Pascal leaves her and sees Tony arrive at Franklin's dressing room. Pascal sings of his life and the pain of love. From inside the dressing room Franklin and Tony join in. Pascal tries to reconcile his love for Claudia with his lingering love for Diane. Pascal continues walking through the empty theater and comes upon Nancy Warren and Claudia. They are arguing about Pascal. Pascal breaks up the altercation and tells Nancy he must speak with Claudia. After Nancy leaves, Claudia rushes into his arms crying. Pascal tries to soothe her, but once again is battling his past demons. In a sudden moment, he drops to one knee and proposes to Claudia. The abrupt and unexpected proposal is so unlike Pascal that Claudia runs off, unsure of how to respond.

Scene 3

The scene begins within Baur's opera, *Orphée Redux*. David, the Orpheus character, has just found out that his wife, Pamela (Eurydice) has contracted AIDS. David goes to the club to save her, finding her passed out under a bed sheet. He begs her to leave with him and she agrees, but only if he'll turn around

while she dresses. He agrees, but like Orpheus, David can't help himself. When he turns around she screams and they fight. The opera ends and Pascal accepts the audience's applause. He begins to speak and once again proposes to Claudia. This time, though, she accepts. The cast rushes off to celebrate, leaving behind Nancy. As she laments the engagement, Morriss Greenberg, an FBI agent arrives, telling Nancy that he is there to investigate the Hartford Opera Company.

ACT II (Hartford, 1986) - 40 minutes

Scene 1

A year after the premiere of *Orphée Redux*, Morriss Greenberg returns to the Hartford Opera Company. He runs into Barbara, but she pretends to be a cleaning lady. As she leaves he hears a gorgeous voice from the other side of a partition. She is singing a jazz song. As he comes around in view he startles her. It is Claudia Ingrassia-Baur. Morriss explains that he is there to meet with Pascal Baur. Claudia directs him toward Pascal's office. As they both leave Pascal appears from behind the curtain and sings a worried aria about the sudden appearance of the FBI.

Scene 2

Morriss questions Franklin in his dressing room. Franklin is in a flirty mode, but just as Morriss thinks he's getting answers they are interrupted by a knock at the door. It is Tony, looking anxious. Franklin asks Morriss to leave and brings Tony inside. Tony reveals to Franklin that he has AIDS. Franklin is furious and attacks Tony. The lights fade and come up on Morriss meeting with Nancy. Pascal is once again listening from the other side of the curtain when Franklin sees him and rushes over. Pascal tries to keep Franklin quiet, but Franklin is in distress. He tells Pascal about Tony. Pascal instructs him to stay in his dressing room and that he'll come soon to help him. As Franklin leaves, Pascal laments the choice in front of him, whether to point the FBI toward Franklin or just remain hidden. He already knows what Barbara will demand.

Scene 3

Pascal and Barbara are having a secret meeting. He tells her about Franklin and she instructs him to turn him over to the FBI. He resists, but she tells him to think about Claudia's safety. Morriss arrives to meet with Pascal and Barbara hides in the wings. Morriss interviews Pascal, and just as things are getting serious, a fire alarm sounds and the meeting ends. The fire alarm morphs into the disturbing sounds of Baur's second opera, *Hellfire*. Onstage, three allied soldiers are hiding in a bunker. As they try and escape they see a gruesome scene. Simultaneously, Morriss is in the lobby on the phone with his boss. The opera scene continues with the arrival of Mags, a Nazi soldier. The *Hellfire* scenes and Morriss' conversation continue to interlace as the WWII drama grows more horrible and surreal, a mixture of the Dresden bombing and Hieronymus Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights*.

Scene 4

The opera is over and Franklin is waiting on the empty stage for Baur. He hears voices and hides in the curtains. Pascal and Barbara walk onto the stage and

Barbara is talking about the messages within the opera. As she leaves Franklin emerges from his hiding spot and confronts Pascal. Pascal tries to explain his reasons, but Franklin is irate. Just as they seem ready to exchange blows, the lights go out and the entire set topples down upon them. Simultaneously, Claudia is in Pascal's office, and discovers that he is the Soviet spy.

THE INTERMEZZO (video) - 5 minutes

A pile of rubble is center stage with a robed choir surrounding it. Above, a silent video shows a grisly scene with Pascal and Franklin trapped in the debris and paramedics desperately trying to save them. The choir sings of the accident and its immediate aftermath.

ACT III (Hartford, 1987) - 42 minutes

Scene 1

Claudia has just returned from a performance overseas. Since uncovering Pascal's secret she has been taking lots of trips to perform. But tonight is the premiere of his latest opera, *Cassandra's Aria*, and Claudia has found that the Soviet message is in her aria in the third act. At the same time, Pascal is haunted by the choices he has made. He wants to get out from under the grip of his aunt (Barbara) and the Soviets, but he knows they will hurt Claudia if he tries. Both scenes unfold separately, as the two lovers are not yet ready to face one another.

Scene 2

Barbara sings about her life in Switzerland, and her family that was killed in the Schaffhausen bombings. An Assassin arrives and she hires him to kill Claudia if the message does not go through. The Assassin reveals that it was he, on Barbara's command, who had previously killed Diane.

Scene 3

Claudia knocks on Pascal's office door. She wants to still love him, but is unsure if she is capable after finding out about his secret. Pascal finally opens the door and is relieved to see her. They embrace and both think about ways to save the other. Independently, they decide that they will leave after the opera tonight, but both worry about how to explain it to the other.

Scene 4

Cassandra's Aria, an operatic treatment of Agamemnon's return from the Trojan war, is interlaced with reactions and thoughts from Pascal, Claudia, and Barbara. As the opera builds to its climax, Claudia decides to sing a wrong note on the final chord, ruining the Soviet message.

EPILOGUE (video) - 3 minutes

After the opera, Pascal approaches Claudia and she reveals that she knows his secret. They decide to leave right away and exit through a side door. As they leave, the assassin follows.

CHARACTER LIST/VOCAL RANGE:

- Claudia Ingrassia-Baur (Lydia/Mags/Cassandra) – Pascal’s younger wife and the leading Mezzo with the Hartford Opera Company – Dramatic Mezzo-Soprano (b-bb’’))
- Pascal Baur – A Composer and the Music Director of the HOC, who, after the death of his fiancée, agrees to insert Soviet messages into his operas – Full Lyric Baritone (A-f#’)
- Franklin Pettricone (David/Bud) – The lead tenor at the HOC, in a relationship with Tony – Dramatic Tenor (eb-b’)
- Morriss Greenberg – An FBI Agent sent to investigate the HOC, who develops a crush on Claudia – Lyric Bass (F-e’)
- Barbara Urlington – The Costume Mistress as well as Pascal’s long-lost aunt. She coerces Pascal into putting the messages into the operas – Lyric Contralto (g-c’)
- Nancy Warren – A reporter who was in school with Pascal – Light Dramatic Coloratura Soprano (a’-d’)
- Tony Bell (Leonard) – Franklin’s boyfriend, an ad-exec from NYC – Bass-Baritone (Ab-eb’)
- Rebecca Olundsen (Clytemnestra) – A world-famous opera singer in the twilight of her career. She sees Claudia as a threat and treats her miserably – Light Lyric Coloratura Soprano (g’-e’)
- Kansas Jaffarian (John) – Another Tenor at the HOC – Heroic Tenor (db-b’)
- Assassin – An associate of Barbara’s – Bass (d-g) *this role could be spoken if desired*

CHORUS – SSAATTBB – 8 voices (can be made up of all or part of the cast or separately)

The names in () represent the roles the character’s play in Pascal’s operas. In addition, the characters of Leonard and Clytemnestra could be cast individually, or doubled with Tony and Rebecca, respectively. If they are doubled, then care should be taken to completely separate the two characters in the audience’s mind.

PERFORMANCE NOTES:

Accidentals apply throughout the measure, in the octave of occurrence, in the usual tradition.

Tuplets are always written to represent a higher ratio. So, for example, 7 sixteenth notes will always be written in place of 4 sixteenth notes, not 8 sixteenth notes.

Trills should be performed using the note one letter name higher than the notated pitch. Unless a flat or sharp is present above the trill sign, the trilled note should be played as a natural note.

▲ as a notehead indicates the highest possible pitch. ▼ as a notehead indicates the lowest possible pitch.

In the vocal score, the pianist is asked to play within the piano, strumming strings and muting them. This is to approximate the orchestral effect for the passage.

Vocal passages with text, but without notes should be spoken.

Vocal passages with X noteheads should be sung in a “speech” style.

Vocal passages with X marks on the stem of the note should be sung in the Sprechstimme tradition of the second Viennese school.

The Prologue, Intermezzo, and Epilogue are meant to be filmed by the cast before the performance. For this reason, the Prologue appears as an orchestral score even in the vocal score. The epilogue choir part could either be performed live, or prerecorded with the video. The epilogue should also be recorded and placed within the video.

There is a tape part for Act II scene 3. Indications as to when it should be audible and when it shouldn't are marked in the score. The tape will be of sufficient length that either adjusting the volume or pausing the tape will produce the desired effect and will not effect the performance. For the performance, the speakers should be down in the pit, and the tape should be treated as an ambient background accenting the orchestra during the *Hellfire* moments.

In Act III Scene 2, the hand percussion part may be performed by Barbara (if the piano is on the stage), or by another member of the cast.

The vocal score attempts to incorporate all possible accompaniment parts, and is often impossible for performance by a single pianist. A second pianist may be employed, or certain layers may be omitted.

INSTRUMENTATION

The vocal score is written for piano (with the exception of the Prologue)

The Orchestrated Full Score:

FLUTE

PICCOLO/FLUTE

OBOE/ENGLISH HORN (G)

CLARINET/SAXOPHONE

BASS CLARINET

BASSOON/CONTRABASSOON

2 HORNS (F)

2 TRUMPETS (C)

TROMBONE

BASS TROMBONE

TUBA

PIANO

TIMPANI/PERCUSSION

VIOLIN I

VIOLIN II

VIOLA

VIOLONCELLO

CONTRABASS

SONGS FROM BEHIND THE CURTAIN

Prologue

(Pascal, Claudia)

[The stage is empty. A video camera is set up on a tripod, attached to a television. The music starts and a video begins to play]

CLAUDIA (in the video, spoken)

Is it on? Why are we doing this again?

PASCAL (in the video, spoken)

It's on...

[The camera is moved and PASCAL BAUR comes into view, he is wearing a tuxedo and looks worried]

My name is Pascal Baur and I don't have much time. I am the musical director for the Hartford Opera Company, a composer, and unfortunately, a Soviet spy. I didn't intend to do what I did, but so much of it was out of my control. My father and mother were both born and raised in Schaffhausen, Switzerland. They emigrated to the US early during the second world war. Some of my family remained in Switzerland, and my uncle, aunt, and cousins were all killed during the US bombing of 1944. I was born a year later and was named after my deceased uncle. The story should have ended there, except that my aunt survived the bombing, and her grief and anger toward America boiled into a seething rage. She was recruited in the 1950s by the Soviets and sent to America. It was not a coincidence that I met her upon winning the Hartford Opera Company position. She had entrenched herself as the costume mistress and immediately recruited me to help her encode messages into the productions. My fiancée, Diane, had been murdered, and she used my own grief to twist my beliefs and my loyalties. I developed an ambivalence toward this country. It was shortly after writing my first opera, when I met Claudia and everything...

Adagio ♩ = 40
Harmon Mute

Trumpet
Timpani
Violin I
Violin II
Viola
Violoncello
Contrabass

© 2011 Jazzperson Music, All Rights Reserved, ASCAP
for more information visit www.ryanjesperson.com

Jespersen - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Prologue

Musical score for measures 5-8. The score includes parts for Tpt., Timp., Vln. I, Vln. II, Vla., Vc., and Cb. Measure 5 features a Tpt. line with a triplet of eighth notes marked *mf* and a slur leading to a *pp* dynamic. Vln. I and Vln. II play a triplet of eighth notes marked *arco* and *mp*. Vla. plays a triplet of eighth notes marked *mp*. Vc. plays a triplet of eighth notes marked *mf*. Cb. has a triplet of eighth notes marked *p* and a *Div.* marking. The key signature has one flat and the time signature is 3/4.

Musical score for measures 9-12. The score includes parts for Tpt., Timp., Vln. I, Vln. II, Vla., Vc., and Cb. Measure 9 features a Tpt. line with a triplet of eighth notes marked *f* and a slur leading to a *mf* dynamic. Vln. I plays a triplet of eighth notes marked *f*. Vln. II, Vla., and Vc. play triplets of eighth notes marked *mp*. Timp. has a triplet of eighth notes marked *ppp*. Cb. has a triplet of eighth notes marked *mp*. The key signature has one flat and the time signature is 5/4. The instruction "Senza sord." is present above the Tpt. part.

Jespersen - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Prologue

12

Tpt. *p* *mp* *mf*

Timp.

Vln. I Div. Unis. *p* *mf*

Vln. II Div. Unis. *p*

Vla. Div. Unis. *mp* Div. *p*

Vc. Div. *mp* Unis. pizz. *p*

Cb. *pp* arco *mp*

15 rit. ----- Moderato ♩ = 72

Tpt.

Timp. *mf*

Vln. I *mp*

Vln. II Div. Unis. *mp*

Vla. *p* *mf* *p* *mp*

Vc. *mp* Unis. *mp*

Cb. *mp*

Jespersen - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Prologue

19

Musical score for measures 19-22. The score includes parts for Tpt., Timp., Vln. I, Vln. II, Vla., Vc., and Cb. Measure 19 features a Tpt. entry with a *mf* dynamic. Measures 20-22 show a sustained *p* dynamic across all instruments.

Tpt. *mf*

Timp.

Vln. I *p*

Vln. II *p*

Vla. *p*

Vc. *p*

Cb. *p*

23

Musical score for measures 23-26. The score includes parts for Tpt., Timp., Vln. I, Vln. II, Vla., Vc., and Cb. Measure 23 features a Tpt. entry with a *f* dynamic. Measure 24 includes a *poco rit.* marking. Measure 25 features a Tpt. entry with a *pp* dynamic. Measure 26 features a Timp. entry with a *mp* dynamic.

Tpt. *f* *poco rit.* *pp*

Timp. *mp*

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Prologue

27 **Adagio** ♩ = 58

Tpt. *pp* *pp* *p* Harmon Mute

Timp. *ppp* *pp*

Vln. I *pp* *mp* sul tasto

Vln. II *pp* *p* sul tasto

Vla. *pp* *p* sul tasto pizz.

Vc. *pp* *p* sul tasto pizz.

Cb. *pp* pizz. arco

31

Tpt. *mf* *sub. p*

Timp.

Vln. I *mf* *ord.* *mf p*

Vln. II *mp* *ord. arco* *mf p*

Vla. *mp* *ord. arco* *mf p*

Vc. *mp* *ord. arco*

Cb. *mp* *pizz.* *mp* *arco*

p *mp*

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Prologue

35

rit. ----- Senza sord.

Tpt.

Timp.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

Adagio ♩ = 40

accel. -----

38

Tpt.

Timp.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Prologue

più mosso ♩ = 56 **rit.**

42

Tpt. *ff*

Timp. *sfz* *sfz* *f*

Vln. I *f*

Vln. II *f*

Vla. *f*

Vc. *f* *sfz* *sfz* Div.

Cb. *f* *sfz* *sfz* Div. (b2)

45

Tpt.

Timp.

Vln. I *ppp*

Vln. II *ppp*

Vla. *Con sord.* *ppp*

Vc. *ppp*

Cb. *ppp*

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Prologue

SONGS FROM BEHIND THE CURTAIN

ACT I

ACT I

Scene 1

(Nancy, Franklin, Rebecca, Pascal, Claudia, Barbara, Chorus)

[The stage is an empty stage. People are walking around preparing for an opera production. Nancy Warren enters, looking around for someone.]

Moderato ♩ = 88

(walking around, preparing the stage for the show)

Chorus

pp
oo
pp
oo
pp
oo
pp
oo

Chorus

5

ah
ah
ah
ah
la la la la la la la la
bah bah
bah bah

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 1

9

Chorus

so low oo

la la la la oo

bah bah oo

bah bah oo

mp *p*

mp *p*

12

Chorus

oo ah

oo ah

oo ah

oo ah

mp *p*

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 1

A **meno mosso** ♩ = 80

16

Nancy

Mis - ter — Pet - tric - i - on - e —

la la la la la la la la la ah

Chorus

so low — oh — la la la la la la la la

bah bah bah bah

bah bah bah bah

19

Nancy

— so good to see you. — Yes, —

Franklin

Nan - cy, — so you're back — in Hartford?

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 1

22

Nancy

I'm here to cov-er Mae-stro Ba-ur's lat-est op-er-a, Or- phée Re-dux.

25

Nancy

I hear you are wonder-ful as

28

Nancy

Or- phée - us.

Franklin

You are too kind. It is a great role. A great op-er-a.

Chorus

A great op-er-a, A great op-er-a, A great op-er-a, A great op-er-a.

Jespersen - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 1

32

Franklin

It will be the best of nine-teen eight - y five!

f

Chorus

The best in

The best in

The best in

The best in

The best in

35

Nancy

And Re - bec - ca Ol-und-sen as Eur - y - dic - e,

years. _____

Chorus

years. _____

years. _____

years. _____

years. _____

f

p

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 1

38

Nancy

mar - ve - lous! I ev - en hear the new young mez - zo is quite cap - a - ble

41

Nancy

— a - mong oth - er —

mp

Yes she is yes she is, yes she is, yes she is.

Chorus

mp

Yes she is yes she is yes she

mp

Yes she is, yes she is, yes she is, yes she is, yes she is.

mp

Yes she is

f

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 1

44 *mp*

Franklin

I'm a - fraid I must be go - ing. I still have some pas - sag - es

>pp

Chorus

is. *>pp*

is. *pp*

pp

p

47 *p*

Franklin

I'll see you...

p

Chorus

oo

oo

oo

oo

oo

p

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 1

accel. -----

51

Nancy

Hel-lo, Miss Ol-und-sen, hel - lo,

Chorus

pp

pp

54

Nancy

it's me, Nan - cy War-ren, from the Hart - ford Cour -

Chorus

oo

oo

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 1

57 ----- **B** **Allegro** ♩ = 132 **ff**

Rebecca

Nancy

ant

Chorus

MY TEA!

Watch out.

Watch out.

8^{vb}

The musical score is written for five parts: Rebecca, Nancy, ant, Chorus, and piano accompaniment. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. The score begins at measure 57. Rebecca's part has a long rest followed by a note on a B-flat in the final measure. Nancy's part has a long rest. The ant part has a long rest followed by a melodic line starting in the second measure. The Chorus part has a long rest followed by a melodic line starting in the second measure. The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern in the first measure, followed by a melodic line in the second measure, and a final melodic line in the third measure. Dynamic markings include **ff** and **8^{vb}**. The tempo is marked **Allegro** with a quarter note equal to 132 beats per minute. The section is marked with a boxed **B**.

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 1

60

Rebecca

I must have it! Who are you?

She must have it! Watch out. —

Chorus

She must have it! Watch out. —

8

She must have it! oo

She must have it! oo

63

Rebecca

Get me my tea now! Where is my tea. Clau - di - a

Get her the tea now! Watch out! — *p*

Chorus

Get her the tea now! Watch out! — *p*

8

Get her the tea now! Watch out. — *p*

Get her the tea now! Watch out. — *p*

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 1

rit.

66

Rebecca
— will get it for me. Clau - di - a Clau - di - a!

Nancy
— What, — what

Chorus
— oo — oo —
Watch out. Watch out.
Watch out. Watch out.

mf *mp*

Detailed description: This block contains the musical score for measures 66 to 68. It features five staves: Rebecca's vocal line, Nancy's vocal line, the Chorus's vocal line (with two parts), and the piano accompaniment. Rebecca's line starts with a triplet of eighth notes and includes the lyrics "will get it for me. Clau - di - a Clau - di - a!". Nancy's line has the lyrics "What, — what". The Chorus has the lyrics "oo — oo —" and "Watch out. Watch out." repeated twice. The piano accompaniment includes dynamic markings *mf* and *mp*. The tempo is marked *rit.* (ritardando). The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4.

69 **Moderato** ♩ = 80

Nancy
a hor - ri - ble per - son. All the stor - ies

Detailed description: This block contains the musical score for measure 69. It features two staves: Nancy's vocal line and the piano accompaniment. Nancy's line has the lyrics "a hor - ri - ble per - son. All the stor - ies". The piano accompaniment includes dynamic markings *mf* and *mp*. The tempo is marked **Moderato** with a metronome marking of ♩ = 80. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4.

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 1

72

Nancy

true. How Pas-cal can put up with her I don't

[Nancy leaves. The stage is empty.
Pascal and Claudia enter, looking
secretive, but in love.]

C

rit.-----meno mosso ♩ = 80

75

Nancy

know.

Claudia

Oh,

mp

78

Claudia

Pas-cal, are we a-lone?

Pascal

Clau-di-a, my dar-ling

mp

p

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 1

Freely

81

Claudia

Pascal

Tell me a-gain.

Clau-di - a, I think so.

81

82

83

84

Moderato ♩ = 72

84

Pascal

"I love you," that is what I said. I meant

84

85

86

87

Claudia

Pascal

it, now you're cry-ing, do you love me?

87

88

89

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 1

90

Claudia

love you too, yes I do.

Pascal

mp

Clau-di - a, my love you

93

Claudia

But, you must tell me, do you still

Pascal

make me hap - py. Hap - pi - ness like rays of sun.

95

Claudia

love her? They whis - per,

Pascal

Since her death I've been with-drawn

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 1

97

Claudia *mf*
"Stop, he has lost her,

Pascal
I will tell you ev - 'ry - thing.

mp

99

Claudia
this can't be love." Tell me the truth

Pascal
I will give you my word, I

f

102

Claudia *f*
I can't be a sec - ond choice,

Pascal
love you.

mf

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 1

104

Claudia

Pascal

for her.

I will tell you ev - ³ry - thing, in

106

mp

Claudia

Pascal

I can't love you par - tial - ly, but

time. I will give you all ³my soul,

108

pp

Claudia

Pascal

whol - y.

in time.

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 1

poco accel. ----- **D Allegro** ♩ = 132

110

Rebecca

p ----- *f*

MY TEA!

Chorus

p ----- *f*

Make way, watch out here she... Watch out! _____

8

p ----- *f*

Make way, watch out here she... comes

Make way, watch out here she... comes

Moderato ♩ = 80

113 *sub. p* ----- *mf*

Rebecca

oh... Clau - di-a! _____ I have been looking for you. You

mp

poco rit. -----

116

Rebecca

seemed to com - plet - ely dis - ap - pear...

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 1

Freely ♩ = 58

Moderato ♩ = 80

Rebecca

119 *p* *f*

Would you ³ be a dear and ³ go get me some tea?

Claudia

122

It is al - ways a thing with her, these games she

Claudia

126

plays. I just don't want to cause prob-lems or

Claudia

129

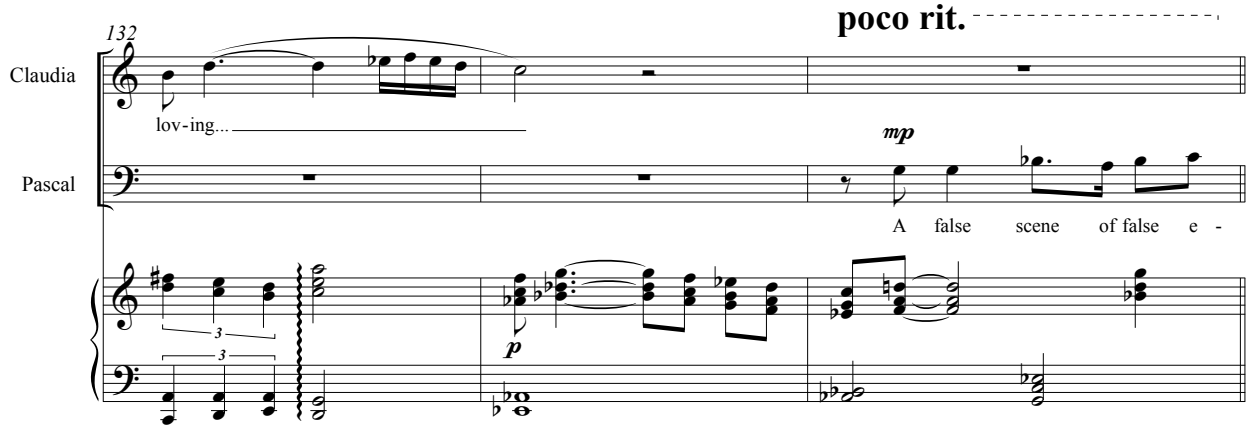
con - flicts or strife. I just want to be here sing-ing and

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 1

132 **poco rit.**

Claudia
lov-ing...

Pascal
mp
A false scene of false e -



E Adagio ♩ = 60

135 *mf*

Pascal
mo-tions. They sing for me, but they don't know what I've done.

pp
Set the stage, _____ it's al - most time to sing. A

Chorus
pp
Set the stage, _____ it's al - most time to sing _____ A

pp
Set the stage, _____ it's al - most time to sing A

pp
Set the stage, _____ it's al - most time to sing A



Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 1

poco accel. ----- **F** **Allegro** ♩ = 132

143 [Rebecca takes a sip, spits it out and then throw's the rest of the tea into Claudia's face and chest] *f*

Rebecca Cold! The tea is cold, what are you

Pascal I can't let them... —

Chorus *p* Make way, watch out here she... *f* Watch out! *mp* oo

Make way, watch out here she... *f* Watch out! *mp* oo

8 Make way, watch out here she... *f* comes *mp* oo

Make way, watch out here she... *f* comes *mp* oo

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 1

146

Rebecca

try - ing to do? Is there milk in it? How ab - surd.

Chorus

Is there milk in it? oo

Is there milk in it? oo

Is there milk in it? oo

Is there milk in it? oo

Is there milk in it? oo

149

Rebecca

You ruth - less bitch!

Chorus

You ruth - less bitch! oo

You ruth - less bitch! oo

You ruth - less bitch! oo

You ruth - less bitch! oo

You ruth - less bitch! oo

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 1

152 **rit.** G **Adagio** ♩ = 60

Pascal

Di - ane! My

Chorus

155

Pascal

muse, you don't know how I've missed you. The

158

Pascal

three years — have felt like three hun - dred! I have tried to live, I have

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 1

161 **poco rit.** **Adagio** ♩ = 50

Pascal

tried to live. but since your death the quick-sand of ap-a-ty has

164 **poco accel.** **più mosso** ♩ = 60

Pascal

grabbed hold. And now I have found some-one, some-one to

168

Pascal

pull me from the void, but ev-en she makes me feel guil-ty a-bout you.

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 1

171 *mp*

Pascal

Oh how, how ³ can I love you both? Can I love

175

Pascal

— Clau - di - a, — ev-en though I still hold you in my heart?

178

Pascal

Speak! Ab - solve me of my crimes, of my guilt.

180 *p*

Pascal

I ask you — Di - ane, to call out to me, and give me a sign...

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 1

183 *mp* **H** **Moderato** ♩ = 80

Nancy

Pas - cal, _____ it's so good to see you.

186

Nancy

Yes, _____

Pascal

Nan - cy, _____ how are you? It has been years. _____

190

Nancy

_____ and now I'm here _____ to do an art - i - cle _____ on your op - er - a. _____

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 1

193

Nancy

Pascal

I am glad to hear it. How man-y years has it been?

197

Nancy

Too man - y. At least more than three.

meno mosso ♩ = 72

200

Nancy

Pascal

Three years, oh guilt, you are cunning in your dis - guis-es.

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 1

203

Pascal

Why must you tor - ture me through mean - ing - less con - du - its?

mp

205

Pascal

It has been far too long, and we have so much to re - mem - ber.

208

Nancy

mf **I** **Moderato** ♩ = 96 *f* [Barbara enters]

Let me tell you what I want to write a - bout, it's...

f

211

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 1

214 *mf*

Pascal

I'm sor-ry Nan-cy, but I need to speak with Bar-bar-a a - bout the cos-tumes to - night.

mp

217 *struggling with English*

Barbara

We need to talk the cos - tumes

Pascal

ff mp

8vb

220

Barbara

of the show.

Pascal

I a -

mf p

8vb

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 1

223

Pascal

pol - o - gize. — Nan - cy, — it was nice to see you — and we will

rit. ----- **meno mosso** ♩ = 88

226

Nancy

Pascal

talk more lat - er. — Pas - cal, —

229

Nancy

Barbara

— it is a plea - sure to see you a - gain. **J**

There is some

8^{va}-----

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 1

233

Barbara

prob - lems ___ with the mes - sage. *mf* > *p*

Pascal

Shh! Not here, ___ not now. ___ Clau - di - a ___

(8vb)

poco rit.

236

Pascal

___ will be here soon. ___ We will talk lat - er.

(8vb)

239

Barbara

Yes we will. ___ The code must be sent through the op - er - a. ___

mf *pp*

(8vb)

243

End of Scene

ppp

(8vb)

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 1

Scene 2

(Pascal, Claudia, Franklin, Tony, Nancy, Chorus)

Allegro ♩ = 150

Piano accompaniment for measures 1-4. The music is in 4/4 time. The right hand features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with accents, and the left hand has a bass line with triplets and dynamic markings of *f* and *mp*.

Piano accompaniment for measures 5-8. The music continues with similar rhythmic patterns and dynamic markings. Measure 5 starts with a 3/4 time signature change.

Claudia *f*

Vocal line for Claudia in measures 9-11. The lyrics are: Cold Tea! She ru - ins my shirt o - ver. The piano accompaniment continues with dynamic markings of *f* and *mp*.

Claudia

Vocal line for Claudia in measures 12-14. The lyrics are: tea that was not cold. Bold Me! I still. The piano accompaniment continues with dynamic markings of *mp* and *f*.

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

15 Claudia *mf*
 shrink from her screams, a - fraid as the first day. She is the

18 Claudia
 fa - mous face from my re - cord sleeves and I

22 Claudia *f* *mf*
 find my - self wor - ship - ping my i - dol who has long since

27 Claudia
 wilt-ed toward the ground.

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

31 **f** **A**

Claudia

My voice _____ I must learn to be as - ser - tive, _____

34

Claudia

_____ to de - mand re - spect. _____ A choice, _____ Pas - cal

37

Claudia

loves me, he loves me, but he al - ways will love her. _____ Di -

40

Claudia

ane, Di - ane, who has be - come _____ an im -

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

44
Claudia

pos - si - ble wo - man to fol - low. He still

48
Claudia

wor-ries that to love me means to not love her!

52
Claudia

Love

56
Claudia

me! Here now.

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

60

Claudia

Pas - cal won't e - ven stand up to Re - bec - ca... Love

[Pascal enters looking for Claudia]

64

Claudia

me, I just need him to hold me and...

Pascal

Where have you

mf *p* *mp*

B Moderato ♩ = 72

68

Pascal

been, we were sup - posed to meet five min - utes a - go?

p *f*

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

[Claudia holds up the tea-stained shirt]

poco rit. -----

71 **Allegro** ♩ = 138

Claudia

mp

Why did - n't you stop her? _____

74 **Moderato** ♩ = 72

Claudia

p

[stuttering and awkward]

Pascal

p

I _____ did - n't want to be ap - pear - ing to play fav-rites. _____

76 **poco accel.** ----- **Allegro** ♩ = 150

Claudia

mf

So I am pun - shed? _____

Pascal

sfz *mp* *mf* *mp* *f*

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

79

Pascal

mf

I'm sor-ry you feel that way.....

mp *f* *mp*

[Claudia reaches out and wraps her arms around him. He smells her hair and thinks through the next logical step. Pascal Baur is nothing if not logical.]

83

Claudia

poco rit.

mp

Pas - cal,

p

[She is holding him tight, and he looks away for a second then focuses into her eyes. His gaze is steady and he is holding her face in his hands.]

86

Claudia

C **Adagio** ♩ = 60

tell me you love me.

Pascal

mf

Of course I do.....

p

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

89 Claudia *p*

I, I some - times feel _____

91 Claudia

like I am your se - cond choice. Just some - thing Re - bec - ca said.

93 Claudia *mf*

She just want - ed to in - sult me,

96 Claudia *mp*

but some - thing a - bout it stuck with me and made me feel...

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

99 Claudia *mp*

I can us-ual-ly _____ shrug her off, _____ but she kept

poco accel. -----

102 Claudia *f mp f*

push-ing and push-ing and, oh, _____ and she made me feel like noth-ing. _____

D Allegro ♩ = 150

105 Pascal *f mp f*

What _____ was she say-ing? _____ What _____ did she tell you? _____

[Claudia takes a step back, as if ashamed to be speaking "her" name.]

109 Claudia *mp f mp f*

She was talk-ing a-bout Di - ane. _____ How she died in a rob-bry

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

113

Claudia

and that you are now, just us - ing

116

Claudia

me.

Pascal

Don't list - en, don't

120

Pascal

list - en to that wo - man. Her star is fad - ing fast on the

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

124

Pascal

stage and she's ³try-ing hard to drag an - y - one down with her.

129

poco rit. **E** **Largo** ♩ = 52

Pascal

mp I have not told you a - bout Di-ane be -

133

Claudia

Pascal

mp Do you love her? _____

cause I ³thought you would - n't want to hear ³a - bout her.

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

136

Claudia

Pascal

Yes, _____ but she died a long time a - go.

Moderato ♩ = 72

139

Claudia

Pascal

On - ly three years...

But time _____ grew slow-er af - ter she

mf

p *cresc.*

143

Pascal

died. I did - n't feel like things got back to nor -

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

147 **F** Adagio $\text{♩} = 60$

Pascal

mal speed un - til I met you. And then there was a day, —

f *p* (*very delicate trem.*)

150 *cresc.*

Pascal

just like — an-y oth-er, — when I woke up and felt the sor-row wash through my soul — and then I

cresc. *sim.*

153 *f* *mp*

Pascal

knew I — was no long-er a pris'ner and my pri - son was gone and now I see. —

f *mp*

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

157

mf *cresc.*

Claudia I can see the love for her in your eyes, I see it

mf *cresc.*

Pascal I can't say I don't still love Di-ane, but I al-so I al-so

161

Claudia now as you gaze in-to my eyes. I can love you too

Pascal love you. Now I ask you please, can you still love me?

rit.

165 *f*

Claudia I can love you too wait and see.

f

Pascal I can love you too wait and see.

[Claudia has started crying and Baur is afraid she is disappointed in him. He covers back, but instead she embraces him again, holding him and rocking him like a child.]

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

G Adagio ♩ = 60

169

Claudia *p* Pas - cal?

Pascal *p* [He's building himself up to propose]
 Clau-di - a, I'm sor - ry I did-n't know how to do...

poco rit.

173

Claudia You can stay...

Pascal *p* But I have to leave, *pp* it's... *mp* You know I love you.

[lights down on them as Pascal leaves. Lights up on Franklin's dressing room. He is there, looking at pictures taped to his mirror]

175

Claudia *mp* I do, I love you.

Pascal

(lift pedal while still holding remaining notes, make sure remaining notes are still audible)

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

H 179 **Freely** ----- **Moderato** ♩ = 72

Franklin

The stor-y _____ of my life held in place by Ko-dak ink and pa-per... _____

Franklin

and tape. Here _____ is my first re-ci-tal _____ at Car-ne-gie hall;

Franklin

my first ap-pear-ance at the Met. And this tat-tered pic-ture _____ of two sim-il-ing

Franklin

men is from the wed-ding _____ where Ton-y and I met. _____ He worked on

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

193 [There is a knock on his door. Franklin opens it to find Tony Bell]

Franklin
Broad - way, _____ but in ad - ver - tis - ing, "Get in here."

Tony
"I'm sorry, but I'm looking for Franklin Pettricone, the famous tenor and all-around sex god."

I **più mosso** ♩ = 80

197
mp *ff*

201 *mp* *mf* *mp*

Pascal
Love, love I've seen it be - fore. I've felt it

205 *mp*

Pascal
ru - in - my life. I lost my

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

meno mosso ♩ = 72

210
Pascal

love, Di - ane, _____ and my world went _____ a - sun - der. I had

This system contains the musical notation for measure 210. It features a vocal line in bass clef with lyrics and a piano accompaniment in bass clef. The piano part consists of chords in the left hand and a simple bass line in the right hand. There are three triplet markings in the vocal line.

213
Pascal

noth- ing left _____ in my life. That's when she _____ came to me.

This system contains the musical notation for measure 213. It features a vocal line in bass clef with lyrics and a piano accompaniment in bass clef. The piano part consists of chords in the left hand and a simple bass line in the right hand. There are three triplet markings in the vocal line.

217
Pascal

"Put a message _____ in your op- er - a," _____ she said, "and we will kill the man _____

This system contains the musical notation for measure 217. It features a vocal line in bass clef with lyrics and a piano accompaniment in bass clef. The piano part consists of chords in the left hand and a simple bass line in the right hand. There are three triplet markings in the vocal line.

220
Pascal

_____ who mur-dered Di - ane, the one _____ the po-lice let go.

mp

This system contains the musical notation for measure 220. It features a vocal line in bass clef with lyrics and a piano accompaniment in bass clef. The piano part consists of chords in the left hand and a simple bass line in the right hand. There are three triplet markings in the vocal line. A dynamic marking of *mp* is present at the end of the system.

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

poco accel.
 223 *cresc.*

Pascal

My an-ger was _____ ov - er - flow - ing and I a - greed.

226

Pascal

I want - ed him to feel my pain, feel my loss.

a tempo ♩ = 72 **poco rit.**

Franklin

My

Pascal

I am not a com-mu-nist, _____ just a man with noth - ing _____ left.

J **meno mosso** ♩ = 60

233

Franklin


eyes and ears con-stant-ly speak of you _____ What you do to them sends

Tony


My eyes _____ and ears con-stant-ly speak of you _____ What you do to them sends _____


Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

236


Franklin 
shiv - ers through my bod - y. mm

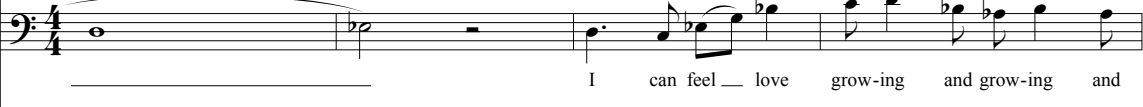
Pascal 
But now my heart is not so fro - zen.

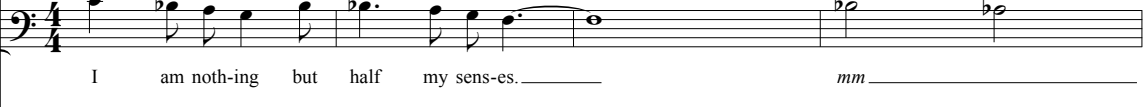
Tony 
shiv - ers through my bod - y. mm




240

Franklin 
I am noth - ing but half my sens - es. mm

Pascal 
I can feel love grow - ing and grow - ing and

Tony 
I am noth - ing but half my sens - es. mm



Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

244

Franklin *p*
 And they do noth-ing but speak of you.

Pascal *mm*
 what it finds it loathes. "Why?" it asks,

Tony *p*
 And they do noth-ing but speak of you.

K

247 *p*
 Franklin *mm* Why?

Pascal *p*
 "why do you be-tray your coun-try. Why do you lie to your-self?"

Tony *mm* Why?

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

251 *mf*

Franklin
Why? _____ Why? _____ Why? _____ Why? _____ If there was

Pascal
Why?" _____ Why? _____

Tony
mf
Why? _____ Why? _____ Why? _____ Why? _____

255

Franklin
one thing I could not live with - out It would not be my

Pascal
My life was emp - ty but now it's full.

Tony
If there was one thing I could not live I'd

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

258

Franklin
eyes, my ears, my hands, my heart. I could not

Pascal
Clau - - - di - a! Clau - - - di - a!

Tony
give my eyes, my ears, my hands, my heart.

261

Franklin
live with-out the soft cen - tur - i - ans that are my lips.

Pascal
If this is true you will be the one who saves me.

Tony
I could not live with - out the soft cen - tur - i - ans that are my lips.

mf

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

poco rit.

264

Franklin

Pascal

Tony

Chorus

Clau - di - a! Clau - di -

pp

pp

pp

The musical score is written for five parts: Franklin (soprano), Pascal (bass), Tony (bass), Chorus (SATB), and Piano. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 5/4. The tempo is marked 'poco rit.'. The score begins at measure 264. Franklin's part consists of whole rests. Pascal's part has a half note G2, a quarter note A2, a quarter note B2, a quarter rest, a quarter note C3, and a quarter note B2. Tony's part consists of whole rests. The Chorus part has whole rests in the soprano and alto staves, and half notes G2 and C3 in the tenor and bass staves. The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes in the right hand and half notes in the left hand, with a 'pp' dynamic marking.

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

L Adagio $\text{♩} = 60$
mp

267

Pascal

a! —

p wait-ing for the day when my heart will know wait-ing for the

Chorus

p love — day — love —

p feel — for the — feel —

p list-en — wait-ing — list-en —

270

Pascal

mf I must — find my

day when my heart will know that I have found a

Chorus

day — know that I have found a —

for the — I've found love —

wait - ing — I have found — love —

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

272

Pascal

love _____ where _____ ³ can she be? Wait - ing for the per -

love where _____ can she be wait - ing for the

Chorus

love _____ be _____

feel _____ can she _____

list - en _____ where _____

274

Claudia

mp
Pas - cal? _____

Pascal

for - mance, her per - fect smile _____ calls to me. I

day when she calls to me wait - ing for the

Chorus

day _____ me _____

for the _____ calls to _____

wait - ing _____ when she _____

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

276 *mp*

Nancy
Pascal.

Claudia
la la la la la

Pascal
hear her with Nan - cy. But, she does - n't seem too

Chorus
day with her oo with
day with her oo with
day with her oo with
day with her oo

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

279

Nancy
"I" "an" "Di" "ah" I ah I an

Claudia
la la la la

Pascal
mp
hap - py. and what is it that Nan - cy has said? It

pp
her I ah I an

pp
her I ah I an

pp
her I ah I an

pp
her I ah I an

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

288

Nancy

mem-ber hear-ing of her mur-der, and how they caught the man, but were un-

291

Nancy

ab - le to charge him with the crime. He loved her

Claudia

Pas - cal nev - er told

mf

mp

294

Nancy

that is sure. Would he do the same for you?

Claudia

me... Pas - cal loves me this I know. He

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

297

Nancy

But Di - ane was true love you are just a

Claudia

loves me this I know. He loves me!

mf

f

301

Nancy

fla - vor, he needs me.

Claudia

I can prove it. I can prove it.

mp

f

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

304

Nancy
Pas - cal needs me

Claudia
I can prove it. *f*
Pas - cal loves me

Chorus
fp Love love *f*
fp Love love *f*
fp Love love *f*
fp Love love *f*
Love love

ff *f*

3 10 3

Detailed description: This is a page of a musical score for Act I scene 2. It features five staves: Nancy (soprano), Claudia (soprano), Chorus (SATB), and Piano accompaniment. Nancy's line starts at measure 304 with the lyrics 'Pas - cal needs me'. Claudia's line has the lyrics 'I can prove it.' followed by 'Pas - cal loves me'. The Chorus consists of four parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) with the lyrics 'Love love'. The piano accompaniment includes a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand and a triplet of eighth notes in the left hand, with a ten-measure melodic run in the right hand. Dynamics include *f*, *fp*, and *ff*. The score is in a key with one flat and a common time signature.

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

[Pascal comes out from behind the curtain
and Nancy and Claudia both see him]

306

Nancy

he can't love her. He will tell me, I can prove it.

Claudia

yes, he loves me. He will tell me, I can prove it.

Chorus

love love love love love love

love love love love love love

love love love love love love

love love love love love love

love love love love love love

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

N

309

Nancy Pas - cal! Or

Claudia Are you here to see me?

love.

love.

love.

love.

accel.

311

Nancy are you here to see me? Or me?

Claudia Or me? Or

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

più mosso ♩ = 80

Nancy
Or me? Or me? He's here for me,

Claudia
me? Or me? He's here for me,

Chorus
Me for
Me for
Me for
Me for

313

f

f

fp *f*

fp *f*

fp *f*

fp *f*

f

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

315

Nancy
not here for her. He's here for me, Pas - cal needs me.

Claudia
not here for her. He's here for me, Pas - cal loves me.

Chorus
me for me for me for
me for me for me for
me for me for me for
me for me for me for

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

O **meno mosso** ♩ = 72

318

Nancy

Pascal

Chorus

mf

pp

mp

me.

me.

me.

me.

me.

oo oo oo

I need you

Nan - cy I am sor - ry, but I must speak with Clau - di - a.

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

321

Nancy

for my stor - y.

Pascal

I'll speak with you _____ af - ter the

Chorus

pp

f

mp

323

Nancy

I'm sor - ry _____ it must

Pascal

op - er - a _____ per - for - mance. _____

Chorus

f

mp

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

[Nancy has left the room, but is sulking behind a partition]

325 *f*

Nancy
be like this... He'll

Claudia
Oh, my Pas - cal, my love I'll find a way

Pascal
I thank you. We'll speak lat - er

Chorus
pp

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

328

Nancy
nev - er see my love... He will nev - er, nev - er see me...

Claudia
to show him my love... He will know it! All my love for him!

Pascal
Clau - di-a, Clau-di-a! She will know it! All my love for her!

pp

Chorus

The musical score is written for three vocalists and a chorus. Nancy's part is in the soprano clef, Claudia's in the alto clef, and Pascal's in the bass clef. The chorus consists of four parts: soprano, alto, tenor, and bass. The piano accompaniment is shown in grand staff notation. The score includes lyrics and dynamic markings such as *ff* and *pp*. The page number 328 is at the top left, and the page number 82 is at the bottom center.

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

332

Nancy
Nev - - - er see me...

Claudia
He will know it! All my love _____ for him! _____

Pascal
She will know it! All my love _____ for her! _____

f
Love for him for her for

Chorus
f
Love _____ for him _____ for her _____ for

f
Love for him for her for

f
Love for him for her for

ff

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

335 **rit.**

Nancy
Claudia
Pascal
Chorus
him for them.
him for them.
him for them.
him for them.

339 **P Freely**

Pascal
I know now that I love you, and I

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

342

Claudia *p*

Pascal *mp*

8^{va}

6

p

Pas-cal... [He drops to one knee]

want you to mar-ry me. Clau-di-a, to spend my

Moderato ♩ = 72

345

Claudia *mp*

Pascal

I can't think how long for-ev-er tru-ly is. I can't

life with you. To give my joy to you.

348

Claudia

Pascal

think of com-pet-ing with Di-ane for all time.

To give all my love to you. I can love

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

351

Claudia *But will you still love her? _____ But will you still love her? _____*

Pascal *you. I _____ can love you.*

354

Claudia *_____ Pas - cal,*

Pascal *I can love you both; Clau - di - a,*

356 *f*

Claudia *we be - long to - geth - er. _____ I love you,*

Pascal *we be - long to - geth - er. _____ Is your*

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

359

Claudia *3* but we this is for - ev - er... Can we for -

Pascal *3* hes - i - tance be - cause you sense my sec - rets. Let us for - get the past,

ff mp

rit.

362

Claudia *3* get the past Ev - en though I love you?

Pascal *3* just know I love you.

ff

366

Claudia

Pascal "I'm sorry, I can't give you an answer right now...I'm so..."

p (holding down just the two notes, brush strings inside piano with free hand.)

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 2

Q **Largo** ♩ = 48

369

p

oo oo oo oo list - en

p

oo oo oo oo list - en

p

oo list - en

p

oo list - - -

pp *p*

rit.

Lights Down

372

pp

feel love

pp

feel love

pp

feel love

pp

en feel love

pp

Scene 3

(Franklin, Claudia, Rebecca, Pascal, Nancy, Morriss)

[An announcement comes over the loudspeakers. "Ladies and Gentlemen, please take your seats for *Orphee Redux*". A few seconds later, the music starts]

Allegro ♩. = 108

The musical score is written for piano and consists of six systems of music. The first system is in 6/8 time and begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The second system starts at measure 5 and features a forte (*f*) dynamic. The third system starts at measure 9 and includes a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. The fourth system starts at measure 13. The fifth system starts at measure 17. The sixth system starts at measure 21 and concludes with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The score includes various musical notations such as treble and bass clefs, time signatures, dynamics, and articulation marks.

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 3

[Franklin and Claudia (David and Lydia) are onstage. The lights come up before the music ends and we get the impression that we're joining the opera in progress. David is reading a letter and looks exhausted]

Adagio ♩ = 63

Franklin

26

Pos - i - tive? That makes no sense. — Does that mean I'm

Claudia

29

I don't know... —

Franklin

pos - i - tive — as well? Lyd - i - a, — what can I

Freely *p* **A** **Moderato** ♩ = 76

Claudia

32

Noth-ing... She is not —

Franklin

do to save her? —

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 3

36

Claudia

the same the same big sis - ter who had taught me to sing.

Franklin

mf 3
She is not the same

Musical score for Claudia and Franklin, measures 36-38. Claudia's part is in treble clef with lyrics. Franklin's part is in treble clef with lyrics and a triplet. Piano accompaniment is in grand staff.

39

Claudia

There is noth-ing, noth-ing you could do. She is not—

Franklin

the same — wife who cry - ing put on the ring. There is noth - ing,

Musical score for Claudia and Franklin, measures 39-41. Claudia's part is in treble clef with lyrics. Franklin's part is in treble clef with lyrics. Piano accompaniment is in grand staff.

42

Claudia

the same the same big sis - ter who had taught me to sing.

Franklin

noth - ing I could do. She is not the same,

Musical score for Claudia and Franklin, measures 42-44. Claudia's part is in treble clef with lyrics. Franklin's part is in treble clef with lyrics and a triplet. Piano accompaniment is in grand staff.

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 3

45 **poco rit.** -----

Claudia
There is noth - ing, noth - ing you could do. There is noth - ing,

Franklin
the same ___ wife who cry - ing put on the ring. I must do some -

48

Claudia
noth - ing you could do. _____ There is noth - ing, noth - ing you could do. _____

Franklin
- thing. I must do some - thing. I must do some -

----- **B** **meno mosso** ♩ = 60

51

Claudia

Franklin
- thing. _____ I can see the light, _____ ³she is there, be-hind the door,

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 3

Franklin

54

mf ————— *f*

wait-ing for me_ to save her. _____

Franklin

57

mp **accel.** -----

I must try. _____

Moderato ♩ = 72

(8^{va}) -----

(8^{vb}) -----

(8^{va}) -----

(8^{vb}) -----

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 3

rit. ----- **C** **Freely** ♩ = 58
p

Franklin

65
8

My eyes de - ceive me.

Franklin

68
8

I see a bright light, and her out - line ly - ing still un - der

Franklin

71
8

mf

bed sheets. My Eu-ryd - i - ce. Let me sing you a love song.

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 3

D [offstage] *mf* *f* **poco rit.**

Rebecca 75 Da - vid are you here? I hear you. I

Franklin 8 Yes! Yes!

a tempo *ff*

Rebecca 78 hear you... Don't come in, please don't look at me.

Franklin 8 Yes! [turning away from the bed] It's

Moderato ♩ = 72 *mp*

Franklin 82 fa - ted, leave with me, don't wor - ry. Now, get up

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 3

86

Rebecca *mf*
I will leave with you,

Franklin *f*
and fol - low me. It's time to go.

89

Rebecca *f*
but you can't see me like this. You can't see me like this.

92

Rebecca *mf*
Please prom - ise. Please prom - ise. I'm so hu - mil - i - at - ed. Please

Franklin *mf* *mp*
I prom - ise. I prom -

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 3

96

Rebecca

turn as I get dressed. Please, _____ prom-ise, _____ you prom-ise. _____

Franklin

ise. I prom-ise. _____ no

mf

100

Franklin

turn-ing _____ a - round, but we must go, _____ we must leave this hell. _____

rit. ----- **E** **meno mosso** ♩ = 72

105

Franklin

My love, _____ just a lit-tle bit long-er _____ 'til the sur-face. _____

f *p* *mf* *f*

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 3

Franklin

108 *mp* *mf*

In my heart _____ I've cured you. Pam-e-la, ___ I can feel your

Franklin

111 *f* *mf* *poco rit.*

strength re - turn - ing ___ and I ___ can i - mag - ine ___ the vi - rus leav - ing. ___ Love ___

[David is too worked up and forgets his promise. He suddenly turns around to embrace Pamela and notices the lesions and filth covering her. He leans back in horror. Pamela steps back in shame and anger.]

Rebecca

Franklin

114 *ff* *ff* *ff* (use fingers on strings inside piano)

NO! ___

is the cure for ___ all.

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 3

117 **F** **Moderato** ♩ = 96

Rebecca

I told you not to turn a-round

120 *mf* *f*

Rebecca

but you nev - er list - en you nev - er list - en.

Franklin

mf

Pam - e - la, —

(poco at first, fast near the end)
accel.

122

Rebecca

You just keep say - ing that things will be

Franklin

I'm sor - ry.

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 3

124 *ff*

Rebecca
bet - ter but I know the truth. You, _____

Franklin
f
Pam - e - la, for - give me. _____

ff

(8^{vb})

[Growing more angry and spiteful. Pamela begins to throw things at David] [David loses control and grabs Pamela, hurting her]

127

Rebecca
_____ you on - ly think of your-self _____ you self - ish bas - tard. _____

(8^{vb})

[A large man steps from behind a door and grabs David in a head lock. The man pulls him toward the exit as Pamela slowly moves back toward the door. David is screaming for her the whole time, reaching his hands out to her, but she just stands there mute, her gaze one of hate and spit, but also shame and struggle.]

130 **Freely** ♩ = 58

Rebecca
Help

ff

(8^{vb})

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 3

133 **molto rit.**

[The "show" is over and the audience applauds. Pascal, Claudia, Franklin, and Rebecca come out onstage]

[Pascal, Rebecca, Franklin, and Claudia bow. When Claudia bows, Pascal comes over and hugs her and kisses her. This is a surprise. She stands back, startled. He again drops to a knee]

137

Pascal

"Thank you. Thank you. Thank you very much."

G Moderato ♩ = 72

140

145

Pascal

Clau-di - a, I can hide no more. I love you. I

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 3

148 *f* **meno mosso** ♩ = 60

Pascal

ask you a-gain with this ring. And the ques-tion is the

152 *f*

Pascal

same... Will you mar - ry me?

156 **poco rit.** *p* **a tempo** *mp*

Claudia

Yes, yes, a thou-sand times

160 *f* *mp* *f* **accel.**

Claudia

yes. Oh, Pas-cal, you have made me so hap - py.

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 3

[Pascal and Claudia leave with the cast following, clapping. Nancy, who had come up on stage to talk with Pacal, is left alone. Then, a portly man in a suit comes up on stage]

163 **H Moderato** ♩ = 72

167 Nancy

Hel-lo, who are

171 **accel.** ----- **più mosso** ♩ = 98

Nancy you?

Morriss My name is Mor - riss Green-berg, —

174 [Lights and curtain down. End Act I]

Morriss "and I'm here to investigate the Hartford Opera Company."

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act I scene 3

SONGS FROM BEHIND THE CURTAIN

ACT II

ACT II

Scene 1

(Morriss, Barbara, Claudia, Pascal)

Allegro ♩ = 132

Musical notation for measures 1-3. The piece is in 5/4 time. Measure 1 starts with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The right hand features a triplet of eighth notes followed by a quarter note, while the left hand plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment.

Musical notation for measures 4-6. Measure 4 continues the triplet pattern in the right hand. Measure 5 shows a change in the right hand's accompaniment. Measure 6 concludes the section with a final chord.

Musical notation for measures 7-9. Measure 7 begins with a *rit.* (ritardando) marking. The right hand has a triplet of eighth notes, and the left hand has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 8 features a more complex rhythmic pattern in the right hand. Measure 9 ends with a final chord.

meno mosso ♩ = 56

Musical notation for measures 10-13. Measure 10 starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The right hand has a triplet of eighth notes, and the left hand has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 11 features a more complex rhythmic pattern in the right hand. Measure 12 and 13 conclude the section with a final chord.

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 1

14 **A** Allegro ♩ = 132

Morriss

mf

Ex-cuse me, _____ I'm look-ing for Pas-cal Ba - ur.

17

Barbara

mp

I am clean-ing lad - y. _____ I don't

20

Barbara

know.

Morriss

My name is Mor - ris _____ eh..._

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 1

rit. ----- **B** **meno mosso** ♩ = 56
mp

23
Claudia
and like _____ and like a dy-ing

Morriss
_____ I guess I'll _____ find _____ him my - self.

pp 6 *p* 3 *with a little swing*

26 *mf* *p*
Claudia
la - dy, _____ lean and pale, who _____ tot - ters

29
Claudia
forth, wrapped in a gauz - y veil, _____

Morriss
What sad-ness _____ sings so beau - ti-ful? _____ My

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 1

32

Claudia
 out of her cham - bers, _____ led by the _____ in - sane _____

Morriss
 la - dy, _____ I hear your cry and want to love you _____ with - out

35

Claudia
 and feeb - le _____ wand - er - ings _____ of her

Morriss
 see - ing you. _____ oo _____

38

Claudia
 fad - ing brain. _____ The moon _____

Morriss
 Am I? _____ Am I in - sane? In - sane? _____ We

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 1

41

Claudia

Morriss

a - rose up in the mur - ky east (mur-ky)

sing, we sing of the same moon, and I know that with-in it's

44

Claudia

Morriss

east) a white a white and shape-less mass.

cyc - le you will have come and gone and I

47

Claudia

Morriss

The wan - ing moon the

and I will be a - lone. And I will be a - lone.

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 1

50

Claudia wan - ing moon. and like... Oh, shit!

Morriss — And I will be a - lone.

ord. (no swing)

freely, with no meter

53

Claudia MORRISS: I did not mean to startle you.
CLAUDIA: I dropped my pencil into the piano.
MORRISS: Is that bad?
CLAUDIA: Yes, it will damage it.
MORRISS: Let me help you (*he hands her his cell phone*)
CLAUDIA: What is this?
MORRISS: A phone. You can use the antenna to fish out the pencil.

[Morriss dips the antenna into the piano and the pencil comes out]

p

C **Moderato** ♩ = 108

55

Claudia Thank you, oh, where are my man - ners? My name is

mp

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 1

59

Claudia

Morriss

Clau - di - a In - gras - si - a - Ba - ur.

Mor - ris Green - berg, F. B. I.

63

poco rit.

Claudia

Morriss

Yes, my hus - band.

I'm here to meet Pas - cal Ba - ur. Is he your...? —

67

Moderato ♩ = 108

Morriss

Oh, yes, of course.

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 1

70 **rit.**

Morris

I was sup-posed to meet him right now, but I can't find his of - fice.

73 **meno mosso** ♩ = 56

Morris

Would you? Would you take me there?

76 **più mosso** ♩ = 108

Claudia

I don't think he's there right now, but I can

79

Claudia

give you di - rec - tions. Just go through that red door and head to the

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 1

82

Claudia

right. There's a name - plate on the door.

84

Claudia

Morris

rit. *meno mosso* ♩ = 56

timidly

Thank you Clau-di - a, -

87

Morris

I must say you have a beau - ti - ful voice.

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 1

rit.----- freely, with no meter

Claudia

90

Thank you. And good luck with Pas - cal. By the way,

slightly slowing, don't coordinate with voice

fp mp pp

8^{vb}-----

Claudia

92

what are you here in - vest - i - gat - ing, — if you don't mind me ask - ing? —

(continue holding down keys. After last chord, depress sostonuto pedal)

8^{vb}-----

Moderato ♩ = 108

poco accel.

Morris

94

p almost whispering, showing off a little

I am here look - ing for spies. We think...

f

8^{vb}-----
Sostonuto Pedal

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 1

Allegro ♩ = 132

96

Morris

there is a spy at the Hart-ford Op-er-a Com-pan-y.

(8th) (release sostenuto pedal)

rit.

99

mp *mf* *p*

D **più mosso** ♩ = 56

102

Pascal

For me? What can he know? What does he sus-pect? I

105

Pascal

see the line long past, fading in the dis-tance. She said it was our se-cret.

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 1

108 **rit.** ----- **a tempo**

Pascal

That's how it start-ed. Her friends would kill the man who mur-dered her.. The

pp *mp*

111

Pascal

one who got - a - way with it. It all hap-pened so quick-ly I could - n't

113

Pascal

ev - en pro - cess all the thoughts go - ing on in my head. So I a -

115 **poco rit.**

Pascal

greed to put So - vi - et mes-sag-es in my op - er - as, Now I see

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 1

E **Largo** ♩ = 56

117
Pascal

my path fading, she calls from the dark I hear her pain,

delicate and sustained throughout

mf

sim.

120
Pascal

her last gasping breath My hate maligned in treason and de -

123
Pascal

ceit A shame her life must end in death

126
Pascal

A simple line, a few sprinkled

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 1

129

Pascal

notes Her voice will not be si-lenced and for-got-ten I speak from

132

Pascal

pain, from lost prom-ises I sing in code for my be-

Allegro ♩ = 132 **poco rit.** -----

135

Pascal

lat-ed.

----- **meno mosso** ♩ = 108

138

mf *mf* *mp*

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 1

poco rit.

Musical score for piano, measures 141-142. The score is in 7/4 time and consists of two staves. Measure 141 features a melody in the right hand starting with a quarter rest, followed by eighth notes, and a bass line of quarter notes. Dynamics include *mf* and *p*. Measure 142 features a more complex right-hand melody with a triplet of eighth notes and a bass line of quarter notes. Dynamics include *mf* and *pp*. The tempo marking **poco rit.** is positioned above the score.

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 1

Scene 2

(Franklin, Morriss, Tony, Nancy, Pascal)

[Franklin is in his dressing room, looking through a score. The door is open]

Moderato ♩ = 88

Piano introduction in 4/4 time, starting with a *mp* dynamic. The music features a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the right hand and a more active bass line in the left hand. Dynamics shift to *mf* and *p* in the second measure, and back to *mp* in the third.

4

Franklin *mf* Hel - lo?

Morriss [Morriss appears outside his door and knocks] *mf* Hel - lo,

Measures 4 and 5. Franklin's vocal line begins with a *mf* dynamic. Morriss's vocal line enters with a *mf* dynamic. The piano accompaniment features a *f* dynamic in the first measure, *mp* in the second, and *f* in the third. The key signature changes to one flat (Bb) in measure 5.

7

Morriss Mis - ter Pet - ric - i - on - e, my name is Mor - ris Green - berg,

Measures 7, 8, and 9. Morriss's vocal line continues with a *f* dynamic. The piano accompaniment features a *f* dynamic in the first measure, *mp* in the second, and *f* in the third. The key signature changes to two flats (Bb, Eb) in measure 7.

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 2

10

Franklin

Morriss

How can I help you?

[Morriss steps in and Franklin closes the door]

spec - ial a - gent.

13

Franklin

Morriss

Is there an - y trou - ble? _____

No, just a few quest - ions _____

16

Franklin

Morriss

Yes. Wait,

_____ a - bout last year's pro - duc - tion. _____

fp

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 2

19 Franklin *mf*
you said F. B. I., — not a re - port - er?

mp *p* *pp*

22 Franklin
What kind of ques-tions —

Morriss
Yes, F. B. I.

25 Franklin **A** **Adagio** ♩ = 63
— do you want to ask?

Morriss
What can you tell me — a - bout last year's — pro - duc - tion of

p *8va*

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 2

Moderato ♩ = 88

28

Franklin

mp I'm not sure. *mf* Lot's of things.

Morriss

Or - phée Re - dux? _____

31

Franklin

_____ Did you see it? I played Da - vid.

Morriss

No. Oh.

34

Morriss

What can you tell me _____ a - bout Pas - cal Ba - ur? _____

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 2

37 **poco rit.** ----- **meno mosso** ♩ = 66

Franklin

A great com - pos-er, so fast. We're pre - mier-ing a - noth - er work to -

sub. *p* *mp*

40 **Moderato** ♩ = 88 *mp*

Franklin

night. Can you be - lieve it? Like what?

Morriss

An - y - thing else?

mf *p*

44 *mf*

Franklin

Like se - crets? What kind of

Morriss

An - y - thing... What kind of

mf *mp* *mf* *p*

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 2

47 [Franklin is playful and slightly flirty] *mp*

Franklin Oh, — noth - ing... — Par-don

Morriss se - crets? What kind of se...

mf *f* *mp* *f*

50 [Tony is on the other side of the door. He looks sick. Franklin expression immediately changes. He lets Tony in.] *mf*

Franklin me. I'm sor-ry — A - gent Green - berg, — but I need to help my

Morriss Hel-lo, my name is Mor-riss —

p *f* *mp* *p*

54 [Franklin silently leads Morriss to the door and with a sense of urgency shuts it in his face] *mp*

Franklin friend now. — Could we re - sched - ule?

Morriss Sure, I guess.

mp

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 2

rit. ----- **B** **meno mosso** ♩ = 72

Franklin 58 *p* 3
What's the mat - ter?

Tony
Oh, _____ oh Frank-ie, I've real-ly messed

sfz *mp* *pp* *mp*

poco rit. -----

Franklin 63
Shhh, _____ what is it? _____ You can tell me.

Tony
up. _____ real-ly bad. _____

3 3

67 **a tempo** ♩ = 72

Franklin 8
Hush, _____

Tony
No, _____ I can't, _____ it's too bad. _____

p *pp*

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 2

71

Franklin

8 tell me.

Tony

mp Prom-ise you won't get mad?

75

Franklin

8 *mp* I prom-ise, *p* I prom-ise... *rit.*

Tony

C a tempo ♩ = 72

80

f

8va

8vb

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 2

accel.

82 *mp* 3 *mf* *mf* *mf* 3

Franklin Pos-i-tive? Does this mean _____ just how did you

Tony Let me ex-plain

ff *pp* *f* *mp*

(8^{va}) (8^{vb})

85

Franklin get it? _____

Tony I don't know, _____ I swear. _____

mp 3

f *pp* *mp*

(8^{va}) (8^{vb})

D **più mosso** ♩ = 84

88 *f* *ff* *mf* 3

Franklin What's his name? Tell me. _____

Tony I don't know, I mean.

f 3

(8^{va}) (8^{vb})

[Franklin his Tony and continues with each orch. hit]

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 2

Franklin

91

How could you do this to me? How could you kill me? _____

Franklin

93

It is nine - teen eigh - ty six, you should know bet - ter. _____

Tony

96 **più mosso** $\text{♩} = 126$ **f** **poco accel.**

I love you. _____

100 [Tony screams]

8vb

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 2

E **Adagio** $\text{♩} = 69$

103 [As Tony screams, the lights fade on them and rise on Nancy, waiting onstage. Morriss enters]

Nancy *mp*

Mor - ris, good to see you a -

espressivo

p

106

Nancy gain. I'm here as you re -

Morriss *mp*

Nan - cy, a plea - sure as al - ways. —

sim.

109

Nancy quest - ed, writ - ing a piece on Ba - ur's op - er - a as a cov - er. —

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 2

112

Nancy

Morriss

mf

mp

Per - fect — Do you have — an - y leads? Have you heard an - y -

114

Nancy

Morriss

I think — you should look at Clau - di - a — Ba...

thing? I have met her — and I

116

Nancy

Morriss

mf

But she's sneak-y, — oh, so sneak-y. Yes.

don't think she's in - volved. If you say so... What —

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 2

119 *mp*

Nancy [Pascal Baur enters on the other side of the curtain. He hears the voices and approaches slowly] Ev-'ry - thing Ev-'ry-

Morriss ___ can you tell me ___ a-bout Frank-lin ___ Pet-ric-ci-on - e? Pas-cal Ba-ur?

F *con rubato*

122 [Nancy leans in and starts whispering to Morriss]

Nancy thing.

Pascal *mp* [Franklin arrives, worried, frenzied]

Pascal Is that Nan-cy? Is she help-ing the F. B. I.? Does she know an - y - thing?

pp

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 2

126 **a tempo**

Nancy *p* sa la di

Franklin *mp* Franklin *in a loud whisper* I'm in trou-ble, I've done it now...—

Morriss *p* ah oh

Pascal *p* *mp* Hush Frank-lin, can't you hear the F. B. I. a-gent—

sim.

129

Nancy ah ti do

Franklin *mf* I don't care. I'm guilty, he should

Morriss *op* ah—

Pascal on the oth-er side of the cur-tain?

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 2

132 *f* *mp*

Franklin
lock me up right now. _____ Ton - y, _____ he has the

Pascal
Why? What hap - pened? _____

135 *mf*

Franklin
bug and I do too. I _____ could - n't help it, I _____ just at - tacked him. _____

138 *f* *mf*

Franklin
Now he's gone prob - ab - ly went to the pol - ice al - read - y. I should

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 2

141

Nancy *ti do*

Franklin *turn my-self in now.*

Morriss *oh ah nee —* *p*

Pascal *Hush, you need to go back to your room and wait for me. —*

144

Franklin *Thank you* *mf*

Pascal *We still have the show; — and I'll help you, but first you have to trust me.* *mf*

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 2

rit.

147

Franklin *p* mae - stro, thank you. You are a saint a - mong men. *mf* Yes! *p* Thank you! —

Pascal *f* You must get go - ing right now!

[Franklin gets up and leaves silently. Unbeknownst to either of them, Morriss and Nancy had already left via the other side of the stage and Pascal and Franklin were alone. Pascal sits silently, and after not hearing voices realizes that he is alone. He walks over and flips open the curtain, stopping on the other side]

G **con rubato**

150

Franklin

Pascal *mf* Not just a fig - ment — an - y more, here lies the line I have la - ment - ed so long.

153

Pascal *f* But how can I do this? *p* Who am I an - y - more? To —

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 2

meno mosso ♩ = 63

155 *mf*

Pascal

what side _____ of the line do I be - long? From _____

157 *f*

Pascal

what side _____ of the cur - tain do the voic - es call out to me? _____

159 *mf*

Pascal

Lines _____ in the sand are eas - y, _____ eas - y to e -

161 *f*

Pascal

rase, eas - y to push back _____ toward the ebb of the surf, _____ to be washed a -

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 2

163 *mf*

Pascal

way and re-drawn with the tide.

poco rit.

166

pp

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 2

Scene 3

(Barbara, Pascal, Morriss, Franklin, Tony, Kansas, Claudia, Chorus)

Moderato ♩ = 92

[Pascal is onstage and Barbara enters.
She notices that Pascal looks worried]

Barbara

mp
Hush, tell — Nar-nl —

Barbara

— what F. B. — I. says.

Pascal

mf *mp*
It's not the F. B. I., — it's Frank-lin. — He says Ton-y has

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 3

11

Barbara

Pascal

AIDS and he does as well. And he at-tacked Ton-y... A per-fect

mf

mp

p

15

Barbara

Pascal

pat-sy for the F. B. I. But why? Why not stay

mp

mp

18

Pascal

low? They will nev-er find out.

mf

f

f

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 3

21 *mf*

Barbara

Sac - ri - fic - es must be made. _____

Pascal

Why? I don't be -

f

7 9

p

23

Barbara

They

Pascal

lieve you.

f

3

26

Barbara

make mis-takes, _____ a - pol - o - gize. _____ A - mer - i - ca _____ is land of a - pol - o - gy. _____

3 3 3

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 3

29
Barbara

Take what you want! a - pol - o - gize. Kill who you want! A - pol - o - gize. It is the

32
Barbara

same, ov - er and ov - er a - gain. You will see. You will see.

35
Pascal

Did you hear me? I want to be done. I don't want to do this...

38
Pascal

... an - y - more.

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 3

41 *mf*

Barbara

There is no "done". You have no choice, you are al-read-y ³guil-ty.

Pascal

But I've

p *mf*

44

Pascal

changed. Clau-di-a changed me, the an-ger has gone.

Morriss

(offstage) *mf*

³Ov-er there?

47 *p*

Barbara

Hush, there is some-one com-ing.

accel.

50 *mp*

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 3

A freely (♩ = 72)

53

Morriss

mf

Pas-cal Ba-ur, — I pre -

fp

56

Pascal

mp

Cor - rect, Ag - ent Green - berg.

Morriss

mp

sume? You know who I

f *mp* *f* *mp*

59

Pascal

Yes, not much hap - pens — in this build - ing — I do not know.

Morriss

am?

f *mp*

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 3

meno mosso ♩ = 69

62

Pascal

Morriss

How can I

Then you are the man I've been wait - ing to see.

mf

mf

pp

mp

66

Pascal

Morriss

help you?

I'm look - ing for spies here at the Hart - ford Op - 'ra

69

Pascal

Morriss

Spies? _____

com - pan - y. _____

Yes, Rus - sians. _____

accel.

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 3

72 **B** Adagio $\text{♩} = 66$
mf

Pascal

What kind of man could keep such, — such se-crets ly-ing there for all to see?

76 *mf*

Morriss

What kind of man? He is smart, — ver-y lik-a-ble, — but hides

79

Pascal

I don't think I know this man, here at the

Morriss

— his true co-lors. — You will know him.

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 3

[Barbara reappears at the corner of the stage, hidden]

82

Pascal

op - er - a _____ we all are peace - ful art - ists. _____ I can't

Morriss

He's here a - mongst you. _____ Just think _____ a

85

Pascal

not one _____ I can't _____ It could be an - y - one. _____

Morriss

name trust _____ your gut You know _____ it could be an - y - one. _____

C

88 *mp*

Barbara

What kind of wo - man could do such things? She would have to be a

Pascal

Morriss

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 3

91

Barbara *f* haunt - ed soul. What _____ kind of wo - man could be a

Pascal *f* What _____ kind of man could be a spy, _____ could be -

Morriss *f* What _____ kind of man _____ could be a spy, _____

94

Barbara *f* spy, _____ could be - tray her fam - 'ly, could watch them die? My

Pascal *f* tray his coun - try and live a lie? I don't

Morriss *f* _____ could be - tray his coun - try _____ and live a lie? _____

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 3

97

Barbara

child - ren, my child - ren, my child - ren.

Pascal

think I know this man. But we are art - ists not trai - tors.

Morriss

You _____ will know the man quite well. You're hid - ing some - thing I'm sure.

100

Barbara

What kind of man could hide from the truth that

Pascal

What kind of man could hide from the truth that

Morriss

What kind of man could hide from the truth that

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 3

Moderato ♩ = 92

ff

103

Barbara

we will have our re - venge.

Pascal

ev - ry - one will suf - fer to his choi - ces.

Morriss

spies will be un - cov - ered.

D

106

Pascal

mf

Noth - ing I

Morriss

mp

Is there an - y - thing you want to tell me?

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 3

109

Pascal

know.

Morriss

I can sense your hes-i-tance. You don't have to be a-fraid.

112

Pascal

It is noth-ing. There is no one. It is nothing.

Morriss

You know. We can pro-TECT you.

accel.

116

Pascal

I know noth-ing. What can I say?

Morriss

But you do. You can say, just

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 3

120 $\text{♩} = 92$ *ff* freely

Pascal
There is a per - son who's not...

Morriss
say a name.

f

ff

(forearm clusters)

3 3 3 3

6

Tape [Start Tape. A fire alarm sounds]

123

Pascal
We have to leave the building. I'm sorry.

Morriss
How convenient.

(brush fingers along strings)

8^{vb} - -

Tape

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 3

(a plastic chain should be placed on pno strings between C4 and C6)

E

Allegro ♩ = 240

127

mf

Tape

132 **accel.**

sfz

8^{vb}

Tape

Freely ♩ = 60
(tap on piano)

136

mp 5

sfz

mp 3

sfz

mp 5

8^{vb}

Tape

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 3

140

Franklin

mf 3

Let's move!

Chorus

pp

(random whispers)

p

oo

(faster and faster)

sfz *p* *cresc.* *sfz*

Tape

144

Chorus

oo

oo

sfz *sfz*

Tape

148 **Moderato** ♩ = 96

Tony

p 3

What the fuck happened to her?

mf

Tape

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 3

151 *mp*

Kansas *No i - dea.*

Tony *mp* What kind of bas-tard would cut her in

Tape

154

Tony half like that?

Tape [Fade/Pause Tape]

F Adagio $\text{♩} = 56$

156 *p*

Morriss Yes, I think some - thing is hap - pen - ing here... I

Chorus *mf* *cup hands over mouth and imitate trombone oo*

sub. p *f* *fp*

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 3

159

Morriss

did - n't _____ at first _____ and I was a ³ lit - tle ³ lax with the sus - pects... _____

Chorus

wa _____

f

161

Morriss

No, I'm not sure... _____ but I think it war - rants _____ some more in -

Chorus

fp oo _____ *fp* oo _____

f *fp*

wa _____

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 3

164

Morriss

vest-i-ga - tion... Like I said ear - li - er, the com - pos - er is act - ing strange

Chorus

oo

wa

f *fp*

167

Morriss

— and he's point - ing me toward an ac - tor, like he knows some - thing

Chorus

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 3

169

Morriss

Yes, _____ we could of - fer him...

Chorus

oo

wa

wa

fp

f

171

Morriss

I thought of that too... what do you think? but...

Chorus

oo

wa

wa

fp

f

fp

f

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 3

G (tap on piano)

173 *mp* 5 *sfz* *mp* 3 3 *sfz* *mp* 5

[Tape resumes]

Tape

177 **Moderato** ♩ = 96 *mf*

Franklin *f* Mags, — you have shit for stealth.

Kansas Don't move bitch.

mf

Tape

179

Claudia I got it... — tak - ing

Franklin Where'd ya get that?

mf

Tape

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 3

181

Claudia

care of some _____ loose ends _____ be - fore dis - band - ing _____ the in - tern - ment sta - tion.

mp

Tape

183

Franklin

You mean you got it _____ when the fuck - ing camp got bombed.

Tape

185

Claudia

I mean what I say.

Franklin

John, Leon - ard,

f *mf*

Tape

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 3

187

Franklin

what do you think we should do with her? You re -

mf

Tape

190

Claudia

May - be.

Franklin

pon - si - ble for that? What a - bout the

Tape

192

Claudia

May - be.

Franklin

nurse at the camp? Ah, fuck you! I have to

mp

Tape

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 3

H Adagio ♩ = 56

195

Franklin

Morriss

Tape

take a piss. Watch her. *mf* Yes, her name is

f *mp*

[Fade/Pause Tape]

197

Morriss

Chorus

Bar - 'bra Ur - ling-ton... with a U

f *fp* *f* *f*

oo — oh

wa oh

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 3

199

Morriss

uh... like curl-ing, _____ with - out the... Yes...

Chorus

oo _____ ah _____ oo _____

wa _____ ah _____ wa _____

202

Morriss

an - y - way, _____ she just seems _____ a lit - tle sus - pic - ious, _____

Chorus

wa _____

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 3

205

Morriss

There was a fire — a - larm — pulled — in the base - ment, —

fp

Chorus

oo

fp

Detailed description: This block contains the musical score for measures 205 and 206. It features three staves: Morriss (bass clef), Chorus (treble clef), and Piano (grand staff). Morriss has lyrics: "There was a fire — a - larm — pulled — in the base - ment, —". Chorus has "oo". Piano has "oo". Dynamics include *fp*. There are trills of 3 notes in Morriss and Piano parts.

207

Morriss

— but that was a false a-larm... — No, I don't think... You're

fp

Chorus

oo

wa

f *fp*

f *fp*

Detailed description: This block contains the musical score for measures 207 and 208. It features three staves: Morriss (bass clef), Chorus (treble clef), and Piano (grand staff). Morriss has lyrics: "— but that was a false a-larm... — No, I don't think... You're". Chorus has "oo". Piano has "wa". Dynamics include *fp*, *f*, and *fp*. There are trills of 3 notes in Morriss and Piano parts.

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 3

210 **meno mosso** ♩ = 60

Morriss
 right, but... ah, yes... An - y - way, I think that af - ter I

Chorus
 oh oo
 oh wa

213

Morriss
 fin - ish my chat with him this eve - 'ning I'll head to Yes...

Chorus
 oo
 wa oo

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 3

I Freely ♩ = 60 (without pulse)

216

Claudia

Morris

Chorus

Glad you could re - join us.

Good-bye.

la la

la la

(tap on piano)

mp 5

sfz

*mp*³ 3

[Tape resumes]

219

Franklin

You, you fuck-ing bitch...

sfz

mp 5

sfz

Tape

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 3

accel.

[While Franklin sings his line, Claudia continues with random yelps of sound, using the same pattern. Once Franklin sings his line, Claudia continues with her second line]

222

Claudia

"You would be kind enough to hand your pistol and rifle over to Jon here. Look, Jon is guarding John, isn't that funny?"

Franklin

pp

This was a trap? —

Chorus

(random whispers) *p* (add occasional moans and screams)

oo *oo*

(faster and faster) *sfz* *sfz*

Tape

226

Claudia

"Of course, how else would I catch my supper?"

Franklin

You fuck - ing bitch, you're a

Chorus

oo

sfz

Tape

[Fade/Pause Tape]

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 3

229 **J** Adagio ♩ = 56

Franklin
can...

Morriss
Sir, I think that is the wrong move... Yes, I un-der-stand...

Chorus
pp (whistle tone) ah... *fp*
f wa... *fp*

231

Morriss
I'm sure he'll be ver - y cap - a - ble fol - low - ing up...

Chorus
fp oo... *fp*
wa... wa... oo...

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 3

234

Morriss

Yes... Right...

Chorus

oh la la

wa oh la la

K Freely ♩ = 60 (without *p*) **Allegro** ♩ = 132

236 (forearm clusters)

sfz *p*

Tape [Tape resumes]

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 3

240 **Freely** ♩ = 60 (without pulse)

Franklin
Where are we?

Kansas
Bud, are you all right?

(forearm clusters)
ffz
6
p (with fingers inside piano on strings)
(mute string with finger)
8vb

Tape

L **Allegro** ♩ = 132

243
Claudia
Let there be light!

f

Tape

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 3

247 *mf*

Claudia *mf*
Like my lit-tle cham-ber?

Franklin *f*
You're fuck-ing in-sane.

sub. p *f*

Tape

251

Claudia
Real-ly, _____ you think

sub. p

Tape

254 *f* **M** **meno mosso** ♩ = 80

Claudia
so? _____ Get them! [Franklin, Tony, and Kansas all try to flee.
Kansas and Tony are caught and butchered]

mp *sub. p*

Tape

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 3

258 **Allegro** ♩ = 132

p *f*

Tape

262 **meno mosso** ♩ = 88 **Allegro** ♩ = 132

p *sub. p*

Tape

267 **meno mosso** ♩ = 96

pp

Tape

272 **Allegro** ♩ = 132

sub. p

Tape

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 3

276 **poco rit.**

Tape

280

Tape

[Morriss continues to try and flee the horrible scene. He moves around slowly, then crosses the invisible divide to where Morriss is on a phone. He reaches out to the figure, but when Morriss turns around he is wearing a nun's habit and has the nose of a pig. Franklin screams and flees. The lights slowly fade out until it is completely dark and silent]

284 **meno mosso** ♩ = 80

Tape

[20" of tape music until final fade out]

Jespersen - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 3

Scene 4

(Franklin, Claudia, Barbara, Pascal)

[Franklin is on the stage, the show ended hours ago and most of the lights are out]

Adagio ♩ = 66

The musical score is set in 4/4 time with a tempo of Adagio (♩ = 66). The key signature has one sharp (F#). The piano accompaniment consists of two staves. The right hand features a complex rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes, often in triplets, with dynamic markings of *pp* and *mp*. The left hand provides a harmonic foundation with chords and occasional triplets. The vocal line for Franklin is written in a soprano clef (C1) with a 7/8 time signature. The lyrics are: "Wait - ing, wait - ing _____ for the mae - stro. Wait - ing. _____ He'll know what to do. _____". The score includes dynamic markings such as *pp* and *mp*, and performance instructions like *8va* (octave up) and *8va* (octave down). Measure numbers 3, 5, and 7 are indicated at the start of their respective systems.

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 4

Franklin

9

8

Wait - ing. I know it was Ton - y who

8^{va}

3

3

7

Franklin

11

8

pulled the fire a - larm. He did it as a warn - ing.

8^{va}

3

3

3

7

Franklin

13

poco rit.

8

May - be he has al - read - y gone to the po -

8^{va}

3

3

3

3

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 4

[Lights up on Claudia inside Pascal's office. She is waiting for him]

15

Claudia *pp* Wait - ing *p* Wait - ing Wait - ing

Franklin lice. To the po - lice. To the po - lice. To the po -

18 **meno mosso** ♩ = 60

Claudia for my love. la la la la la, my

Franklin lice.

21

Claudia love Pas - cal love what's this? *f*

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 4

24 *pp* **A** *freely*

Claudia — what have you done?

Franklin *mp* The cops won't like a lov-er's spat — be-tween — two gays. — I can't go to jail. —

8^{vb}

27 **Adagio** ♩ = 66

Franklin *mf* They'll mur - der me. — *mp* Eith - er

mp *pp*

8^{vb} (D only through mm. 30)

30

Franklin AIDS or pri - son will kill me. I'm a dead man walk - ing —

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 4

33

Franklin

sing-ing my last song to an emp ty stage.

B Moderato ♩ = 102

36

Barbara

[Franklin hears someone approaching and hides.
Barbara and Pascal enter just as he slips out of view]

The mes-sage was good. Mos-cow will

Franklin

8vb-

39

Barbara

get the ra-di-o broad-cast. You have no

Pascal

I'm done! I told you, no more.

(8vb)-

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 4

rit. ----- **meno mosso** ♩ = 90

42

Barbara

choice. They will kill you... and her.

Pascal

Aunt A-ris-a!

(8^{vb})

45

Pascal

No, they can't... I can't let them... I can't let an-y-one hurt

(8^{vb})

49

Claudia

mp

Pas - cal, a spy?

Pascal

Clau - di - a.

mf *p*

(8^{vb})

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 4

53

Claudia

Franklin

What _____ does this mean?

Aunt A - ris - a? _____ What _____

56

Barbara

Franklin

Moderato ♩ = 102

I have been

_____ is Ba - ur talk - ing a - bout? _____

59

Barbara

rit. -----

at this _____ for a long time. _____ I know when to re - lax and when to run. _____

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 4

freely

C Adagio ♩ = 66

[Barbara leaves. Pascal stays, waiting for Franklin. Claudia is figuring out the code] *p*

62

Claudia

Barbara

We need to be care-ful.

A code?

pp *mf*

8^{va}

3

3

8^{vb}

66

Claudia

It's here in his op - er - as.

pp *f*

8^{va}

3

3

68

[Once Barbara is gone, Franklin steps out from behind the curtain, startling Pascal]

Franklin

Pascal

How long have

How long have you been there?

mf

3

3

8^{vb}

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 4

meno mosso ♩ = 60

71

Franklin

you _____ been a trai - tor? _____

Pascal

It's not like that.

74

Pascal

I just am help - ing re - store bal - ance. _____ can't you see that? _____ I just put a

76

Franklin

That's what _____ you think you're

Pascal

mes - sage _____ in my op - er - as. _____ It's not

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 4

78

Franklin
do - ing? Stop - ping a war?

Pascal
bomb codes. It's not bomb codes, just a

80

Claudia
mf
But why

Franklin
Keep - ing the peace? You have a

Pascal
way to keep ten - sions down. I had no

82

Claudia
would he lie? Pas - cal...

Franklin
choice. Turn your - self in. Do what is

Pascal
choice. I know they'd kill her. I had no

The musical score is presented in three systems, each with three staves. The first system (measures 78-79) features Franklin and Pascal. Franklin's vocal line has lyrics 'do - ing?' and 'Stop - ping a war?'. Pascal's vocal line has lyrics 'bomb codes. It's not bomb codes, just a'. The piano accompaniment includes triplets and an 8va marking. The second system (measures 80-81) features Claudia, Franklin, and Pascal. Claudia's vocal line has lyrics 'But why' and a dynamic marking of *mf*. Franklin's vocal line has lyrics 'Keep - ing the peace?' and 'You have a'. Pascal's vocal line has lyrics 'way to keep ten - sions down. I had no'. The piano accompaniment includes triplets and 8va markings. The third system (measures 82-83) features Claudia, Franklin, and Pascal. Claudia's vocal line has lyrics 'would he lie?' and 'Pas - cal...'. Franklin's vocal line has lyrics 'choice. Turn your - self in. Do what is'. Pascal's vocal line has lyrics 'choice. I know they'd kill her. I had no'. The piano accompaniment includes triplets and 8va markings. The time signature changes from 4/4 to 3/4 at measure 82.

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 4

84 *pp* **più mosso** ♩ = 72

Claudia I need to know A trai - tor to our

Franklin right. You have a choice.

Pascal choice. I had no choice.

87

Claudia life, how can I love him? All

91

Claudia on this page in the pitch - es of the line. a

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 4

95
Claudia

mes - sage made of trea - son oh... why Pas -

D Moderato ♩ = 102

98
Claudia

cal?

Franklin

We won't ev - en see them com - ing

100
Franklin

102
Franklin

They'll just show up one morn - ing and you'll have

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 4

(♩=♩) **Adagio** ♩ = 51

104

Claudia *p* It is here _____ in the

Franklin 8 helped them do it. *mp*

Pascal Frank -

106

Claudia op - er - a... _____ and Or - phée Re - dux!

Pascal lin, list - en, there is a good ex - plan - a - tion...

(♩=♩) **Moderato** ♩ = 102

108

Claudia *f* Lies, lies, _____

Franklin 8 Real - ly? _____ Real - ly?

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act II scene 4

110

Claudia

Franklin

and lies!

What the fuck Pas-cal, real-ly?

ff

accel.

112

Claudia

Franklin

Pascal

"The lights."

"What?"

{Claudia's screams grows more and more angry, but the crash of the stage startles her into silence}

attacca

ff (cluster chord)

(ends quickly, imitating the falling set)

Intermezzo

(Chorus)

[With the lights still down, a video is projected on the back of the now empty wall. It is a video of the stage, with paramedics trying to move the carnage while cast members and crew sit by and weep, confusion reigns and everyone looks exhausted. Onstage the fallen set is lit dramatically. The choir is prerecorded and played with the video]

Adagio ♩ = 60

The musical score is written for a choir in 4/4 time, marked Adagio with a tempo of 60 beats per minute. It consists of eight staves. The first four staves are for vocal parts, and the last four are for piano accompaniment. The vocal parts are mostly silent, with some lyrics appearing in the fifth staff. The lyrics are: "Blood..." on the third staff, and "A loud crash..." on the fifth staff. The piano accompaniment is mostly silent, with some notes appearing in the fifth staff. The score is marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic.

(many lines are continuous throughout, so singers should breath when possible and avoid noticeable gaps, unless indicated)

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Intermezzo

4 *p*

Screams... Screams... Screams...

Blood... Blood... Blood...

loud crash... A loud crash... A loud crash... A

Three fin - gers wig - gl - ing, —

p try - ing to grip the shi - ny wood - en

7

Screams... Screams...

Blood... Blood... Blood...

p Lights com - ing to life... Lights com - ing to life...

loud crash... A loud crash... A loud crash... A

floor... Three fin - gers wig - gl - ing, —

p try - ing to grip the shi - ny wood - en

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Intermezzo

10

Screams... Screams... Screams...

Blood... Blood... Blood...

Lights com - ing to life... Lights com - ing to life...

loud crash... A loud crash... A loud crash... A

p Pin-stripes... Pin-stripes...

floor... Three fin - gers wig - gl - ing, —

try - ing to grip the shi - ny wood - en

13

Screams... Screams...

Blood... Blood... Blood...

Lights com - ing to life... Lights com - ing to life...

loud crash...

Pin-stripes... Pin-stripes...

floor... Three fin - gers wig - gl - ing, —

try - ing to grip the shi - ny wood - en

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Intermezzo

16 **A**

Screams... Screams...

p

She stood sob - bing... She stood

Lights com - ing to life... Lights

a sev - ered fin - ger...

Pin - stripes...

floor... Three fin - gers wig - gl - ing...

18

sob - bing... She stood sob - bing... She stood sob - bing...

The sound of moan - ing... The sound of moan - ing... The sound of

com - ing to life...

a sev - ered fin - ger... a sev - ered fin - ger...

Pin - stripes... Pin - stripes...

jag - ged chunks of wood... jag - ged chunks of wood...

try - ing to grip the shi - ny wood - en floor... jag - ged

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Intermezzo

21

She stood sob - bing... She stood sob - bing... She
moan-ing... The sound of moan-ing... The sound of moan-ing... The sound
hea - vy breath - ing... hea - vy
a sev-ered fin - ger... a sev-ered fin - ger... a sev - ered
Pin-stripes...
jag - ged chunks of wood... jag-ged chunks of wood... jag-ged chunks of wood...
chunks of wood... jag - ged

24

stood sob - bing... She stood sob - bing...
of moan-ing... The sound of moan-ing...
breath - ing... hea - vy breath - ing... hea - vy
fin-ger... a sev-ered fin-ger... a sev-ered fin-ger...
Blood... Blood... Blood...
jag - ged chunks of wood... jag - ged chunks of wood... jag - ged chunks of wood...
chunks of wood... jag - ged

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Intermezzo

27

Screams... Screams... Screams... Screams... Screams... Screams...

Blood... Blood...

breath - ing... hea - vy breath - ing... hea - vy

a sev - ered fin - ger... first aid...

Blood... med - ics...

jag - ged chunks of wood... jag - ged chunks of wood... jag - ged chunks of wood...

chunks of wood... A

30

Screams... Screams... Screams... Screams... Screams... Screams...

Blood Blood...

breath - ing... hea - vy breath - ing... hea - vy

first aid... first aid... first aid...

med - ics... med - ics... med - ics...

jag - ged chunks of wood... jag - ged chunks of wood...

loud crash... A loud crash... A loud crash... A

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Intermezzo

33

Screams... Screams... Screams...

Screams... Screams... Screams...

a limp bod - y... a limp bod - y...

breath - ing...

first aid... first aid... first aid...

med - ics... med - ics... med - ics...

a man - gled

loud crash... A loud crash... A loud crash...

Detailed description: This block contains the musical score for measures 33 through 35. It features seven staves. The top two staves are vocal lines with lyrics 'Screams...' repeated. The third staff has lyrics 'a limp bod - y...'. The fourth staff has lyrics 'breath - ing...'. The fifth staff has lyrics 'first aid...'. The sixth staff has lyrics 'med - ics...'. The seventh staff has lyrics 'a man - gled' and 'loud crash... A loud crash... A loud crash...'. The music includes various note values, rests, and dynamic markings.

36

Screams... Screams...

Screams... a wo - man,

a limp bod - y... a limp bod - y...

a wo - man, a wo - man, a wo - man,

first aid... first aid... first aid...

med - ics... med - ics... med - ics...

leg... a man - gled leg... a man - gled leg...

a wo - man, a wo - man,

Detailed description: This block contains the musical score for measures 36 through 38. It features seven staves. The top two staves are vocal lines with lyrics 'Screams...' and 'Screams... a wo - man,'. The third staff has lyrics 'a limp bod - y...'. The fourth staff has lyrics 'a wo - man, a wo - man, a wo - man,'. The fifth staff has lyrics 'first aid...'. The sixth staff has lyrics 'med - ics...'. The seventh staff has lyrics 'leg... a man - gled leg... a man - gled leg...' and 'a wo - man, a wo - man,'. The music includes various note values, rests, and dynamic markings such as 'cresc.'.

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Intermezzo

39

Screams... Screams... Screams...

a wo - man, a wo - man, a wo - man,

cresc.
a limp bod - y... a limp bod - y...

a wo - man, a wo - man, a wo - man,

first aid... first aid... first aid... a wo - man,

a wo - man, a wo - man, a wo - man,

a man - gled leg... a wo - man,

a wo - man, a wo - man, a wo - man,

42

a wo - man, in black, limp - ing a - way...

a wo - man, in black, limp - ing a - way...

a wo - man, in black, limp - ing a - way...

a wo - man, in black, limp - ing a - way...

a wo - man, in black, limp - ing a - way... *mp* a

a wo - man, in black, limp - ing a - way...

a wo - man, in black, limp - ing a - way...

a wo - man, in black, limp - ing a - way...

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Intermezzo

45 *mp* Screams... Screams... Screams...
mp Screams... Screams...
mp Blood... Blood... Blood...
loud crash... a loud crash... a loud crash... a
mp a wo - man, a wo - man,
mp a wo - man, a wo - man,

48 Screams... Screams...
Screams... Screams...
Blood... Blood... Blood...
mp the sound of
loud crash... a loud crash... a loud crash... a
mp the sound of
limp - ing, a wo - man, a wo - man,
limp - ing, a wo - man, a wo - man,

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Intermezzo

51

Screams... Screams... Screams... Screams... Screams... Screams...

Blood... Blood... Blood...

si - rens... the sound of si - rens...
loud crash... a loud crash... a loud crash... a

si - rens... the sound of si - rens...

limp - ing, a wo - man, a wo - man,

limp - ing, a wo - man, a wo - man,

54

Screams...

Blood...

the sound of si - rens... the sound of

loud crash...

the sound of si - rens... the sound of

limp - ing, a wo - man, a wo - man,

limp - ing, a wo - man, a wo - man,

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Intermezzo

57

— a dis - card - ed a

trum - pet... trum - pet... trum - pet... trum - pet...

si - rens... the sound of si - rens...

trum - pet... trum - pet... trum - pet... trum - pet...

si - rens... the sound of si - rens...

limp - ing, a wo - man, a wo - man,

limp - ing, a wo - man, a wo - man,

Detailed description: This block contains the musical score for measures 57 through 60. It features seven staves. The top staff is a grand staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The second staff is a vocal line with lyrics: "a dis - card - ed a". The third staff is a piano accompaniment line with lyrics: "trum - pet... trum - pet... trum - pet... trum - pet...". The fourth staff is a vocal line with lyrics: "si - rens... the sound of si - rens...". The fifth staff is a piano accompaniment line with lyrics: "trum - pet... trum - pet... trum - pet... trum - pet...". The sixth staff is a vocal line with lyrics: "limp - ing, a wo - man, a wo - man,". The seventh staff is a piano accompaniment line with lyrics: "limp - ing, a wo - man, a wo - man,".

60

shat - tered glass... shat - tered glass... shat - tered glass... shat - tered glass...

dis - card - ed a dis - card - ed a dis - card - ed a dis - card - ed a

trum - pet... trum - pet... trum - pet... trum - pet...

the sound of si - rens... the sound of

trum - pet... trum - pet... trum - pet... trum - pet...

the sound of si - rens... the sound of

limp - ing,

limp - ing, Blood...

Detailed description: This block contains the musical score for measures 60 through 63. It features seven staves. The top staff is a grand staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The second staff is a vocal line with lyrics: "shat - tered glass... shat - tered glass... shat - tered glass... shat - tered glass...". The third staff is a vocal line with lyrics: "dis - card - ed a dis - card - ed a dis - card - ed a dis - card - ed a". The fourth staff is a piano accompaniment line with lyrics: "trum - pet... trum - pet... trum - pet... trum - pet...". The fifth staff is a vocal line with lyrics: "the sound of si - rens... the sound of". The sixth staff is a piano accompaniment line with lyrics: "trum - pet... trum - pet... trum - pet... trum - pet...". The seventh staff is a vocal line with lyrics: "limp - ing,". The eighth staff is a piano accompaniment line with lyrics: "limp - ing, Blood...".

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Intermezzo

63

shat - tered glass... shat - tered glass... shat - tered glass... shat - tered glass...

dis - card - ed a dis - card - ed a dis - card - ed a dis - card - ed a

trum - pet... trum - pet... trum - pet... trum - pet...

si - rens... the sound of si - rens...

trum - pet... trum - pet... trum - pet... trum - pet...

si - rens... the sound of si - rens...

a loud crash... a loud crash... a loud crash...

Blood... Blood... Blood...

Detailed description: This block contains the musical score for measures 63 through 65. It features eight staves. The top staff is a vocal line with lyrics 'shat - tered glass...' repeated. The second staff is another vocal line with lyrics 'dis - card - ed a dis - card - ed...'. The third and fourth staves are instrumental, with lyrics 'trum - pet...' and 'si - rens... the sound of si - rens...'. The fifth and sixth staves are instrumental, with lyrics 'trum - pet...' and 'si - rens... the sound of si - rens...'. The seventh and eighth staves are instrumental, with lyrics 'a loud crash...' and 'Blood...'. The music is in a key with one sharp (F#) and a 2/4 time signature.

66

shat - tered glass... shat - tered glass... shat - tered glass... shat - tered glass...

dis - card - ed

trum - pet... trum - pet... trum - pet... trum - pet...

Screams... Screams...

trum - pet... trum - pet... trum - pet... trum - pet...

Screams...

a loud crash... a loud crash... a loud crash...

Blood... Blood... Blood...

Detailed description: This block contains the musical score for measures 66 through 68. It features eight staves. The top staff is a vocal line with lyrics 'shat - tered glass...' repeated. The second staff is a vocal line with lyrics 'dis - card - ed'. The third and fourth staves are instrumental, with lyrics 'trum - pet...' and 'Screams...'. The fifth and sixth staves are instrumental, with lyrics 'trum - pet...' and 'Screams...'. The seventh and eighth staves are instrumental, with lyrics 'a loud crash...' and 'Blood...'. The music is in a key with one sharp (F#) and a 2/4 time signature.

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Intermezzo

69

shat - tered glass... shat - tered glass... shat - tered glass... shat - tered glass...

Screams... Screams... Screams...

oo

Screams... Screams...

trum - pet...

Screams... Screams... Screams...

a loud crash... a loud crash... a loud crash...

Blood Blood...

72

dim.

poco rit.

shat - tered glass... shat - tered glass... shat - tered glass... shat - tered glass...

Screams... Screams...

dim.

Screams... Screams...

dim.

Screams... Screams...

dim.

a loud crash... a loud crash...

dim.

crash crash

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Intermezzo

[Lights and curtain down. End Intermezzo]

75

pp

oo

pp

oo

pp

oo

pp

oo

pp

oo

pp

oo

crash

oo

SONGS FROM BEHIND THE CURTAIN

ACT III

ACT III

Scene 1

(Claudia, Pascal, Morriss, Barbara, Kansas, Nancy, Franklin)

Largo (♩ = 48)

(legato and muddy)

Adagio ♩ = 60

Claudia

It is good to be home. Oh, mir'r you are so

Claudia

dirt-y and dust-y. Has no one been clean-ing you? My on-ly con-fi-dante,

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 1

12
Claudia

a - lone down here while I was ³a - way — sing - ing. — Now —

15
Claudia

— I have re - turned to tell you all my sec - rets. — You are the on - ly one I

18
Claudia

trust. But when you find out your hus - band has com - mit - ted trea - son, you lose a

21
Claudia

lit - tle faith in ev - 'ry - one. — What's that you ask, what did my ³hus - band do?

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 1

A Largo (♩ = 48)
mp

Pascal

24

All the col - ors like ghosts

Pascal

27

they haunt me. I hear their voic - es call

Pascal

29

out. Death draw-ing near.

Pascal

32

His foot - steps ech - o - ing. What have I

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 1

rit. ----- **B** **a tempo**
p

Claudia
Pascal

35

done? (whispered) Here _____
"He's here!"

f (legato and muddy) *p*

accel. ----- **Adagio** ♩ = 66

Claudia

37

the weight of all his lies. What did my hus-band do? Well, _____ he's been

mf *p*

Claudia

40

hid - ing mes - sag - es _____ in his op - 'ras. He al - so was near - ly killed _____ when the

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 1

43

Claudia

stage fell down ³u - pon him. Frank - lin died, Pas - cal lived. I

46

Claudia

wait-ed by his side ³for weeks. I kept mean-ing to ask him a-bout the mes-sag-es,

49

Claudia

C *più mosso* ♩ = 72

what they meant, why he did it...

mp She sat there, watch - ing ov - er and I

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 1

52 rit. -----

Pascal

want - ed so to tell her, but I was too a - fraid.

D Adagio ♩ = 66

55

Claudia

The a - gent came by a few times, to ask ques-tions, and to try and get a

58

Claudia

date. "Do you know of To - ny Bell?" he asked.

Morriss

Do you know of To - ny Bell? ___

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 1

61

Claudia *tr* $\frac{4}{4}$ $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{4}{4}$ $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{4}{4}$ $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{4}{4}$
 "Would you like to get a bite___ to eat?" I told him ev-'ry-thing___ I

Morriss *tr* $\frac{4}{4}$ $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{4}{4}$ $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{4}{4}$ $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{4}{4}$
 Would you like to get a bite___ to eat?

64

Claudia *tr* $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{4}{4}$ $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{4}{4}$ $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{4}{4}$ $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{4}{4}$
 knew a-bout Frank - lin_____ and To - ny._____ He seemed sat - is - fied___ and

67

rit. -----

Claudia *tr* $\frac{4}{4}$ $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{4}{4}$ $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{4}{4}$
 left.

Morriss *tr* $\frac{4}{4}$ $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{4}{4}$ $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{4}{4}$ $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{4}{4}$
 Thank you Clau - di - a, _____ er, Miss - es Ba - ur... _____

p *mf*

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 1

E **Largo** (♩ = 48)
(legato and languid throughout)

Pascal

71 *p* Two sha - dows _____ cling them - selves to me their

74 whis - pers haunt _____ my _____ soul. _____ A - noth - er _____ code _____ they ask _____ of

77 *mf* *p* me. I _____ can - not _____ tell them _____ no. _____ My leg is filled with all their

81 pain, a cry for all _____ I've done,

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 1

84

Pascal

and now they ³ have come back for me. They will not let me

87

F

Nancy

[Offstage] *pp* *p*

oo wa la la la

Kansas

[Offstage] *pp* *p*

oo ah la la la

Pascal

f *pp* *mf*

go... Can you

mp *f* *mf* *mp*

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 1

90

Nancy *mp*
oo ah oh

Kansas *mp*
oo la la la la la

Pascal *f*
hear? They haunt me in my sleep.

92

Nancy *p*
oo la

Kansas *p*
oo la

Pascal
In their guil - ty em - brace - s

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 1

G Adagio $\text{♩} = 60$

95

Claudia

Pascal

Oth - ers had vis - it - ed. Bar - bra, the

I see her,

p

98

Claudia

cos - tume mis - tress, and Kan - sas, the oth - er ten - or, ev - en

101

Claudia

Nan - cy War - ren, that re - port - er who loves Pas - cal. They

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 1

104

Claudia
 all tried _____ their best, "He will get bet ter soon," "If you

Barbara
 He will get bet - ter soon. He will get bet - ter, ver - y

Kansas
 If you

107

Nancy
 I'm Sor - ry, so

Claudia
 need an y thing..." "I'm Sor ry." Re -

Barbara
 soon. He will get bet - ter, ver - y soon. He will get bet - ter soon.

Kansas
 need an - y - thing... If you need _____ an - y -

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 1

110

Nancy
sor - ry. I can't find words to tell you how

Claudia
peat - ing and re-peat - ing all the time, a - gain and a - gain.

Barbara
He will get bet - ter soon. He will get bet - ter, ver - y soon. He will get

Kansas
thing, if you need an - y - thing. If you need an - y -

113

Nancy
sor - ry.

Claudia
Then they start - ed to thin out, and Pas - cal got bet - ter.

Barbara
bet - ter, ver - y soon.

Kansas
thing...

Pascal
p
I see her

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 1

H **meno mosso** (♩ = 54)

116 [Offstage] *p*

Franklin

Morriss

Pascal

Clau-di - a. She sits be - side me and I can't

119 *pp* *mp*

Nancy

Barbara

Franklin

Morriss

Pascal

look at her... The mes-sage - es have tak - en ov - er me. They'll

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 1

rit. ----- **I Largo** (♩ = 48)

121

Nancy
kill her. _____ She will die, they _____ will make

Claudia
_____ She will die.

Barbara
kill her. _____ She will die.

Franklin
_____ oo _____ oo _____ oo _____ Your cries.

Kansas
_____ oo _____

Morriss
oo _____ oo _____ oo _____ oo _____ oo _____
[noticeable gasp]

Pascal
kill her un - less I... I... _____

Piano
mf

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 1

124

Nancy
sure. A pun - ish - ment to you.

Claudia
A pun - ish - ment.

Barbara
A pun - ish - ment.

Franklin
A suf - fer - ing you can - not know. A test - a - ment to what you

Kansas
oo oo ah

Morriss
oo oo ah

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 1

127 *mp* *s* *f*

Nancy
The on-ly way to save her fate... you know just what to do.

Claudia
The on-ly way. You know just what to

Barbara
The on-ly way. You know just what to

Franklin
sowed. You can-not change the path you chose, you can-not change you can-not

Kansas
oo *oo* *oo*

Morriss
oo *oo* *oo*

mp *s*

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 1

130

The musical score consists of eight staves. Nancy's part is in treble clef, starting with a fermata and then singing "The on - ly choice you've ev - er" with a *mf* dynamic. Claudia and Barbara have vocal lines in treble clef with lyrics "do." and "oo", marked *mp* and *p* respectively. Franklin's part is in treble clef with lyrics "grow!" and "She cries," marked *mf* and *p*. Kansas has a vocal line in treble clef with the lyric "ah" and a long note, marked *f* and *oo*. Morriss has a vocal line in bass clef with the lyric "ah" and a long note, marked *f* and *oo*. Pascal's part is in bass clef with lyrics "That's e - nough the voi - ces call out... ___" and "The on - ly choice I've ev - er", marked *f* and *mf*. The piano accompaniment is in grand staff, marked *mf* and *mp*.

Nancy
The on - ly choice you've ev - er

Claudia
do. oo

Barbara
do. oo

Franklin
grow! She cries,

Kansas
ah oo

Morriss
ah oo

Pascal
That's e - nough the voi - ces call out... ___ The on - ly choice I've ev - er

mf *p* *mp* *f* *mf* *mp*

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 1

132

Nancy
had You must keep her safe a - way from

Claudia
her tears will wash your love a - way.

Barbara
her tears will wash your love a - way.

Franklin
her tears will wash your love a - way.

Kansas
la la la la

Morriss
la la la la

Pascal
had I must keep her safe a - way from

f *mp*

Jesperson - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 1

rit. -----

134

Nancy *pp*
bad.

Claudia *pp*
oo

Barbara *pp*
oo

Franklin *pp*
oo

Pascal *pp*
3 Bar-bar-a, 3 ev-en if it's the last thing I do.

p *pp*

Scene 2

(Barbara, Assassin)

[Barbara is standing onstage looking off into the distance, daydreaming. She hums a little of Beethoven's 9th under her breath and suddenly breaks out into a 7/8 pattern. The music starts]

Allegro ♩ = 300

The musical score is divided into five systems. The first system (measures 1-4) is in 7/8 time, marked *mf*. The second system (measures 5-8) continues in 7/8 time. The third system (measures 9-12) changes to 9/8 time. The fourth system (measures 13-17) features a piano part marked *f* and *mp*, and a drum line marked *mf*. The fifth system (measures 18-21) returns to piano accompaniment.

(play piano like a drum) (this line could be performed by Barbara onstage or by a musician in the pit)

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 2

rit.

23

A Adagio ♩ = 69

27

Barbara

30 *mp*

The fall air re - minds me of Swit - zer - land. And the

Barbara

33

mo - ment the la - zy Rhine flows past my mind I

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 2

36
Barbara

hear my child - ren laugh - ing. I see them

39
Barbara

hid - ing un - der the pews while their fath - er re - hears - es the

42
Barbara

choir. — Then I hear the high screams of planes. I don't

45
Barbara

know they are com - ing for me. I can

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 2

48
Barbara

sense the hap-pi-ness of mus-ic soar through my hus-band.

51
Barbara

He looks back at me as the first bomb hits. I can al-most see his smile.

54
Barbara

I can smell my past lin-ger-ing in the fall air,

57
Barbara

and I can taste the fire from which I was born.

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 2

poco accel. -----

Musical score for measures 60-62. The score is in 7/8 time and features a piano accompaniment with a treble and bass clef. The melody is in the treble clef, and the bass line is in the bass clef. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The music consists of eighth and quarter notes.

Allegro ♩ = 300

Musical score for measures 63-66. The score is in 7/8 time and features a piano accompaniment with a treble and bass clef. The melody is in the treble clef, and the bass line is in the bass clef. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The music consists of eighth and quarter notes.

Musical score for measures 67-70. The score is in 7/8 time and features a piano accompaniment with a treble and bass clef. The melody is in the treble clef, and the bass line is in the bass clef. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The music consists of eighth and quarter notes.

[The Assassin enters]

Musical score for measures 71-74. The score is in 9/8 time and features a piano accompaniment with a treble and bass clef. The melody is in the treble clef, and the bass line is in the bass clef. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The music consists of eighth and quarter notes.

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 2

B Freely ♩ = 69

75

Barbara

(if desired, the role of the assassin could be spoken)

I might have a job for you.

Assassin

Why am I here?

78

Assassin

I thought the New York job was my last. Who is it this time?

80

Barbara

It is some - one in the op - er - a com - pan - y.

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 2

82

Barbara

Assassin

No, Pas-cal is im -

Not the com-pos - er? First his fi - an - cee and now...

85

Barbara

por-tant. If we need to teach him a les - son it will be the same as last time.

88

Barbara

Assassin

But this time he will know the truth.

But if he finds out...?

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 2

91

Barbara

He will do what we say.

Assassin

What if he does - n't?

94

Barbara

He will.

mf

pp

poco rit.

97

ppp

Scene 3

(Pascal, Claudia)

[Claudia stands in front of Pascal's red office door. It is shut.
She tries to knock, but steps back, unsure]

Moderato ♩ = 72

8^{va}

Piano introduction in 4/4 time, key of D major. The right hand plays a series of chords: D4, F#4, A4, B4, C#5, D5. The left hand plays a descending eighth-note pattern: D4, C#4, B3, A3, G3, F#3, E3, D3. Dynamics include *mp*, *pp*, and *p*. Fingerings of 5 are indicated for the left hand.

Claudia *mp* Pas - cal, are you there? *p*

Measures 4-6. Claudia's vocal line starts with a whole rest in 4/4, then a half note G4 in 6/4, and a quarter note G4 in 4/4. The piano accompaniment continues with the eighth-note pattern from the introduction, with dynamics *pp* and *p*. Measure 6 has a 6/4 time signature change.

Claudia *mp* I have

Measures 7-9. Claudia's vocal line has a whole rest in 3/4, then a quarter note G4 in 4/4. The piano accompaniment features a 3/4 time signature change in measure 7 and continues with eighth-note patterns. Dynamics include *mp*. Fingerings of 6 and 5 are indicated for the left hand.

Claudia missed you, e - ven though I should loathe you.

Measures 10-12. Claudia's vocal line has a quarter note G4 in 4/4, followed by a half note G4 in 4/4. The piano accompaniment continues with eighth-note patterns. Dynamics include *mp*. Fingerings of 3 and 5 are indicated for the left hand.

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 3

13
Claudia

I have wand-ered from stage to stage, want-ing to share my

16
Claudia

joys and pains, — but I can't trust you an - y - more.

19
Claudia

Why would you do such a thing? — But, ev-en

22
Claudia

worse, why would-n't you tell me the truth? I'm your

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 3

25
Claudia

wife, ev - en if you are a trai - tor.

28
Claudia

A sound? You are in there.

mp *pp* *p*

31
Claudia

Pas - cal, are you there?

mp *p*

34
Claudia

[Pascal opens the door. He looks exhausted] I've missed you too.

Pascal

I've missed you.

rit. *meno mosso* ♩ = 66 [They hug and kiss. It's a deep embrace, but there was some hesitation]

ppp *mp* *pp* *p*

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 3

38 *p* *mp* *p*

Claudia

oo mm

8va

41 **freely** ♩ = 58 *p*

Claudia

mm *mm*

Pascal

mp

My ³ songs. _____

44 **in tempo** ♩ = 66 *mf*

Claudia

mm Too sing of love

pp *mp*

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 3

47

Claudia

a love that can sur - vive such se - crets and lies,

Pascal

mf
To sing of love,

49

Claudia

is a bless - ing one I can't de - ny.

Pascal

a love that can sur - vive my se - crets and lies.

51

Claudia

To sing of love

Pascal

She's a bless - ing that I must pro - tect.

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 3

53

Claudia

a love that can sur - vive such se - crets and lies,

Pascal

To sing of love

55

Claudia

it's a bless - ing some - thing to em - brace.

Pascal

a love that can sur - vive my se - crets and lies.

57 **poco rit.**

Claudia

He's a bless - ing a love I can't de - ny.

Pascal

For her I must try, for her

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 3

59

Claudia

No con-fess-ing, for him I have to try.

Pascal

I would die, for her no more lies.

freely ♩ = 66

62

Claudia

Oh, his arms feel so right. I try to for-get the

64

Claudia

mes-sage that ling-ers in the op-er-a to-night.

Pascal

She

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 3

66

Claudia

Pascal

lies there, in - no - cent, un - touched. by the tra - ge - dy of my

mp *p*

68

Pascal

choi - ces. How do I pro - tect her from the So - vi - ets?

p

70

Claudia

Pascal

Do I sing his mel - o - dy of do I call A - gent Green - berg,

mp

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 3

73

Claudia

and turn him in?

Pascal

I know they would kill her!

p *pp* *8va*

75

Pascal

Look what they did to my leg af - ter Hell - fire. — I am

8va —
8va upper line only

77

Claudia

Do I stand by,

Pascal

stuck in a corn - er — with - out an an - swer. —

8va —
mp *8vb*

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 3

79

Claudia

or do I be-tray my hus-band? I am Cas-sand-ra, the wo-man who

Pascal

I tried to

82

Claudia

knows the fu-ture, and fate it seems has cast the

Pascal

stop, but they, I know they'd kill her. So I am

84

Claudia

role just right. I lie here...

Pascal

stuck in this en-cod-ed char-ade. I lie here...

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 3

rit. -----

87

Claudia

Pascal

and think all that I need to change our lives is...

and think all that I need to change our lives is...

90 **meno mosso** ♩ = 58

Claudia

Pascal

To sing a song, a song of love a song of love and be-

mf

legato

f *mp*

93

Claudia

Pascal

To sing a song, a song of love, a

tray - al. My wife, my

mf

mp

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 3

96

Claudia *mf*
 song of love and be - tray-al. _____ A song that can't, _____

Pascal
 words, _____ a choice. A song that can't, _____ can -

99

Claudia *f*
 can - not be sung, but how to stop it? _____ How to stop it? _____

Pascal *f*
 not be sung, _____ but how to stop it? _____ How to stop it? _____

102

Claudia *mf*
 We can't run, but could we hide? _____ Will he stop? _____ Would I go? _____

Pascal *mf*
 We can run _____ we can't hide. _____ Will she come, _____ It must be. _____

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 3

molto rit.

a tempo ♩ = 58

105 *f* *mp*

Claudia *f* *mp*

Pascal *f* *mp* *f*

We must leave to - geth - er. I must pro - tect her from

107 *f*

Claudia *f*

Pascal *f*

I must pro-tect him from him - self. We could run, just as long as we are to -
them. We could run, we could hide.

110

Claudia *f*

Pascal *f*

geth - er I could ru - in the ar - i - a, all the wrong notes,
I could stop the per - for - mance, run from them.

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 3

rit.
ff

113

Claudia
just one half-step. I still love you oh, I

Pascal
Just as long as we're to - geth - er. All be - cause I

ff

8^{vb}

117

Claudia
still love you.

Pascal
love you. I do.

ff

8^{vb}

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 3

Largo ♩ = 52

120

Claudia

Pascal

But will he still love me?

But will she come with me?

p

n.

mp

pp

p

123

Claudia

[Claudia looks worried, but Pascal runs his hand across her face and she leans in toward him. They kiss as the lights go down.]

n.

pp

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 3

Scene 4

(Claudia, Kansas, Pascal, Barbara, Rebecca, Chorus)

[The stage is set for *Cassandra's Aria*. Claudia is sitting in a bedroom. She starts to hum]

Adagio ♩ = 52 (humming) *p* *mm* *mp*

Claudia

I hear the sounds ____ of your

acc. **Adagio** ♩ = 60

5 Claudia

foot - steps. Not as they are now, but as they will be be -

mf *mp*

6

8 Claudia

[Kansas (Agamemnon) enters]

fore you are slaught - ered. I hear the

f *p*

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 4

poco rit. ----- **A** **a tempo** ♩ = 60

11
 Claudia sounds of your foot-steps fad-ing. _____
 Kansas _____ Your for-tune tell-ing _____ is a -
 8^{va} _____
ppp *f* *mp*

14
 Claudia _____ You can't un-der-stand what you can-not see. _____ To
 Kansas _____ bout as clear as my spit. _____ *hmm* _____
sfz

16
 Claudia me all of time is like a thread I can fol-low _____ in-to the dark-ness of the
 Kansas _____ *hmm* _____ *hmm* _____
p

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 4

Freely

18

Claudia

fu - ture. Where oth - ers can't see I can go.

Kansas

hmm

(offstage, eerily)

pp

oo

pp

oo

pp

oo

pp

oo

Chorus

The musical score is written for Claudia, Kansas, Chorus, and piano. Claudia's part is in treble clef with lyrics. Kansas has a vocal line with a 'hmm' sound effect. The Chorus consists of four staves (soprano, alto, tenor, bass) with 'oo' sound effects. The piano accompaniment is in grand staff. The score starts at measure 18, marked 'Freely'. It features a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The music transitions from 4/4 to 5/4 and back to 4/4. Claudia's lyrics are 'fu - ture. Where oth - ers can't see I can go.' Kansas has a 'hmm' sound effect. The Chorus has 'oo' sound effects. The piano accompaniment includes a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. Performance directions include '(offstage, eerily)' and 'pp' (pianissimo).

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 4

B a tempo ♩ = 60

20

Claudia

And I can tell _____ we are not long for this world.

mf

wa _____

Chorus

mf

wa _____

mf

oo

mf

oo

8va

23

Chorus

wa _____

wa _____

oo

oo

oo

oo

oo

oo

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 4

26

Claudia

mf Just be - cause 1

Kansas

Then why don't you do some-thing to stop it?

29

Claudia

see through the dark does - n't mean I can change what's there.

C Allegro ♩ = 196

32

f

Kansas

E - nough of your ser - pent tongue! Stay

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 4

37
Kansas
still and qui - et. We will soon be din - ing

mp

D Adagio ♩ = 60

42
Claudia
As you wish. His

Kansas
and I don't want you to speak.

3

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 4

46

Claudia

feet have the stench of a thou - sand hard miles, — yet we have been seat - ed, —

pp

Chorus

pp

49

Claudia

rest - ing for most of the jour - ney. — — — — — How can such vile — — — — —

pp

Chorus

pp

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 4

51

Claudia

smells _____ come from feet that are bathed dai - ly by vir - gins?

Chorus

oo.

53

Claudia

Freely

His feet must speak of a black heart? But, should I ex - pect the feet of a mur - der - er to

ah

Chorus

ah

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 4

56

Claudia

smell _____ like ros - es? _____

oo oh

oo oh

8va

Largo ♩ = 48

58

Claudia

mp I'd like a few words more, a kind of dirge, _____

(legato and muddy)

p _____ *mf*

60

Claudia

pp _____ *mp* _____ *p* _____ *mm* _____

a sent - i - ment. _____

p _____ *mf* _____ *pp*

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 4

E Moderato ♩ = 80

63

Claudia

"And that, I think breaks the heart of both men and gods."

Kansas

(yawning) *p* Ah, ah... *mf* It's good to be

67

Kansas

home. Yes, good.

71

Kansas

I've missed my king - dom — and all of my slaves. —

74

Kansas

la la la la la la la — la la la la la la la —

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 4

77 **Freely**

Claudia His song, it is a

Kansas *ppp*
la la la la la la la la la la la

p *ppp*

80 **F Freely**

Claudia sad song tru - ly. The king sings of all he has, —

82

Claudia but in truth it is noth - ing, for he has lost it all with his choi - ces.

p

84 **G Moderato** ♩ = 72

Pascal *p*
I see her look - ing out at me. Her eyes shine like they

pp

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 4

88 *mp*

Claudia I see Pas - cal in the

Pascal used to when we first were mar - ried. *mp* I can feel the

92

Claudia first row, he sits and does - n't know what he

Pascal love be - hind the cur - tain. I will tell her ev - 'ry - thing.

p

95

Claudia still has. He is a king that's in

Pascal I will tell her ev - 'ry - thing. I will tell her ev - 'ry - thing.

mp

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 4

98 *mf*

Claudia
dan - ger ³ of be - ing thrown un - der his own throne. —

Pascal
I — will give her the choice I

102 *f* *rit.*

Claudia
I will tell him ev-'ry - thing. — I know. —

Pascal
did not — have. I will tell her ev-'ry - thing — to -

106 *meno mosso con rubato* ♩ = 60 *mf*

Claudia
Al - most

Barbara
mp
It is — al - most time for the end. Noth - ing will stop ³ us now! —

Pascal
night.

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 4

109 **Freely**

Claudia
time to sing.

Pascal
mp
It is near-ing the end. Clau-di - a will be en - ter - ing...

111 **H Adagio** ♩ = 60

Claudia
I smell the roast-ed flesh of the guil - ty. Cly - tem - nes - tra, — you know that

Pascal
mf
now.

114

Claudia
har - mon - y does not stand. — En - tro - py — is the nat - ur - al state, and the

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 4

a tempo ♩ = 60

116

Rebecca

Claudia

beau - ty of hu - man right - eous - ness is not the same!

But,

mf *f* *mf*

119

Rebecca

where is my, where is my hus - band? He must join us first.

121 **Freely**

Claudia

He will be in soon. This will end as you have planned.

pp

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 4

124 **a tempo** ♩ = 60

Rebecca

You speak like an or-a-cle, — yet, you are not a-fraid? —

I Moderato ♩ = 72

127

Pascal

Ag - a - mem - non is next to die. — And Clau di a? —

130

Claudia

My love,

Pascal

How will I ex - plain my de - cep - tion? —

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 4

133

Claudia

will you for - give me?

136

Claudia

mf I do this for us, not for now, but the

139

Claudia

f fu - ture, *mf* for the fu - ture.

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 4

J Allegro ♩ = 126 *mf*

Rebecca
 You think you'll be spared?

Kansas
 Spared? Are

mp

Rebecca

Kansas
 we hav - ing ribs?

mf

sfz

Rebecca
 feast so large you'll nev - er eat a - gain! Now tell me hus - band,

sfz

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 4

152

Rebecca

what is your fav - 'rite meat?

mf

155

Rebecca

Fun-ny, I thought you'd be par - tial to deer.

Kansas

"Why, that's easy,
any meat that's in
my mouth."

a tempo ♩ = 126

sfz *mf*

158

Kansas

Why would you say that?

sfz *sfz* *mf* *f*

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 4

K Freely

161 *mp* *f*

Claudia Don't an-swer, you know it's a trap!

sfz *pp* *oo* *pp*

yi yi yi yi

Chorus why, why, why, why, why, why, why, why

pp

why, why, why, why, why...

mf *sfz* *sfz* *sfz* *sfz*

163 **a tempo** ♩ = 126 **Freely**

Rebecca Did - n't you sac - ri - fice a deer as tri-bute to Ar - te-mis?

mp

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 4

a tempo ♩ = 126

166 *mf*

Kansas

Why, yes...

mf

f

mp

a tempo ♩ = 126

169

Rebecca

Then you will be hap - py —

Kansas

mp

I did.

mp

p

3

8^{vb}-----

172

Rebecca

I have the same meat. —

3

(8^{vb})-----

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 4

L Freely

175

Claudia

Flesh of my flesh they'll say

Kansas

My sto-mach's not in the mood.

Chorus

yi yi

oo oo

why, why, why, why, why, why, why, why, why

sfz *mf* *mf* *mf* *mf*

(8th)

178

Rebecca

Just a bite?

Claudia

in a thou-sand years.

Chorus

yi yi

oo oo

why, why, why, why, why, why, why, why, why...

pp *mp*

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 4

181 *f*

Kansas

No! Not

sfz *mf*

184 **M** Freely

Claudia

She knows the scent re -

Kansas

ev - en a bite.

Chorus

yi yi

oo oo

why, why, why, why, why, why, why, why, why -

sfz *pp* *pp* *mf* *sfz*

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 4

a tempo ♩ = 126

186

Claudia
minds you of her.

Kansas
No! I will not eat it.

yi yi

oo oo

why, why, why, why, why, why, why, why, why...

pp

sfz *sfz* *sfz* *sfz* *mf*

188

Rebecca
Just like I nev - er will see my daugh - ter a -

Kansas
Nev - er a - gain.

f *mf*

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 4

191 *with a low-pitched ferocity*

Rebecca

gain. _____

Mur - der - er!

195 **N** **Moderato** ♩ = 80

Kansas

I had no choice, _____ the

199 **poco accel.**

Kansas

gods de - mand - ed it. _____

202 **Allegro** ♩ = 126

Rebecca

Did ___ they? ___

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 4

Freely

205

Rebecca

You mur - dered our daugh - ter. Do you de - ny this?

Moderato ♩ = 80

208

Rebecca

Kansas

I do not. I made a choice;

poco rit. ----- **a tempo**

212

Rebecca

Then I too am left with no choice! —

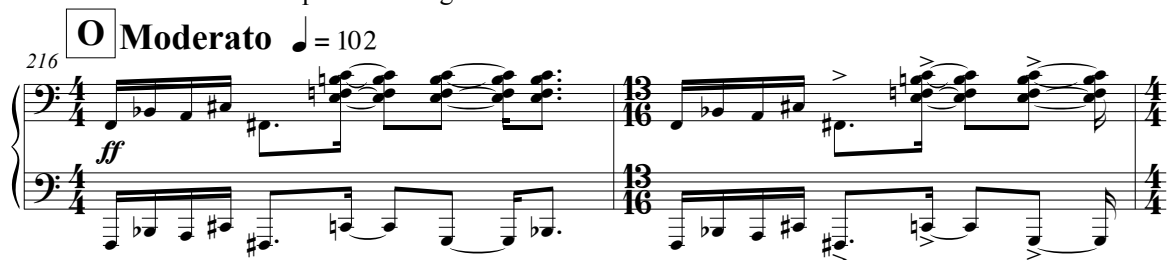
Kansas

I had no oth - er choice to...

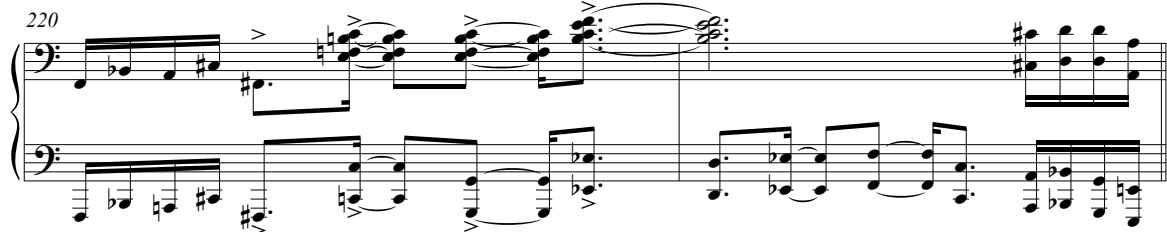
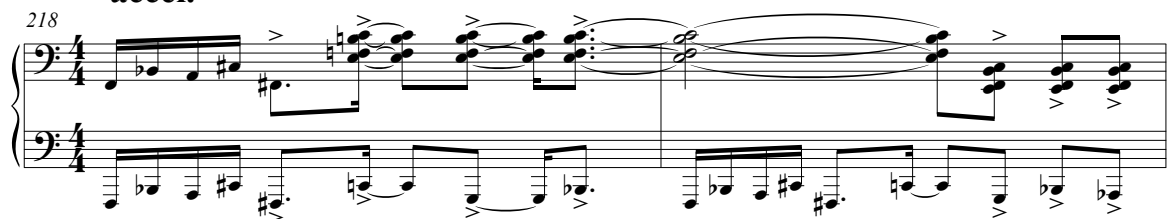
(silently depress all keys below) (strum fingers on strings inside piano)

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 4

O Moderato ♩ = 102



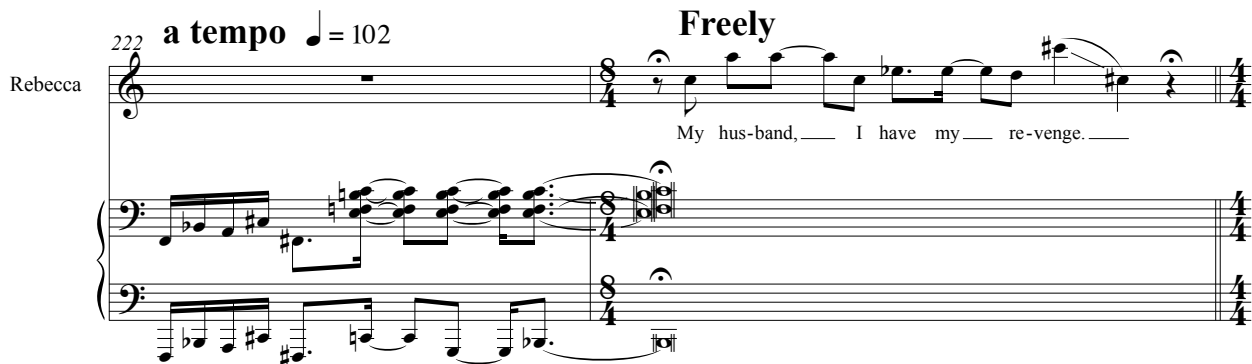
accel.



Rebecca

a tempo ♩ = 102

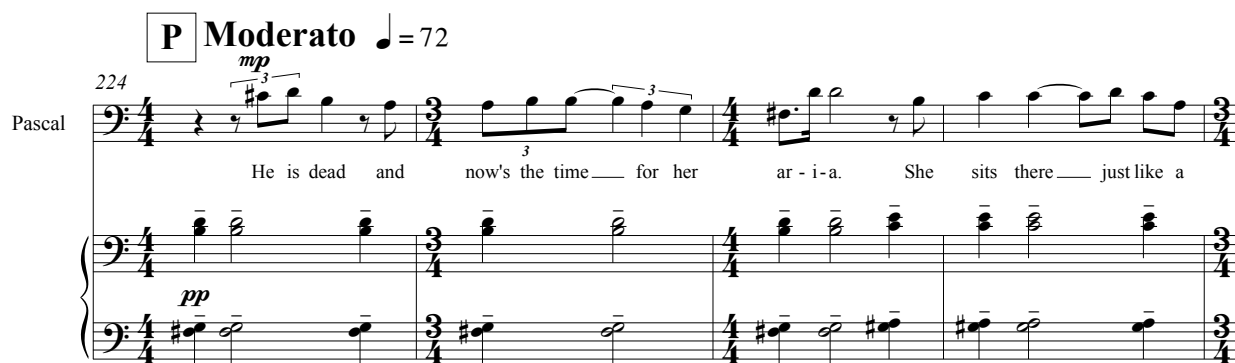
Freely



My hus-band, I have my re-venge.

P Moderato ♩ = 72

Pascal



He is dead and now's the time for her ar-i-a. She sits there just like a

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 4

228

Barbara

Pascal

Al-most time, al-most time

deer wait - ing to be slaugh - tered. She sits there... I've

231

Rebecca

Barbara

Pascal

You stand there un - a - fraid.

to sing the last song.

brought her to die.

Q

sfz *mp*

234

Rebecca

Claudia

Do you have noth - ing to live for?

You have killed

Freely

p *f* *p*

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 4

237

Rebecca

Claudia

him _____ and will now kill me.

"Tell me prophet, will I be successful?"

ppp

mf

240

Claudia

No man is ev - er suc - cess - ful _____ for ev - 'ry man dies.

pp

242

Rebecca

Claudia

Suc - cess, like life is rel - a - tive.

You speak in non - sense and

Moderato ♩ = 80

mf

mp

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 4

244

Rebecca
sup - po - si - tion. —

Claudia
You'll be suc - cess - ful in kill - ing me, — but

rit.----- **Freely**

247

Rebecca
By who?

Claudia
you too — will die. By your ac - tions.

R Adagio ♩ = 52

250

Claudia
8va — — — — — *hmm* — — — — — I'd — like a

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 4

253

Claudia *mp*
 few words more, a kind of dirge...
 3

Barbara *mf*
 The ar - i-a!

Pascal *mp*
 It is time. It will soon be o-ver...
 3

256

Pascal

S Adagio ♩ = 52

260

Claudia *p*
 Hands... tell... fate... life.. Des-tin-y. Love. ...
 (slowly lift sustain pedal as the previous chord fades)

264

Claudia
 Your hands tell the tale... Your hands tell the tale... tell how fate works.

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 4

268

Claudia

— Fate Fate will be — the ru - ler — the ru - ler of your

272

Claudia

world ru - ler of you ru - ler of your world

275

Claudia

speak. Fate will be — the ru - ler of

Chorus

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 4

278

Claudia

your world ah I see the

pp *ppp*

oo oo

pp *ppp*

oo oo

pp *ppp*

oo oo

281

Claudia

rise and fall of na-tions, the ash-es and dung from which the great lies of time are sprung.

pp *ppp*

oo oo

pp *ppp*

oo oo

pp *ppp*

oo oo

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 4

284 *spoken slowly, mysteriously* **T Largo** ♩ = 56

Claudia

"The end of our world is near, but not in the way you understand." I see a time ___ when thoughts ___ can

delicate and sustained throughout

pp

288

Claudia

kill and will en-slave ___ more ___ than ___ peo-ple. When gen-o-cide ___ and hate ___ fill the

sim.

290

Claudia

air, a time to kill ___ with steel ___ hands.

292

Claudia

I see a time ___ of in-e-qual-i - ty and hun-gry mouths ___ the weak ___ and for-

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 4

294

Claudia

got - ten and those that have won't help those who have not. A bloat-ed world ___ that's lost its

296 $\text{♩} = 56$

Rebecca

mf **poco accel.** -----

Tell me. ___ Tell me. ___

Claudia

mf *f*

cen - ter. ___ I see a red haze like a mist of blood ___

mf *f*

300 **Adagio** $\text{♩} = 66$ **accel.** -----

Rebecca

f

What? Why? How?

Claudia

I taste it... it haunts me... in - fects my

f *ff*

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 4

303 **U** **più mosso** ♩ = 80

Rebecca
To kill, I

Claudia
soul...

Barbara
mf
Now the mes - sage.

Pascal
mf
Now the mes - sage.

mp Sac - ri - fice. Kill the fu - ture. *mp*

mp Sac - ri - fice. Kill the fu - ture. *mp*

mp Sac - ri - fice. Kill the fu - ture. *mp*

mp Sac - ri - fice. Kill the fu - ture. *mp*

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 4

306

Rebecca
must be - come

Claudia
I see the frost at the end of the world! I see the cur-tain

Barbara
Sing to the end.

Pascal
Sing to the end.

Chorus
Stop all the lies and the pain. oo

f

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 4

310 **poco accel.** ----- *cresc.*

Rebecca
a kill - er. My

Claudia
block out the light of the sun! *ff* All will hap - pen *cresc.*

Barbara
to the end. The End.

Pascal
to the end.

mf *f*
block out the light of the sun. Oh the

mf *f*
block out the light of the sun. Oh the

mf *f*
8 block out the light of the sun. Oh the

mf *f*
block out the light of the sun. Oh the

mf *cresc.*

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 4

3/3

Rebecca
dag - ger will kill you, a for - tune won't

Claudia
fate de - crees it. All is fore - told can't be - lieve it.

Barbara
The End. The End. The End.

Pascal
The End. The End. The End.

pain it cries and dies but

Chorus
pain it cries and dies but

pain it cries and dies but

pain it cries and dies but

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Act III scene 4

316

Rebecca
save you. It's done. *ff*

Claudia
trust my mes - sage it's on - ly a mat - ter of time! *fff*

Barbara
The End. The End. No! *ff*

Pascal
The End. The End. No! *ff*

Chorus
all are all the slaves of time.

all are all the slaves of time.

all are all the slaves of time.

all are all the slaves of time.

fff *f*

[Clytemnestra (Rebecca) stabs Cassandra (Claudia) as she finishes the high note. She dies and the curtain falls. Everyone erupts into applause.]

Epilogue

(Pascal, Claudia, Barbara, Assassin)

freely

The musical score is written on two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and the lower staff is in bass clef. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The music begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic and a piano (*pp*) dynamic. The melody in the treble staff starts with a whole note chord (B-flat, D, F) and then moves through a series of notes: B-flat, D, F, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, A. The bass line starts with a whole note chord (B-flat, D, F) and then moves through a series of notes: B-flat, D, F, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, A. The final note in the treble staff is a high A note.

(Sustain the first chord for an extended amount of time, then gradually play through the pitches notated. If the last pitch is reached before the portion of the scene is performed, start from the first pitch again, trying to reach the last pitch as the section closes.)

PASCAL

My love, what's wrong. You did so well, but...there is something wrong, isn't there? Please, talk to me. Your final note...the high A...I'm trying to understand, but you just don't know how important that note was...I mean, I must tell you. Why?

[She throws her fists into his chest and starts sobbing.]

CLAUDIA

Because I love you, you bastard. I love you and I couldn't do it.

PASCAL

Then we must leave. You don't know what I'm talking about, but you have to trust me. Claudia, do you trust me? They will know that something is wrong. They might already know something is wrong. They will kill you.

CLAUDIA

But I changed the message.

PASCAL

What? You know about the message?

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Epilogue

A

f *pp*

(Employ the same technique as before, but this time if the progression is started again, repeat the same notes, treating one as a grace note to the second. This should prepare the dyads in the concluding section.)

CLAUDIA

Yes. I found the sheets on your desk. It was the night of the accident. I have tried to tell you a thousand times, but I didn't know why you did it.

PASCAL

I tried to protect you from that, but they threatened you and I didn't know what... I wanted to take you and run, but I didn't know if you'd come with me. Now we don't have any other choice. I'm sorry, I'm so, so sorry. It's my fault, and you shouldn't be punished, but now there is no other possibility...we have to...

CLAUDIA

Then yes, I will go with you, but we must leave. Now.

Jespersion - Songs from Behind the Curtain - Epilogue

B

(Only perform this set once, slowing down as the progression nears an end.)

PASCAL

But they'll be after us. Barbara won't be able to protect us.

CLAUDIA

What does she have to do with it?

PASCAL

It's a long story and goes all the way back to my relatives in Switzerland.

CLAUDIA

We can make a tape and send it to the FBI agent. I have the camera in my dressing room.
But is there time?

PASCAL

I don't know, but the truth will finally be told. Together we can make it, together we are strong
enough. Claudia... Through the door, follow me. Don't look back.

CLAUDIA

Pascal, I love you.

PASCAL

I know.

C **Largo** ♩ = 46

(Begin this as Pascal and Claudia leave through the door. Make the music labored as if it were difficult to produce.)

LIBRETTO

PROLOGUE

The stage is empty. A video camera is set up on a tripod, attached to a television. The music starts and a video begins to play.

CLAUDIA *(in the video, spoken)*

Is it on? Why are we doing this again?

PASCAL *(in the video, spoken)*

It's on...

The camera is moved and PASCAL BAUR comes into view, he is wearing a tuxedo and looks worried.

My name is Pascal Baur and I don't have much time. I am the musical director for the Hartford Opera Company, a composer, and unfortunately, a Soviet spy. I didn't intend to do what I did, but so much of it was out of my control. My father and Mother were both born and raised in Schaffhausen, Switzerland. They emigrated to the US early during the second world war. Some of my family remained in Switzerland, and my uncle, aunt, and cousins were all killed during the US bombing of 1944. I was born a year later and was named after my deceased uncle. The story should have ended there, except that my aunt survived the bombing, and her grief and anger toward America boiled into a seething rage. She was recruited in the 1950s by the Soviets and sent to America. It was not a coincidence that I met her upon winning the Hartford Opera Company position. She had entrenched herself as the costume mistress and immediately recruited me to help her encode messages into the productions. My fiancée, Diane, had been murdered, and she used my own grief to twist my beliefs and my loyalties. I developed an ambivalence toward this country. It was shortly after writing my first opera, when I met Claudia and everything...

There is a commotion behind the camera, Baur pauses mid-sentence, looks at the camera, worried. The camera topples over and three sets of rush through. The camera remains on its side, the screen empty. The empty shot lingers and fades, very slowly, as the music builds.

ACT I

SCENE 1

Lights up, but not theatrically, as if the stage is being used for rehearsal. The stage is covered in rubble, but not from a bombing, but rather the scattered debris of a rehearsal stage. A few men are wandering about, and a young man is sweeping up piles of dust in the corner. FRANKLIN PETTRICIONE walks on from right, a script in his hand. Two men follow him with a table that has a violin resting on top of it. More men bring out an upright piano and place it toward the front left of the stage. More people wander through, including a man who jumps off the stage into the audience and runs out the back. As he goes through the back door he pushes by NANCY WARREN, who is wandering up toward the stage. She climbs up and looks around, interested. She notices Franklin and waves.

NANCY

Mr. Pettricione, so good to see you.

FRANKLIN

Nancy, so you're back in Hartford?

NANCY

Yes, I'm here to cover Maestro Baur's latest opera, *Orphée Redux*. I hear you are wonderful as Orpheus.

FRANKLIN

You are too kind. It is a great role. A great opera. It will be the best of 1985.

NANCY

And Rebecca Olundsen as Eurydice, marvelous! I even hear the new, young mezzo is quite capable, *she winks at Franklin*, among other...

Franklin laughs uncomfortably. He looks down at his watch and motions to Nancy.

FRANKLIN:

I'm afraid I must be going. I still have some passages. I'll see you...

Franklin leaves. Nancy looks around, wandering toward the piano, plunking a few notes. It is the beginning of some famous work. From the direction that Franklin left comes REBECCA OLUNDSEN. She seems to be looking for someone. Nancy spots here and raises her hand in recognition.

NANCY

Hello, Miss Olundsen, hello, it's me, Nancy Warren, from the Hartford Courant.

Rebecca turns to Nancy and bears down on her. She is quite intimidating.

REBECCA

My TEA! I must have it. Who are you? Get me my tea, now! *Nancy looks at Rebecca, terrified.* Where is my tea. Claudia will get it for me. Claudia! CLAUDIA!

Rebecca exits. Even from offstage you can hear her high-pitched calls for "Claudia".

NANCY *to herself, timidly*

What, what a horrible person. All the stories true. How Pascal can put up with her I don't know.

Nancy wanders offstage looking for people to interview. A few seconds later PASCAL BAUR and CLAUDIA INGRASSIA sneak onto the stage.

CLAUDIA

Oh, Pascal, are we alone?

PASCAL

Claudia, my darling Claudia, I think so.

CLAUDIA

Tell me again.

PASCAL

"I love you," that is what I said. I meant it, now you're crying, do you love me? Claudia, my love, you make me happy. Happiness like rays of sun. Since her death I've been withdrawn. I will tell you everything. I will give you my word, I love you. I will tell you everything, in time. I will give you all my soul, in time.

CLAUDIA

I love you too, yes I do. But, you must tell me, do you still love her? They whisper, "Stop, he has lost her, this can't be love." Tell me the truth. I can't be a second choice for her. I can't love you partially, but wholly

Rebecca can be heard from offstage. Pascal and Claudia quickly step away from each other. Rebecca enters and realizes that she has finally found Claudia.

REBECCA

MY TEA! Oh...Claudia! I have been looking for you. You seemed to completely disappear! Would you be a dear and go get me some tea? *She does not wait for Claudia to respond.*

Claudia stands and looks to the audience.

CLAUDIA

It is always a thing with her, these games she plays. I just don't want to cause problems or conflicts or strife. I just want to be here, singing, and... *She looks at Pascal.* Loving...

Claudia leaves. Pascal steps to the side for his aria.

PASCAL

A false scene of false emotions. They sing for me, but they don't know what I've done. Held hostage by unseen forces. Soviets!

As Pascal is singing, he is looking around. There are many people walking through, doing their work, and he suspects that any and all of them are Soviet spies.

Their words infect my music. But, now there's Claudia, and I can't let them...

Claudia returns with tea. She walks over to Rebecca and hands it to her. Rebecca lifts the cup to her lips and takes a sip. She spits it out in anger and throws the remainder of the cup onto Claudia's white sweater.

REBECCA

Cold! The tea is cold, what are you trying to do? Is there milk in it? How absurd. You ruthless bitch!

Claudia is in shock and begins to cry. She rushes off stage. Baur watches, his face stunned in disbelief. Rebecca seems to smile, watching Claudia leave. She looks over at Franklin.

PASCAL

Pascal looks around, helpless. Claudia has run off and now Rebecca and Franklin have left as well. The lights are low and a spotlight lights up a lone woman standing near the wings. It is DIANE. Pascal reaches out as if he could bring her back to him.

Diane! My muse, you don't know how I have missed you. The three years have felt like three hundred! I have tried to live, but since your death the quicksand of apathy has grabbed hold. And now I have found someone, someone to pull me from the void, but even she makes me feel guilty about you. Oh, how can I love you both? Can I love Claudia though I still hold you in my heart? Speak! Absolve me of my crimes of my guilt. I ask you Diane, to call out to me, and give me a sign...

Diane disappears into the darkness. Pascal has sat back down at the piano bench and is slowly playing two chords, both dissonant and mournful. As the lights slowly go back up and stagehands wander by the wings, Nancy Warren slowly makes her way in. She approaches Pascal slowly, almost motherly.

NANCY

Pascal, it's so good to see you.

PASCAL

Nancy, how are you? It has been years.

NANCY

Yes, and now I'm here to do an article on your opera.

PASCAL

I am glad to hear it. How many years has it been?

NANCY

Too many. As least more than three.

At the mention of three years, Pascal turns to the side, tormented again by the thought of Diane.

PASCAL

Three years, oh guilt, you are cunning. Why must you torture me through meaningless conduits? *He turns back toward Nancy.* It has been far too long, and we have so much to remember.

NANCY

Let me tell you what I want to write about, it's...

BARBARA URLINGTON enters. She stands awkwardly nearby waiting for Pascal to finish.

PASCAL

I'm sorry Nancy, but I need to speak with Barbara about the costumes tonight.

BARBARA

We need to talk the costumes of the show.

PASCAL

I apologize. Nancy, it was nice to see you and we will talk more later.

NANCY

Pascal, it is a pleasure to see you again.

Nancy leaves and Barbara turns to Pascal.

BARBARA

There is some problems with the message.

PASCAL

Shh! Not here, not now. Claudia will be here soon. We will talk later.

BARBARA

Yes we will. The code must be sent through the opera.

Barbara leaves. Pascal watches her and looks slightly frightened. He leaves in the opposite direction. LIGHTS DOWN.

SCENE 2

The stage is clear and dark. Claudia comes rushing in, her shirt changed. She looks around for Pascal, but he is not yet there. She looks relieved, and wanders to the edge of the stage, sitting down, her legs dangling over the edge. The stage stays dark and she begins to sing.

CLAUDIA

Cold Tea! She ruins my shirt over tea that was not cold. Bold Me! I still shrink from her screams, afraid as the first day. She is the famous face from my record sleeves, and I find myself worshipping my idol who has long since wilted toward the ground. My voice! I must learn to be assertive, to demand respect. A choice! Pascal loves me, he loves me, but he always will love her. Diane, who has become an impossible woman to follow. He still worries that to love me means to not love her. Love me! Here, now. Pascal won't even stand up to Rebecca... Love me, I just need him to hold me and...

The lights come up. Pascal enters, looking for Claudia.

PASCAL

Where have you been? We were supposed to meet.

CLAUDIA

Why didn't you stop her?

PASCAL

I didn't want to appear to be playing favorites.

CLAUDIA

So I am punished?

PASCAL

I'm sorry you feel that way...

Claudia reaches out and wraps her arms around him. He smells her hair and thinks through the next logical step. Pascal Baur is nothing if not logical.

CLAUDIA

Pascal, tell me you love me.

She is holding him tight, and he looks away for a second then focuses into her eyes. His gaze is steady and he is holding her face in his hands.

PASCAL

Of course I do.

CLAUDIA

I sometimes feel like I am your second choice. Just something Rebecca said. She just wanted to insult me, but something about it stuck with me and made me feel... I can usually shrug her off, but she kept pushing and pushing and oh, she made me feel like nothing.

PASCAL

What was she saying? What did she tell you?

Claudia takes a step away, as if ashamed to be speaking her name.

CLAUDIA

She was talking about Diane. How she died in a robbery; and that you are now just using me.

PASCAL

Don't listen to that woman. Her star is fading fast on the stage and she's trying hard to drag anyone down with her. I have not told you about Diane because I thought you wouldn't want to hear about her.

CLAUDIA

Do you love her?

PASCAL

Yes, but she died a long time ago.

CLAUDIA

Only three years...

PASCAL

But time grew slower after she died. I didn't feel like things got back to normal speed until I met you. And then there was a day, just like any other, when I woke up and felt the sorrow wash through my soul and then I knew I was no longer a pris'ner and my prison was gone and now I see. I can't say I don't still love Diane, but I also love you. Now I ask you please, can you still love me? I can love you too wait and see.

CLAUDIA

I can see the love for her in your eyes. I see it now as you gaze into my eyes. I can love you too. I can love you too wait and see.

Claudia has started crying, and Baur is afraid she is disappointed in him. He cowers back but she instead embraces him again, holding him and rocking him like a child.

PASCAL

Claudia, I'm sorry I didn't know how to do...

CLAUDIA

Pascal? You can stay...

PASCAL

But I have to leave, it's... You know I love you.

CLAUDIA

I do, I love you.

They embrace and hold each other tight. The lights fade out on them and up on Franklin Pettricone in his dressing room.

FRANKLIN

The story of my life held in place by Kodak ink and paper...and tape. Here is my first recital at Carnegie Hall; my first appearance at the Met. And this tattered picture of two smiling men is from the wedding where Tony and I met. He worked on Broadway, but in advertising...

There is a knock at his dressing room door. Franklin stops in mid-sentence and rises to open it. On the other side of the door is a smaller man with black hair that is parted straight down the middle. It is TONY BELL.

TONY (*spoken*)

I'm sorry sir, but I'm looking for Franklin Pettricone, the famous male tenor and all around sex god.

Franklin reaches out and grabs his face, pulling it close to him. They don't kiss but touch heads together.

FRANKLIN

Get in here.

Tony enters and Franklin shuts the door. Pascal walks by as the door is closing.

PASCAL

Love, love. I've seen it before. I've felt it ruin my life. I lost my love, Diane, and my world went asunder. I had nothing left in my life. That's when she came to me. "Put a message in your opera," she said, "and we will kill the man who murdered Diane, the one the police let go." My anger was overflowing and I agreed. I wanted him to feel my pain, feel my loss. I am not a communist, just a man with nothing left...

Inside the dressing room, oblivious to Pascal. Franklin and Tony are kissing and singing.

FRANKLIN and TONY

My eyes and ears constantly speak of you/What you do to them sends shivers through my body

PASCAL

But now my heart is not so frozen.

FRANKLIN and TONY

I am nothing but half of my senses/And they do nothing but speak of you.

PASCAL

I can feel love growing and growing and what it finds it loathes. "Why?" it asks, "Why do you betray your country? Why do you lie to yourself? Why?" My life was empty, but now it's full. Claudia! Claudia! If this is true you will be the one who saves me.

FRANKLIN and TONY

Why? If there were one thing I could not live without/It would not be my eyes my ears or my heart/I could not live without the soft centurions that are my lips/My lips who now say no one but you.

Pascal moves on down the hall. Inside the dressing room, Franklin and Tony are asleep. Pascal walks through the empty hall. He hears voices on the other side of a partition and sneaks up to listen. Nancy Warren is talking with Claudia and their conversation is growing heated.

PASCAL

Claudia, Claudia! I must find my love where can she be? Waiting for the performance, her perfect smile calls to me. I hear her with Nancy. But, she doesn't seem too happy. And what is it that Nancy has said? It sounded like Diane what is it she's done? A closer listen...

NANCY

I knew them years ago. I remember hearing of her murder, and how they caught the man, but were unable to charge him with the crime.

Claudia and Nancy begin a duet.

CLAUDIA

Pascal never told me... Pascal loves me this I know. He loves me! I can prove it. Pascal loves me, yes, he loves me. He will tell me. I can prove it.

NANCY

He loved her that is sure. Would he do the same for you? But Diane was true love you are just a flavor, he'll love me. Pascal loves me, yes, he loves me. He will tell me.

Pascal is worried for Claudia, stands, and comes around the partition. The two women are facing each other like gunfighters ready to battle.

NANCY

Pascal!

CLAUDIA

Are you here to see me?

NANCY

Or are you here to see me?

CLAUDIA and NANCY

Or me? He's here for me, not here for her. He's here for me, Pascal loves me.

Pascal retreats a little, worried at the looks the two women are giving him. He almost feels a little in danger.

PASCAL

Nancy I am sorry, but I must speak with Claudia.

NANCY

I need you...for my story.

PASCAL

I'll speak with you after the opera performance.

NANCY

I'm sorry it must be like this...

Claudia is standing there about ready to cry. Pascal notices and bows slightly to Nancy, hoping she will hasten her departure. She seems to understand and walks away, looking back near the exit to see if they are already embracing. They are not.

CLAUDIA

Oh, my Pascal, my love. I'll find a way to show him my love.

PASCAL

Claudia, Claudia!

NANCY

He'll never see my love...He will never, never see me...

PASCAL and CLAUDIA

He/She will know it! All my love for him/her!

Nancy has finally left and Pascal leans in close Claudia. He seems to be unsure how to continue, but finally drops to a knee and looks up at her.

PASCAL

I know now that I love you, and I want you to marry me.

PASCAL

Claudia, to spend my life with you. To give my joy to you. To give all my love to you. I can love you. I can love you both; Claudia, we belong together. Is your hesitance because you sense my secrets? Let us forget the past, just know I love you.

CLAUDIA

Pascal...I can't think how long forever truly is. I can't think of competing with Diane for all time. But will you still love her? Pascal, we belong together. I love you, but this is forever... Can we forget the past even though I love you?

I'm sorry, but I can't give you an answer right now. I... I'm sorry...

Claudia rushes out. Baur stands there on his knee, not sure what happened. He slumps his shoulders. The choir begins to sing from offstage. The lights go down.

SCENE 3

ANNOUNCER (over a loudspeaker)

Ladies and Gentlemen, please take your seats for Orphée Redux.

Lights come up on a dark hallway. The walls are black with dayglo paint that glows in the dim lighting. At the end of the hallway there is a door with a sliver of bright light coming from the bottom. David (FRANKLIN) and Lydia (CLAUDIA) are standing next to each other. David has just finished reading the letter. It should feel like we are joining the work in progress.

FRANKLIN (DAVID)

Positive? That makes no sense. Does that mean that I'm positive as well? Where did this come from?

CLAUDIA (LYDIA)

The doctor does not lie. He's been your friend for ages.

FRANKLIN (DAVID)

Lydia, what can I do to save her?

CLAUDIA (LYDIA)

Nothing...

CLAUDIA (LYDIA)

She is not the same, the same big sister who had taught me to sing. There is nothing, nothing you could do.

FRANKLIN (DAVID)

She is not the same, the same wife who crying put on the ring. There is nothing, nothing I could do.

I must do something. I can see the light, she is there, behind the door, waiting for me to save her. I must try.

David pushes Lydia away and starts to walk toward the door. He opens it and is engulfed in light. He steps back. Lydia leaves the way she came in.

FRANKLIN (DAVID)

My eyes deceive me. I see a bright light, and her outline lying still under bedsheets. My Eurydice.
Let me sing you a love song.

REBECCA (PAMELA offstage)

David, are you there? I hear you. Don't come in, don't look upon me.

FRANKLIN (DAVID)

Yes, Yes. It's fated, leave with me, don't worry. Now, get up and follow me. Its time to go.

REBECCA (PAMELA offstage)

I will leave with you, but you can't see me like this. Please promise. I'm so humiliated. Please turn as I get dressed. Please promise, you promise.

FRANKLIN (DAVID)

I promise no turning around, but we must go, we must leave this hell.

David turns away from the light. He takes a few tentative steps away. Pamela Pindar (REBECCA) comes through the door. She is wearing a skin-tight, skin-colored leotard that makes her appear naked. Her body is covered with sores and filth. She starts to follow David away from the light and toward the exit.

My love, just a little bit longer 'til the surface. In my heart I've cured you. Pamela, I can feel your strength returning and I can imagine the virus leaving. Love is the cure for all.

With this last line David turns toward Pamela. He notices the lesions and filth covering her. He leans back in horror. Pamela steps back and starts to scream.

REBECCA (PAMELA)

NO! I told you to not turn around. But you never listen.

FRANKLIN (DAVID)

Pamela, I'm sorry. Pamela, forgive me.

REBECCA (PAMELA)

You just keep saying that things will be better, but I know the truth. You, you only think of yourself you selfish bastard.

Before Franklin realizes it he has swung and struck Pamela. She steps back in horror.

Help!

A large man steps from behind a door and grabs David into a head lock. The large man pulls him toward the exit as Pamela slowly moves back toward the door. David is screaming for her the whole time, but she just stands there mute, her gaze one of hate and spite, but also shame and struggle. David is thrown to the ground near the edge of the stage and Pamela goes through the door and shuts it behind her. The light goes out and all action freezes. The music fades and the lights slowly come up. The opera within an opera is over. The curtain falls.

Franklin comes stands up and bows. Rebecca and Claudia come from their respective wings and bow as well. The pit is raised and Pascal is now at the conductors podium. They acknowledge

him and he steps out of the pit onto the stage.

PASCAL (*speaking*)

Thank you. Thank you, thank you very much.

The pit is still raised, but the musicians start to play again. The real opera is not yet over.

PASCAL (*singing*)

Claudia, I can hide no more. I love you. I ask you again with this ring. And the question is the same... Will you marry me?

Pascal produces a ring out of his pocket and goes down on one knee. Claudia gasps and Franklin and Rebecca seem shocked.

CLAUDIA

Yes, yes, a thousand times yes. Oh, Pascal, you have made me so happy.

All the characters leave in celebration except for Nancy Warren, who stands sadly near the edge of the stage, as if a member of the audience and not a cast member. A portly man stands up in the front row of the audience and walks up to her as she steps down away to leave. The man is MORRISS GREENBERG, an FBI agent. She does not notice him at first.

NANCY

Hello, who are you?

MORRISS

My name is Morriss Greenberg and I am here to investigate the Hartford Opera Company.

The curtain falls abruptly. End Act I.

ACT II

SCENE 1

Lights up on an empty stage. All the set decorations for Orphée Redux are gone and the stage is now littered with set pieces for Hellfire, Pascal Baur's second opera. A piano is situated on the stage for rehearsals. Claudia Ingrassia-Baur is sitting there tinkering and writing. On the far side of the stage enters Morriss Greenberg. He is wearing a baggy suit and has shiny FBI shoes. In his hand is a large 1980's cell phone. He looks lost and turns hears the tinkering coming from Claudia but they are separated by a partition. Barbara Urlington comes walking through with fabric in her hands. Morriss stops her to ask for directions.

MORRISS (*spoken*)

Excuse me, I am looking for Pascal Baur.

Barbara stops and looks confused. She seems to be pretending not to understand.

BARBARA (*spoken*)

I am cleaning lady. I don't know.

MORRISS

My name is Morriss Greenberg eh...I guess I'll find him myself.

Barbara has left. Morriss turns toward the partition and hears singing. After the first stanza, Morriss starts dueting with her from behind the partition.

CLAUDIA

And like a dying lady, lean and pale,
Who totters forth, wrapped in a gauzy
veil, Out of her chamber, led by the
insane And feeble wanderings of her
fading brain, The moon arose up in the
murky east, A white and shapeless mass.
The waning moon.

MORRISS

What sadness sings so beautiful? My
lady, I hear your cry and want to love
you without seeing you. Am I? Am I
insane? We sing of the same moon, and
I know that within its cycle you will
have come and gone and I will once
again be alone.

Morriss follows the voice around the partition and sees Claudia. She looks up at him and is startled.

CLAUDIA

And like...Oh, shit!

MORRISS (*spoken*)

I didn't mean to startle you.

CLAUDIA (*spoken*)

I dropped my pencil into the piano.

MORRISS (*spoken*)
Is that bad?

CLAUDIA (*spoken*)
Yes, it will damage it.

MORRISS (*spoken*)
Let me help you.

Morriss hands her his cell phone and she looks at it quizzically.

CLAUDIA (*spoken*)
What is this?

MORRISS (*spoken*)
A phone. You can use the antenna to fish out the pencil.

Claudia reaches in with the antenna and gets the pencil. She produces it and looks pleased.

CLAUDIA
Thank you, oh, where are my manners? My name is Claudia Ingrassia-Baur.

MORRISS
Morriss Greenberg, FBI. I'm here to meet Pascal Baur. Is he your...

CLAUDIA
Yes, My husband.

MORRISS (*looking a little disappointed*)
Oh, yes, of course. I was supposed to meet him right now, but I can't find his office. Would you take me there?

CLAUDIA
I don't think he's there right now, but I can give you directions. Just go through that red door and head to the right. There's a nameplate on the door.

MORRISS
Thank you Claudia, I must say you have a beautiful voice.

CLAUDIA (*blushing*)
Thank you. And good luck with Pascal. By the way, what are you here investigating, if you don't mind me asking?

MORRISS
I am here looking for spies. We think...there is a spy at the Hartford Opera Company.

Morriss is showing off a little, bows a little and leaves through the red door. Claudia looks at him, unsure of what just happened. She takes the pencil in her hand and examines it. She gets up and leaves. After she is gone Pascal comes out from behind a curtain. He has heard everything.

PASCAL

For me? What can he know? What does he suspect? I see the line long past, fading in the distance. She said it was our secret. That's how it started. Her friends would kill the man who murdered her. It all happened so quickly I couldn't even process all the thoughts going on in my head. So I agreed to put Soviet messages in my operas. Now I see...

My path fading, she calls from the dark
I hear her pain, her last gasping breath
My hate maligned in treason and deceit
A shame her life must end in death

A simple line, a few sprinkled notes
Her voice will not be silenced and forgotten
I speak from pain, from lost promises
I sing in code for my belated.

The janitor walks in and starts to sweep the edge of the stage. Pascal sees him and steps back through the curtain and is gone. Lights down.

SCENE 2

Franklin Pettricone is sitting in his room. He looks exhausted. He stands and goes to the mirror and pulls off a picture and stares at it. The door is open and Morriss appears within it. He knocks.

FRANKLIN

Hello?

MORRISS

Hello, Mr. Pettricone, my name is Morriss Greenberg, special agent.

FRANKLIN

How can I help you? Is there any trouble?

MORRISS

No, just a few questions about last years production.

FRANKLIN

Yes wait, you said F.B.I., not a reporter?

MORRISS

Yes, F.B.I.

FRANKLIN

What kind of questions do you want to ask?

MORRISS

What can you tell me about last year's premiere of *Orphée Redux*?

FRANKLIN

I'm not sure. Lot's of things. Did you see it? I played David?

MORRISS

No. Oh. What can you tell me about Pascal Baur?

FRANKLIN

A great composer, so fast. We are premiering another work tonight. Can you believe it?

MORRISS

Anything else?

FRANKLIN

Like what?

MORRISS

Anything.

FRANKLIN *(playing coy)*

Like secrets?

MORRISS

What kind of secrets?

FRANKLIN

Oh, nothing

MORRISS

What kind of se...

There is a knock on the door.

FRANKLIN

Pardon me.

Franklin stands up and opens the door. Tony Bell is standing there looking sick. Franklin understands that there is a problem and leads him in.

MORRISS

Hello, my name is Morriss...

FRANKLIN

Sorry, agent Greenberg, but I need to help my friend now. Could we reschedule?

MORRISS

Sure, I guess...

Franklin silently leads Morriss to the door and slightly shoves him out the door. Morriss turns back to stay something, but Franklin has already shut the door. The moment the door is shut Tony starts crying. Franklin hugs him and holds him.

FRANKLIN

What's the matter?

TONY

Oh Frankie, I've really messed up. Really bad.

FRANKLIN

Shhh, what is it? You can tell me.

TONY

No, I can't, it's too bad.

FRANKLIN

Hush, tell me.

TONY

Promise you won't get mad?

FRANKLIN

I promise.

Tony steps back from Franklin and pulls an envelope out of his pocket. He hands it to Franklin and waits silently as Franklin reads it. As his eyes scan the lines they grow more and more worried and angry.

FRANKLIN

Positive?

TONY

Let me explain.

FRANKLIN

Does this mean...just how did you get it?

TONY

I don't know, I swear.

FRANKLIN

What's his name? Tell me.

TONY

I don't know, I mean...

Franklin swings and slaps Tony across the face.

FRANKLIN

How could you do this to me? How could you kill me? It is 1986, you should know better!

TONY

I love you...

Franklin interrupts Tony with a fist to the face. Tony stands back scared. Franklin lunges at Tony and the stage goes to black. We hear the sounds of a fight and the screams of Tony. As the music transitions, lights come up on another part of the stage. Nancy Warren is standing there waiting.

Morriss Greenberg enters. He sees Nancy and heads toward her.

NANCY

Morriss, good to see you again.

MORRISS

Nancy, a pleasure as always.

NANCY

I'm here as you requested, writing a piece on Baur's opera as a cover.

MORRISS

Perfect. Do you have any leads? Have you heard anything?

NANCY

I think you should look at Claudia Ba...

MORRISS

I have met her. I don't think she's involved.

NANCY

But she's sneaky, oh, so sneaky...

MORRISS

If you say so.

NANCY

Yes.

MORRISS

What can you tell me about Franklin Pettricone?

NANCY

Everything.

MORRISS

Pascal Baur?

NANCY

Everything.

The stage is portioned in half, and while Nancy and Morriss talk on the left half, Pascal Baur enters on the right half. He moves toward the voices slowly, listening.

PASCAL

Is that Nancy? Is she helping the FBI? Does she know anything?

Franklin stumbles in toward Pascal. Pascal puts his finger up to his mouth to shush Franklin. Franklin falls softly into Pascal's arms and he places him on the floor.

FRANKLIN (from the floor)

I'm in trouble, I've done it now...

PASCAL

Hush Franklin, can't you hear the FBI agent on the other side of the curtain?

FRANKLIN

I don't care, I'm guilty, he should lock me up.

PASCAL

Why? What happened?

FRANKLIN

Tony, he has the bug and I do too. I couldn't help it, I just attacked him. Now he's gone, probably went to the police already. I should turn myself in now.

PASCAL

Hush, you need to go back to your room and wait for me. We still have the show; and I'll help you, but first you have to trust me. You must get going right now!

FRANKLIN

Thank you maestro, thank you. You are a saint among men. Yes! Thank you!

Franklin gets up and leaves silently. Unbeknownst to either of them, Morriss and Nancy had already left via the other side of the stage and Pascal and Franklin were alone. Pascal sits silently, and after not hearing voices realizes that he is alone. He walks over and flips open the curtain, stopping on the other side.

PASCAL

Not just a figment anymore. Here lies the line I have lamented so long. But how can I do it? Who am I anymore?

To what side of the line do I belong? From what side of the curtain does the voices call out to me? Lines in the sand are easy to erase, easy to push back toward the ebb of the surf, to be washed away and redrawn with the tide.

Baur walks through the curtain again, leaving the way he came. The front curtain drops.

SCENE 3

Barbara and Pascal stand onstage. The stage is set for Hellfire, the opera to be premiered that evening. The set looks like an abandoned music instrument shop, but with mannequin and doll body parts nailed to the walls. It looks a lot like something out of Hieronymus Bosch's The Garden of Earthly Delights. Pascal seems upset and Barbara is trying to calm him down.

BARBARA

Hush, tell Narnl what FBI says.

PASCAL

It's not the FBI. It's Franklin. He says Tony has AIDS and he does as well. And he attacked Tony...

BARBARA

A perfect patsy for the FBI.

PASCAL

But why? Why not stay low? They will never find out.

BARBARA

Sacrifices must be made.

PASCAL

Why? I don't believe you.

BARBARA

They make mistakes, apologize. America is land of apology. Take what you want! Apologize. Kill who you want! Apologize. It is the same, over and over again. You will see.

PASCAL

Did you hear me? I want to be done, I don't want to do this anymore.

BARBARA

There is no "done". You have no choice, you are already guilty.

PASCAL

But I've changed. Claudia has changed me, the anger is gone.

MORRISS (offstage)

Over there?

BARBARA

Hush, there is someone coming.

Barbara leaves. Baur turns away from her and watches Morriss Greenberg enter. He comes right up to Baur's face and puts out his hand.

MORRISS

Pascal Baur, I presume?

PASCAL

Correct, Agent Greenberg.

MORRISS

You know who I am?

PASCAL

Yes, not much happens in this building I do now know.

MORRISS

Then you are the man I've been waiting to see.

Morriss and Pascal move toward the edge of the stage. There is a litter of chairs and they each

grab one and sit, as if choreographed.

PASCAL

How can I help you?

MORRISS

I'm looking for spies here at the Hartford Opera Company.

PASCAL

Spies?

MORRISS

Yes, Russians.

PASCAL

What kind of man could keep such, such secrets lying there for all to see?

MORRISS

What kind of man? He is smart, very likable, but hides his true colors.

PASCAL

I don't think I know this man, here at
the opera we all are peaceful artists.
I can't, not one. I can't

MORRISS

You will know him. He's here amongst
you. Just think a name. Trust your gut.
You know.

PASCAL and MORRISS

It could be anyone.

BARBARA

What kind of woman could do such things? She would have to be a haunted soul.

PASCAL, MORRISS

What kind of man could be a spy, could betray his country and live a lie.

BARBARA

What kind of woman could be a spy, could betray her fam'ly, could watch them die? My
children.

PASCAL

I don't think I know this man. But we are artists not traitors.

MORRISS

You will know the man quite well. You're hiding something I'm sure.

PASCAL, MORRISS, and BARBARA

What kind of man could hide from the truth...

PASCAL

That ev'ryone will suffer from his
choices.

BARBARA

That we will have our revenge.

MORRISS

That spies will be uncovered. Is there anything you want to tell me?
I can sense your hesitance. You don't have to be afraid.
You know. We can protect you.
But you do. You can say, just say a name.

PASCAL

Nothing I know.
It is nothing, there is no one. I know nothing. What can I say? There is a person who's not...

Suddenly Pascal is interrupted by a blaring siren. It is a fire alarm. The lights are flashing and the screech is unbearable. Morriss and Pascal stand up and look toward the exits.

PASCAL (*spoken*)

We have to leave the building.

MORRISS (*spoken*)

How convenient.

PASCAL (*spoken*)

I'm sorry.

The lights go down and the music fades out. The sirens continue, but slowly change to more electronic and distorted sounds. Live music also begins. A few lights flicker on Stage Left (SL), and onstage you can see BUD HUDSUCKER (Franklin), JOHN (Kansas), and LEONARD. They are soldiers, crouched and hiding in a bombed out storefront. John and Leonard look terrified, but Bud seems to have his wits. A plane flies overhead and bombs start exploding everywhere. Stage Right (SR) remains dark.

FRANKLIN (BUD)

Let's move!

They all get up and move toward the door. As they come around the bend they see a torso bobbing in a pool of water. Leonard buckles over.

LEONARD

What the fuck happened to her?

KANSAS (JOHN)

No idea.

LEONARD

What kind of bastard would cut her in half like that?

Bud gives them a look that says, "Quiet". He takes out a pistol from his waistband and turns toward the edge of the stage. He motions them forward and leads them offstage. SL lights down. Suddenly the SR lights come up and Morriss Greenberg is standing on the other side of the stage. It looks less like a warzone and more like the lobby. He has his giant cellphone up to his ear and is talking.

MORRISS

Yes, I think there is something happening here...I didn't at first and I was a little lax with the suspects...No, I'm not sure...but I think it warrants some more investigation. Like I said earlier, the composer is acting strange and he is pointing me toward an actor, like he knows something...Yes, we could offer him...I thought of that too...what do you think?...but...

The SR lights go back down (SL up) and Bud, John and Leonard come out from around the corner. They move silently toward the opposite side of the stage. A light suddenly turns on from above and at the opposite side of the stage they see a woman. She's dressed in ratty clothes and looks dirty. In her hand is a large chunk of meat. It is MAGS (Claudia) a prison guard from the Nazi camp that Bud, Leonard and John were kept at. They almost jump at the sight of her, but she seems calm and relaxed.

KANSAS (JOHN)

Don't move bitch.

They finally all recognize that it's Mags.

FRANKLIN (BUD)

Mags, you have shit for stealth.

Mags takes a giant bite of her meat chunk.

FRANKLIN (BUD)

Where'd ya get that?

CLAUDIA (MAGS)

I got it...taking care of some loose ends before disbanding the internment station.

FRANKLIN (BUD)

You mean you got it when the fucking camp got bombed.

CLAUDIA (MAGS)

I mean what I say.

FRANKLIN (BUD)

John, Leonard, what do you think we should do with her?

They both look terrified. Neither say a word, just watch Mag's chunk of meat as it waves around in her dirty hand.

FRANKLIN (BUD)

You responsible for that?

He points his pistol back toward the floating torso.

CLAUDIA (MAGS)

Maybe.

FRANKLIN (BUD)

What about the nurse in the camp?

CLAUDIA (MAGS)

Maybe.

FRANKLIN (BUD)

Ah, fuck you! I have to take a piss. Watch her.

Franklin leaves and passes Morriss as the SR lights once again come up (SL down). Morriss is still on the phone.

MORRISS

Yes...Her name is Barbara Urlington...with a U...uh...like curling without the...yes...anyway, she just seems a little suspicious...There was a fire alarm pulled in the basement, but that was a false alarm...No I don't think...you're right, but...ah, yes...Anyway, I think that after I finish my chat with him this evening then I'll head to... Yes...Goodbye...

Franklin passes Morriss as the SL lights go back down (SR up). As he comes into view of Mags and his men he finds that two new NAZI SOLDIERS had guns pointed at Leonard and John. Mags is in the same position, eating the big chunk of meat.

CLAUDIA (MAGS)

Glad you could rejoin us.

FRANKLIN (BUD)

You fucking bitch...

CLAUDIA (MAGS)

You would be kind enough to hand your pistol and rifle over to Jon here. Look, Jon is guarding John, isn't that funny?

FRANKLIN (BUD)

This was a trap?

CLAUDIA (MAGS)

Of course, how else would I catch my supper?

Mags has finished the chunk of meat and throws it over toward Bud. She reaches into her coat and pulls out an arm and takes a big bite out of it.

FRANKLIN (BUD)

You fucking bitch, you're a can...

As Bud tries to say the word "Cannibal" he is struck on the head by one of the Nazi guards. The SL lights go down and the SR lights come up. Morriss is finishing his phone conversation.

MORRISS

I think that is the wrong move...yes, I understand...I'm sure he'll be very capable following up... Yes...Right...

The SR lights go down and the SL come up. Mags is sitting on a throne like the lower section of Bosch's Garden of Earthly Delights. They are in an instrument shop that has equal parts brass

and bodies pinned to the walls. Bud, John, and Leonard lie in a lump in the center of the room. Near the back door are two Nazi guards.

KANSAS (JOHN)

Bud, are you alright?

FRANKLIN (BUD)

Where are we?

CLAUDIA (MAGS)

Let there be light!

John and Bud both turn around as the lights become brighter in instrument shop. They see Mags sitting atop a tall chair, her arms open wide so that they can see what she has done with the place.

Like my little chamber?

FRANKLIN (BUD)

You're fuckin' insane.

CLAUDIA (MAGS)

Really, you think so? Get them!

The two Nazi soldiers raise machetes and close in on the trio. Leonard curls up in the fetal position and is the first to be killed. John stands up and tries to run toward the door but is caught. Bud, getting up at the same time as Leonard, heads the opposite direction toward stage right. He passes through to where Morriss is standing, but instead of Morriss there is a nun with her back turned toward the audience. Bud reaches out and tugs her shoulder. The nun turns around and it is Morriss wearing a nun's outfit and a pink, rubber pig nose. He screams and pushes the monster aside and runs offstage. The lights fade out with the orchestra and the curtain comes down.

SCENE 4

The set is still the same, but all the lights are up. The show is over and Franklin is waiting for Baur. He walks to the edge of the stage and dangles his feet over the edge.

FRANKLIN

Waiting, waiting for the maestro. Waiting. He'll know what to do. Waiting. I know it was Tony who pulled the fire alarm. He did it as a warning. Maybe he has already gone to the police.

As Franklin is singing, lights up on Pascal's office. Claudia is there waiting for him. Bored, she starts reading things on his desk. As she is singing she finds a paper with one of the hidden messages.

CLAUDIA

Waiting, waiting, waiting for my love. *La la la la la* my love, Pascal, what's this? What have you done?

FRANKLIN

The cops won't like a lover's spat between two gays. I can't go to jail, they'll murder me. Either AIDS or prison will kill me. I'm a dead man walking, singing my last song to an empty stage...

Voice can be heard offstage. Franklin steps toward the curtain and hides, afraid that it might be the police. Barbara Urlington leads Pascal onto the stage. She looks angry and Franklin is surprised that she can control him the way she is. He stays hidden and listens.

BARBARA

The message was good. Moscow will get the radio broadcast.

PASCAL

I'm done. I told you, no more.

BARBARA

You have no choice. They will kill you...and her.

PASCAL

Aunt Arisa! No they can't... I can't let them... I can't let anyone hurt Claudia.

Claudia is reading other papers. She is worried and confused.

CLAUDIA

Pascal, a spy? What does this mean?

FRANKLIN

Aunt Arisa? What is Baur talking about?

BARBARA

I have been at this for a long time. I know when to relax and when to run. We need to be careful.

Claudia is piecing it all together.

CLAUDIA

A code? It's here in his operas.

Simultaneously, Barbara leaves. Pascal stands his ground and looks around for Franklin. Once Barbara is gone Franklin steps out from behind the curtain, startling Pascal.

PASCAL

How long have you been there?

FRANKLIN

How long have you been a traitor?

PASCAL

It's not like that. I just am helping restore balance. Can't you see that? I just put a message in my operas. It's not bomb codes, just a way to keep tensions down. I had no choice...I know they'd kill her...I had no choice.

Unbeknownst to either man, Barbara sneaks back onto the stage and watches the exchange.

FRANKLIN

That's what you think you are doing? Stopping a war? Keeping the peace? You have a choice. Turn yourself in. Do what is right. You have a choice.

CLAUDIA

But why would he lie? Pascal...I need to know. A traitor to our life, how can I love him? All on this page in the pitches of the line a message made of treason oh... Why Pascal?

FRANKLIN

We won't even see them coming. They'll just show up one morning and you'll have helped them do it.

CLAUDIA

It is here in the opera, and *Orphée Redux!*

PASCAL

Franklin, listen, there is a good explanation...

CLAUDIA

Lies, lies, and lies!

FRANKLIN

Really? What the fuck Pascal, really?

They are circling each other, both ready for the other to attack. But just as the tension reaches a boiling point the lights go out throughout the auditorium. It is pitch black. Claudia continues to shriek, her anger quite scary. Just as she looks ready to freak out the lights go out.

FRANKLIN and PASCAL

What? The lights...

There is a loud crash and silence. The emergency lights come on and the stage is a deathly red color. Where Pascal and Franklin were standing is now a pile of rubble. The sets have all been toppled. End Act II. Attacca.

INTERMEZZO

With the lights still down, a video is projected on the back of the now empty wall. It is a video of the stage, with paramedics trying to move the carnage while cast members and crew sit by and weep, confusion reigns and everyone looks exhausted. The fallen set is lit dramatically. If prerecorded, then the choir will not be onstage, but if performed live, then the choir will be robed onstage, surrounding the wreckage.

CHORUS

A loud crash...blood...screams...three fingers wiggling, trying to grip the shiny wooden floor...lights coming to life...pinstripes...she stood sobbing...a severed finger...the sound of moaning...jagged chunks of wood...heavy breathing...blood...screams...a loud crash...first aid...medics...a limp body...a mangled leg...a woman in black, limping away...the sound of sirens...shattered glass...a discarded trumpet...blood...a loud crash...screams...

Lights and curtain down. End Intermezzo.

ACT III

SCENE 1

Claudia enters her dressing room with a suitcase in her hand. With her free hand she reaches and turns on a light near the mirror. The stage lights subtly come up at the same time. She sets the suitcase down and does a little twirl. Even though she is worried it feels good to be home. She looks into the dirty mirror and starts to sing.

CLAUDIA

It is good to be home. Oh, mirror, you are so dirty and dusty. Has no one been cleaning you? My only confidante, alone down here while I was away singing. Now I have returned to tell you all my secrets. You are the only one I can trust. But when you find out your husband has committed treason, you lose a little faith in ev'ryone. What's that you ask, what did my husband do?

Pascal is in his office, but it is almost like a hospital room. There is no partition between him and Claudia, but a darkness separates them.

PASCAL

All the colors like ghosts they haunt me. I hear their voices call out. Death drawing near. His footsteps echoing. What have I done? He's here!

CLAUDIA

Here the weight of all his lies. What did my husband do? Well, he's been hiding messages in his operas. He also was nearly killed when the stage fell upon him. Franklin died, Pascal lived.

Claudia moves toward Pascal, who is now on a hospital bed, asleep. Morriss Greenberg enters.

I waited by his side for four weeks. I kept meaning to ask him about the messages, what they meant, why he did it.

PASCAL

She sat there, watching over and I wanted so to tell her, but I was too afraid.

CLAUDIA

The agent came by a few times, to ask questions, and to try and ask me out. "Do you know of a Tony Bell?" he asked. "Would you like to get a bit to eat?" I told him everything I knew about Franklin and Tony. He seemed satisfied and left.

MORRISS

Thank you Claudia, er, Misses Baur...

Morriss exits.

PASCAL

Two shadows cling themselves to me their whispers haunt my soul. Another code they ask of me. I cannot tell them no. My leg is filled with all their pain, a cry for all I've done, and now they have come back for me. They will not let me go...

Nancy and Kansas are offstage and begin to sing with the accompaniment.

Can you hear? They haunt me in my sleep. In their guilty embraces. I see her,

CLAUDIA

Others had visited. Barbara, the costume mistress, and Kansas, the other tenor, even Nancy Warren, that reporter who loves Pascal.

Barbara, Kansas, and Nancy enter.

They had all tried their best.

“He will to get better soon.”

“If you need anything.”

“I’m sorry, so sorry.”

Repeating and repeating all the time, again and again. Then they started to thin out, and Pascal got better.

PASCAL

I see her, Claudia. She sits beside me and I can’t look at her... The messages have taken over me. They’ll kill her unless I...

All the characters have left except for Pascal and Claudia. From all around them comes the haunting chorus. Claudia sings parts of it, not sure where it is coming from. Pascal listens and finally joins in at the end. The voices have been in his head the entire time.

NANCY (*offstage*)

She will die, they will make sure. A punishment to you. The only way to save her fate... you know just what to do.

FRANKLIN (*offstage*)

Your cries. A suffering you cannot know. A testament to what you sowed. You cannot change the path you chose, you cannot change you cannot grow! She cries, her tears will wash your love away.

NANCY (*offstage*)

The only choice you’ve ever had. You must keep her safe away from bad.

PASCAL

The only choice I’ve ever had. I must keep her safe away from Barbara, even if it’s the last thing I do.

Lights down.

SCENE 2

Barbara is standing on an empty stage. She is looking off into the distance, daydreaming. She hums a little of Beethoven’s 9th under her breath and suddenly breaks out into a 7/8 pattern. The music starts.

BARBARA

The fall air reminds me of Switzerland. And the moment the lazy Rhine flows past my mind I hear my children laughing. I see them hiding under the pews while their father rehearses the choir. Then I hear the high screams of planes. I don't know they are coming for me. I can sense the happiness of music soar through my husband. He looks back at me as the first bomb hits. I almost can see his smile. I can smell my past lingering in the fall air. I can taste the fire from which I was born.

Barbara is lost in thought when a man with curly, red hair slinks onto stage. He looks around and sees her and slithers up.

ASSASSIN (*sung or spoken*)

Why am I here?

BARBARA

I might have a job for you.

ASSASSIN (*sung or spoken*)

I thought the New York job was my last. Who is it this time?

BARBARA

It is someone in the opera company.

ASSASSIN (*sung or spoken*)

Not the composer? First his fiancée and now...

BARBARA

No, Pascal is important. If we need to teach him a lesson it will be the same as last time. But this time he will know the truth.

ASSASSIN (*sung or spoken*)

But if he finds out...?

BARBARA

He will do what we say.

ASSASSIN (*spoken*)

What if he doesn't?

BARBARA

He will.

They leave. Lights down.

SCENE 3

Claudia stands in front of Pascal's office door. She knocks and waits. There is no immediate answer. Pascal is inside looking at the door suspiciously.

CLAUDIA

Pascal, are you there?

She turns away from the door, talking to herself.

I have missed you, even though I should loath you. I have wandered from stage to stage, wanting to share my joys and pains, but I can't trust you anymore. Why would you do such a thing? But, even worse, why wouldn't you tell me the truth? I'm your wife, even if you are a traitor. A sound? You are in there.

She turns back to the door.

Pascal, are you there?

Pascal opens the door slowly. They look each other over, not sure what to do. Finally, they lean in and kiss, slowly.

PASCAL

I've missed you.

CLAUDIA

I've missed you too.

Claudia slowly allows herself to be taken into his arms. She feels the comfort and love that she had always felt, but the secrets create a layer of discomfort between them. It is noticeable at first, but then she allows herself to relax. She starts to hum a little bit.

PASCAL

My songs...

Claudia hums some more, and Pascal begins to join in. As they get caught up in the humming, she turns her head away from his.

CLAUDIA and PASCAL

To sing of love, a love that can survive such secrets and lies is a blessing, one I can't deny.

PASCAL

She's a blessing that I must protect. For her I must try; for her I would die; for her no more lies.

CLAUDIA

It's a blessing something to embrace. He's a blessing, a love I can't deny. No confessing, for him I have to try. Oh, his arms feel so right. I try to forget the message that lingers in the opera tonight.

PASCAL

She lies there, innocent and untouched by the tragedy of my choices. How do I protect her from the Soviets?

CLAUDIA

Do I sing his melody, or do I call Agent Greenberg and turn him in?

PASCAL

I know they would kill her! Look what they did to my leg after *Hellfire*. I am stuck in a corner without an answer.

CLAUDIA

Do I stand by, or do I betray my husband? I am Cassandra, the woman who knows the future, and fate it seems, has cast the role just right.

PASCAL

I tried to stop, but they, I know they'd kill her. So I am stuck in this encoded charade.

PASCAL and CLAUDIA

I lie here and think all that I need to change our lives is...

PASCAL

To sing a song, a song of love, a song of love and betrayal. My wife, my words, a choice.

CLAUDIA

To sing a song, a song of love, a song of love and betrayal.

PASCAL and CLAUDIA

A song that can't, cannot be sung, but how to stop it? How to stop it?

PASCAL

We can run, but we can't hide. Will she come? It must be. We must leave together.

CLAUDIA

We can't run, but could we hide? Will he stop? Would I go? We must leave together.

PASCAL

I must protect her from them. We could run, we could hide. I could stop the performance, run from them. Just as long as we're together. All because I love you. I do.

But will she come with me?

They kiss on the lips and the lights go down.

CLAUDIA

I must protect him from himself. We could run, just as long as we are together. I could ruin the aria, all the wrong notes, just one half-step. I still love you.

But will he still love me?

SCENE 4

The stage is set for Cassandra's Aria. Claudia is onstage as Cassandra, standing next to Kansas who is playing Agamemnon. He is lying on the bed, relishing the feeling of fresh sheets. Claudia (Cassandra) is standing near the window, worried.

CLAUDIA (CASSANDRA)

I hear the sounds of your footsteps. Not as they are now, but as they will be before you are slaughtered. *She walks around him.* I hear the sounds of your footsteps fading.

Kansas (Agamemnon) contemplates this for a second, then clears his nostrils and spits onto the

floor. He starts laughing.

KANSAS (AGAMEMNON)

Your fortune-telling is about as clear as my spit.

CLAUDIA (CASSANDRA)

You can't understand what you can't see. To me all of time is like a thread that I can follow into the darkness of the future. Where others can't see I can go. And I tell we are not long for this world.

KANSAS (AGAMEMNON)

Then why don't you do something to stop it?

CLAUDIA (CASSANDRA)

Just because I see through the dark doesn't mean I can change what's there.

KANSAS (AGAMEMNON)

Enough of your serpent tongue! Stay still and quiet. We will soon be dining and I don't want you to speak.

CLAUDIA (CASSANDRA)

As you wish.

Claudia (Cassandra) sits on the bed next to Kansas (Agamemnon). She takes off his sandals and rubs his feet. He lies back in the bed and exhales loudly. She shivers and holds her nose back from his feet.

His feet have the stench of a thousand hard miles, yet we have been seated, resting for most of the journey. How can such vile smells come from feet that are bathed daily by virgins? His feet must speak of a black heart? But, should I expect that the feet of a murderer to smell like roses?

Kansas (Agamemnon) elicits a loud and disgusting snore. He rolls over and Claudia (Cassandra) lets his feet follow out of her reach.

I'd like a few words more, a kind of dirge, a sentiment. *She pauses and looks up at the sky, humming a little. (spoken)* And that, I think breaks the heart of both men and gods.

Claudia (Cassandra) stands up and walks offstage of the opera within the opera. The audience can still see her as she starts to readjust her make-up in a mirror. Barbara comes over and straightens her dress. Onstage, Kansas (Agamemnon) wakes and begins to sing a melody.

KANSAS (AGAMEMNON)

It's good to be home. Yes, good. I've missed my kingdom and all my slaves...

Back offstage, Claudia looks in the mirror. Kansas (Agamemnon) begins to fade and Claudia begins to sing.

CLAUDIA

His song, it is a sad song truly. The king sings of all he has, but in truth it is nothing, for he has lost it all with his choices. I can see Pascal, in the first row, he sits and doesn't know what he still has. He is a king that is in danger of being thrown under his own throne. I will tell him everything

I know.

Pascal stands and looks at Claudia peering at him.

PASCAL

I see her looking out at me. Her eyes shine like they used to when we first married. I can feel the love behind the curtain. I will tell her everything. I will give her the choice I did not have. I will tell her everything, tonight.

BARBARA *from behind Claudia*

It is almost time for the end. Nothing will stop us now.

CLAUDIA (CASSANDRA)

Almost time to sing.

PASCAL

It is nearing the end. Claudia will be entering...now.

The opera within the opera lights come up and Clytemnestra is setting plates onto a table. Claudia (Cassandra) enters onstage.

CLAUDIA (CASSANDRA)

I smell the roasted flesh of the guilty. Clytemnestra, you know that harmony does not stand. Entropy is the natural state, and the beauty of human righteousness is not the same.

CLYTEMNESTRA

But, where is my husband? He must join us first.

CLAUDIA (CASSANDRA)

He will be in soon. This will end as you have planned.

CLYTEMNESTRA

You speak like an oracle, yet you are not afraid.

PASCAL

Agamemnon is next to die. And Claudia? How will I explain my deception?

CLAUDIA *stepping out of the scene, speaking toward but not too Pascal*

My love, will you forgive me? I do this for us, not for now, but the future.

CLYTEMNESTRA

You think you'll be spared.

Suddenly Kansas (Agamemnon) enters. He looks groggy.

KANSAS (AGAMEMNON)

Spared...are we having ribs?

CLYTEMNESTRA

A feast so large you will never eat again. Now tell me husband, what is your favorite meat?

KANSAS (AGAMEMNON)

Why, that's easy, any meat that's in my mouth.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Funny, I thought you'd be partial to deer.

KANSAS (AGAMEMNON)

Why would you say that?

CLAUDIA (CASSANDRA)

Don't answer, you know it's a trap.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Didn't you sacrifice a deer to Artemis?

KANSAS (AGAMEMNON)

Why, yes, I did.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Then you will be happy. I have the same meat.

KANSAS (AGAMEMNON)

My stomach's not in the mood.

CLAUDIA (CASSANDRA)

Flesh of my flesh they will say in a thousand years.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Just a bite?

KANSAS (AGAMEMNON)

No, not even a bite.

CLAUDIA (CASSANDRA)

She knows that the scent reminds you of her.

KANSAS (AGAMEMNON)

No! I will not eat it. Never again.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Just like I will never see my daughter again. Murderer!

KANSAS (AGAMEMNON)

I had no choice. The gods demanded it.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Did they? Do you deny this?

KANSAS (AGAMEMNON)

I do not. I made a choice. I had no other choice to...

CLYTEMENSTRA

Then I too, am left with no choice.

Clytemnestra reaches under her robe and produces a huge knife. She plunges it into Kansas (Agamemnon)'s chest. He leaps back and dies. She follows him toward the ground, holding his head gently as if she were sorry. Claudia (Cassandra) stands in the corner, with almost no response.

My husband, I now have my revenge.

PASCAL

He is dead, and it is almost time for her aria. She stands there just like a deer waiting to be slaughtered. She sits there...I've brought her to die.

BARBARA

Almost time to sing the last song.

CLYTEMNESTRA

You stand still, unafraid. Do you have nothing to live for?

CLAUDIA (CASSANDRA)

You have killed him and will now kill me.

CLYTEMNESTRA (*spoken*)

Tell me prophet, will I be successful?

CLAUDIA (CASSANDRA)

No man is ever successful for every man dies. Success, like life, is relative.

CLYTEMNESTRA

You speak in nonsense and supposition.

CLAUDIA (CASSANDRA)

You will be successful in killing me, but you too will die.

CLYTEMNESTRA

By who?

CLAUDIA (CASSANDRA)

By your actions.

Clytemnestra pulls the knife out of Agamemnon and approaches Claudia (Cassandra). Claudia (Cassandra) starts humming, and Clytemnestra stops, watching her as if in a trance.

CLAUDIA (CASSANDRA)

I'd like a few more words, a kind of dirge...

Clytemnestra steps forward and stabs Claudia (Cassandra) in the stomach. Claudia (Cassandra) buckles over and lies again the table.

BARBARA

The aria!

PASCAL

It is time. It will soon be over.

CLAUDIA (CASSANDRA)

Hands...tell...fate...life. Destiny. Love. Your hands tell the tale, tell how fate works. Fate, fate will be the ruler of your world. Speak. Fate will be the ruler of your world, ah. I see the rise and fall of nations, the ashes and dung from which the great lies of time are sprung.

(spoken) the end of our world is near, but not in the way you understand.

I see a time when thoughts can kill and will enslave more than people. When genocide and hate fill the air, a time to kill with steel hands. I see a time of inequality and hungry mouths, the weak and forgotten and those that have won't help those who have not. A bloated world that's lost its center. I see a red haze like a mist of blood. I taste it...it haunts me...infects my soul.

CLAUDIA (CASSANDRA)

I see the frost at the end of the world! I see the curtain block out the light of the sun! All will happen fate decrees it. All is foretold can't believe it. Trust my message it's only a matter of time.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Tell me. What? Why? How? To kill, I must become a killer. My dagger will kill you, a fortune won't save you. It's done.

PASCAL and BARBARA

Now the message. Sing to the end.

CHORUS

Sacrifice. Kill the future. Stop all the lies and the pain. Block out the light of the sun. The pain it cries and dies but all are all the slaves of time.

PASCAL and BARBARA

No!

Both Pascal and Barbara wail as the crowd erupts in applause. Clytemnestra has stabbed Cassandra (Claudia) and they lie there, almost in a lover's embrace. The curtain drops.

End Act III

EPILOGUE

A chord erupts from the pit. The curtain rises and there are people gathered. It is after the show and Claudia is standing in the center of the room waiting for Pascal. In the corner, Barbara and the Assassin watch her. Pascal enters and goes straight to her. The Epilogue is completely spoken dialogue. The Epilogue could be filmed and onscreen or performed live.

PASCAL

My love, what's wrong. You did so well, but...there is something wrong, isn't there? Please, talk to me. Your final note...the high A...I'm trying to understand, but you just don't know how important that note was...I mean, I must tell you. Why?

She throws her fists into his chest and starts sobbing.

CLAUDIA

Because I love you, you bastard. I love you and I couldn't do it.

PASCAL

Then we must leave. You don't know what I'm talking about, but you have to trust me. Claudia, do you trust me? They will know that something is wrong. They might already know something is wrong. They will kill you.

CLAUDIA

But I changed the message.

PASCAL

What? You know about the message?

CLAUDIA

Yes. I found the sheets on your desk. It was the night of the accident. I have tried to tell you a thousand times, but I didn't know why you did it.

PASCAL

I tried to protect you from that, but they threatened you and I didn't know what... I wanted to take you and run, but I didn't know if you'd come with me. Now we don't have any other choice. I'm sorry, I'm so, so sorry. It's my fault, and you shouldn't be punished, but now there is no other possibility...we have to...

CLAUDIA

Then yes, I will go with you, but we must leave. Now.

PASCAL

But they'll be after us. Barbara won't be able to protect us.

CLAUDIA

What does she have to do with it?

PASCAL

It's a long story and goes all the way back to my relatives in Switzerland.

CLAUDIA

We can make a tape and send it to the FBI agent. I have the camera in my dressing room.
But is there time?

PASCAL

I don't know, but the truth will finally be told. Together we can make it, together we are strong enough. Claudia...Through the door, follow me. Don't look back.

CLAUDIA

Pascal, I love you.

PASCAL

I know.

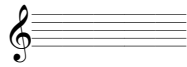
Pascal and Claudia leave through the red door, neither looking back to see the Assassin following. He turns back right before closing the door and looks at Barbara, who drags her finger across her neck in a slicing motion. He nods and closes the door behind him.

End Epilogue. Final Curtain.

SONGS FROM BEHIND THE CURTAIN

a novel by
Ryan Jespersen

Prologue – Switzerland, April 1944/New York, May 1945



The morning light slipped over the Rhine Falls and tumbled throughout the city of Schaffhausen. With the light came the slow buzz of morning frenzy. Children played in the streets and the adults prepared for another weekend of unusually hot weather. By mid-morning the buzzing grew louder and could only be drowned out by the ringing of church bells. The river passed lazily throughout the city, both before and after the plummet of the falls, and a few dedicated families made the long walk from their houses to the church.

Outside the day was growing sweet and fat. A few clouds occasionally passed in front of the sun, but beating rays quickly won out and warmed the skin of children in their play clothes. They were running along the empty streets pretending to be US soldiers. These were the same kids who only a few years ago had all dressed up as Nazis.

The tide had turned and the Allies were gaining momentum everyday. The citizens of Schaffhausen watched often as planes flew overhead into Germany, like tiny pin-tips floating over the clouds. The number of German planes running contrary missions had drastically decreased. The skies told the tale of the war and all around assumed the Americans would be controlling Germany by the end of the year.

There is a loud knock on the door. Inside, a fat man sips a beer and is listening to the radio. Himmler had just been found dead—cyanide they say. The man listens for more news, perhaps something from the Pacific. The knocking grows louder and finally he stands up and walks slowly to the door.

He opens the door and stares at the two people trying to push their way in. They are his neighbors from down the hall, immigrants, but not too bad. They knew enough English not to be worthless, and he was pretty sure they were not from Germany or one of those Socialist countries.

“We need to borrow your phone,” the man asks, making eye contact with the fat man and then drawing his eyes down to his wife’s stomach. She is pregnant and is sweating heavily.

“Is she havin’ the thang?” the fat man asks.

As if in reply the woman lets out a high-pitched yip. The man nods and tries to maneuver himself further into the doorway. “Please,” he pleads again, beads of sweat cascading down his bald head, “May we use your phone?”

The fat man would rather slam the door and go back to his radio, but something about the woman is so pathetic that he feels he has no choice. She looks sad, he thinks, as if she thought that something bad was about to happen. The fat man reluctantly opens the door and lets the couple in. The man rushes to the phone, picks it up and asks the operator to connect them to the hospital. He had done his research and knows what will be needed for the child to be born. He asks the hospital to send a midwife down to their apartment on 123rd Street. The lady on the other end is unsure of the procedure, but the

man knows all the answers already and explains it to her with the patience that he learned from teaching technical writing to foreign speakers. He thanks the woman profusely and hangs up the phone. He then thanks the man again for allowing them the use of his facilities. The fat man is angry at his use of the word, “facilities” but shrugs and turns back toward his radio. They are now talking about the war in the Pacific and secret projects in New Mexico. The fat man is interested and doesn’t even hear the couple as they close the door and go back to their apartment to wait for the midwife.

A family of four walked through the town and toward the church. They were wearing matching outfits—the father and son in green and the mother and daughter in tan. Two Allied bombers flew high above them, twisting through a spit of clouds, as they entered the church. The boy stopped and watched them disappear into the sky, leaving no sign that they were ever there—the sound sliding down and dissipating before it reached his ear. The mother, short with two shiny knitting needles holding up her hair, called for the boy and he followed her inside.

The sun hid behind a cloud and the town was engulfed with an ominous shadow. A low buzz started from beyond the falls. It grew louder and higher and the children playing in the street looked out in anticipation. From beyond the falls the sky was filled with what looked like dragonflies. But as they pushed nearer the children realized that they were not insects but planes. One child quickly counted and shouted out that there were thirty-nine of them. Another shouted forty. An American soldier visiting his European lover looked up and saw the sky full of B-24s. They were flying too low to be

heading through toward Germany. He didn't understand why, but it appeared that Schaffhausen was the target.

The soldier yelled up the street toward the children to run inside. The kids only seemed to know German, no English. He yelled at them in the scariest voice he could muster to get them indoors, but they just looked back blankly and retrained their attention back up toward the planes. The sun came out from the cloud cover right as the first bombs were dropped. The immense shine of all that metal blinded everyone looking up. It was like a bolt of lightning and within two seconds everyone in the area could hear the thunder.

The midwife stands with a wet rag over the woman's head. She speaks in a sort of English/Yiddish mix that neither the husband or wife completely understand. The midwife gestures toward a towel and the man hands it to her timidly. She looks at it and throws it aside and points even more sternly at the same spot. The man looks and this time sees that under the towel is a small knife. It is rusty and old, like something one might find in an old tackle box, next to mummified worms and discarded lures. He grabs it gently, unsure whether to worry about getting splinters from the worn-wood handle. Her motions are so quick that he worries he might get cut as she pulls it from his palm. He releases the knife as she makes contact and it falls subtly into her hand. She takes the knife and aims it at the woman's stomach. The man looks on in horror as he thinks she might jab it through his wife's midsection and into their child. The midwife holds the knife firmly in her hand and reaches under the blanket with the other.

From beneath the red quilted blanket the man hears what sounds to him like the sexual act. The lady is moving her hand around and the man listens to all the body sounds emanating from beneath the blanket. The man holds his breath and waits for the sounds to end. They are like screams to him, and his thoughts drift to his family, far away. The woman takes the knife and lowers it down under the blanket. His wife, who had been rhythmically breathing and huffing, stops as well and looks at the midwife. The effect to the man is like putting in earplugs. The world gets quiet and he swears he can hear a fourth heartbeat in the room. The midwife has sweat beading from her brow and she removes a hand and wipes it with her rolled up canvas sleeve. The man looks down at her other hand which is cradling a small child.

“Boy,” is all she says, the word coming out like a stifled yawn.

The mother brings her hands together and does a little happy clap. The father just nods silently, feeling that somehow he had done something right. The midwife takes the old knife out from under the blanket and drops it into a bowl of water. The small amount of blood on the knife spreads out among the water like tentacles of smoke. The child has not yet cried but is moving his fingers. The midwife wraps the child into an old pink blanket and hands it to the mother, her face red with exhaustion and happiness.

“Your son,” the midwife says.

“Thank you. Gregor, look.”

The man looked over at his wife cradling the child. He smiles and rubs her shoulder. “What should we name him?” he asks.

“Maybe after your brother-in-law...or my father?” she asks.

“I don’t think your father’s name is good. It is too German a name.”

“But we are Swiss, not German.”

“That won’t matter to the Americans now. A German name is not a nice thing to do to a child right now.”

“Then after your brother-in-law?”

“May he rest in piece.”

The midwife has left the room and returns with a sheet from the hospital. It is a birth certificate that she has to return to the hospital to get paid for the delivery.

“What is the name?” the midwife asks.

The mother turns to the midwife, her motions cautious with the child in her arms, and smiles. “Pascal Baur, after my brother-in-law. He died last year. The war.”

“What a nice name,” the midwife says. “Can you write?”

The four million dollars was like a slap to the face, the residents said to the cameramen who asked questions. They recalled the day as one that no amount of money could buy back. The look of mirth on the faces of the children playing could not be replaced by any amount, US dollars or not.

Forty planes had dropped bombs over Schaffhausen. Those forty bombs had each killed a person. But that was not really true. In reality it was only a few bombs that had done the actual killing, the rest landing upon one another in a gross display of overkill. The bodies blown up again and again.

A soldier who was there on leave watched as a whole playground was destroyed. He had lost an arm, another ironic image from a war-torn continent. But it was the church that was hit the worst. Twenty people were inside, including a large, extended

family of long-time Schaffhausen residents. They were an educated family of artists and musicians, there rehearsing music for the Easter celebration. Work crews had arrived and cleared out the rubble, but no bodies were found.

Just scattered limbs and shreds of clothing.

The American government had apologized and tried to pay reparations for the mistake. The Swiss government took the money, what else was it supposed to do? But the money was spent on infrastructure. Not a penny ever went to any of the families touched by the tragedy.

A writer who lived in the village wrote an open note to the American government. But rather than send it to a bureaucrat who was not likely to read it, he copied the letter three times and posted them on the fringe of the three worst hit sections. Photographers at the scene took pictures of scattered residents reading the letter. A very famous photo is one of a woman with a large bandage on her leg. She appears as if she had pulled herself out of the rubble, and is holding a few scraps of clothing in her hand, the sunlight shining off of untarnished silver knitting needles that held her hair together. As the photo is taken a passerby explains that the woman lost her whole family in the church. She stood there in front of the letter, reading it at least three times, her finger trailing her eyes down the page. When she had finished, she ripped the letter off the wall and crumpled it up. She threw it to the ground and started walking toward the falls. The letter said:

“To the American Government who killed us from above like insects:

You should be ashamed. In this world of war and death, life is the only thing left that is sacred. Yet, in a moment of supreme destruction, you accidentally dropped the arsenal of forty aircrafts onto a peaceful village. That you could no longer recognize your friends from your enemies should serve as a warning. The philosophers talk of butterflies shaping the events on the other side of the world; I pledge that you may have done the same. You are now one of only two dominant super-powers

left on the planet. You need to be wiser with your choices. The Germans were not wise and you chose to destroy them. Be wise or else someone might decide to destroy you.

I do not send this message as a certainty or as a threat, but merely as a cautionary tale. If the deaths of Schaffhausen teach you nothing else, it should be this: All life is sacred. If you kill then you ask to be killed. And when someone who doesn't ask to be killed is killed, the world finds a way of evening it out. My English might not be clear or to the point, but I hope my spirit is, and I hope my plea is heard throughout your country as one of peace. We now need peace, not more war. Please, put down your guns and planes and join us in the field of destruction. For, staring out of a crater of human suffering is the only way to truly show how insignificant and fragile we all are."

The photographer took more photos and asked more questions, but his mind constantly reverted to the woman reading the letter and storming off. He had wanted to yell to her as she limped away, wait, let me help you, but had not been quick enough. He hoped she hadn't gone to throw herself over the falls. He hoped she hadn't decided to send her pain down the Rhine toward everyone else.

ACT I



Pascal Baur watched impatiently as Franklin Pettricone once again missed his mark. A furrow of displeasure creased his chalky forehead, riding up along his bald skullcap like a shiver, pulling him off the piano bench and pushing him toward his lead tenor. As he walked toward Franklin, all eyes focused on Baur. His stride was quick and lean, utilizing his arms and legs in a grace that made him seem faster than he was. Even after a night of fitful sleeping, Baur had a precision and acuteness that morning which seemed a metaphoric correlation toward his Swiss ancestry. Baur walked toward the taped X on the floor of the Bushnell theatre, ignoring a plump, hand from the costume mistress near the rear of the stage. His focus was on Franklin and the one spot he consistently missed. Franklin waited impatiently, one arm folded over, the other strangling the neck of an old violin, irritated that he had once again landed off target.

“I’m sorry Maestro, I don’t know why I have trouble with this one spot.”

Baur stopped three feet in front of Franklin with the deftness of a soldier. He had grey, neutral eyes and a light ring of hair that ran around the dome of his head. On top, he was completely bald, although his head did not shine and reflect light in the way that some men’s did. Pascal wore flat colors and his clothes fit snug and tailored, as if every piece of clothing had been prepared specifically for him. His arms were thin and long, with stubby fingers that belied their musicality. He always had a sort of rigidity in his posture that made one think of robots or military men. He looked down at the spot and

over at Franklin, seemingly unaware that Franklin had already apologized, and then pointed to the spot.

“Franklin, I need you to make it all the way across to this spot, or else the lights won’t catch you.”

“I’m sorry Maestro, let’s try it again and I swear I’ll hit my mark.”

“Okay, from the line, ‘listen, and tell me you love me.’”

Franklin walked back to stage right, his face tinted blue from the house lights. He placed the violin on the table and waited for Rebecca to come back from offstage. Baur sat back on the edge of the piano bench, still rigid, but with a quizzical look that made him appear unsure of what was about to happen. A stagehand rushed over to Baur and explained that Rebecca was making a cup of tea and would be right out. Baur looked over to Claudia and pointed towards the table that Franklin occupied.

“Claudia, could you sit in for Rebecca for a minute, just for Franklin?”

Claudia stood up without question and obediently sat down at the table. Her hair, dyed blonde, was in a ponytail and she was wearing legwarmers over tight-fitting black velvet pants. Her tattered copy of the score to *Orphée Redux* was rolled up into a tight club and she swung it side to side softly like a pendulum, waiting for the music to begin.

Baur stood up and offered the stark, shiny black piano bench to a large woman in her sixties. She had been waiting patiently next to the piano and now sat down and ran her fingers swiftly over the keys. She had a strong, clumsy feel, but for a rehearsal pianist she was more than adequate. Baur, his torso and head still rigid, began to loosen up in his arms as the music developed a steady pulse. His hands unconsciously kept the beat, sensually swaying like a boat on a lake, pulsing with the beat, each finger spreading

and contracting as if running through fistfuls of sand. Claudia watched Baur and smiled, sure he was unaware of his phantom conducting.

Franklin made it through the recitative with ease. He sat at the table, rubbing rosin on the violin and singing of his unfettered love for Pamela. After carefully wiping down each string, a gesture that was mimicked in the piano by consecutive ascending glissandi, he stood up and started moving toward the taped spot on the floor. This is where he always got into trouble, especially when he decided to ad-lib a small dance move that ultimately left him too far to the left. But this time he overcompensated to the right, his portly body spinning with a grace that would take women by surprise. He finished his spin and found himself half a step to the right of his spot. With the remaining two beats of the introduction he made a final step and landed directly onto his spot, his red, crumpled shirt soaking in the stage lights, stomping it a little too strongly for Baur's taste.

Franklin lifted the instrument to his neck and held the bow with his wrist limp and relaxed. His curly, greasy brown hair had fallen into his eyes, but since he wasn't really going to play the instrument this hardly bothered him. His mouth was slightly crooked, and as he prepared to play he unconsciously licked his lips, a remaining habit from his high school clarinet days, which really did not help him fake the violin. He squatted down, bracing his legs and prepared to fake the solo that David, his character, would play for Pamela. Baur looked at his watch and tapped the pianist on her back. The pianist stopped playing and Franklin walked back to the table.

Now that the music had stopped the stage returned to normal, with technicians and other auxiliary stagehands wandering from side to side, measuring distances and

pointing light-meters in every direction. From this scuttle of bodies emerged a lady wearing all black, her silver and black hair forcefully tied back into some resemblance of Gordian's Knot. She had thick frames and thick ankles, and looked like she was carrying a heavy burden upon her shoulders. It was the costume mistress, Barbara Urlington, and she motioned for Baur to come over and speak with her. Baur had his back to her and was focused on Franklin. He silently weighed all the aspects of the scene, looking for things that might need to be fixed before tonight's premiere. Baur thought about asking Franklin to cut his spin move altogether, but worried that it might disrupt his memory and cause an even worse mistake.

Claudia watched as Barbara continued to try and get Baur's attention. After a few unsuccessful tries, Barbara noticed Claudia watching her and she stopped trying to signal Baur and turned her attention to staring at Claudia. Barbara Urlington had a way of staring that reminded Claudia of a reproachful look at church. Her eyes would shimmer, almost shake, and as they stared into yours you could feel the fear seep up into your tear ducts and, like an animal threatened, all moisture would be withheld from your eyes. The two women stared at each other for a moment, then Claudia felt her forehead flare up as if Barbara was focusing light through a magnifying glass. Claudia blinked and looked away, her eyes robbed of every tear, and when she looked back up, Barbara had left.

"I got it that time, just a little bit off, but I figured out how to get there," Franklin said to Baur, an inflection of both triumph and relief present in his voice.

Pascal Baur, still and pensive, gave him a stiff head nod and clapped his hands together, another unconscious tick that Claudia had learned meant he was happy but needed to move on to some other problem as fast as possible. In the eight months that

Claudia had been with the Hartford Opera Company she had not found Baur to be a man prone to talking unless absolutely necessary. He had a slight speech impediment with the letter S, and he had once told her of some of the taunts he had received growing up in New Jersey. Still, she wanted to believe that his silence was more an indication of his advanced intelligence rather than any limitation in his speech. Indeed, occasionally Baur would get excited and speak wildly, gesticulating with his hands and even the lines on his barren head, moving from topic to topic with such speed and lack of transition that he would quickly lose everyone in the room. At that point, when the eyes of anticipation would change to glazed eyes of milky confusion, he would grow increasingly self-conscious of his own mouth, and his eyes would cease to shift from onlooker to onlooker, but would instead attempt to glance down at his own mouth and with an invisible hand slowly reign in the volume until he was totally mute. This sort of verbal decrescendo seemed musical to Claudia, and often, when they were alone in his bed she would try to excite him just to see hear him speak with that sort of musicality.

It was in intimations like that that Claudia had accidentally revealed their relationship to the entire company. At first it had been an exciting covert existence, and their dinner diner dates had been scripted through secret communications and even at one point a cipher based on the word “Bach”. But she was no longer as excited about sneaking around, and he had long ago favored a more haphazard approach. If they find out, then they find out had become his motto, and so employing all of her study of Sarah Bernhardt (or maybe it was Diane Keaton), Claudia had dropped clues like a bad criminal and allowed a few people to catch them in the act. At first it had been Rebecca Olundsen, the great Swedish mezzo prima donna of the company, her reaction being almost as

dramatic as Claudia's surprise, a showdown of purple shock that seemed more at home in the president's western films. And then Barbara Urlington had uncovered them naked in the prop room, such a cliché of theatre that Claudia had worried they would not be taken seriously.

Barbara's shock had been the most enjoyable to Claudia. Pascal had been kissing her pink, goose-fleshed breasts when a small whisper had come through a maze of costumes and props and nestled into her ear like the tickle of a warm wind. She had said that the third act had some wrong notes, and at first Claudia was so confused at Barbara's audacity to question Baur that she momentarily forgot her missing shirt and exposed chest. Pascal had stopped kissing the side of her breast and looked through the web of tin foil armor and velvet maiden dresses to find the imposing women looking back at him. Claudia watched the lust drain from his face and his eyes dance with worry. He looked at her and made a silent entreaty for her confidence. Claudia had quickly redressed and crouched behind him, hoping to hide among the shadows and chain-mail.

"Pascal," Barbara had whispered, peering behind him suspiciously, "I thought I heard noises back here. What is are you doing?" Barbara spoke with a heavy French accent, and would often double-up on her verbs or change tenses in the middle of a sentence.

Baur had cleared his throat and reached into his pocket, producing a twice-folded piece of manuscript paper. He handed it to her in absolute silence. Claudia, crouched cornered cowering behind Baur's beige belt, felt the red fear of discovery and her racing heart. She watched Barbara's thick ankles shuffle from one side to another, a black thread dangling from the bottom hem of her skirt. At that moment she tried listing all the

scenes in Shakespeare that found characters hidden during an important conversation. Not that the costume mistress was really important, more like a secondary character in this drama, but nonetheless important to continuity and foreshadowing. Everyone was a secondary character in some story. And at that moment Claudia felt the first pangs of worry as to whether she could ever compete in Baur's private world of drama and music. Barbara and Pascal were talking low, at a hushed yet pressing pace, like two competing recitatives of worry. Claudia felt that Baur must be worried about discovery, about having the entire company know of their affair.

"I says you need to look through the final act and make sure the key is clear," Barbara said, a maternal sound in her voice that made Claudia shiver.

"I don't think you have the right to go through my music," Baur responded quite loud and pronounced. His chin was raised and Claudia felt his worry at the thought of being discovered. "I will speak with you later, but just because you have some musical training from old Marseilles, doesn't mean you have the fortitude to question my use of tone and timbre. Do you understand?" With this final statement he lowered his chin and gestured for her to leave. Barbara did not seem defeated, but simply walked away, her gait lopsided like a dotted rhythm. Claudia watched as her simple matte black sweater disintegrated into the background and she disappeared. Her worried heart was beating out of control, and as Baur languidly turned back toward her she jumped up out of her crouching position and slung her arms around his neck and her thin, dancer's legs around his waist. Although a small and elderly looking man due to his premature baldness, Pascal Baur was extremely strong and grounded. His body barely perceived her weight as she dug her nails into his back and started kissing his neck. As Claudia continued to

kiss him, his cheeks and face slowly regained a healthy color. It was as if Barbara Urlington had tried to suck the life and vivacity out of him, and it was up to Claudia to return it before he collapsed of hypothermia or some such affliction.

She watched Baur and could tell that the warmth of life had once again left his face. He must have indeed noticed Barbara from the nether-reaches of the stage. Baur seemed lost and confused, and bumbled through his score for a minute while the stagehands hustled around him like worker bees. He seemed to be having trouble focusing on the score. His eyes swept from line to line, from oboe to trumpet in a sort of frenzy that seemed to Claudia like a loss of his usual confidence. A bead of sweat ran down his head, an escaping thought, and his body stood rigid as the sweat rested harrowingly at the corner of his cheek, hanging there on the precipice.

From stage right came the sound of something breaking, and then the piercing sound of Rebecca Olundsen screaming at a stagehand. Claudia, like a Pavlovian subject, always pinched her eyes shut in anticipation of the high, buzzing pitch of Rebecca's natural speaking voice. She spoke higher than Claudia could comfortably sing, and it often made an echo effect throughout the cavernous stage, with little bits of her voice bouncing from every wall and assaulting from all angles. Like a cyclone, it spun throughout Claudia's skull in a swarming jumble of past memories. But this wasn't to be one of the overplayed explosions that had occurred weekly since Claudia joined the company. Rebecca seemed to be getting her way and the stagehand must have been told by another crew member to just give in and get silent. The worst thing you could do to Rebecca Olundsen, everyone knew, was to speak back.

After a few more seconds of dramatic shrieking, the curtain grew silent and a muddle of whispering ensued from all sides of the stage. From the epicenter of the altercation emerged a curvy woman with long, permed blond hair, her hips swinging from side to side in an overstated manner that underscored her tendency toward melodrama. She was wearing a pink polyurethane dress, which stretched to a point of oblivion with each swing of the hips as if ready to burst forth from the fulcrum if yielded too wildly. Her lips were bright red, plastered into an illusory smile like the Mona Lisa, a permanent fixture on her face. It was as if Rebecca was always acting, always ready to perform.

Rebecca approached the table and Claudia and seemed ready to start some more mischief. She was staring at Claudia and her seeming familiarity with the seat, Pamela's seat, and her pretentiousness regarding her place in this company. Claudia could feel all this like she felt the temperature in the theater perceptibly rise. Better to not let her think she was being challenged, Claudia thought. Better to let Rebecca stay on top until the wall finally crumbled—no reason to let her get a grip beforehand.

“Claudia,” Rebecca called out as she took a seat across from Franklin, “I forgot my tea back in my room, would you be so kind as to please retrieve it for me. Thank you dear, you are the best.” Rebecca smiled at Claudia, challenging her to respond. Speak back, her eyes glistened, see what that gets you.

You are the best, Claudia thought, walking away from the stage. She hated the way Rebecca would attack with pleasantries, like placating a child with a sugary treat, always “you are the best,” or “you are so so kind”. Too much hyperbole, she thought, and way too much make-up. Rebecca always brought out a cattiness in her that Claudia

loathed. That someone could get her blood boiling for no discernable reason created a feeling of hatred and helplessness that often left Claudia feeling physically sick. She would much rather just let Rebecca have whatever she wanted rather than be forced to fight it out under such circumstances. For this passivity she blamed her parents, and would rather follow her better angels down to the basement or to the corner market in defeat before unleashing her demons to wreak havoc on others. But the worst was Rebecca watching her leave, her posture tall and victorious, and Claudia's knowledge that Rebecca did not see any of the victories that Claudia found in submissiveness. To Rebecca the only victory was the one she was now engraving with her laser eyes into Claudia's backside as she moved toward the stairs.

Claudia took the old red door near the light panel. It lead down into the catacombs of Bushnell Theatre, down to *Phantom of the Opera* realm, where dark corners hid mice and spiders and other sorts of nocturnal crawlers, and the bland cement walls held you in like a prison, a place where it seemed for a long time Hartford had chosen to hide its opera company.

The cement stairs spun around for two floors and finally spilled Claudia out into a long water-stained hallway of glowing halogen sticks.

This is Pascal's Day-Glo hallway, she thought.

Rebecca's dressing room was the third door. Claudia moved expertly between the jagged ledges of couches and cots that lined the walls like a relief shelter after a hurricane. For an entire week before the show most of the important crew, or those that fancied such sleepovers, had spent too many hours fixing and taping and altering and

revising, and a little bit of down time seemed an ample reward from the bourgeois stage director, Bill Williams, or “Billy Bill” as he was known throughout the bathroom stalls.

Claudia stepped over a few blankets covered in glitter and wigs, by a sleeping light technician, and found herself holding her breath to squeeze through the door to Rebecca’s dressing room. A bookshelf had been propped onto a dolly and seemed to be waiting for the slumber party to break up so it could make it to the freight elevator. In its rush to escape, it had unfortunately blocked the door to Rebecca’s sanctuary.

Claudia now understood that Rebecca had never even made her tea. She would never have been able to fit through the door without moving the bookcase.

Now, she thought, when I show up with her tea Rebecca’ll get angry about the fact that I could squeeze through and she couldn’t.

Guess I’m screwed either way.

The room was dark, with the only light coming from a patch of glow-in-the-dark stars on the south wall. They were not in any standard constellation scheme, but rather had created a crude “Rebecca” that slanted and fell down the wall like some sort of self-glorious waterfall. Claudia knew of the star map, even knew about it before she was officially hired for the position. She had interviewed the day after an infamous “Becca Binge” that had left a large hole in her dressing room wall. Claudia remembered sitting in an aisle seat in the hall waiting for Baur to show up. She had been sitting there for nearly half an hour, fifteen of it being early, fifteen waiting for Baur to arrive. She had been waiting for so long that the stage crew had largely forgotten about her, and seemed to pretend that she had left some time ago. So Claudia sat still and patient, enticed by the antibacterial smell of the place, all the colors and painted angels soaring above the

ceilings like it was the renaissance and this concert house belonged to the Gonzaga's or the Medici's. So Claudia sat and sat, and soon found that a slight conversation was occurring within earshot, not within her traditional hearing range, but within this heightened range that occurred in halls with incredible acoustics. Two fat men, dressed in near-identical tattered blue jeans and faded, patched flannel, were talking up near the curtain, stage right. It was a hushed whisper that seemed to center on Rebecca Olundsen, a name famous enough to make Claudia blush and feel conspiratorial, like she was uncovering the Iran-Contra scandal or Eagleton's depression.

“So she fuckin’ snapped at Tom and threw a mug through the wall.”

“No, she couldn’t do that, these walls are tough.”

“...that’s what I’m saying. I think she actually threw that brick that used to hold her door open. I looked closely at it this morning and it appeared to have been up to some mischief some time I bet.”

The balder of the men, wearing shiny blue Nike sneakers, turned and stared down Claudia, like he had just noticed that she was in the room. But apparently he either didn’t think she could hear or just didn’t care.

“I heard that she threw the mug at Tom, and that Bobby Duggs saw everything. I mean, he didn’t call in today or nothin’, and I don’t hear anybody bitchin’ about where he is.”

“No you fuckin’ idiot. Jesus Christ, Bobby Duggs is with his wife, she’s having the baby.”

“No shit, I didn’t know she was pregnant.”

“Why the fuck did she get so fat then?”

“I figured she felt she got the rock and then could get off the rock.”

“You fuckin’ idiot.”

Rebecca Olundsen, recognizable from the album covers Claudia had owned since her teens, entered and immediately the two men shut up and tried to wander nondescript to various points offstage.

Her skirt was tighter than a straight-jacket, and immediately Claudia caught sight of her fire-engine lips and felt ashamed of her own clear-coated, worm-looking weaklings. If lips defined a voice, she thought, then I have just met a voice with no equal.

And then Rebecca had opened her mouth and that high-pitched train whistle reverberation had lingered and she had never been able to shake it out. She started ripping into the two stagehands, her voice like that of some jungle animal, spitting out foul language that seemed incongruous with the voice that had serenaded Claudia to sleep since she was six. After the first minute of circular-breathing belittlement, Rebecca noticed Claudia sitting in the audience. Her voice did not miss a beat but her eyes now focused on Claudia. Claudia sunk down into the seat, but that seemed to enrage Rebecca further. The two men stood there and took the abuse as if it was normal, but to Claudia, the end of each sentence pummeled her like a lopsided boxing match. As she kept still and hidden, Rebecca got louder and seemingly taller, until finally she ran out of breath and stormed back out, staring into Claudia’s eyes, and her soul, with every retreating step.

The joy of the job interview with Pascal had been forgotten in the screaming. On the day she had won her first ever job all she could remember was the fierce timbre of Rebecca Olundsen.

She found the tea next to an old, stained Juilliard mug. It was some sort of Chinatown brew that Rebecca had learned of from Alma Mahler's granddaughter (or so she said) and was rumored to contain such exotic ingredients as the shriveled testicles of dolphins (this was on good authority by the assistant costume mistress). Claudia almost wished the dolphin testes were true, and that it would somehow explain Rebecca's piercing chatter.

The microwave oven, which Rebecca claimed was a gift from the CEO of GE (she claimed to have been the guest of honor at his house in Fairfield), chimed after a minute and Claudia cautiously removed the steaming mug. She had learned to use a towel to lift the mug out of the microwave oven after burning her hand the first time Rebecca had sent her down for tea. Tom, Rebecca's manager and sometimes boyfriend, had started laughing at her, as if she had just bused in from the plains and was unfamiliar with today's modern luxuries. And what a wonder, the microwave oven looked like some sort of thing out of a sci-fi movie, Star Wars kind of stuff. It had a riveted stainless steel exterior that wrapped around continuously to the back like a blanket. The front had a digital display and about twenty buttons, each with a different automatic setting for a certain dish. One button simply read, "Boil Water". The front had a clear glass screen with graph-paper lines laminated on, and when watching something cooking inside Claudia felt like she was watching her food through a scope. The door handle was a curved single piece of aluminum, the kind that had held the Apollo mission together.

Claudia had never owned a microwave oven in her life, and although she had often seen them in the kitchens of her friend's mothers, the specimen that was placed on the altar in Rebecca's dressing room made her nervous just like she used to get at the dentist.

After letting the tea steep, she sheepishly picked up the still scalding mug and headed toward the stairs, using one of her leg warmers to insulate her hands. The tea smelled of wood, and Claudia was brought back to her childhood hikes through eastern New York. She could almost smell through the tea and up the tunxis trail through the Berkshires. Her father falling and getting covered in mud and her mother laughing and also rolling around in the mud as a way to not emasculate him. The trail was infinitely wet and always fresh and alive with the smells of trees and plants. And Rebecca's tea had that same density, as if underneath the surface of the tea survived a thicket of forest with a winding trail from the mug handle through the brim.

Claudia maneuvered again past the bookshelf, watching the mug the entire time and trying not to spill any tea on her leg warmer. She watched the mug suspended in the air, a thick steam swirling out of the mug to the left, when two small hands reached from behind the bookshelf and softly grasped the mug. Claudia kept her grasp at first, then slowly let go and rushed through to meet the floating hands.

Attached to the hands was Tony Bell. Tony, with a familiar part down the middle of his shiny black hair, softly cradled the mug like Claudia imagined he would later cradle Franklin's head as they would lie silently, resting before the performance. Like Tom did for Rebecca, Anthony seemed to be the calming presence in Franklin's life. Ironically, Franklin would often spend hours in deep discussion about just the opposite, how he was the normal one and Tony was the drama queen. Claudia had learned quickly

how to avoid the landmines of the Hartford Opera Company, and Franklin's lack of "living" was one of those that you just didn't question. Nodding and agreeing was her secret to surviving from week to week, and at the moment all she wanted to do was survive.

Tony held the mug and was continuing a conversation that Claudia didn't remember beginning. He was gesturing with his arms like a ballerina; both his hands curved from their sockets, creating a large circle as if he was holding someone tight, the mug acting like the joint that connected his hands together. He was pulling his hands in and out as he talked, cyclical and steady with his breathing. At first Claudia thought he was offering her back the mug, but after having it pulled back from her reach twice she waited patiently and let him finish his rant. As usual it was partially about Franklin and partially about Tony's job at an ad firm working on promotions for *Sunday in the Park with George*. It seemed someone had done something with rush tickets or Tony was supposed to save tickets or something. He had obviously been driving up the Saw Mill Parkway and ranting to himself, and naturally this had continued as he walked through the tombs toward Franklin's dressing room. That Claudia had happened upon this was nothing more than coincidence, and that he was now talking to her as opposed to the open air didn't seem to matter to Tony one way or another.

"And then the bastard forgot that we are doing two shows this Saturday. I mean, how can you forget that we are doing two shows on Saturday? It's the same schedule every fucking week, like the movies or the Marines, no one ever cancels this bastard."

Claudia thought about answering Tony while he caught his breath, but as she opened her mouth to speak Tony started in again, lambasting the poor worker who had

made the error. Claudia kept her mouth open, waiting like a driver trying to enter I-95 at rush hour, and watching Tony for a slight break or hesitation. Most of the cast played this game, just leaving their mouths agape when talking to “Tony the Mouth”, as if frozen before beginning. It was worth more kudos from the others if you could also manage to keep eye contact with him the whole time, mouth hanging open and if you dared, tongue dangling out.

Tony still had the cup of tea in his hand, and Claudia was worried that as he got more excited he became more prone to spilling. But his hands remained steady, even while he criticized Franklin’s handling of a recent negotiation for a concert up at Dartmouth. His hands just continued to expand and contract, like a breathing exercise for a pregnant woman. The Mouth kept moving, jumping subjects as often as sentences, sometimes as fast as from one clause to another. Claudia stood there, too afraid to stick her tongue out like the others, but still holding her mouth slightly ajar, trying to play the game and wait patiently for the soliloquy to end.

If we pretend, like rats, that we have a knowledge of the inner-workings of Bushnell Theatre, then, can you now see the path from Claudia down in the tombs up to Baur, Franklin and Rebecca onstage? We must look past the fourth wall if we are going to make it. Quick, we must hurry. Next to Claudia is a light switch, one of those damper numbers with a dial, and attached behind the socket cover is a strip of wire. If we scurry up it we come to a master line that breaks through cobwebbed sheetrock shards up through the floor and to the lights high above the stage. Up high, we can perch and stare down like angels, listening to Baur as he directs Rebecca and Franklin through the last scene of the opera. Rebecca sits on the stage bed, her body covered in a fuzzy pink robe,

her legs bare except for one small sock on her left foot. Around her like electrons circling a nucleus buzz the make-up artist, her manager, and some other technicians.

Baur, messaging his hands, sits at the piano waiting for the circling birds to leave Rebecca alone. One by one they disengage and finally the stage is clear for another shot at the climactic confrontation. To Baur, the slow accelerando and crescendo to Pamela's high scream was like a mauve landscape changing to a bright orange. The string glissandi and the high wind trills all left him feeling quite enthralled and exhausted. Conducting it was almost as much work as writing it.

First the contrabasses and celli start to slip, just microtones at first, finally falling augmented fourths furiously down to a cluster of double-stops. With a rumble established, the strings start to skirt up slowly but continuously until they are at an octave above their starting pitches. Then a large blast of brass stirs them to rise more, like a wave tipping a teetering ship, until they are running up in some out-of-control pattern that ends in an altered minor chord of harsh harmonics. The piercing strings are softened momentarily by wind tremolos, but soon all are mutated by percussion and low brass, transplanting the once serpentine lines into a harsh pile of sound. Through all this Rebecca starts softly and pierces through, her voice like a harpoon gun plunging through the belly of a giant whale. Franklin, or David if you will, stands aghast at both the audaciousness of her voice and the scattered scabs upon her chest. Rebecca had refused to rehearse nude, but had agreed to expose her breasts for the performances. But even without the grisly scarlet letters upon her body, the music pierced through, even at half volume in rehearsal, and shuddered the souls of everyone moved by even an atom of the soundwave.

As the sound faded through the rafters, Baur grit his teeth and nodded a begrudging appreciation. It was not everyday that he wrote a passage of music that even affected him. The rest of the cast and crew were crouched in hiding around the stage. Baur watched them slowly rise, as if painfully waiting for an aftershock. But still, to have that affect within their bones made Baur proud. In his head he took a mental snapshot, thinking about how this sort of posture and pensiveness might be useful in his next commissioned opera, about the bombing of Dresden.

Rebecca and Franklin were sitting in on the bed, both waiting for the approving eyes of Baur. Franklin's red shirt was soaked with sweat, and it seemed as good of a time as any to be through for the moment.

"Okay," Baur coughed, his ears a little shocked at the unintended volume of his voice, "but tonight, just because it's the premiere, let's really go all out. Rebecca, can you give me the same kind of intensity that you gave to Salome?"

Franklin gave a slight clap, his face happy like a child's after finishing his chores. "What about my reaction? Did you think it a little over the top?"

"Franklin," Rebecca butted in, "you can't freak out too much when you see me. After all, I'll be naked, and even though I have these scabs, I'm still naked."

Franklin looked at her chest dismissively. "Don't worry Rebecca, I'll be shocked, but respectful. If I was in your place I would be scared too."

Baur could feel foreshadowing escalation like some feel an oncoming storm in their joints. "Franklin and Rebecca, let's end the morning rehearsal there. You were both wonderful, and I'd hate to lose either of your voices this evening through my own stubbornness. Franklin, as to your question, let's be initially excited about her naked,

kind of in a weird, wrong way, and then as if focusing a camera lens, get shocked when you really see her scabs.

“And Rebecca, I know you are worried about the scene, but just don’t overlay it. Lean back as if you are ashamed, but then when you go after him remember to push out at him, like an alpha male would. Really dig into him and *then* go for it.”

Both looked at the other, and Baur sensed that a temporary truce had been achieved. Franklin turned away and started putting the violin into its case, first wiping down the strings like Baur had instructed, and then gently placing the large, beat up student model into the plastic, numbered case.

Rebecca, her eyes darting over all corners of the stage, was the first to see Claudia emerge from the tombs. In her hands, wrapped in a soft, white leg-warmer, was a mug of tea. Rebecca shot her arms up in the air, the skin under her biceps jingling like kids on a swing set. “Claudia, my darling, thank you heavenly, so much for the tea.”

She approached Claudia in some sort of ballet-esque walk, her legs pouncing out in front of her and her toes pointed with venom toward her pretend sister Lydia. As if passing off a torch, Claudia reached out the mug and Rebecca grasped it with two arms, her head bowing deeply. As Claudia let go, she momentarily forgot about the bookshelf and what she had expected from Rebecca. Instead, she was pleasantly surprised by the chivalry and courteousness that seemed so unusual from the legendary soprano. She turned and sheepishly smiled toward Baur, who had a perplexed look on his face.

“Claudia,”

She turned around to Rebecca wondering what other unusual absurdities were going to happen. But, instead of finding Rebecca happily sipping her tea, she turned just

as a mug' worth of hot, brown liquid splashed across her chest. Claudia stood, mortified, as if she had just been covered in pig's blood at the prom, and from beyond her outstretched trembling hands she beheld the burning evil face of Rebecca Olundsen.

“What the hell? This tea is absolutely frigid. Why did you do something like that to me? Why?” Rebecca kept screaming, her voice rising each sentence like a cycle approaching the upper limits of human hearing. “What could ever have gone through your sad, pathetic skull to try and ruin me with such frozen tea? You know what happens when vocal chords freeze up, you know. You probably even spiked it with milk or cream, didn't you? Didn't you?”

Claudia stood frozen, unable to process what had just happened. She could feel the tea soaked through her shirt and dripping down her stomach to her underwear. She could feel the first few drips scavenge through the lace and tumble down her legs like kids down a slide. A disgusting brown pallor of hate filled her lungs and she tried her best to choke it down. Even with her best ability, a few chirps and grunts escaped her lips, and she started to feel the ensconced heat of her face expand through her arms and chest, thumping from her heart with the percussion of a march. The crowd around the corners of the stage stood frightened by Claudia's murmurs and grunts. They all expected some sort of feral attack and waited with both glee and worry, as the two female leads, separated by only a few feet, stood on the brink of a bad batch of mutually assured destruction.

Rebecca seemed the first to break free and dismiss Claudia, even turning her back to her as if she already knew that Claudia would simply stand there stammering until long after the moment had passed, a deer frozen in the bulbous headlights of the pitch-forked

vixen. But instead of waiting patiently, as they had been taught by the older crew in the same breath as where the best lunch could be found, instead of flinging herself headfirst in a fury toward Rebecca, Claudia did the one thing even she didn't expect, she started crying.

Rebecca heard the familiar trail of tears as she stood facing the audience, her back to Claudia. She still had the tea mug in her hand, and thought for a split second in her own demented way about turning and throwing the mug at her feet. But a calm seemed to come with the tears, and her mood became muddled and soft, so she beckoned to Tom and started walking toward the freight elevator and back to her dressing room.

Claudia had gained control of her tears and was slowly retreating toward the bathroom. She looked down to survey the damage and found that the tea bag was still stuck to her left breast like an exaggerated nipple. She picked it off, discarding it in the wastebasket as she crept away from the myriad eyes watching her with pity. The peripheral parade of eyes gave her unspoken support, but she still felt humiliated and cold that not a single voice had come to her aid. She tried to find Baur's grey stoic eyes among the mass, but all was blue or brown or green. Like judges, they all seemed to be above her, looking down with Cheshire stares and blank mouths. The stage was quiet and not a soul felt free to move around. A train whistle could be heard off in the distance, and the moment Claudia went through the bathroom door the frozen awkwardness lifted and all turned to their neighbor, a glisten of sadness in their eyes, and silently vowed that such travesties would never befall them.

Baur was sitting behind a rubble of stagehand stomachs and watched the whole ordeal painfully. He knew that he should intervene, but he feared that his presence would

create even further problems. His hand was resting on his chin, like some Rodin plagiarist, and his thumb was running up and down his cheek, fighting and flowing with the early-afternoon stubble.

A hand touched him softly on the shoulder, and he felt the slight grip of Barbara's fat fingers. "You care for her," she said, her voice soft and blurred, like she was talking through cupped hands. "Is all ready for the tonight?"

Baur turned around and faced her. Even sitting, he still barely had to look up to make eye contact. Her eyes seemed sincere and she was being nicer than usual. The Barbara he had come to rely on was always pointed and sharp, with a stubbornness that he knew well.

"Franklin seems to be getting the spots he wasn't. I think all will go well. Did you have anything new to talk about?" He accelerated as he spoke; he wanted her to leave. He didn't want to talk with Barbara about Claudia or any other personal aspect of his life.

"No. I just want everything to be good. What your plan is do with Rebecca?"

Baur shrugged and waved her off. He turned his head and listened to her uneven retreat. Like a heartbeat growing fainter until it had vanished.

The diminuendo, like all thoughts that fade to black, immediately cut in his mind to her. In his beleaguered mind, death and despair were both synonyms for Diane.

Diane would never have gone for any of this, he thought. She would have kept me balanced and focused.

The smell of fresh wood always excited her, and the simple pleasures of fresh fruit and a large crisp piece of cod. She would smile and tell him that life's simple

pleasures were the greatest strength of the human experience. She had a sort of ambitious, poetic way of speaking that was hard for Baur to not unconsciously create a swelling soundtrack of cinematic vigor.

“The Gods,” she would say, her voice growing professorial, “they had everything, and thus couldn’t come to enjoy the simple pleasures of life. That’s why they are always so miserable in Homer or Ovid or Hesiod. Pascal, could you imagine what a single grape would taste like to Zeus? Try this.”

She reached over to him and brought a stabbed slice of carrot to his mouth. He took it in and savored the taste, the cheesy dressing and the crisp break of the vegetable between his teeth. He had his eyes closed as he chewed, and when he opened them he saw her looking, her eyes dancing with anticipation.

“It is great,” he said, still chewing, “but I think Zeus wouldn’t necessarily taste the food because he was too drunk on ambrosia.”

“Pascal, ambrosia is just some concoction of wine and rose petals. Give me a large beer anyday and I’d show Zeus what he’s missing.”

He loved to listen to her talk, her hands swinging through the air like a bullrider, corralling her words into sentences and paragraphs of fun and mirth. Her dark black hair created a stark contrast to her pale face, and her eyes always danced with excitement even when talking about the most mundane subjects.

He reached across the table and grasped her delicate hand. She wiggled her fingers in his and he ran his hand up her arm to the elbow, cupping it and brushing down with his fingers. She smiled and allowed her hair to fall across her face, hiding her eyes between stalks of hair the color of night. He smiled and reached up to her elbow again,

and she shrugged the pitch-black hair out of her face and reached her mouth down and kissed his hand. Pascal squeezed her arm and pulled back, taking in a complete view of Diane from a few feet back, like an art aficionado pulling back after staring closely at a beautiful portrait.

A candle flickered and the musty light pulsed through her hair and onto her face. Baur was holding his breath as if he might somehow ruin this perfect moment. He was always amazed how oblivious she seemed to his stammering unworthiness. To him, she was the embodiment of some deity that had somehow seen a flicker of amusement in his company. He would often stop and just watch her, his mind racing for that perfect poem that might speak through to her soul and enlighten her to the joyous music that rang through his head every time he was in her presence. To somehow sum this up into a transmittable gesture was more provocative to him than any poem or symphony. It was the ultimate in both absolute and programmatic music. Like Strauss with *Der Tod*, he just wanted to transmute the indecipherable.

Baur stared through her hair until he caught her eyes staring back. She had a mischievous smirk that left him slightly aroused. And he knew she knew it.

He could feel her foot brush up his leg under the table.

Diane whispered something that he didn't quite catch. She smiled again and he felt her leg push slightly harder up his. He leaned in, catching the lingering scent of jasmine and roses quaffed with the heat of the flickering candle. Diane reached out her hand over the plate of fish and noodles and brushed it up against her cheek.

“I said, ‘What do you want to do next?’”

Baur felt the warmth of her hand leave back over the plate. He smiled conspiratorially and whispered, “You tell me what you’d like to do.”

Diane sat there smiling, and then slowly and discreetly licked her lips. Baur felt a quick rush of blood leave his face and travel south. Then, as he was exhaling his long held breath, Diane starting smiling even more, and he felt the first brush of her toes near his crotch. Her big toe found the growing bulge and he about jumped out of his seat. She started giggling and once again allowed her hair to slide down and cover her face. She continued to wiggle her toes and Baur tried to make a stern face. “Stop it,” then, “Don’t start something you won’t finish,” and, “Let’s not wait for dessert.”

The five minutes Baur waited for the bill was excruciating. He had managed to get Diane to stop teasing him, but still he couldn’t quell the desire that was spreading through his body almost as fast as the alcohol. He paid the bill and met her at the door. She was wearing a solid blue dress with a dash of flowers near the bottom. She held her coat in her arms and then turned around completely as she put it on, pushing out her ass slightly, taunting Baur even more. This was one of her favorite games, to try and get him to abandon his usual even exterior. She would flirt with him and reach down and brush his thigh as they walked through Central Park, or kiss his neck slightly as they rode the subway. She was not overly adventurous, but her desire to entice him far outweighed any public timidity.

Baur watched her put on the coat and before she finished he had moved in and cornered her in the dark entranceway. They had been eating at one of those submerged basement, dark restaurants in the village and were now nestled in a secluded hallway that led to the street. He leaned her up softly against the peeling white walls and kissed her

passionately and deeply, starting with her neck and moving up to her lips, holding it until the sound of a doorway opening brought him up for air.

They rode the subway back up towards Columbus circle, Diane being relatively well-behaved the entire way. The car was mostly empty, just a few teenagers listening to a boombox at the far end. They sat silently in the handicapped seats and hoped the youths would depart at Times Square. They didn't, so they just sat there nestled in large wool coats, hands clasped together, a little drunk and tired from the afternoon Christmas shopping. Pascal smelled her hair and listened to the music coming from the other end. It was something by Kool and the Gang, and he couldn't help but analyze the chord progression. Diane watched him lost in thought, her eyes still dancing, but slowly, like a waltz, and watched through the window as they swept through the tracks to Columbus circle.

They exited the station and rose to the surface, hand in hand, Baur leading Diane from the dank stench of urine and trash. Above the streets were covered with snow, and all the shops were closed for the evening. They walked the two blocks down and over to 58th, and then climbed three flights of stairs to their apartment. As they rounded the last flight in silence, Diane stopped, tugging Baur back into her arms. He instinctively hugged her, reaching around and pulling her in as if wanting to somehow compress her into him. She started kissing his neck, then stopped, looking up into his eyes, crying.

“Pascal, tell me you love me.”

He looked into her eyes and tried to imagine a woman he could love more.

“My Diane, I couldn't imagine a woman I could love more than you. I wish I had some scrap of Shakespeare to read or some precious stone that could prove how much I

value you, but all I can do is tell you that you are the most perfect women in the entire city of New York, and that I can't imagine loving anyone more than you ever in my life."

"Pascal," she purred, kissing him softly on the neck, "tell me what we're going to do."

"My love, I am going to earn a spot with some orchestra as a composer or a conductor, and then we are going to buy an apartment and you'll get a job teaching English at a local college and we'll be sitting by a fire reminiscing about that time we had dinner in the village in the snow."

Diane wiggled in his arms, her free hands reaching up and pulling down his hunting hat over his eyes. She started laughing and kissing him, moving up his neck until she reached his lips. Baur tried to reach up and remove his cap, but she was hugging his arms to his sides and she was strong.

"Where do you have interviews this week?"

Pascal reached down and tickled her sides. She lurched back and he quickly adjusted her hat. She darted back toward him and once again pinned his arms by his side, rocking him with her hips from side to side.

"I have a community orchestra conducting interview in Danbury tomorrow, then the Hartford Opera Company music director interview on Thursday. Babbitt has connections in Hartford, so I hope that at the very least I will make the finals."

"Have you ever been to Hartford?"

"Once, a few years ago for a concert. Pretty shitty city, but it has a rich section that has a ton of money. And it's not too far from New York by train. A job is a job, so how picky can I be?"

Diane hugged him tight and then led him up the stairs to their apartment. He remembered the dress and her hair, her foot under the table and the candle flickering by the salt. He had held up his end by remembering the night they had dinner in the village when it snowed, but he no longer had her, and now it was just a story that he told to himself. Like a punishment, he would remember the touch of her big toe and kissing her in the dark hallway. He remembered going with her down into the subway and coming back out like some sort of conquering heroes, both running for no reason from the station all the way to the apartment building. Running through the falling snowflakes and catching them on their teeth and tongues.

Baur still owned the hunting cap, but he no longer had the will to wear it. He thought about how it would have been a great night tonight to have walked back home with Diane after the premiere, running in their formal wear all the way to Main Street and up the elevator to their apartment. It didn't have a fireplace, but that hardly seemed to matter now.

He heard a sound from the back of the theatre and quickly checked his watch to see how long he had been sitting there. It was slightly before three and he had work to do before putting on his tux for the performance. He thought again about Diane and worried that it might not be fair to Claudia. He knew that she would never be able to understand how he could still be fixated on a dead woman while simultaneously falling in love with her.

Maybe it was because he worried he might be falling in love, he thought, maybe it was some subconscious need to resolve things that had ended badly.

“Pascal,” a familiar voice shouted from the back of the theatre. He looked back and saw Nancy Warren, a girl from his New York days, conjured up as if in some Dickensonian way, with chains and a luminescent glow of a nineteenth century poltergeist. But it wasn’t Nancy Warren the twenty-year-old, but the real Nancy Warren who was now an arts reporter for the Hartford Courant.

“Pascal, my god, it’s been so long.” She was now rushing up from the back, dressed in a sleek mini-skirt and a long coat, her legs bare and seemingly unaffected by the blistering Hartford cold. She was carrying a large purse and had her press badge pinned on a swollen sweater that was bouncing up and down with each stride. She got to the stage and reached up her hand. Baur wasn’t sure why at first, but then understood that she wanted him to pull her onto the stage. He reached down, momentarily checking out her toned body, and grasped her hand at the wrist, pulling her up onto the stage with one swift motion.

“Nancy, are you here to do the story?”

He had agreed a few days before with Albert Camus, the humorously named arts editor for the Harford Courant, for someone to come and do a story. He knew that Nancy sometimes did freelance work for the paper, but had expected Don, the usual arts reporter to come and cover the premiere.

Nancy, squirming like a girl at prom, shook her head emphatically. Baur waited for her to start talking, but it seemed she was happy with allowing an uncomfortable silence to pass between them. After too many seconds, he shrugged.

“I am pretty busy today,” he said, attempting small-talk, “I’m sure you can understand, but if you want to hang around for an hour or two I can give you a bit of time around five. You can check out the costumes and talk with anyone else if you want.”

Nancy again shook her head in agreement. “That would be fantastic. Did Al tell you that I’m now the arts reporter for the Courant? Don moved to St. Louis and is going to also work a bit in Chicago. Al picked me up full time rather than farm out bits and pieces to a bunch of the pool. So no more scraping it out in Boston, now it’s all Hartford all the time.”

The last sentence felt a bit loaded to Baur, as if he was supposed to be familiar with her plight in Boston and that somehow her arrival would be beneficial for him. They had a history, but he always saw her not as a potential love interest, but as a bit of a pest. He recognized her attractiveness, but to him it was something embedded in their early encounters that had formed an aversion around her phoniness and desperation.

“Feel free to hang around and talk with the cast and crew, and if you want a score you can check out mine in the pit. I’ll come and find you around five when I have time. It was great to see you, and I look forward to the interview.”

“I was hoping to do the entire article about you and your creative process, so any thoughts you can give me would be wonderful. Also, I want to know how you came to the Orpheus idea and why.”

“I’ll be happy to answer all your questions in a bit, but I’m afraid I have to run right now. Sorry. It was great to see you.”

Baur nodded, then almost did a complete bow to his toes and turned and left. Nancy stood there, alone on the stage, staring at the bed and laminated art in front of her.

Her eyes scanned the famous posters lining the walls and tried to name all the artists. So much was familiar to her but she just couldn't quite place it. Nancy found a Da Vinci that she had had in college. The thought of the poster and college brought back a wave of good memories and she remembered how Baur had once helped her prepare for a history exam in that same dorm room. She wondered if he was still as intense as she remembered. She wiggled a little in anticipation and pulled out a notepad and started writing.

Scene 2



Two figures stand on a dark stage. Shadows conceal their faces, but you think you know who they are. The subtle lighting creating the shadows makes a plethora of stars upon the waxed stage, constellations of forgotten galaxies hiding beneath their bare feet. They appear naked, but you are not quite sure if they are. The stars pulse like racing heartbeats. They weave together polyphonically, against one another but also together, in the way that music can create cohesion out of opposition. Holistic versus Reductionistic...

*“Tell me you love me. I must know”
“ Tell me you love me..... I must know. Yes...”*



“Yes I do.”

The music begins soft and sweet, just sustained chords in the winds. A harp ostinato is spinning slowly, pulsing with the chord like a heartbeat. Shhhhh. A single muted trumpet peers out of the murkiness, starting with a single three-note motive. It's that same motive that Beethoven asked in his string quartet. “Must it be?” And Kundera sings back in his wonderful tome, “It must be.” The trumpet asks again and again, like a stranded hiker into a radio, changing the channels but still getting nothing back but static. The trumpet changes register, changes tempo, changes durations, but nothing comes back to him. Indeed, the cry of the child three rows back is unintended, but still a striking metaphor. Life always answers back. But no companion song sings sensuously in return. Shhhhh. Even the winds have started to back off, leaving the loon trumpet to

swan sing alone. But the harp still spins the spinning wheel of an ostinato, something pentatonic but not, with an added note that makes the whole thing sound minor and sad, or possibly augmented and spooky. A pulse of string pizz spits out of the pit and sprays the crowd with harmony – with direction and intention, function. What a strange meter they all think, ignorant of runo singers or Desmond, that great cat of velvet glory. The pizzicatos mush with the plucks of the harp into something that sounds like mumbling priests. The trumpet is still up high, naked and wandering, “Must it be?” is all he knows. Onstage the stories are still being acted out, as they know the dramatic intent that one forgets while reading the words on a page. You have skipped ahead, and now are looking into the past, like some wizard into a magic mirror, and you now know how this all ends, but not how it sounds. The trumpet is a surprise, I’m sure, but not unexpected. The opening overture had a fair amount of muted trumpet; enough that one could assume the composer has an affinity for the sound. But the action onstage doesn’t seem to make sense with the music searching through the ether. How do the two connect to make something more important than either could be alone? How do they combine in a counterpoint of art that speaks through the silence and into the dampened ears of the sleepy reader? How do we get to a point where you understand that no one is going to answer the trumpet? No one in the orchestra will get the chance to lift up his or her instrument and spin a yarn that explains why it must be. The score, an unchanging future, has already decreed what will happen and that cannot change. Each instrument is merely a part of the machine of life, like a forest that is more than the sum of its parts. And it is not the job of the instruments to explain themselves or why they are more than themselves.

That job is yours.

Just like it's your job to keep going, to assimilate the music with the story into a jumble of meaning and reasoning. The trumpet has now finished, bowed and accepted the scattered applause that built up into a crackling spatter that to him doesn't really matter. It's the music that speaks its thanks, like a woman whispering into his ear, and that's all the appreciation he cares to know.

Claudia doesn't know that this scene has happened so many times before, like a clock winding through the hours, she doesn't begin to imagine that nothing ever changes. Her one true wish is to know that some things can change, and more specifically, that Baur can change. She loves him with a devotion that she does not think is reciprocated. Every time she kisses him and looks into his eyes, the only thought that flings across her brain is the jealous musing of Baur's past loves. She can't get their hands off of him, can't rid the ghost lipstick off of his cheeks. He looks like a cherub aiming arrows, and she wishes he would just pull back his bow and put her out of her misery.

Her watch warned her that he was standing impatiently backstage. Claudia stood, momentarily frozen, worried about being late for Baur, but also needing to soak the tea stain out of her shirt. She ran some water into the bathroom sink and soaked the blouse. It bled in shit-colored swirls that diluted into the sink turning the entire basin a bark shade of brown. Luckily the tea came out pretty easily, and all she had to do was rub some soap over it with her hands. Her watch bobbed up from the water with her arm and she glanced down with worry regarding the time. I'm already late, she thought, but he should understand, shouldn't he?

Claudia pulled the once white blouse out of the murky water and rang it out. It remained a stained shade, but the dark spot that had been the epicenter of the tea assault was now considerably lighter, with no lingering lines of discoloration. Claudia dropped the shirt into a laundry basket that was near the desk she used for her make-up. Her skin was starting to goose-bump, and she hugged her bra tight as she ran through the makeshift dressing room. Normally she would have no problem exposing her chest while changing for a scene, but something about this felt different, unsanitary. She was embarrassed to be topless at the behest of Rebecca, as if it was simply her whim that had forced her into such a precarious situation. Claudia exhaled audibly and thankfully as she came upon a small duffle bag that she had filled with spare clothes—not because she expected to be hit with a tea assault, but just in case she had needed a change due to exertion. Thinking about him made her smile discreetly, and she no longer feared being late for her meeting with Baur. She knew he might be angry, but she also knew that she had a foolproof way to get his mind off such trivial matters.

She reached into the bag and pulled out a dark-blue long-sleeved shirt. It had yellow stripes down the arm and made her look like she was trying out for the softball team. Claudia stood momentarily by the mirror, sucking in her slightly protruding stomach and pushing out her chest. She turned toward the mirror seductively, as if practicing for Baur, and slowly ran her finger down her side toward her waist.

“Come on, help me with the rigging...”

The voices came from behind a curtain and Claudia jumped back from the mirror, her hands rising slightly as if she was being arrested. The curtain started to move and she

quickly pulled the shirt over her head, sliding both arms in at the same time with the grace of a dancer.

Two men came out from behind the curtain and Claudia walked toward them. One of the men held the curtain back and she saw Baur standing in the other partition, his back to her. She nodded to the man holding back the curtain and walked through, Baur turning as she approached.

But that is only a memory. Barely visible through the movements of Claudia's toes. Onstage there are still just two people, standing still with shadows subverting their faces. You look closer, straining your eyes, as if you could will away the black and see the exposed flesh of the faces. But you can't, and you must wait for them to make the move. This is how drama works, by imprisoning the will of the audience and pontificating on the thought of freedom. A forced will of opposites. Or so you think...

Onstage, the two silhouetted characters step into the light. Just like you guessed it, they are Pascal and Claudia. They stand apart, like Tony and Maria in the film version of West Side Story, but they aren't preparing to dance or anything like that. The background is a similar emoted concoction of flat color and tinted lights. The music has died down and only a soft string tremolo remains. Everybody in the theatre, both fictional and real, are holding their breaths.

Claudia steps forward, a slight drop of sweat glistening from her forehead. Her pupils adjust to the bright lights shining from above. Pascal notices her change of clothes, and makes a mental note to apologize for earlier. Still, he feels it his duty to allow her the opportunity to rebuke him, so he prepares his line and opens his mouth.

“Where have you been, we were supposed to meet five minutes ago?”

Claudia pulled on the front of her softball shirt, letting it snap back to her chest. “I had to change,” she said, growing a little impatient. “I can’t believe Rebecca threw her tea on me. Why didn’t you say anything to her?”

Baur looked caught off guard. “I didn’t want to appear to be playing favorites.”

“So I am punished for being your girlfriend?”

“I’m sorry if you feel that way...”

Claudia tried to stand rigid and menacing, but her skin was still cold and she couldn’t hold her stance without wishing to be in his arms. He had softened, and she thought he looked truly sorry for not intervening. The lights above were on and Baur stepped into the path of a pink stage light, making his face seem more penitent and affectionate. She reached out and he stepped into her arms, wrapping his arms around her and feeling her hands press into his back. Claudia felt Baur’s hands move systematically up and around her back, gently massaging and scratching as if he was in a circling pattern. She could sense his mind logically moving from thought to thought, and wondered what he was waiting for the right moment to say. She took a deep breath and held it in, hoping he’d take the cue and speak.

“Are you ready for the performance?”

Claudia let out her breath, confused as to why it took him so long to ask such a simple question. “Yes, I have everything memorized, even Rebecca’s lines.” Claudia smiled with a sly hint of conspiracy. “I’m sure she’d hate to hear that. I was singing one of her arias the other day and I felt that I could give her a run for her money. She’s starting to get old and lazy. Resting on her laurels like she’d written the freakin’ Fifth or something. Pascal, tell me you love me.”

He wants to go to her, but cannot move. He is locked in place on the stage and she had turned away, her mind pushing him back and making room for another. For a split second Baur understands what it must feel like to compete with his dead Diane. It is a sensation akin to a tingle as he can feel his place in thought lose hold. He is a million little neurons traveling from one synapse to another in Claudia's brain. He can feel them begin to disperse, like a thousand tiny tugs on his exposed skin, for he is naked and disintegrating. Each atom represented by a neuron, one to one, but not because she knows every contributing factor that coincides as Pascal Baur. No, the neurons are for the character, the associations, the way that he smells and how it reminds her of camping for many days without a shower. How his scent is not foul, but the power of it, the pull she feels toward him reminds her of her of the potency of her own scent after a few days of heavy hiking. These neurons create him through such small and seemingly random associations and connections. It is like the individual letters on this page, or better yet, the individual components of each letter, the arms and leg of a Y and how they create words that have meaning even if the font is meaningless. Pascal can understand such thoughts because he is in the abyss of her mind as he slowly seeps away. He tries to cry out but his vocal chords are already gone. He feels the dark closing in and he holds his breath, not sure when he will be called back.

Onstage, Baur fades out. Claudia is still bathed in a glorious shade of blue. She looks to her left to where Baur had been standing. He is gone and the stage is dark. From her right a voice startles her: "Hello, can I help you?"

Claudia turned and found Franklin Pettricione standing in his own halo of light. He was dressed in a stereotypical Shakespeare outfit, a green tunic that ended above the

knee. His rather large legs are wrapped in a dark forest of tights, his shoes look to be tap shoes that have been painted a musty brown, with a few decorative buttons glued on.

Franklin was dressed as Macbeth.

“You look lost,” he added, a small, cavalier smile creasing his round face.

Claudia looked him over once more, her eyes resting on his large, black belt, that she thinks possibly was pillaged from a Santa Claus outfit. To her it made him look jolly. “I am, thanks,” she replied, finding her voice easier to control once she had acknowledged his preposterous belt. “I just got hired and I don’t know where to go to get a score.”

Franklin looked at her and sighs. She looked innocent and trusting, and he worried about the young girls who show up that way. Often he thanked the gods that he had been born a gay man. Not often, but on such occasions where he could be helpful to a young girl showing up all innocent and asking for his help, giving him her total trust, he was thankful that his libido would not deceive him and lust uncontrollably.

“Oh,” he said, trying to formulate the safest plan, “I’m not sure if the librarian is still around tonight, but if you need to start working you can borrow mine for the evening. Who are you playing?”

Claudia blushed with pride. “I’m playing one of the three witches, ‘toil and trouble’ and all that.” She paused, finally able to remember the portly man’s name. She wasn’t very good with names. “You’re Franklin Pettricione, correct? You’re Macbeth?”

“Yeah, I guess I am.” He shrugged a little, smiling from the tips of his mouth. “And you know you just cursed our whole run.”

Claudia almost literally jumped back, until the sheepish grin registered and she understood the joke. “Oh my god I can’t believe I just did that. I had been told and even thought consciously not to say the name the whole way here, and now, oh, my god, I can’t believe...I’m so silly.”

“Oh, it’s nothing, really, don’t even worry your pretty face about it.”

Claudia blushed further and noticed Franklin’s smile growing wider. Suddenly infused with a sense of power and arousal (which for her always seemed to coincide), she closed the two foot gap between them and reached over him for a piece of butterscotch candy in a small red bowl on the desk. Franklin noticed the sudden shift in dominance, and worried about the young girl.

The lights tint a fierce yellow as she sensuously sucked on the candy. She stuck it out toward him, her tongue caressing around the dissolving disc. “This is great, where did you get it?”

“It’s not butterscotch,” he told her, sure that she was confused about the candy just as she seemed to be confused about him, “but actually maple candy. I got it in Vermont after a symphony engagement. Have you ever had it?”

“No. I’m from Danbury, but I’ve never actually been up to Vermont. Just Boston on field trips and down to New York for lessons when I was younger.”

Franklin leaned back a little, trying to create some more space. “Beautiful country, almost like being in the Midwest or up in Seattle. Lake Champlain is wonderful, especially in the summer.”

“Sounds great. I hope to head up there someday.”

“I’m sure you’ll meet some great boy to take you, hopefully someone who knows the country...”

Claudia dropped one shoulder slightly, letting the loose-necked shirt she wore slip off. She expected him to react but he seemed unaware of her effort. She reached forward and slowly caressed his shoulder. The tunic he wore was a soft velvet-like material, and she felt a small charge build as she dragged her finger from his bicep toward his neck and down to the shoulder blade. She took her hand and started to massage his back. “I’m sure he will know his way around,” she purred, her voice almost a whisper. She reached her other hand around his back, but before she could start the massage Franklin pulled away. She looked at him confused and hurt, not sure why he rejected her. A small furrow of sweat had built upon his forehead, and he reached up and pulled off the wig.

“I think you might have the wrong idea.”

Claudia surged out toward him again, “Just tell me what to do to make you happy.”

Once again, Franklin pulled back, using his hands to gently create a barrier. She stared, confused, first looking at her hands and then his chest, which pulsed from a quickened heart rate. “Don’t you like it?” she asked.

“My dear, I’m sorry for leading you on like this, but in fact I don’t like it.”

Her tears began well into the first syllable. The first tear held upon her eyelash, big and fat, until it seemed to break the laws of physics. Finally it fell, and like a sudden thunderstorm in the plains, after the first drop the rest came quickly and powerfully. Franklin stood up from his chair and reached over and hugged her. “You misunderstood

me. I'm sorry, I just don't normally tell strangers such things, but it's not that I don't like you personally, I'm just not into women in general."

Claudia pulled back from the embrace, surprised to hear him say it. She almost giggled at first, then was not sure how to respond. She wiped the tears from her eyes and allowed herself to fall back into his arms. He felt good and smelled good, and she didn't know why she suddenly trusted him completely, but she did. "I'm sorry, it's my fault," she said. Franklin saw the smears of make-up down her cheeks and handed her a tissue. She wiped it gently, like a child. "I'm sorry," she said again, "I can't believe I made such a fool of myself. I'm sorry Mr. Pettricone, I just can't believe how nice you were and how right everything felt."

"It's alright my dear, you are so young and have yet to have your heart broken a thousand times. I envy your non-jaded life and all your purity. I myself wish for such a unique outlook."

She was not sure what to say. He seemed so confident but seemed to get everything about her life completely wrong. If only you knew, she thought. But instead of correcting him, she just embraced him again, feeling the warmth of his skin upon her swollen eyes. "Thank you."

"Don't worry about it. It just made us best friends, you know?"

"Yes, I do."

Claudia looks away from Franklin and can feel his warmth slowly leave. Her mind is again wandering through the synapses, searching with no discernable target. The shadow-covered figure to her right is back. She knows it's Baur from the smell. Almost on cue her neurons create the warm sensation of a campfire right behind her, and she

can feel the flames dancing upon her naked back. The sounds of woodland beasts filter through her ears, but not a natural sort of sound, but rather as if everything came from a sound effects tape. She can hear the howl of a wolf and the roar of a bear. Next to her, Pascal can hear them too, and can feel his reconstituted body cringe as the sounds swirl around him, seem to be emanating from him.

A disembodied voice calls out.

“Pascal, tell me you love me.” The voice is muffled, and he can feel the breath through his shirt and the tears soaking through to his skin. It is as if the voice is melding into him, becoming one with him. It is the voice of the cosmos, stripping him one layer at a time until it is running through him like his own blood. He is startled by the polyphony of a second voice, then a third, and on, ad infinitum. The voices are muffled, and the words, no longer decipherable, simply sound like noise; a long and then short pulse, a heartbeat, something in 3/4 time that pushes through like a waltz. His eyes are open and he can again see the stage, the ether where all starts and stops. Like some sort of limbo he is stuck in place, looking out into a crowded theatre, his life on display and his soul completely exposed. The words begin to recede, and the voice travels further from his head, and finally settles to his left. He turns and smiles. They have found the present through the tangled web of memory; synapses fire.

The stage lights rise.

He is still holding her and she squeezes him tight as she finished her sentence. It had just come out of nowhere, right out of her subconscious like a rocket screaming through the clouds. She is worried about his response, but finds his eyes are staring into hers and his gaze is steady. He reaches up his hands and cups her face. His hands are

warm. To Claudia, a tight embrace and a feeling of warmth could say more than any soliloquy or monologue.

“Of course I do,” he says reassuringly, but with a slight sustained ending that makes her feel that something else is coming. “What has gotten into you? You know how I feel about you, even if I’m not that great at showing it.”

“I don’t know, I just felt like I was someone’s second choice or something. Just something that Rebecca said to me yesterday. She just wanted to denigrate me, but something about it stuck with me and made me feel like shit. I can usually shrug her off, but it was like she was saying the truth, like she knew something I didn’t.”

“What was she talking about?” Pascal asks, his hands still holding her face, but now they feel slightly cold, as if all the warmth has left. Claudia slowly removes her head from his grasp and takes a step back, worried about what it would mean to say her name.

“She was talking about Diane. How you were when they hired you and how you are now, just sowing oats.”

Baur looks toward the ground and thinks through his response. He doesn’t want to get this wrong, doesn’t want to do anything to either of them. “Don’t listen to that woman. She’s falling from the map and trying to drag anyone she can with her.” Baur’s speech stops, but his mouth hangs open, preparing his lips for the next line. The pink light still clings to his face, helping his rigid stance seem softer, yet still frozen. He holds it as long as he feels he can, then finally his mouth starts moving again. “I have not told you about Diane because I thought you wouldn’t want to hear about her.”

“Did you love her?”

“Yes, but that was a long time ago.”

Claudia watches as Baur again disappears from the stage. His imagination is slinging thoughts and images wildly around. He can almost smell American cheese, the Velveeta kind that Diane used to mix in with elbow pasta to make her homemade mac and cheese. It was an overpowering odor, something that he now found almost revolting, but in this fugue-dream state seems to be more subduing than anything. His pulse slows, and he feels the sensation of drowning, as the memories and feelings overcome him and smother him beneath the weight of a love that had been stolen from him. He is still as the feeling of enclosure fills his body. Pascal closes his eyes and stops breathing.

“I love you, you know?”

Pascal mouths the words. He turns slowly and looks at her. Her eyes are closed, but he can see them move from side to side and knows she is dreaming. He hopes it is not the dream of insanity that he suffers. He slowly walks over and touches her hair, his hand cupping her cheek, flesh to flesh, and he kisses her deeply on the mouth. The room is colored in the sounds of a lone trumpet. They are on the empty stage as before, but they are also on a different stage, one where the trumpet does not speak.

Claudia’s eyes open.

“Only three years...” She isn’t sure she wants to press this, but the point of no return seems to have flown by and this locomotive no longer has any brakes. Like pulling off a band-aid quickly in one gesture, she wants to get the pain over with fast. Claudia feels the tinge of masochism on her cheeks and imagines the tiny cuts. Just say what you need to say and let me be, she thinks, her heart on the verge of falling into pieces.

“But time grew slower after she died. I didn’t feel like things got back to normal speed until I met you. For me the last three years felt like thirty. Then there was a day, just like any other, when I woke up and instead of feeling time haunt and torture me, I felt that I was no longer a prisoner, and you were waiting for me with open arms and I understood that I needed to leave my prison and move on, and that Diane was no longer in the prison, she had long ago moved on, but the prison was just me, just me and my guilt and my hate. I was trying to punish myself and you helped me stop. I can’t say I didn’t love Diane, but I also love you, and I have you now with me and I know that I can love you as much as I have every loved anyone. Do you understand?”

The tears start forming the first time he says her name. She still worries as he speaks but can feel that he wants to love her. When he says, “I love you” she releases the dam and starts to sob uncontrollably. Her nose, although starting to clog with the tears, still takes in his aroma, a bouquet of woods and fruit, a smell that she suddenly wants to taste and see, to engulf her and beguile her and cover her completely. She watches as he cowers back, unsure of what her tears mean. She watches him watching her and feels the languid pulse of attraction quicken and strengthen. She suddenly wants him more than she ever has, and she wants to feel him inside her and throughout her, wishing he could circulate through her like her blood, not caring whatsoever as long as it is him. She reaches out and gently caresses his thin arm, pulling him close to her and rocking his body with hers. Her hands search his body, rubbing him and clutching him. She continues to cry, but her sobs have lessened, and she feels the cathartic release of emotion intermingle with a lust and desire that her hands made abundantly clear.

“Claudia, I’m sorry I didn’t do anything when Rebecca threw the tea on you. I’m sorry I didn’t get in there and protect you. That’s my job and that’s what I should have done, both as your boyfriend and as the director.

“Don’t worry Baur,” she says, playfully, “I can take care of myself. But I love that you want to save me.” Her hands reach his crotch, and she hovers around his penis slowly, enticingly, her fingers coaxing and supple.

“You know I love you.”

Claudia kisses him on the mouth and starts unbuttoning his pants. He reaches down to help her and kisses her neck, biting her ever so slightly. Claudia thinks about his last sentence and starts to moan. “I do,” she moans into his ear, and then, with her head back and to no one in particular she repeated herself, feeling a small tingle in her crotch as she moans the words softly.

The two bodies on the empty stage were tangled within each other.

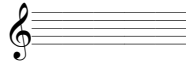
The two shadowed figures were suddenly bathed with a light coming from the back of the stage, casting an amorphous shadow out upon the audience. Like a child arranging his hands, the shadow looked like some sort of rudimentary beast, with multiple tusks and other various appendages. As the light grew in intensity the hum of strings from the pit grew as well. First it was a low unison G, then it slowly spread through tremolo glissandi until it was a mammoth chord of all twelve notes. The sound at the unison had also been plain and consonant, but as the pitch spread the timbre split also until it was a noisy array of sul pont and sul tasto. It was as if the instruments had started at a unified whole and then had intended to encompass the entire spectrum of sound. Much the opposite of the multidimensional figures interwoven onstage that

became a monochrome shadow cast out upon the real world. Then, from the abyss of buzzing strings came the familiar sparkle of a muted trumpet.

“Must it be,” it whittled through the strings.

Like a child crying in a dark house, the trumpet continued unabated, but no answer came, no one awoke and hushed it back to equilibrium, to a stasis that would conclude at unity. The strings continued to buzz, each one slowly moving from one area to another, no one together. The dust visible in the backstage light sparkled with unintended hues. Life once again answered and infiltrated the designed metaphor of musical language. The trumpet continued its cry, alone in the dark, nobody answering, no mate to intertwine and encapsulate, nothing but the vacuum of darkness and the innocuous particles of dust pluming through the stale air.

Scene 3



As Franklin Pettricione entered the small room, he felt again that he was missing his mark. The room was dark, and the hallway light barely licked the edge of the plywood molding that encircled his second-hand desk. He groped against the wall and found the light switch, flicking it up with a hint of disdain and impatience. A low humming sforzando came from above his head, and a few seconds later the light pulsed from a long tube hidden behind frosted plastic.

The room was in a fine shape of disarray, with clothes hanging off three of the four bed posts and an all-black outfit laid out as if sleeping on top of the sheets. The desk was directly in front of a mounted mirror, a rectangle reflection of the bed cased in a dark, aged mahogany. Taped to the corners of the mirror were pictures of Franklin with a variety of men and women, some famous, some in costume, and more than a few featuring a smiling yet shy Anthony Bell. Tony had black hair, shiny liked polished shoes, of a medium length and parted directly down the middle. From that center line you could follow the slightly askew proportions of his face, the small wire-frame glasses that tilted to the right, as if pulled by the gravitational field of the large mole on the right corner of his chin, and the thick, bushy eyebrows that reminded one of a blurry imitation of Groucho Marx.

In one picture Tony and Frank were holding each other bare-chested on a beach, Tony in the foreground engulfed in the Franklin's massive chest; another contained them both in costume after one of Franklin's performances (It had been Halloween after all),

and like the seedling from which all the others sprung, at the bottom of the mirror was a faded picture of Franklin and Tony after the wedding for a mutual friend, the event that had initially brought them together. In Franklin's world of unfettered imagination and dress-up, he would never had run into that ad man from Broadway without the fortune of attending a wedding he usually would have missed. It had been a tenuous attraction, set in motion by a mutual friend, Suzanne, who had ignorantly assumed that the two gay men she knew at this wedding would obviously be perfect for one another. The conversation had been forced by Suzanne at first, but once alone, both Franklin and Tony had shared horror stories of set-ups with other "gays", and they decided to stick together the rest of the night so that Suzanne would stay away. Yet, neither was malicious really, so when Suzanne had asked near the end of the evening that they pose for a picture both had slapped on a cheesy grin and swung their arms around each other. Phone numbers were exchanged and Franklin, bored (or so he always said), a week later rang up Tony to go with him to the Met (he had an extra ticket). A few meals and shows later and a romance had truly begun. It was the linchpin—the picture of the two men, smiling and clutching tight in a pseudo-friendly hug. It was yellow with age and stagnation, and seemed to have a load bearing effect on the rest of the mirror. Remove that picture and all the rest would come unglued and be lost behind the littered desk.

Franklin stared at the pictures, searching through them like through patches on a quilt of memories, until he found a photo of himself with Sara and Richard Tucker, two great friends who are now both dead. He had been called a few days before and been told of Sara's death, a tragic fight with cancer. Her death now created a pall throughout the room, with everything seeming to move at the pace of a dirge. Behind the feckless

plastic, the bulb pulsed like a decaying heartbeat, and Franklin felt the fluorescent depression of the murky light. Dropping his score on the bed, he took off his crimson, long-sleeved shirt, pulling each arm tightly through the once loose-fitting shirt, wadded it into a giant rotten tomato, and tossed it over his shoulder into a laundry basket that was filled with black socks and white briefs.

His sanctuary, or dressing room/office, had a lingering scent of musky dog, with a hint of lime and rosemary. A well-used candle limped out of a beer bottle on the corner of the desk, with dried rivers of wax twisting down counterclockwise in a hastening descent. Franklin reached over, grabbed one of the strewn about lighters, and set the red candle aflame. The candlelight wasn't very strong, but offered a pulsing effect to the room that soothed Franklin. He grasped behind the candle and twisted the desk lamp on, a metallic oddity coated with dust and wax that had a soft watt bulb he used to enhance the candle. With a fluidity of practice, he reached behind him and swung his meaty arm at the light switch, this time knocking it down and out. His watch read just a bit past three, giving him a few hours to rest and relax before preparing for the night's performance.

A fine night for an opera, he thought. With death so near and the world in shambles, a fatalistic streak within him started snowballing the sorrow and despair, tinting it with a thin silver streak of hope that was mostly artificial in his mind. An ambitious Franklin started pondering how to use this new turmoil in his performance. Could David possibly have lost a parent like Sara? Maybe he had an over-the-top aunt, someone who always stuffed pancakes full of chocolate chips or felt that the measles could only infect you if you were in love?

Franklin had experienced so little drama in his life that he felt any instance needed to be shared on the stage, for others like him who didn't have a weekly date with chaos or despair. In his own mind he was nothing but normal, and felt a lament should be sung for his inopportune life. Like a diabetic, he had to get the sugar of living artificially, through the imaginations of people who had truly lived. In an immature way, Franklin carried a secret wish for the horrific to infect his life like it had done for Baur's fictional David and Pamela. He craved it like a junky, alone and isolated. A green-eyed wish for the unique and the removal of the mundane.

The candle flickered with an unusually steady pulse. Franklin watched it and let his thoughts drift off, away from the small room to a previous dinner with Tony, then an audition that he mangled seventeen years ago, the connection nothing but tenuous in his mind. Why would that thought bring up that thought? he asked himself, sitting up in a mockery of Rodin and acting like a philosopher.

The audition had been for a new production of *Postcard from Morocco*, Dominick Argento's opera from the early seventies. Franklin had prepared for the man with a Paint Box role (or had it been the man with the Old Luggage?) and had felt confident during the audition. It was going to be staged in Boston, but the audition had been in New York, in a space he was familiar with and had performed before. It felt like home-court advantage, and that was when it had all went wrong.

Franklin had walked in wearing a polo shirt and slacks. It was mid-August in the city and the smell of garbage and the tourists were seeping out of every corner. It was almost one hundred degrees outside, and even the relative cool of the subway had left him with a giant sweat line running down his chest. Some delay with the train had left

him with only five minutes before the audition, and his voice was strained from fitful sleeping the night before.

The stage was cool, and the sudden temperature flux had his stomach feeling wistful and consternated, as if his light breakfast of a bagel and coffee had suddenly shrunk due to temperature change and was rumbling around like a hard marble in a balloon.

The accompanist asked Franklin what scene he wanted to sing. Even though the indelible catastrophe was stamped into his mind, he couldn't remember the scene's name. She had given him a starting pitch and it had caught him off guard. For some reason he didn't think the note she had played was the correct starting pitch. Frozen, he had stood there trying to internally find the right note, his mind searching through years of music for that one note which would start everything off right. From the darkened theatre he heard the annoyed tapping of a pencil, and as if commanded he opened his mouth and started singing.

In Franklin's world there was no such thing as only messing up a little. He was one of those artists that balanced on the high-wire; going for broke in every second of his musical life. He immediately knew that he had started wrong, but was unable to right the ship until the piano came in. He stuck with it, scooping into every note and finding that his chosen tessitura put him too high near the end, and his voice cracked like that of some prepubescent boy. The piano came in suddenly, as if trying to put poor Franklin out of his misery. The chord was startling to everyone in the room. Franklin had managed (or so he later deduced) to start a tritone off, and so when the chord came in the dissonance was stark and unnatural. Franklin had turned aghast to the poor woman at the out-of-tune

upright and had given her a look so mortified that she had sounded the chord again, this time staring at her fingers and making sure she had all the correct notes.

In his mind this is where he fades out, for the rest of the audition was even more painful. Everything seemed to fall apart and he came in wrong in every possible sense. Like being controlled by someone remotely, he watched disembodied from himself as the music kept starting and restarting and he kept inconceivably blowing every possible moment in the music. The house lights had been turned on and a young man in a “theatre club” t-shirt had softly come onto the stage and touched Franklin on the shoulder, leading him off. Waiting in the wings he had a vomit bag and a box of tissues. Seemed he had prepared for the worst possible scenario and felt Franklin was it. The sight of the emotional aides had thrown him into a fit of rage, and he knocked the tissue box out of some mousy girl’s hands, looked back at the stage and the accompanist reproachfully, and then rushed to the bathroom where he subsequently vomited and then cried for twenty minutes.

As he was coming out of the bathroom he spotted the young man once again. He was waiting by the door with the vomit bag and tissues—it seemed he had not given up on Franklin yet.

Franklin lifted his head from thought, removing his hand and watching as the white skin regained its color. The dinner with Tony a few nights before had been a similar disaster, but more in an emotional way than in anything functional. Why his mind had linked the two he couldn’t figure. He had been on many dates with similar results, had been on several auditions that ended poorly but not as devastating. Franklin worried that his subconscious might be trying to tell him something about his relationship

with Tony that he had been avoiding. He knew that Tony would always drive up to Hartford even when Franklin didn't feel like coming down to the city. He understood what this meant to their relationship, how it could be seen that he was unwilling to do his fair share. But that was not the case, and he wanted to scream out that he loved Tony and he really would do anything for him.

Franklin stood up and took the two steps across the room toward his desk. In a drawer he found a practice violin made of cardboard and covered in small penciled notes about technique that he had learned from his lessons with Michael. Not that he had really learned how to play the violin, but rather how to not look incompetent while attempting to play a dummy instrument that had been so dampened that it barely produced any sound at all. He took out the practice board and tried to finger his melody from the second act. It was a bit of a pain to sing, and as he was finding out, pretty hard to play on a string instrument as well. It was a densely chromatic line, like he was tying knots with a rope, and felt the small slides of his voice expand and contract with his breathing. He was half-singing the melody in a pallid imitation of a violin, complete with vibrato, when he was interrupted by a knock on the door. It was a quick knock, followed by the Jets whistle from *West Side Story*. It was Tony, being coy and silly. The handle twisted and he barged in almost by accident, his head swiveling around out of control, looking more lost than a tourist in Times Square who inadvertently wanders into a porno den with his kids in tow.

“I'm sorry sir, but I'm looking for Franklin Pettricione, the famous male tenor and all around sex god.”

Franklin looked at him with a half-smile creasing his lips. Tony always made an entrance, and seemed to relish his drive up from New York for the solitary planning it offered. If Tony had any musical ability, Franklin figured he'd have written a half-dozen musicals during the drive alone.

Tony was still looking around like a tourist, holding the bit a bit longer than he needed. Franklin put down the practice violin and wrapped his hands around Tony, his left hand reaching up and mussing with his evenly parted hair.

"How was the drive?" he asked in a whisper into his ears. Franklin was rocking Tony softly to the remnants of the music that was scattering throughout his head. Tony let him lead and seemed to go limp in his arms, completely under Franklin's control.

"Any traffic?"

Tony remained silent, letting his angst and worry wash away from him like he would like to have done to the splattered mud in the wheel wells of his car. He closed his eyes and hummed a famous tune from another Sondheim musical. Franklin knew it by heart and started humming along, then, when the climax of the phrase appeared, he belted out the words:

*Blowing out their candles or
Combing out their hair,
Even when they leave
They still are there.
They're there*

*Ah! Pretty women, at their mirrors,
In their gardens,
Letter-writing,
Flower-picking,
Weather-watching.
How they make a man sing!*

Tony turned and kissed Franklin on the cheek, nuzzling his face into the crevice of his neck.

“Claudia gave me the open mouth today. I just saw her a little bit ago in the basement and I was telling her about the fucking retard at work and she just started holding her mouth wide open. Not the most subtle entry into the game, but I guess I deserved it.”

Franklin chuckled at the inadvertent game the cast and crew had invented to poke fun at Tony. The “mouth wide open while he talks” game was pretty well-known throughout the cast, and Franklin even played it occasionally when they were alone and Tony would not stop talking about something inconsequential. It had become a joke between them, and had even been morphed into a seduction tool for its obvious implications.

There had been a time when Tony had come in crying, cuddling into Franklin’s arms and explaining what everyone was doing, there mouths wide open as he talked, as if they didn’t even care what he had to say. Franklin had not handled it well, blaming Tony for his propensity for run-on sentences and all-around random collection of thoughts that followed one-another out of his mouth without the smallest plotting as to structure or connection or ending. The fight had brought them even closer in the end, but there were a few days that no one on the cast was immune to the wrath of the portly tenor. He had even gotten into an epic battle with Barbara Urlington, who wasn’t even aware of the game but nonetheless would never back down when a lowly “singer” challenged her in her costume department.

“What are you thinking about?” Tony asked, interrupting the building sequence in Franklin’s head.

“Just about when they first started playing the ‘open mouth’ game and how upset you were.” Franklin gave Tony a soft squeeze to let him know that he no longer blamed him for the game or for his reaction. His hands slowly kneaded Tony’s stomach and side, mixing with the candlelight into a strange shadow creature on the wall. Franklin nestled his chin into the small depression where Tony’s neck met his shoulders and took in the strong scent of Tony’s aftershave, a heavy dose of alcohol and mint. It tickled his nose and he had to remove his head to itch it with his left hand.

Tony felt the release and turned toward Franklin, his eyes glistening with a few soft tears. Their relationship had been rocky over the past year, but it seemed as the new opera got closer to opening Franklin had calmed down more and their once blistering bickering had now simmered into a comfortable hug of mutual neediness. The idea of not wanting Franklin but simply needing him bothered Tony, and he wasn’t sure if Franklin understood that this sort of unification was not fated to last. At least in Tony’s mind, he knew that their relationship was like a deep breath, and eventually they would both have to exhale and then choose whether to breath in again.

“I have good news,” Tony said, breaking the silence of the moment.

“What’s that?”

“I scheduled the trip to Greece for the summer. We’ll be gone for two weeks in June. How does that sound? Sounds pretty great, huh?”

Franklin reached out and gently took hold of Tony’s small hand, his fingers intertwining with Tony’s. The candle was still flickering and the moment seemed to be

some sort of musical suspension to Franklin, who instinctively waited for the resolution. Tony turned toward the metallic lamp and switched it off, leaving the pulsing candle to fill the tiny room. Like a heartbeat it was steady and sensual, a living being that lacked the steely consistency of a florescent bulb. Tony moved close to Franklin and kissed the meaty hand that was interlaced with his own. Franklin's cheeks had started to fill with a rouge color as if he had just come in from the cold. The lingering sound of a violin scale swept through the room then left the two lovers to the quietude of peace. Franklin reached his free hand up and cupped Tony's face, his slightly cold fingers causing Tony's skin to goose bump underneath. Franklin hummed a few notes of the Sondheim tune into Tony's ear, following it in with his lips and a soft kiss. With the influx of music came the poetic words that Franklin gently whispered into Tony's ear.

*My eyes and my ears constantly speak of you
What you do to them sends shivers through my body
I am nothing but half of my senses
And they do nothing but speak of you*

*Within my heart the rhythmic pulse records your actions
A gentle tap of red hued indication
To tell my hands of the landscape and mist
And to prepare my thighs to push closer*

*But to all of your being my lips are the kings
They are the explorers of your soul
Reporting back with the electricity of the sun
And bringing to life the dormant spirit of love*

*If there were one thing I could not live without
It would not be my eyes, my ears, or my heart
I could not live without the soft centurions that are my lips
My lips who have met yours and now speak of nothing but you*

The candle flickers on until it has run out of fuel and fades to an ember glow. The alarm clock sleeps nearby, not ready to wake the two men for at least another hour.

Franklin and Tony lie together on the bed, Franklin holding him snug like a child would his prized stuffed animal. Tony feels Franklin pass through to the realm of dreams and imagination, his lips slowly falling asleep resting on his neck, as if afraid to let go for fear that when he wakes all will have changed.

“Not tonight,” Tony whispers to himself. “Nothing will change tonight and that’s all we have.”

Scene 4



The page was still half empty, but time seemed to slow as Baur's frantic hand closed the gap. At a pace that would create a cinematic blur, he marked sharps and flats, whole and half notes, triplets and syncopation. He was scribbling fast but deliberately, not a stem or word extension out of place. Baur's thoughts shifted consistently from the page to an imaginary setting in his head, a meadow with fake flowers and the latent scent of pasture and shit. His opera would be opening in only five hours, but his mind was beyond sex and Hades, screaming toward a new work, building up momentum like a plane before take-off. Like Sisyphus, Baur felt obliged to discard his present work, to start climbing the creative hill afresh, leaving lessons learned for a time and reimagining the world as a postmodern predicament scathed in bombings and the utter metaphorical destruction of music.

How would he create a new universal language? How does one begin to speak in a new tongue and find a tone (or is it tones?) that everyone understands? His fight was with an audience that was coddled and pampered to believe the triad was the ruler of the cosmos, and that chaos could be excused as a lack of technique. To follow Messiaen and Synesthesia would be to color the world with sound images, but what about the colorblind, or those that only taste color with every bite of a plump pear? Baur believed the world was a vibrant blue, and that hate and fear were a puke green/red mix. He felt love was yellow, death black, and creation a magenta hued afterbirth.

Sapphire is noble.

Fuchsia is hubris.

Beige is passivity.

All life was shaded in the colors of his imagination. He saw words painted like houses, and could smell the teal of a fresh piece of fish, cooked in oil, simmering on a plate with a green salad and the dirt brown starch of potatoes. To him, the pencil lead was creating a kaleidoscope of emotions, but it was like melting a box of crayons together; the image was not logical, but was a wash of random hues, which, when looked at from across the room bled into a black hole, a place where no meaningful sound could escape. Unlike others, to Baur the color of life was static, never changing and always in focus. Baur kept scribbling, but he doubted any of this music would be worth salvaging.

How do I take the motive and raise intensity for the evacuation scene? When will the texture need to thin for a sense of transparency and evocation? Do the cellos need to be playing sul pont? His creative center sparkled with flashes of genius and pedantry. A blue flash of heroism mixed with a yellow escape of nature and a green image of a forest swirled into a single green leaf stretching from a yellow stock that was growing out of the bland gray rubble. Baur's eyes pulsed as image passed to image and sounds emerged from the swamp of ether, some vibrant and stoic, others soft and dark.

A break in thought silenced the sound of marching snare drums. He set down the pencil and reached over into a stack of papers, rifling through loose pages before finding a heavily marked page of text.

“Why would they do this?” he intoned, his voice hoarse from disuse. He tried several variations in his head, but none seemed to make sense. Regardless, the word

“bomb” littered the pages like cowpies in a pasture. He wanted to see the colors of the horrific, and was aghast when all he could see was black.

“Let’s start with February 13th,” he mused, trying to start a dialogue that would lead him to some sort of revelation regarding his work. The new page of manuscript paper was empty, just rows and rows of five-lined staves, an empty canvas that echoed through time with possibilities. It was the same blank page that Mozart, Beethoven and Debussy started with. But how was he going to make such a beautiful lie out of horrific events? He had wanted Dresden, had requested it from Hans Smigler, and now that the carnage was staring him in the face, he was having second thoughts.

Maybe I should start with a V-2, he thought, like a roar of hate screaming across the sky. I could create an image as absurd and surreal as Pirate Prentice, and litter it over the city like rain in Seattle. Baur sat rigid, letting his brain twist like a cog trying to change a watch face, watching the tension and torque build up until the potential energy overturns the staticness of inaction and the new day dawns. The light between the venetian shades had turned green, and the reel started spinning in his mind. The story should be sparse and thin, a wafer over the tongue of the knowing sinner. His mouth was dry and flecked with cracked skin, falling off like scales. His tongue waiting for the cracker that symbolizes all he can hope for, but instead of the dissolving sensation of starch and salt, he gets a mouth full of fire, of burning flesh and smoked walls. Even though it was illusory, the sound created a gag reflex in his throat, like a cat with a furball. It should be a story of the unknown, as if we all are still crouching down in the damp cellars of slaughterhouses and rocket assembly plants. We wait, not sure of the rising sound of sirens and screaming. The siren in fact blending with the screaming and

creating a cacophonous polyphony of fear, a series of organum rising with the death toll and cadencing upon the rubble of one thousand years of hope and community.

Baur lifted the pen and started scribbling a single motive, a fast line with jagged tremolo marks cutting through the stems of each note. The motive will rise, will be the reverse of the falling bombs. The motive will be the souls of the dead of Dresden climbing out of the brick and oak of the incinerated city and rising into a single voice of protest for death and destruction. How those bombers could blaspheme from up high, from upon the clouds where the angels sing, and drop the depths of hell upon a city that would no longer have twenty-five thousand farmers and factory workers and dentists and movie stars. How all that would leave would be in ash or reduced to primal, charred representations of empty shells. The bombers from up high would fire their canons, the empty shells falling upon the ground aglow and shimmering with heat. And as the empty shells above cooled to the cool winds of the troposphere, the empty shells below would cool within the earth, growing clammy and grey and unrecognizable as anyone's father, mother, aunt or uncle. Death leaves nothing but the empty shells, both up high with the angels, and below with the worms. Baur knew this music, the music of death. The music was whole notes, augenmusik, his own empathy of empty shells. All was dirge and death, even for those that only dare listen to the soundtrack of such atrocities.

A narrative was starting to emerge, and Baur was clutching it like a dying man to a sack of morphine. He could smell the dry winter air of downtown Dresden, the sweet smell of hoarded food rotting in the hochbunkers, and the damp, vinegary smell of bodies being piled into Heiderfriedhof Cemetery. Dresden, a city without a face, still had the olfactory presence of a major metropolis. Any corner could bring to the nose a new idea

of humanity and individuality. The piss of one corner would be replaced with the bloated body of a hairless, blackened cat. Each repulsive, but each unique. Once again, Baur zoomed in and out, looking at the city from the tail of a Lancaster representing the 83rd squadron and then from the same level as a tree that had somehow hidden from the indiscriminate fire that scoured the city. What this story required, he thought, was not the full analytical understanding of the horrific, but the expressionless pleas of the forgotten, those that had lost their voices in the haze of smoke and flames. They deserved to sing and cry, to be able for a fleeting minute to love and laugh again. It was a city that was now dead, and Baur needed to call out in the dark night for the ghosts to rise and speak, to sing their haunted songs of unnecessary pain. This wasn't a war story it was a ghost story.

Baur thought of the blackened silhouettes of the Japanese in Hiroshima. They had left a tale of agony, a picture of true dread. Where was that in the shambles of Dresden? It seemed the British and American forces had buried the true horror under the city streets. But once it was in the ground, it seemed to be at peace and without fear. Something about eclipsing the circle of life that always made matters of death gruesome, but if all followed the natural order all sins could be forgiven. What was it about a body unburied that seemed so unnatural? Why must we all be swallowed up by the earth in order to be free to reach heaven? Baur sometimes wondered if the Norsemen had gotten it right, if we shouldn't all be set adrift in the flames of Prometheus, stolen out to sea to search out destiny. Or, if the towers Achilles had built for his beloved Patroklos would not be a better and faster way for all to rise to heaven?

His breathing was starting to quicken, and his blunt pencil was whipping across the page. He could see all the shades of death, and he now understood that he had to paint each separately, as the accumulation might be black, but each was a unique color unto itself. The page was now a full forest of green, from army to olive. Like a military outfit, Baur had now created a uniform for his character, and it was time to have him try it on and see if it fit.

But who would wear such a ghastly shade? he thought.

Baur scanned his character list. He had one Sergeant Bud Hudsucker, a rhyming name, completely surreal, but hey, we're postmodern now, aren't we? Bud Hudsucker was a man of means who had been drafted after failing out of Yale. His parents were of the Massachusetts' Hudsuckers, ancient money hidden under the overburdened mattresses of seven generations. Originally plantation owners, they now made their money in steel. Bud Hudsucker did not want to go into the family business, but now found himself staring over a dead German soldier, his bayonet plunged through the dead man's eye like a carving knife through a plump thanksgiving ham. He had not wanted to be a man of steel, but now found that his only trustful companion was a utensil forged from the family's loins. Bud Hudsucker was no better than any of the other soldiers captured and left in Dresden prior to the bombing. He had been caught and detained, his boots taken and his gun dismantled. A freak fire freed him and three others, and he took his present gun off the body of a fallen comrade he found bloated and contorted behind a peanut cart buried in the rubble. The song of the vendor haunted the corner, as did the smells of faded grease and legumes. Bud Hudsucker had lost his first gun to the

Germans, but now was armed and angry, a true warrior like Leonitis or Alexander, a man of action and death.

The green backdrop of the notes painted a room full of lean cuts of beef. Bud was hiding from the Nazis with his two companions, Leonard Bitterroot and John Hamm. Bitterroot was Native American, a full-blooded Indian from Wyoming who had been enlisted after a night of drunken debauchery found him locked up in jail. It was three months in prison (which in Wyoming he knew meant nothing better than the eventual loss of a limb or at least three fingers) or he could enlist and be out in 18 months. He had chosen enlistment and had been cursed before leaving by a white woman who had claimed he wronged her. She fancied herself a witch and had placed a hex on his head. Leonard had hoped that the hex would fade as he crossed the Atlantic, but so far he had been stabbed twice and lost a toe to frostbite. He wondered often why the hex wouldn't just finish him off.

John Hamm, Leonard's theatrical antithesis, was the son of a protestant minister, who had heard the call shortly after losing his virginity to his neighbor, a very young girl of diminished faculties. The crimson wave of shame that had touched both him and the bed sheets had permanently stained the young man, and the next day he had repented to his father and pledged to live celibate for the remainder of his Christ-loving life. He had been praying in church when a young man had entered, wearing a navy uniform. He had just returned from the pacific, and asked atonement from the young priest-in-training. John had stood there speechless as the young man explained the debauchery he had experienced and taken part in. John listened as the man described the natives walking around half-naked, with strange piercings and even stranger customs. He heard the

young man explain how he had laid with many of these young girls, and had assured himself that even though he didn't understand their words, he knew in their hearts what it was they wanted. John Hamm had sat silent and sweating as the young soldier recounted act after act. He told the young man that God would only forgive those that truly repented. That night John sat in bed awake, thinking about his own sins. The next morning he informed his father that he would enlist in order to spread the word among the soldiers in the pacific theatre. His father feared for him, but was never one to resist the instructions of the lord. Although he had requested the pacific, he had ended up in southwest Germany, tending to the sick and dying.

It was during Leonard Bitterroot's last sojourn with the medical staff (the lost toe to frostbite) that he met John Hamm. Leonard and John had been talking about the role of each of their beliefs and how it mattered to this war when the Nazis had attacked. They had both survived the raining mortar shells only to be captured by a small contingent of German troops in a nearby valley. Leonard and John were marched north to Dresden, held there for three years, and were barely alive when Bud Hudsucker was brought in.

Pascal Baur tried to think of the pain of the march and how that had made Bud into a killing machine. Baur put himself in the place of Bud Hudsucker, like a hero trying on a cape, and found that it would fit well.

It was during times like this, when he would space out and think about some unwarranted section of his life that would sow the seeds of grumpiness and hostility that many of the cast thought a natural accumulation of his rigidness and eruditeness.

And Eliot Ness, he thought, a song almost forming on his cracked lips.

“Where was I?” he asked the crack in the wall. If he was smart he’d check his watch to make sure of he had enough time to lower his head and keep composing, but Baur was afraid of how much time he had just spent ruminating on cracks in the wall and characters in green, and how it would make him self-conscious and waste even more time. Or was he already doing that? Instead of answering his own question, he just shook his head from side to side and tried to block out green. Maybe Bud Hudsucker was really a blue character. Someone regal, maybe? The light through the venetian blinds faded from a forest green to a dark royal blue. Baur felt the tranquility of blue, of the inner-peace and soft steps and the frozen touch of a pole in the polish winter. Getting a tongue stuck to metal, the life of a schoolboy and the tales of caution of mothers in all corners of the world. Baur wasn’t sure what direction the opera was taking, but he knew what he had on the page was insufficient. He needed something real and immediate and gut-wrenching. He needed the audience to smell and taste the sulfur from a spent fuse, the light mist of blood that slowly swirled inside your mouth and left everything tasting tangy. He needed an image to start, something primal and elusory, something that would create the backdrop, the canvas of destruction and Dresden and dilapidation and decay.

Yellow.

The color of fire, of puss, of the sun.

Immediately a swirling string ostinato broke from the ether and enflamed his ears with a burning sensation like hot peppers. Maybe chartreuse or saffron? He needed a color to surround and engulf Dresden, and nothing would do but the color of fire. But, Baur thought, his head swimming with hues and ideas, the story I have doesn’t look yellow. What kind of war story has the same colors as a dandelion?

The random associations started falling into place and Baur scooped up the loose-leafed manuscript paper and dropped it into a drawer full of paper. The filing system of a composer, where nothing is every discarded, but much is held in limbo until a creative kink elects to release it upon the world, a rehabilitated motive or theme that now has to prove its worth even more to its creator.

The page was once again empty, but the new image was already overlaid upon it thanks to some sort of compositional overhead projector spilling forth from Baur's eyes. It was like tracing. The setting was no longer a city in Germany, but a vision of hell, complete with mythical creatures and exaggerated monstrosities of urbanity. He was now thinking both Hieronymus and Hitler, and how hell had matched up for both.

And it was aboard an amber, rusting tanker of creation, *Anubis* let's call it, riding directly toward the setting oblong sun that Bud Hudsucker and his posse found themselves in a different Dresden, a place that stank of sulfur and left the sweet taste of evaporated blood on each of their tongues.

It was night but the rampant flames were spitting through the sky like geysers. Bud, Leonard and John were now huddled in the corner of a dilapidated building, shivering from the frost on the ground. Half the city was on fire, but the ground was still frozen and hard, and sitting on the barren earth for just a few minutes was enough to warm the frost and soak through your pants. All three had wet asses thanks to the ground thaw, and John Hamm had pissed himself earlier when a bomb had knocked a statue of the Virgin Mary through a window, landing three inches from his outstretched legs. Since then he had remained as fetal as possible, and hoped the warm liquid would remain warm and not freeze. Yet, he was now starting to feel a stiffness in his crotch and

worried that God had found him through the blanket of smoke and was intent on punishing him for his impure thoughts.

The soundtrack was slow, string harmonics representing the screaming planes miles above, and a slow rumble of sul pont basses to add a touch of the constant fear in all their eyes. Occasionally a loud blast of brass and percussion would split through the empty room and wash over them with a fresh tingle of goose bumps and muscle spasms. Baur also heard the electronic sign-waves of a Theremin or an ondes Martenot, something unnatural that could be used aleatorically to “un”-signify the orchestra—something to make the audience question just from where the music was coming from, the pit, or perhaps a place slightly lower... Back in the fevered world of his creation, the yellowed night sky represented all the terrible nightmares they had dreamt as children. Every boogiemer lived just beyond the crumbling walls of the former café. Bud was the only one of the three who really understood that surviving meant getting out of Dresden before the next sundown. That if they weren’t out before the moon they would be stolen away by the specters that hovered just above the Lancasters and the suffocating haze of smoke. From the ground all the stars had disappeared, left for happier skies, and it seemed to Bud Hudsucker that the only people who didn’t know to get the hell out of Dresden were them and the damn cats.

Baur started scribbling in text. First a recitative that explained the location, what had happened, and what Bud was thinking; then an aria about fear and fleeing. How running away was noble rather than cowardly. Bud needed to get his guys ready to go, to get them moving and not crouching in the corner, wet through to their asses and silently crying for this to all be a nightmare.

The scene materialized, first, as if projected on a wall, then refocusing (like blinking) and completely engulfing the voyeur. Now, thought Baur, we'll have a duet:

Bud and Leonard stood and stretched their legs, listening intently to a deep reverberation, something like "do it" had rocked through their bodies. A bomb must have fallen only a few hundred yards away, and if the pattern would hold, which Bud had no faith that it would, they might get a few minutes before another plane dropped anything in their vicinity.

"Time to go," he whispered to Leonard and John. Immediately, as if afraid that waiting would paralyze his legs, John stood up and rushed toward Bud, holding his rifle pointed forward, almost piercing the side of Bud like some Roman soldier with a spear of fierce steel. Bud nonchalantly pushed the rifle to the side, not really worrying about John's lack of tact, and instead focusing on the huddled mass of fatigues and piss in the corner. "Time to go," he repeated to Leonard, a little more forceful and with a quicker cadence. Leonard looked up and made eye contact with Bud. He looked so lost and pathetic, the kind of kid that Bud would have once tortured on the playground of his adolescence. Leonard's dark, red skin was shiny with tears, and his hands were holding one another over his wrists, interlocked like a Chinese puzzle. Another bomb rattled the remaining teacups on the far wall. They were dusty, but still in line as if waiting for some elderly woman to return and boil a fresh pot for everyone. The absurdity of such relics always stifled the imaginations and intentions of soldiers, and all three spent a silent minute simply staring at the teacups, each lost in a dreamland that was far away and solitary.

By the time the moment was over, Leonard had willed himself up and was standing next to John and Bud. His rifle was slung over his left shoulder and he was still holding his wrists with each hand, as if they were the coldest part of his body. Bud could never understand soldiers, could never understand how John Hamm was ready to go even with his piss-stained pants and Leonard Bitterroot was a cowering stack of spindly nerves and neurosis.

“Where are we going?” asked Leonard, his voice timid and high.

“Anywhere but here, we got to get out of the city or else we’ll end up being nothing but rubble by the morning.”

John nodded his agreement to Bud, and Leonard looked at them worried, not sure if their idea was any better than his. “Which direction?” he asked.

“We go east, toward Bautzen. I think we can hopefully make contact with allied forces before we stumble upon more Germans.”

“What do we do if we see Germans?”

“I don’t know. Run or fight I guess. But we’ll worry about that when it happens. Right now, we need to climb out of this city, and that isn’t going to be easy. The bombing has probably destroyed many of the roads out, and we could be dealing with snipers or soldiers if we try and leave on a major road. We’ll just follow the compass and hope we can evade everyone and everything.”

A distant blast a few seconds later was treated like a starter’s pistol. Bud led the way, followed by Leonard and John. Hunched over, they ran through a deserted intersection to the safety of a still-standing brick wall. The wall was caked in shit-colored mud, almost making it appear like some sort of stucco hut that Leonard had been

told throughout his schooling that his distant ancestors once built in the canyons of New Mexico.

Bud checked his compass and led them down the street. The road was headed downhill and John felt that somehow this couldn't be north. He pulled out his own compass and verified the direction. Bud looked back at him in contempt, but said nothing and continued the slow march through the empty street.

Three blocks later they came to a blockade. The Germans had filled the road with red and white ambulances, which had subsequently been bombed by the allies. The faded husks of the machines looked like the remnants of a heart-transplant patient dead on the table. The tops had been blown off, and the red coloring on the sides streaked down in a way that made John think the ambulances had actually bled after being hit. He stared into the empty shells and didn't notice that Bud and Leonard had stopped. He bumped into Leonard, accidentally pressing his wet crotch up to his leg. He turned and saw Leonard and Bud staring at the wall. He followed their gaze past a solitary ladder to a giant protruding knife that had been stabbed into the bricks. John stepped closer, past Leonard and focused on the knife. The knife had pinned to the brick two large ears from a white man. They were clean and obviously from the same person. John gagged a little and that was enough to make Leonard gag as well. Bud looked at both of them, trying to hold in his own stomach.

“Keep going,” he whispered, his voice barely able to convey the message.

John patted Leonard on the back and they both dutifully turned and followed Bud toward the graveyard of ambulances. Once in front of the twisted metal they found a path that led them through the wreckage. As they squeezed through the ever-thinning

canyon Bud thought about the Spartans and Thermopylae and wondered whether this might be some spectacular German trap. The metal wreckage left a narrow path that spindled around fenders and deflated tires like a hedge maze in the Nebraska fall. Bud held his breath and tightened the grip on his gun, his knuckles pale and cold from the decreased blood flow. Jagged, depressing gray knives of flayed metal poked out from the canyon walls like hangnails, catching their clothes and digging into their skin. Like running through a thicket of thorns, all three men soon found fresh streams of blood staining their arms, legs and backs. The canyon came to a sharp turn, where each had to squirm through what looked like a giant cheese grater. Bud sucked in his stomach and inched through the constricting path, feeling tiny pins brush through his hair and watching them narrowly miss his nose. He emerged from the grater with his back to open air, and a momentary worry of nakedness took hold. He turned around and found that there was no one waiting, and that other than a few more feet of tires and broken glass, he was clear of the ambulance graveyard.

As they exited the canyon they came upon another unusual corpse. This one was halfway through a circular window, his torso inside the room and his legs and ass dangling out toward street and the three soldiers. He was dressed only in his faded white underwear, and his exposed legs were as white as an egg. Leonard poked him softly with his rifle, but he was surely dead.

“How could anyone let themselves die like that?” John mumbled, crossing himself and the dead body.

Bud turned and grunted. “There’s nothing beautiful in death. Just like mud. It sticks to everyone eventually.”

John finished his impromptu rite and caught up with Leonard and Bud. The three walked down the street in the haze of smoke and lingering flames. They felt like they had been transplanted into some sort of netherworld, a hell where flames engulfed them on all sides. The strong stench of fire had become familiar, and only in these moments of reflection did any of the three even notice that the burning air was any more or less thick than before. The heavy glow of distant flames kept the sky lit and the stars hidden. John checked his compass again and looked for the north star. Only when he squinted did he even imagine that he could see it. They had now turned the corner from the ambulance graveyard and were on the march through broken bottles and a heavy scent of perfume. Through a broken window John could see an upturned rack of bottles, and assumed it was all that remained of a women's perfume shop. Ahead of him Bud stopped and started coughing, his olfactory senses unable to handle the heavy dose of flowers and whale grease. He turned toward the opposite side of the street and threw up, not a lot, but enough to drop him to his knees. Leonard and John watched as he spit out the remnants of bile and bread. John wondered if it was the perfume that had caused the reaction. It was funny, he thought, that something that if inhaled only four years ago would have caused a man to become aroused now caused the opposite. It was the same sort of understanding that John thought he would have after the war whenever he came across the smell of sizzling bacon.

The music in his head stopped and Baur stared at the page. It was funny that after writing the perfume section he could now smell Claudia's lingering scent. It hung in the air and he felt the momentary understanding of John Hamm as his penis woke as if from a sweet dream. He tried to put thoughts of her out of his mind and return to his work, but

her naked form filled his head and like a voyeur he tried to look past the foggy beginnings of his waking dream to her sweetness and her vitality. He peered past the clouds in his mind and tried to find her, but she had already left. Instead, he found stacks and stacks of paper and scores and he fled the imaginary space before they toppled over and engulfed him. Baur checked his watch and decided it would be best to be done for now and get some food before preparing for the performance.

He shuffled through the scattered pages and placed them in a drawer in his desk. To his eyes they emitted a slight yellow tinge, as if discolored. He was never able to divorce music from the colors in which it was dyed in his mind. Even in waking life he forever saw scores and passages in some prescribed color, a glimmering shimmering that would crescendo with the identification of the score. It was a fascinating phenomenon, and even Baur himself would toy with it like a child playing with a dimmer switch. He would go to his shelf and quickly grab a score and watch the color fade in as he read the title. It was strange, to be sure, but to Baur it was how it had always been—the way in which he always saw the world.

With the pages put in the drawer, Baur pulled out the score to *Orphée Redux* and started thumbing through his notes. Of course he knew the score inside and out, but occasionally, at certain spots, he had to be preparing for some other event that would soon be happening. Making sure the right person was cued, or changing his beat pattern at the right time, all things that might slip his mind when thinking about the opera in the largest of senses.

He skimmed the pages, past flurries of notes and solitary solos, rereading every handwritten instruction, and as he passed into the second act he felt the birthing pangs of

anticipation and nervousness. Such stomach problems had been a staple of his undergrad days, flaring before each and every performance. But he had thought they had passed with the first few of his professional achievements, like teenage acne, only to reappear the morning of his musical prom.

Baur reached down under the desk and grabbed a can of iced tea out of a half-empty 12-pack. He tapped his finger three times on the top and opened the drink. He took a sip and held it in his mouth, swallowing it only after the carbonation had begun to tickle his tongue. Raising the can to his lips he took in a second sip. As he was holding it in there was a knock on the door that almost caused him to spit iced tea over the desk. Baur swallowed and meekly said, "Come in." The door opened and Nancy Warren entered, a yellow-pad in one hand and a giant purse in the other.

"Pascal, I was wondering if you had time to talk now?"

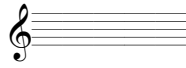
Baur placed the drink down on his desk and gestured her to a chair near the wall. Above the chair hung a poster from a recent tour through Europe. The writing was in Italian and the only thing Nancy could make out was the bold name of Pascal Baur near the middle of the poster. "Nice," she said, nodding at the poster. She pulled the chair from the wall and dragged it toward his desk. She sat down and placed her purse beside her, reaching in and emerging with a pen. Her chair was low and Baur seemed to tower above her like a principal to a student. He reached across the desk and grabbed a giant score. It was thick like the phone book and easily twice as large in surface area. He handed her the score and she started thumbing through it.

“I can give you a different copy later, but for now you can use it if you need to ask any questions about the music.” Baur sat back and smiled, his chair rocking back as if this was the most natural thing in the world.

Nancy sat there weighed down by the score to the opera. She had so many questions but didn't know quite where to begin. That she knew Baur made it even more awkward, and found that like best friends who have been separated for too long, she was uncharacteristically out of words.

“Where should we start?” he asked, his magnanimity seeming to make her feel even more unsure and tongue-tied. He seemed a bit distracted, but Nancy didn't know why. It could be her or it could be something else related to the show. What she didn't know was that Baur was waging a battle in his head, testing Bud Hudsucker and his posse and attempting to find the route out of the hell he had drafted them into. The yellow flames of Dresden flickered in his eyes as he waited for the reporter to begin asking questions.

In his ears he heard that same trumpet call again, lonely, asking the immortal question. The silence held the answer back like the blanket of smoke held back the stars. Distant, from somewhere in the ether he heard Nancy's first question. Baur returned from his daydream and thought about it for a minute, his eyes rising from side to side as he thought out his answer.



Pascal Baur's New Opera

By Nancy Warren
October 5th, 1985

Hartford (CT) – Pascal Baur stands erect, in a slim-cut suit that speaks of his European heritage. He is bald, wears wire-framed glasses, and has a nervous tick of wiggling his arms in tempo with any music that is audible. He is a former student of S. Thomas Beversdorf and Milton Babbitt, but his music sounds more at times like a mix of Elliott Carter and George Crumb. He is currently in his third year as the musical director and composer-in-residence for the Hartford Opera Company.

Pascal Baur's light grey eyes show a sensitivity that might surprise those that were in attendance for the opening of his first major opera, which premiered tonight at the Bushnell Theatre. *Orphée Redux* is a modern retelling of the Orpheus myth. It is set in New York and includes all the grimy details of the nearby metropolis. Gone is the lyre and the literal Hades, Monteverdi's Deus Ex Machina and Tom Jobim's bossa nova soundtrack. In their place are such hot-button topics like the ever-present AIDS crisis and sex addiction, and more than a little cocaine and alcohol.

Baur's envisions Orpheus as a, "stubborn soul who can't accept the things he cannot change." And Eurydice is no longer a victim of simple tragedy, but of a psychological compulsion that she does not understand. The music is incredible, with lamenting ballads juxtaposed over ponticello string clusters and a little bit of set theory. In this world that he has created, Baur blurs the line of reality and surrealism, and invites the audience into a world where we cringe at the thought that we might be capable of

inhabiting these character's skin. Claudia Ingrassia, who plays Pamela's sister Lydia, called the opera, "a work of deep psychological discovery." She continued, "Maestro Baur is an incredible composer and director. His understanding of the voice makes the parts incredibly rewarding to sing. Especially Rebecca, who is just magnificent as Pamela." The Rebecca mentioned is world-renowned soprano Rebecca Olundsen, who is now entering her fifteenth year with the Hartford Opera Company. Baur indeed utilizes her talents well, but not enough can be said of Franklin Pettricone and Ingrassia, who sizzle onstage in their duet scene in the third act.

The morning before the premiere I sat down with Baur and asked him about the work and his view of the big questions the opera raises. Although he was busy making a few last-minute changes, he offered a very insightful glance into the creation of myth.

-

Nancy Warren: *Pascal, The Orpheus myth is one of the most commonly used stories in the world of opera. Why did you feel compelled to explore the same material that Monteverdi and Gluck had already covered, and what new aspects do you think you bring to the tale?*

Pascal Baur: I think that we as humans always subjugate our realities in terms of Jungian archetypes. With that in mind I thought that the myth of Orpheus was the most open to a new interpretation. I wanted to write a work that had a "classical" ideal, but a modern graininess. I wanted to explore obsession and commitment and how that played out in our post 1984 world.

-

NW: *What do you mean a “post 1984 world”?*

PB: I am of course referring to George Orwell’s classic work and how prophetic it sometimes seems. We are at war with a faceless enemy [communism] that must be defeated, and it seems our government wants us to always be at war. Look at the war in Afghanistan and the recent Iraq-Iran war. These conflicts seem to be modern in that there are no longer heroes and villains, just different degrees of grey violence. In that respect I felt that an Orpheus tale that did not have a true “hero” would be something that modern audiences could relate to.

-

NW: *How do you think the trends in modern music have affected this work?*

PB: Herr Schonberg broke with tonality in 1907, and since then the term “modern music” has been used to denote anything that is not popular, or is not consonant to the average listener. Even composers like Terry Riley and Steve Reich have been subjugated to such a label because of the repetitious and unrelenting nature of their vision. I think the new Music Television is something that will eventually destroy music entirely. It makes the idea of length and substance irrelevant. It plays to a tone-deaf audience who only wants to dance and get dressed up in ridiculous outfits.

-

NW: *So you blame MTV for the demise of the concert hall?*

PB: I think it is one of the main destroyers of our art, yes. To take a popular song and satirize it, I guess one could say, “Video killed the concert hall”.

-

NW: *Pascal, tell me a little about Orphée Redux and how it came into being.*

PB: The idea presented itself during my graduate work at Juilliard. I was studying with Milton Babbitt and he asked me if I was ready for my comps [comprehensive exams]. I told him I thought so, but he hinted that I should make sure and be familiar with Monteverdi’s *Orfeo*. I spent two months going through the work and analyzing the score. At the time I had also just finished reading Joyce’s *Ulysses*, and I started to wonder how Orpheus would relate to a modern audience.

-

NW: *Were you aware of the film Black Orpheus at this time?*

PB: No I was not. I only viewed it later, after I had worked out my own story.

-

NW: *I understand that you wrote the story for Orphée Redux yourself, but then collaborated with Niels Crenshaw on the libretto?*

PB: I think that it is always a mistake for a composer to write his own story or libretto. I wrote the story, but when I sent my work to Niels I told him, “rip it apart. I don’t want to ruin my opera through my own narrative...”

-

NW: *Let's get back to Juilliard. I was at Juilliard at the same time you were there. I was working on a Bachelors in Music History. You were quite the star during that time. Would you mind talking a little about your time in New York?*

PB: I was a young man who was given many great opportunities. And a lot of the knowledge I acquired was not from books and school. For example, I did some copywork for Leonard Bernstein and ended up copying some scenes from *Dybbuk* as well as some of his symphonic works, *Slava!* and Three Meditations if I remember correctly. This gave me huge lessons in orchestration and large-scale form. I also worked for my teacher [Milton Babbitt] on a lot of projects. I helped cut some of the tape for *Phenomena* and also helped organize some concerts for a group of graduate composers in the New York area. These sorts of things helped me develop my organizational skills and contacts throughout the community. For example, Bernstein introduced me to Leopold Stokowski, who did me the great honor of premiering my piano concerto. He died shortly after the premiere, and I've felt a great honor to have spent some time with such a great man.

-

NW: *You also won a lot of awards during that time.*

PB: Yes, but so much of that is political in nature. I was writing in the "academic" style that was favored by most of the people who were in charge of giving out prizes. I sometimes envy the minimalist contingent because of their dedication to a philosophical idea and popular success. And John Cage for that matter, who I think has been even

more influential philosophically than musically, but I know he'd probably disagree with that if he were asked. I envy the honesty of their pursuits, which I think some composers do not always believe in, and I hope one day to have that sort of "nonacademic appreciation".

-

NW: *Speaking of "nonacademic appreciation", how do you think the standard Hartford Opera concertgoer will receive Orphée Redux?*

PB: I think they will be challenged, but ultimately they will either reject it or accept it based on the subject matter rather than the music. I believe that my music is really accessible in this instance, and that only the subject matter will be difficult for some to swallow. But I didn't want to write just another Orpheus opera, but rather explore the Freudian undertones of why Orpheus chooses to disobey directions and look back at Eurydice. I think the story is all about why Orpheus looks back. The problem with some of the operas by Monteverdi or Gluck is the implant of a god to save the day and end the story on a happy note. I think this story shouldn't end happy, and my opera strives to end in a real and natural manner. But to get back to your question, I'm not sure how the audience will respond, but I anticipate that they will look deep into their souls and understand the truth of David [Orpheus] and Pamela [Eurydice].

-

NW: *For those musicians reading this column, explain your compositional process, and what influences were at play during the creation of Orphée Redux.*

PB: Like many post-Wagner opera composers, I have employed leitmotifs throughout the work. Each character has an identifiable theme, which is always transitory depending on their psychological state at the present moment. Also, all the main themes, David's, Pamela's, Lydia's are very similar in structure, and actually in regards to set theory, all share 3 of the 4 principal pitches. At times when the work transitions into a "hyper-tonality", the key centers of d minor and g# minor are quite important. Also, E major and C# major. But I hope that listeners, even some of my peers don't need to be coddled with sets and pitch areas in order to appreciate the work. Overall, I strove to create drama and universality that would reach within each listener and resonate.

-

NW: *Thank you very much Maestro Baur for sitting down and talking with me about this exciting new work. I wish you all the success and hope Hartford comes out to see such a wonderful piece of drama.*

PB: Thank you Nancy.

Orphée Redux is now playing at the Bushnell Theatre through October 13th. Tickets can be purchased through Ticketmaster or by calling (860) 534-1119.

Additional research provided by John Babcock.

Scene 6



Claudia Ingrassia stood facing the mirror and singing softly. Her cheeks, rosy with life, puffed and contorted as she maneuvered her mouth to get the desired sounds. Her whole body felt warm with the river of music flowing up and out her throat, a mighty tributary leading through leading tones and passing through passing tones to the sonic promise-land of divine inspiration. Claudia wasn't sure if Baur's opera was on the level of Beethoven or Mozart, but it had a certain succinctness and scratchability, a term she had picked up from a former theory teacher when a piece of music makes you scratch your head in wonder at its ostensibly perfect or unique construction. Every time they ran through *Orphée Redux* Claudia felt that pregnant pang of something coming out of seemingly nothing, as if in a holistic way the entire opera becomes a sum greater than its parts. In this way she always had to revert to "scratchability" every time she tried to explain or think about the opera. It just wasn't enough to give a quick plot outline or explain all the characters or the style of the music, as it would be insufficient to the experience of the experience.

Claudia was thinking about the opera and had stopped singing. She wasn't happy with how she transferred from the low to the high register in the aria and instead of trying the passage again; she began singing a different tune, something she had once been instructed to learn to exercise the same process. Claudia began with a drawn out long tone, an Eb in the lower part of her voice, changing timbre and the vowel as if imitating a didgeridoo. Then, with a flick of her tongue she spun around the note and leaped a sixth,

her voice changing from a throaty mid-register to a light, heady, high-register. She didn't know all the words, and since she didn't know German she was not able to improvise anything but similar sounding sounds, the same sort of fake German that you'd find in a Jerry Lewis movie or in *Hogan's Heroes*. The melody was one of her favorites from *Gotterdammerung*, and she sang it with the frivolousness of someone who had never crossed the Atlantic and seen Bayreuth. She wasn't in a Berlin opera house but a makeshift dressing room of mirrors and desks that was littered throughout a curtained section of the backstage of the Bushnell.

She had never sung Wagner outside of juries in college. It was not a character she was inhabiting, but merely a pretty tune that she used occasionally to work on switching registers. Claudia began again, watching her mouth in the mirror as she made the leap, making sure her face wasn't straining, making sure her neck didn't push too far toward the ceiling. It really was a pretty tune, she thought, trying it a third time and shifting from smiling to frowning as she held the opening note.

Out of the twisting leitmotiv she then transitioned into a jazz scat, an improvisation of the Wagner. From what she remembered from college about leitmotifs she figured Wagner might like her jazzy take. Give that old grump a bit of a tickle. This thought brought her back to Baur, and she smiled a naughty smile and decided she should start working on her make-up. Claudia stretched her arms and then took off her white shirt, not wanting to get it dirty with eyeliner or lipstick.

Although naturally shy, Claudia, like most actresses, had since High School felt comfortable changing her clothes in such large, exposed spaces. She puckered her lips at the mirror, blew an imaginary kiss at her exposed breasts, and reached for her bra, a

padded model that would give Lydia some of the oomph that had originally been written into the story. She found the beige bra with its ridiculous heft and bent over to snap it on. She snapped the bra into place and lifted her head to check the mirror. Claudia let out a ripping scream when, instead of her own face in the mirror, she saw the smiling face of Nancy Warren.

“Holy shit, you scared me,” she shrieked, turning around and finding Nancy waiting patiently five feet from her chair.

“I’m sorry, I was actually trying my best not to startle you, but that apparently backfired horribly.”

Claudia looked at Nancy and silently asked the mirror to judge who was prettier.

“If this is a bad time I can come back later. I just wanted to ask you a few questions about Pascal’s new opera. You play Lydia, correct?”

Claudia was putting on a t-shirt and looked out at Nancy through the neck. She finished pulling the shirt over, tucking it into her velvet pants and ran her hands through her hair, mussing it back evenly and then throwing her head forward and backward, shaking her curly locks into place.

“Yes, I play Lydia,” she answered, a little sheepish at the idea of being interviewed, “but I don’t know what I could tell you about Dr. Baur’s opera.”

“Well,” Nancy said, her lips pursed and ready to attack, “I assumed since you are sleeping with him you would know a lot about it.”

Claudia couldn’t hide the look of shock that creased her face. Nancy had a grim smile as if she had just announced “checkmate” and was leaning in, crowding Claudia into a corner where she would have no choice but to submit. Claudia tried to lean back

but found the desk was surprisingly sturdy. She tried to act surprised and horrified, tried to bring about a look of disbelief and befuddlement, but the only thing Nancy saw was the thin veil of confirmation in her rigid posture and flushed face.

“You don’t need to try and deny it, and quite frankly, it’s not really anything that needs to be denied. I just want to know a few things from the one person who is closest to Pascal.”

Claudia tried to swallow the little bit of surprise that flemmed her throat. “How do you know that we are together?”

“It was easy,” Nancy began, triumphant in her summation, “I saw how he looked at you from the corners of his eyes, how you both intentionally avoided touching. My dear, it was so easy to tell that I’m sure everyone else in the building knows.”

“Really, you think everyone knows?”

“Absolutely.”

Claudia sat rigid with self-scrutiny. The freedom in being found out was both exhilarating and nerve-wracking. Her palms were starting to sweat, a warm soft dribble that kept her mind splintered about. She tried to understand what Nancy was trying to do. What her game would entail and what she would ask of Claudia. Nancy had the predatory stance and posture of someone who found out secrets and relished in such moments of disclosure. A green glow of anger filled Claudia, her hands were clenched tight, the beads of sweat slowly escaping in myriad direction down her arm, following the contours of her veins.

“What do you want from me?” she asked.

Nancy sat forward, conspiratorially, her hands folded across her lap and her red, vinyl stilettos pointing out toward Claudia's shins. She lifted her hand daintily, and wiggled her finger softly at Claudia in a motion that seemed to ooze with hubris, her head mouthing the words, no, no, no...

"I don't want anything from you," she said, "I just want to get a good angle for my story about Pascal. He was pretty rigid during our interview, and I just want to get some more soft or, er, human aspects of him. I know him from his graduate work in New York. Did you know that?" Claudia shook her head, unsure what Nancy was trying to imply. "I knew him and even then he was very private and quiet. He learned, I think, to add a bit of mystery to his persona to attract more attention. And more women."

Claudia opened her mouth but didn't speak. She had almost walked into a trap but held herself back at the last moment. Nancy was just trying to get a rise out of her, and basically succeeded, but she could hold her ground by acting ambivalent and allowing the reporter to keep insinuating and implicating and then let it all wash away. She wanted Claudia to create discord with Pascal, wanted some drama, as it would probably make for a better story, or maybe for her own ulterior motives. Claudia imagined Nancy as some evil female Iago, as diabolical as Shakespeare or Verdi could imagine. Nancy was the sower of lies, the orator of discord; it must be as definitive as that, for to allow doubt to creep and allow sympathy to arrive would be to invite disaster. Claudia understood that she couldn't allow her naiveté to hinder her resolve, she must be careful. But, she was also going to remain professional, was going to remain silent and coy and let her boiling blood subside and then much later she'll ask Pascal and he'll tell her that it was all nonsense, that he wasn't really the guy that Nancy Warren insisted he

were. The lights would be off and the smell of his musk would be emanating from his sweaty body and she would understand that at least for now he was hers, and that she couldn't allow herself to contrive jealousies out of the shaded past of Nancy Warren.

“Has he told you about Diane?”

Claudia about jumped across the short distance to pummel Nancy, but held herself back with all the control she could muster. She was grinding her teeth and her face was contorted into a painful grimace that would be evidence enough to Nancy that her blow had landed solidly. The rouge on her face was adding to the increased blood-flow, and Claudia wondered if the warmth of her cheeks and forehead were at all evident.

“Yes, I know about Diane, but I don't see how this helps your article. In fact, I think you are intentionally being malicious and spiteful.” The smirk disappeared from Nancy's face and she recrossed her legs. Claudia now had the chance to be on the offensive, and she had an idea how to further thrust the blade into Nancy Warren and defend her man. The heat in her face had reached a threshold of intolerance, and a thumping of her heart ratcheted through her stomach up to her head. The pulsing was like a call to arms, a battlefield march, and Claudia felt that all her senses were prepared for attack, were prepared for a fight. She had wanted to remain calm, but an unexpected rage had overridden her latent desires for peace. It was something that Rebecca would have done, she thought, her confusion confusing her understanding of her own responses. Inside her thoughts were jumbled with crossed wires and frayed reactions, and her worst demons were free to run amuck.

And Nancy Warren looked poised to attack, which set Claudia on edge even more.

“I don’t know what you are talking about, but I think you are being rude and inconsiderate, and might I add, a little too aggressive.”

“Don’t give me this crap about being shocked. You have intentionally tried to goad me into responding to your ridiculous questions. What was all that about Diane, huh? What could that have possibly contributed to your story? You are trying to goad me; you are goading me into saying something you can print in big letters in your column. Now, how do you respond to that?”

Nancy sat quiet and pondering, her hand placed under her chin and her eyes looking up at the riggings and lights hanging from the ceiling. She reached her hand up toward her notebook and drew a long line through something. Claudia waited for her response, waited for another chance to attack her for being mean. It had taken all her spite and strength to go at Nancy with such venom, and she hoped that her barrage would prove enough to end the interview. She had come to the understanding halfway through her rant that she was on the bad end of a sinking ship. There was no way to get out of this unscathed, and now Nancy would have all the material she needed to destroy her in the article. It was funny, thought Claudia, that I can be destroyed before anyone knows anything about me. Like many women before her, Claudia found herself in the unfortunate situation of becoming attached to a lightning rod. Her career promising, but not yet formed, her beauty and her talent drew her to a man that seemed at least for the moment like an anchor dragging her toward the dark abyss of some unfathomable trench. Such understanding had not eluded her throughout the courtship, but like all those aforementioned, she had rolled the dice and followed her heart to the deep locker of good intentions. All this silence and internal thought had subsided her instinctual

ferociousness, and she needed a quick dose if she was to have anything to respond to Nancy's next assault, if indeed this battle continued. But Nancy just sat there quiet, her legs taut and still crossed, yet beginning to warble slightly, as if the energy was leaving and she was recoiling. Claudia had an immediate impulse to apologize, and find a way for this to end well, but her defensive instincts held her firm, and like a matador near a dying bull, she understood not to go too close or turn her back.

What had led them to such a stalemate she did not understand, but a draw seemed at the moment to be a lucky thing to Claudia after replaying Nancy's early assault. In her own mind this little four-minute conversation had taken on the epic scope of a Wagner opera. Across from her was not a thin, high-lighted reporter from a mediocre newspaper, but some feminine Hagen bent on destroying her and her beloved. She was trying to trick the erstwhile Brünnhilde into divulging Siegfried's lone weakness.

Nancy scribbled some more into her notebook and smiled wryly at Claudia.

"Claudia, I didn't want this to be confrontational. I'm sorry if I came on strong, I just want to get a really good story for my first Courant assignment. You know what it's like, the new girl in a man's field, well, I guess you kinda know."

Claudia smiled, not sure if Nancy was trying to be funny or not. She wanted to like her, to confide in her, but something told her it was a bad idea. This was a woman who knew Pascal longer than Claudia had been singing, and she desperately wanted to connect to his past not just through something impersonal like score-study. Pascal's mother had died when he was still in high school, and her death had left him estranged from his father, who had passed less than a decade later. He was a man without a past or

any foundation that Claudia could construct. He was what he had been when she met him, like a man without a shadow, a concoction that felt unnatural and unsteady.

“What was he like?” she asked, too curious to remain coiled and worried.

“Who, Pascal? He was a genius, same as he is now.”

Claudia felt a swelling pride as Nancy responded. The thought that he was the same seemed to allow some temporary construct to connect her with a distant, younger Baur. She imagined him with a scruff of dark brown hair and giggled, her body retiring from its defensive posture and loosening, the knot in her shoulders subsiding to a lingering memory. She didn’t notice that Nancy was still poised, still rigid with pen to paper, her eyes still studying Claudia with interest and intent.

“Can I ask you one last question, if you don’t mind? I just would like to know if Pascal still uses that old Waterman pen to write.”

“Yeah, why?”

“Oh, no reason, it was just a gift and I was curious.”

Claudia’s emotive pendulum shot back toward berserk. She was about to launch into another round of attacks and posturing when Baur walked through the stage door toward the two women. His timing was perfect, as if he had been lingering within earshot to save Claudia if things got hairy.

“Hello ladies.”

Nancy turned and smiled at Baur. “We were just talking about you Pascal. I was asking Claudia about the opera and how she likes singing new music.”

Baur looked at Claudia and read the surprised expression on her face. “That’s great Nancy. I’m glad you have been able to talk with the principals about the work. I

hope they are not saying anything disparaging. I put them through the ropes vocally, but I hope they think it is worth it.”

Nancy nodded her head with a fraudulent air of civility. Claudia was so confused with the direction of the conversation that she about tattled to Baur like some prattling child. Baur gave her a reassuring look and she took in her first relaxed breath since the beginning of the interview. She had never been the damsel who needed rescuing, but something about Baur interceding was comforting. It felt to Claudia like the warmth of her mother’s arms, and with Baur in the room she felt safe and secure. The change registered with Nancy and she started packing up her notepad and pen. Claudia had been saved by her man just in time. Something about it was depressing to Nancy and made her feel even more alone.

Claudia kept her eyes on Baur, not wanting to look away for fear that he might be a figment of her psyche and prone to dissipate without a constant vigil. He had a furrow of displeasure creasing his head, a consternation with Nancy’s decision to hijack his cast and ask about him. She knew that he was here to rescue her. Like a caped hero, he had swooped in at the last second to avoid disaster. Baur stood there with his eyes patiently waiting for Nancy to finish packing.

“If you have any more questions for my cast or for me just let me know.”

His voice was kind, but stern, and his rigidity further imbued an imposing demand for Nancy to leave. Baur would have made a great politician, Claudia thought, he would have been able to stand up to Reagan and Bush and brought a quorum of decency to this growing ethos of greed and faux-prosperity.

Nancy finished stowing her pad of paper and pen, something that could have been done much quicker, but she had done it in a way that made Claudia think she was attempting to soak up as much time with Baur as she could. To Claudia, Nancy had that posture and stench of a scorned lover, someone who seemed manic-depressive in the way she would cling to a man as if, like Atlas, he was holding the world on his shoulders. It was a bit of a convoluted idea in her head, but her instincts told her not to leave Nancy alone with Baur if she could help it, and Claudia had always liked to think she had good instincts.

“Thank you very much Miss Ingrassia. Maestro Baur, you too. I think I have what I need to finish my article, and after the performance tonight I think you will be quite the happy camper. Congratulations.”

Baur bowed politely, hoping that the level of formality and stringency would hasten Nancy’s departure. He could see the look of despair in Claudia’s face, and like a feral animal protecting his young, he was worried about the unnecessary presence in the room.

Claudia continued to sit as Nancy stood and walked out slowly, turning around once to ask a question but finding nothing but Baur’s back as he was caressing Claudia’s shoulders. Instead of interrupting, Nancy continued around, making it look as if she had been practicing a pirouette, and walked out of the door, her shoulders drooped and a slight grimace of pain lingering over her made-up face.

The lights dim and all references to the setting are lost. A spotlight focuses on Baur and Claudia, who is now sitting in the empty theatre, her desk having disappeared. They are no longer preparing for the opera, but are now in one, something from the

distant past with swords and spears and the tonal ambiguity of Wagner. But even though it looks like part of the Der Ring des Nibelungen, there is a modernity that belies the ancient tome of the gods. And indeed, neither Baur or Claudia are gods, but mere mortals who are locked in the endless parade of a post-simian emotion that can make the rest of the beasts look humane.

Love.

Love is all that Claudia wants. Her arms are cold from the encounter with Nancy, and rather than a sweater she wants the comforting enclosure of Pascal's arms around hers, his breath upon her neck like a moist kiss, and the knowledge that all the love in his heart was for her, and only her.

Claudia sings:

*Like sunlight
his clear radiance shines on me:
he was the purest,
he who betrayed me!
Deceiving his wife,
loyal to his friend,
with his sword he separated himself
from his own true love,
alone dear to him.
No man more honest
ever took an oath;
none more true
made treaty;
none was more pure
in love;
and yet none so betrayed
all oaths,
all treaties,
his truest love!*

Baur sings:

*O you, heavenly custodian
of oaths!
Turn your gaze
on my great grief,
see your everlasting guilt!
Hear my lament,
mighty god!*

A Duet:

*Through her most doughty deed,
that you rightly desired,
you sacrificed her
who wrought it
to the curse which had fallen on you:
this innocent had
to betray me
so that I should become a man of wisdom!*

Both came from a single voice. They were both Brünnhilde, both lamenting the loss of love. But in this story there has yet been no death, and Claudia continues to sit in the chair, Baur's arms draped around her like a decoramental fur. They were singing a cathartic realization of fears, something that neither had been willing to admit until that pure moment.

Baur grabbed the wobbly wood chair that Nancy had been using and pulled himself close to Claudia. He reached out his arms and stroked her hair and glazed his fingers down her back, his nails running down parallel like a music stave. Until now he had not understood that his relationship with Claudia was serious. He had been caught up with the fun of sneaking around, the excitement of stealth and deceptive behavior. Baur had thought he would never be serious about a woman again, that his ability to love with such a lack of reserve had been lost along with Diane.

But now things had changed. He had accidentally fallen in love with Claudia. Maybe, he thought, he had become predisposed to such grand gestures. The first time had been difficult, understanding his feelings, commiserating with his father, a man who had been forced by love into a loony-bin of a marriage. The frail, small man had said to him, “you’ll know it’s love when you don’t want it to be.” Baur had thought that such a sentiment was nothing more than his dry father trying to be poetic, but he had been right. The old man had actually known what he was talking about. Pascal had been young and the feelings he had were not in fact anything close to love, but the message had been transmitted and he had chosen it as one of the few things of his fathers to save after both his parents had passed.

And in the end the old man had been right.

Pascal and Diane had been in a big fight, and it was lying in bed alone afterward that he had started to understand the pain of which his had father spoke all those years before. To not have her breath upon his neck and her scent in his nostrils was a torture that he had never hereto known. He had started to feel the hopelessness of life without Diane, how much pain had yet been experienced, and he had wished that it wasn’t love, that it was some stomach virus that would pass. Food poisoning, perhaps. But it hadn’t, and now he was starting to feel it again, deep and latent, yawning like a sleeping bear waking from hibernation, an itch that was below the skin. Baur knew what would come next, and for the second time in his life wished that love could have been avoided.

Claudia had been sobbing softly, worried about what she had said to Nancy, but Baur’s soft fingers had slowly rid her body of the need to cry. She was on empty and needed to stop and focus and prepare and so forth and so on for tonight’s premiere. She

felt like she was in some sports movie and was waiting for the big speech to get her back in to the game. But such clichés didn't have the same effect as the soft fingers slowly raking up and down her back. The rampant, random energy sizzling through her body was goalless, striding through her synapses looking for something to occupy the time. Only his fingers were having any effect, systematically shifting and separating the pulses and impulses into small, manageable packets of raw emotion, like a flour sifter, only letting through enough at a time to not overload her condition any further.

“Pascal, I'm sorry about the interview. Nancy really surprised me with some stuff about your past. I was really vicious to her and I think she might use it against you. And...and she knows about you and me.”

She was starting to cry again, a fresh wave of emotions strangling all the cathartic rhythm of Baur's fingers. The small amount of make-up she had applied before her interview with Nancy was streaked down her face, a sad Pierrot-like visage that made her feel pathetic and hideous. Still, Baur continued to hold her tight and caress her pithy shoulders, still not speaking, but rather preparing his remarks as he always did, slowly and methodically and without interest in the interceding silence. Claudia was again reigning in her tears, and had grabbed a tissue from the desk to wipe off all the make-up.

Her eyes watched Baur in the mirror, watched him look from side to side as he deliberated. To Claudia it felt like she was in front of a judge, as if Baur was passing sentence and that everything would be decided with a few soft words into her ear. The thought was frightening, and although she had managed to stop crying, her nerves were frayed beyond recognition and she sat poised in her chair, rigid like a statue, her velvet

pants hiding raised goose bumps and flexed muscles. It was as if her body was preparing to run, to escape, and her brain was powerless to stop it.

“Why would she be so mean?” Claudia asked, trying to get Baur to start talking.

Baur thought for a moment, then answered softly and deliberately. “She is mean because she is a woman scorned. She thought we would be together at one point and when that didn’t happen she became rather vindictive.”

“She wanted to be with you?”

“Yes, while we were both at Juilliard. She tried to seduce me, but I resisted. I didn’t know she felt so betrayed until today. I have run into her occasionally over the last ten years, but she had always been civil. What did she say to you?”

Claudia sat up and turned toward Baur. Her eyes were wide and wet from tears, and in them Baur could make out the glistening of the house lights fifty feet overhead. She might look disheveled and messy, but her condition made Baur that much more attracted to her, that she would worry so much about him in his analytical mind indicated a lot about how she felt. Like Sherlock Holmes, Baur attempted to deduce much from the small amount of information he was given.

“She said that you were just using me, like you did to other women.”

“My sweet,” Baur responded, quickly and without the usual steady cadence, “as I told you earlier, you are the first person who has meant anything to me since Diane’s death. And I know we have not yet talked about her and you don’t know what I went through, or how I emerged, but it is something *we* will talk about, not something you need to find out from some angry bystander.”

“I’m sorry...I’m...” Claudia trailed off in mid-sentence, her eyes watching Baur as he gently lowered to his knees.

“Pascal, what are you doing?”

“Claudia, I love you. I know that for sure and it will not change. I want to do right, and I want you to be happy. The sneaking around is fun to a point, but we have hit that point and need to decide where this is going. I’m not sure, but I know where I would like it to go. Will you marry me?”

Claudia’s mouth hung agape, her ears and eyes not sure the moment had really occurred. Baur was still postured on one knee, holding her hand with his. She had the momentary thought of running away, leaving everything immediately and getting on a train for New York or Chicago or somewhere that wasn’t Connecticut. But a conflicting thought was also unraveling in her head, the thought of saying yes and kissing him and being able to walk out and have everyone know that he was hers, that it wasn’t a fling or sowing oats, but love and commitment and forever.

“Pascal, when did you decide to propose?”

It was then that both realized that he wasn’t holding a ring, that he had just decided. The understanding was exhilarating to Pascal, a coup from his usual methodical actions. He felt that he had finally been able to show the emotion and spontaneity that he worried was not available to him as it was to other people. To Claudia it was a troubling sign, as she knew that this sudden declaration was when his feelings had become genuine for her, as if everything before must have been a fraud. She didn’t want to believe it, but her mind would not let the thought go, and constantly replayed all the kisses and assumed

they had been admonitions, that now this wasn't a proposal, but a way to create a divide that would forever separate them.

Baur stood up slowly, holding one knee as he did, and came in to hug her. "I just decided," he said. "I just came to the understanding that our love is the kind that deserves to be recognized."

"But you don't have a ring."

"I don't have a ring, yes, but I do have a ring in my office. It's a relic from my mother, something that I was saving for just the right person. I had thought to give it to you before, but I just didn't know I would do it tonight."

"I don't know how to answer. I love you, but I can't decide the rest of my life based on a whim of yours. What happens if you have another whim and it doesn't involve me? What happens when you change your mind?"

Baur rubbed her shoulders with the flats of his palms. He wanted to kiss her but knew he had to answer her questions first. He didn't know how to explain to Claudia how he knew. Any mention of Diane would be bad, but it was exactly his love for Diane that made him sure of his feelings for Claudia. How could he tell her that he had begun to feel the pains of not having her, of losing her to a younger man or a better man? How could he tell her that he was so selfish that he couldn't stand the idea of anyone else being with her? In his heart he thought these were virtues, that they explained the concept of love in a more empirical way than cupids or chocolates, but how to explain his understanding to her? Pascal had lost the only other woman he had ever loved. How could he invoke her to his current love and have her understand?

Claudia felt his hands slow and then stop, still holding her shoulders, but no longer massaging. Despite of everything wrong with this moment, she understood all that was right with it. She wanted to say yes, to have a happiness that she could hold onto and treasure. She wanted to be with him, but he had made that more difficult now than it had been.

“What can I do to help you understand my feelings for you? What can I do to help you say yes?”

“You can’t do anything right now. I think I do understand your feelings, and I don’t think they are bad in any way. I just have to figure out mine. This is such a shock that I’m not sure I can answer you right now. I mean, how can I decide the rest of my life without any notice?”

“I just want you to answer what is in your heart.”

“Could you? I mean, you are such a logical, thought-out kind of guy, how would you respond if the tables had been turned?”

“I don’t know.”

“I want to say yes, and I love you so much, but I just can’t right now, not until we’ve had some time to think through everything, to understand everything, hell, to get the ring from your office at the very least.”

Claudia leaned in and kissed Baur, her salty tears mixing with their lips in one of life’s most unique experiences. Through his tongue Baur could taste every time he had ever kissed a crying woman. He thought of a salty kiss with a girl named Kim at a High School party; he thought of kissing Nancy Warren as she came to understand that they would not be together; and he remembered kissing Diane when he proposed, how she had

been crying but saying yes, and each time as she got more stuffed up with phlegm her voice would get a little deeper, like some continuous glissando.

Baur held Claudia for ten minutes, swaying softly and whispering love songs into her ear. A few people tried to come in and change for the performance but immediately left when they found the composer holding one of the principals. Eventually their time ran out and the actors had no choice but to be brave and get ready for the premiere. Baur kissed Claudia a final time before letting go, their bodies damp and hot from the continuous proximity. Everybody watched as Baur slowly made his way out of the dressing room, then turned to Claudia, who had again begun to weep quietly into a handful of tissues.

Scene 7



It wasn't the first act but the third act that really brought them out of their seats. The first had been slow, boy meets girl, boy falls for girl kind of stuff. The second had been the descent, as Pamela started to fall deeper and deeper into the moldy hell that on the exterior in faded neon italics read Sal's Nightclub. But what was contained within was like breaking open a fallen tree to find myriad maggots and grubs. This is when the audience began to take interest, when they started to get taken in by Pascal Baur's vision of Orpheus and Eurydice, a tale of unfettered desire and unrelenting destiny.

The powder room and refreshment cart were both crowded with concertgoers in black tuxes and long, shiny dresses, all smelling of gin and seafood, voyeurs to a horrific car accident of sorts. They were talking about the end of the second act, which found Pamela being led down to the basement of Sal's Nightclub for her nightly lesson in humiliation and degradation. All were acting cool and calm, pretending that such subject matter and graphic descriptions were a normal part of their West Hartford lives. That Baur's attempt to shock them was nothing but an attempt to imitate Bukowski or create enough press to gain some national attention. They didn't want to admit that they had been squirming in their seats when Pamela had screamed to the man wearing a red smoking robe to, "fuck her like she wasn't worth the price of a condom". That when Lydia found out about Sal's they hadn't been secretly relieved for Pam, hoping that all would end well and Pam and David would live happily ever after. But most had seen the Cocteau film or *Black Orpheus* or had a vague memory of their freshmen classics

professor reading Ovid and were aware of the depths the story still had to descend. It was like watching a production of *Othello* or *Romeo and Juliet*. How they hoped someone from the audience would yell out and save her, change the ending they all saw coming, but given the tone and gloom of Baur's music, it was as if she had already been lost.

The curtain rose for the third act. A giant glissando erupted from the pit, beginning in the low strings and ending with the piccolo and harp. David's theme started to sing out of the violins, slowly, with a feeling of sadness that seemed more than a mere pit player could muster. Notes would hang there, floating above the harmony like a feather in the wind, waiting for the breeze to die down before resolving. The melody then repeated, but with a more prominent role coming from the contrabassoon and contrabasses. At first this seemed like an accident, as if the conductor, Baur himself, had lost control of his orchestra, but then, as the low voices began to build a progression it became apparent to whom the music belonged. It was Pamela's theme coming from below, as slow as a dirge, at the moment detached from David's soaring, beautifully sad melody. The music accelerated and grew louder, and a blinding reflection began to bounce off the slightly visible bald head of Maestro Baur. He was bobbing with the music, ensconced in the gesture as it rose to a loud fermata. The crushing chord ended and a loud murmur could be heard from the pit. In the audience everyone tightened their calves and leaned forward, slightly rising to see what was happening. The sound of an engine hummed to life from beneath the stage and the mirrored finished of Baur's head began to ascend. He was relaxed looking and seemed completely ignorant of the 3,000 people half-standing, tense, tight-jawed, behind him. One of the violins stood up and began to put away his instrument into a faded black case. But it wasn't a faceless

Juilliard grad that was putting away the instrument, it was Franklin. But it wasn't Franklin either, but rather David Pindar, Pamela's fiancée, a section violinist with the New York Philharmonic – this stories' Orpheus.

The audience began to applaud as Franklin leaped up from the pit and took the stage. He did a short bow and watched Baur and the rest of the orchestra descend back to their hidden position. He was wearing a black turtleneck and black slacks, with a tattered, sun-bleached violin case resting on his right shoulder. His hands fidgeted with the case as he waited for the introductory music to fade, leaving a silence that was unfamiliar in the concert hall. Franklin began to sing unaccompanied, first in short declaratory statements and then finally in large swirling lines of worry for Pamela. The orchestra entered with a low rumble from the timpani, a tremolo of agony that stayed soft and ominous. A pensive bassoon melody unfolded from the low percussive rumbling, dueting with Franklin's voice. Both kept rising, almost in sequence, and the bassoon reached its upper limits. Franklin attempted to rise with the bassoon but initially seemed unable. His voice, singing of his love for Pamela, kept breaking when he'd talk of her smooth, white skin or her dark, short hair. Finally, he reached inward, and like a bear roaring to its hind legs pushed out his chest and belted a note that was far beyond the bassoon. Frightened, the bassoon shrank away, spiraling down to a more comfortable level. Franklin held the note, allowing it to ring throughout the hall and into the ears of an entranced mezzanine; even those in the bathroom couldn't help but look up at the inadequate speakers crackling in an attempt to explain this wondrous sound. The audience broke into applause and Franklin snapped off the note. The echo was still passing around when Claudia frantically hustled onto the stage. She looked young and

nervous, but had so far been a strong assist to the glowing eminence of Pettricione. Her character, Lydia Smith, was the sister to David's Pamela, and had uncovered her sister's deviant exploits in the previous act.

The music began slow and foreboding, with a low rattle of strings and percussion alternating with chords of muted brass. Franklin and Claudia took choreographed steps toward one another in the empty hall. David looked at Lydia with feigned surprise. He knew she was one to worry and had expected her to try and break them up long ago. Onstage, Franklin felt the adagio pulse of the orchestra, and waited to begin his recitative. He listened carefully for the clarinet solo, and found his note. He made eye contact with Claudia and took a breath. In the empty concert hall, David worried about the smudged make-up on Lydia's cheek, and waited for the decaying sounds of the other musicians' footsteps as they left the rehearsal space. When he felt sufficiently alone, he broke eye contact with Lydia and asked, "What do you want?"

Lydia looked at David and felt the shame of her position. She had not initially liked him, but now understood that he was the only person who might be able to help her sister. He looked goofy in his all black outfit, and his hair was too long and unkempt. His turtleneck was a different faded black than his pants, and she remembered how her sister had told her that with David it was always about music, and that all other aspects seemed to be secondary. She looked at the ground and then at the empty rows of seats, counting the ones left down as opposed to up. Anything that would keep her from telling him about Sal's, and of Pamela's weakness.

"Lydia, what are you here for?"

She tried to immunize herself to the words, to protect herself from all she had seen and uncovered. She reached into her purse and rummaged around for the letter. But even though her fingers immediately found the shredded edges of the opened envelope, she brought her hand out clasping nothing and turned toward David, like a diver jumping from the platform she opened her mouth and let her tongue follow the momentum.

“You need to go find Pam.”

“Why?”

“Please, do you know where she is right now? Do you know?”

“She should be getting off work at the bakery and we’re going to meet in the village unless she feels sick or has to go study?”

“Is that what she’s been telling you, that she needs to study?”

“She’s trying to get back into grad school and she wants to brush up on her French, but you know that, right? Where is she, did she get hurt?” His voice held a hint of concern, but his obliviousness seemed genuine to Lydia, and she felt a momentary relish in knowing something David did not.

Lydia paused to think of the right answer. Then she fumbled in her purse and uncovered the letter. Her fingers found it immediately again, but she still had trouble pulling it out, instinctively catching it on her keys and checkbook, anything she could do to prevent its release. As the letter breached the unobscured air, Lydia worried that David would immediately see the Department of Health return address in the top left corner. She handed the letter over and he pulled it out and read it aloud. After the words “positive test” he paused and tried to make sense of what was left.

“I don’t understand. Does it mean that I’m positive too? But before Pam there was no one. How could this happen?”

Lydia took a deep breath, not for dramatic effect or in preparation for a long response, but in order to waste more time. “I saw Pam go in to Sal’s Nightclub yesterday. She had told me about it and how you two had gone once with Dan and Kaitlin, and I was curious and I just wanted to see what it looked like. But when I got there I saw people going in and out and wanted to see who would do stuff like that. So I went across the street and sat at the diner window and watched for a few hours. I saw Pam go in and I got worried and stayed. I didn’t see her ever come out. Then when I went to your house to see if she was safe I found the letter in the mailbox. I’m sorry, but I had to open it. I’m sorry.”

By then Lydia had completely broken down and was crying on the ground. Her theatrics unnerved David because of how much they reminded him of Pam. She would do the same overemphasis during a speech or fall down in dramatic effect for any perceived slight. He had always encouraged Pam’s acting, but she had never felt she was worth the immortality of film. Lydia continued to sob on the floor, reaching up to David for help, but he had stopped paying attention. The only thing that could occupy his mind were the things that Pamela could be doing at this very minute. The horrible things that he imagined her doing with other men. That moment was the only time he had ever hated her during their relationship. How could he hate her, he thought. It wasn’t like she had a choice in any of this, only I had the power to stop it, and I was too busy to be bothered.

Lydia was still acting like the victim on the floor of the stage. Like an over-stimulated Sissy Spacek, Lydia tried to draw the attention of the entire room onto her.

Her thin frame wiggled around in the dust, and as her yellow shirt grew dingy and started to slowly ride up David had a momentary thought of revenge. He placed the violin case on the floor and repositioned himself next to Lydia. She crawled over to him and placed her head on his extended leg, wiping her smudged make-up and flowing tears on his faded pants. As her hands reached out, he could see her claws extend like a stretching cat's paw and knew that Lydia was just like her sister. They would both have gone into that club once they found it. They both would have been as helpless to its grasp as a drunk to an open bar. It wasn't her fault that their lives had been destroyed, it was his. It was his job to keep her safe and protected from such desires. He was her protector and it was him that had failed. It was him that would ruin Lydia if he chose. He felt the desire for revenge ebb and a strong undulation of sadness shake his body.

“Lydia, what can I do?”

Her body momentarily stopped sobbing and pulsing, and a calm ripple of thought kept her motionless. She seemed broken in his lap, confused as to whom he was referring to. She had hoped for him to console her, although it was something she would never admit to herself. Lydia was mortified that she might be indifferent to her sister's fate, that even though she had been indifferent to David for as long as Pam had known him, she still wanted him to choose her over her sister. She needed him to choose her and prove her worth to everyone.

David felt the pause in her breathing and knew that she might never begin again. “Lydia,” he said again, this time with a little more urgency, “I need to help your sister and you have to tell me what you think I need to do to get her back.”

“David, what the fuck do you think is going on?” Lydia spat angrily at him, her tears pooling with a small amount of spittle near the edge of her chin. “She’s at Sal’s right now and she is dying. There’s nothing you can do, nothing anyone can do to save her. She’s lost, like she got poisoned or has cancer or something. It doesn’t matter what you do, it won’t make no difference.”

“But there has to be something, maybe if I keep her well there will be a cure soon. Something to fix it, something to save her.”

David slowly lifted her head and felt her neck stiffen with resistance. He gingerly placed it on the floor and got to his feet. His leg had fallen asleep under the weight of Lydia’s head and so had to limp to his violin and then limp off the stage. Lydia watched him go with a look of anger on her face exaggerated by her running make-up. She knew her own feelings were not what they should be but no longer cared. She slammed her fist on the floor and stood up and walked off the stage. A moment later she returned for her purse and saw the letter, which David had left in the place his violin case had been, his way of denying a loss of control.

He could hear the pulse of disco music through the ceiling. It was dark and he needed to let his eyes adjust to the black lights. Although the sun had just barely set outside, it seemed that Sal’s dungeon had no knowledge of daylight. David moved slowly down the hall, peering into the open doors on either side, all filled with bestial men and women reminiscent to him of sounds he had heard in his performances of Berlioz or Stravinsky. At the end of the hall he could see a closed door with a beam of yellow light slipping through the bottom crack. Although he continued to look in each

room he passed, he already sensed that destiny had a more symmetrical and dramatic flair than simply placing her in any of these dark, carnal rooms. He needed answers and felt that the sliver emanating from the door was his best chance for enlightenment. As he drew near he felt the hands of women brush upon him and men quicken their pace. The tension aroused him slightly, but not in his usual amorous way. Pam was close, and now he felt more than before that he could save her. Fate had aligned it as such and there was no choice but to reach out and grasp the round doorknob. It was slippery with Vaseline and sweat, but still opened easily. David pulled open the door and was engulfed in a divine light. He entered the room, momentarily blinded by the sudden brightness. He could smell the stale scents of all kinds of sex and could hear a soft breath from the corner of what appeared to be a large second-hand bed. He closed the door behind him and once again waited for his eyes to adjust.

With the door closed his vision improved. The room was small, possibly 10x10, with prints of renaissance paintings covering the walls. He glanced from Botticelli to Giorgione to Titian, and felt a wave of depression wash over him. All the prints were cheap, from various New York poster shops, all laminated and tacked to the wall as if this was a dorm room at NYU. Most were nudes of Venus, with her beautiful form perverted by various penciled-in penises poised to enter her mouth. The only poster untouched was a small print of *Virgin of the Rocks*. As he followed the posters around the room he came to a small desk lamp resting on a nightstand on the left side of the bed. He could see a giant can of Vaseline resting on its side. The jelly, heated by the lamp, had created a pool on the nightstand, drowning a condom still in the wrapper. On the opposite side of the bed lay Pamela, her head nestled into a pillow to shut out the light. She was naked, with

a giant strip of stained semen or possibly Vaseline running from a mole near her neck all the way down to the curve of her waist. She seemed awake but indifferent to the person entering the room. David could see her slowly raise her buttocks as if she was on the job. She still hadn't even bothered to turn around to see the face of her lover when he softly called out her name.

Her body jerked out of its posture and she deftly reached and grabbed a towel from the floor. She turned toward him, covering her naked body as her eyes adjusted to the bright room. From where she lay David looked like a vengeful angel, dressed all in black with a laminated poster behind him reflecting the lamp light and giving his head a halo effect. She looked terrified and exhausted, as if she had been waiting the entire time for him to come.

“Pam baby, come on, let's go.”

As she heard him speak plainly and restrained her face changed from frightened to angry. “David, what are you doing here? Why did you come?” She had taken on a more defiant posture, and seemed to regard him with contempt.

“I came to bring you home.”

“Fuck you, leave me alone. I'm not coming home.”

David leaned toward her but saw her flinch and instead remained standing at the end of the bed. He reached his hand up to his hair and messed it up, something she had seen him do often when struggling with a difficult musical passage. He would stand in front of the music stand, run his hand through his hair and think, then, with the precision of a sharpshooter, he would mark the fingering or bowing into the score and the problem

would have been solved. David never went back and reedited his scores. Once he figured it out, it was solved.

Pam saw the determination in his eyes and knew that he was about to pronounce his judgment. She waited, scared, holding the towel over her body. Even though she didn't want to, she couldn't help but stare into his gray eyes as they darted from right to left. Then, with the finality of a guillotine, they stopped swaying and focused directly on her.

“Pam, let's get dressed and go. It's my fault, I know that, and I will help you and protect you, but you have to come with me now. Let's go, get dressed.”

She mulled over his command for a split second, but then understood that she was powerless to disagree. His presence created a conflict in her mind. She wanted him, had always wanted him, but as he was. She wanted him to be a nameless stranger who can't control her after he cums. But still, she had always wanted those that entered through the darkness to be David, her David.

“David, please turn around while I get dressed. I don't want you to see me like this. I'm so ashamed, I couldn't stop myself, I was just...I was just interested and I came here once after we did that one night, and I couldn't help it. I'm sorry, I'm sorry.”

David lowered his head and exhaled. He knew that she would come with him, but he wasn't sure what kind of problems would follow her up those stairs. It was then that he felt the first sliver of hope that fate had a happy ending in mind. They would climb the stairs and she would grow stronger with each step. By the time they came up, the last shiver of daylight would break through the clouds and she would glow in a different way.

No more black light voodoo or cheap renaissance posters, but a healthy glow of love and trust. She would crawl out of this sewer and once again be his.

With a wry half-smile on his face David turned around toward Pam. His mouth started the rehearsed words but his eyes recoiled in fright. Pam had dropped her towel and was reaching for her sweatshirt. She was naked from the waist up and was covered with scattered lesions all over her breasts and stomach. Some were so small that they looked like cigarette burns or infected pimples, but most were large and oozing and unrelenting in their damnation. Pam saw his gray eyes twitch from side to side and knew he was reconsidering her fate. Fear climbed up her spine and manifested itself as a shriek of horror. It was so loud that David's ears rang. She continued to watch his eyes dart back and forth and before she could think her mouth was moving and she was rushing toward him.

"I told you not to fucking turn around. What is your problem? Don't you listen? This is all your fault you stupid son of a bitch. I came here because of you. You weren't enough for me, you stupid fuck, you fag. I came here and liked every second, every time I knew it wasn't you. You are pathetic, you fucking bastard. You fucking son of a bitch, I hate you."

David listened to every word and felt the sting of every slice of her tongue. He knew that she must still love him and couldn't possibly mean those things. She was just scared, and sick, she was just sick. He was ready to tell her all this when he felt an arm wrap around his neck.

"You can't be here you limp dick bastard."

The arm closed around his neck and started to drag him from the door. He was back in the dark hallway and could see all the glowing eyes and teeth, like an orgy of Cheshire cats, watch him as he was pulled down the corridor. Pam stood near the edge of the bed and watched the bouncer drag David away—her face never changing expression, her eyes never leaving his. David could feel the arm getting tighter; spots and metallic sparks appeared at the corner of his eyes. He continued to watch her as he was pulled away, the door shrinking and growing dim. The thump of the music grew louder as he was lifted up the stairs. It was some sort of disco song, and he couldn't help but analyze the harmonic progression. He could no longer see Pam through the door.

David had spit and tears running down his chin when they tossed him outside. Although the bodyguard, a behemoth with a skull tattooed on each side of his neck, had wanted to throw him away from the door, by the time he had carried him up the stairs and through the club he was too tired to muster any more than dropping him in the alley and kicking him in the back. It was raining and David could hear sirens moving away, their pitch dropping lower and lower until it was no longer audible. He knew that he would never see Pam again, that she had found her own comfort in eternal damnation, and his failure to bring her back caused a spasm of regret and anger to ripple through his head. His faded black violin case had been placed nicely behind him under an awning. David swung his body around and reached for the violin, hoping that maybe if he played her a song Pamela would rise from the depths of Sal's Nightclub and come back to him. He had impressed her on their first date by playing a fast passage of a Bach Partita, something that sounded flashy and impressive. She had been mesmerized by his hands as they mixed with the bow to become a blur of speed and precision. That evening in his

loft he might have given the best performance of his life, and it had only been for her. He knew then that she was something special that he had to have, someone that he had to keep near. Even before he had kissed her he had decided to love her, and as he had stared at her through his piercing gray eyes he flashed through how destiny would reward him for such a fine choice. Now, all he wanted was the violin, he needed it for redemption, in order to write the soundtrack of their happy ending.

David reached for the violin but instead found a broken beer bottle. His hand recoiled in pain and blood starting running down his fingers. He watched the blood dilute with the rain and give the nearby puddles a tint of pink. He watched the blood and waited for fate, for destiny to give him the chance to play for her again, once more, a song for lovers.

David froze as the rumble below him faded. In the distance, offstage, a lone trumpet played a final passage of mourning. The notes bending slightly into one another, pushing each other up and down the sad minor scale. David continued to lie there frozen, and then he blinked and Franklin rose from the stage. He wiped the corn syrup from his hand and looked down triumphantly at Maestro Baur. Baur was holding his hands out to Franklin and then to the orchestra. The audience behind him stood and were cheering. Franklin took a deep bow and then pointed to Pascal Baur. Baur turned to the audience and looked embarrassed, as if they had all walked in during the rehearsal of a work-in-progress. He sheepishly bowed and turned to acknowledge his singers and players, gesturing to the stage crew to raise the pit so all the musicians could be acknowledged. The same engine sound rumbled from below the stage and the shiny head of Pascal Baur

began to climb, as if he had planned this metaphor. He now knew that it had been a success.

The applause lasted for nearly a minute, as terrified onlookers did not want to be the first to stop. To appear to not be okay with the sex or the bleakness, it would be like the kid who wet his pants at the neighborhood sleepover. Whispers would surround them and gossip would become myth and eventually there would be no recourse but to find new friends or try and win back some of the honor lost.

Baur stood in the harsh house lights waiting for them to finish. He was in the unique situation where he had a more important place to be. Throughout the work his thoughts had not been with the characters or the music, but only with her. Claudia was all he wanted as he stood up bowing and waving throughout the house. His face was drenched with sweat and he could feel the coolness of inaction start to chill his body. He needed to warm up and change his shirt before he started shivering. Finally, as if it had taken years, the audience grew tired of applauding and chose to show him mercy. He watched as the first few stopped clapping, and within seconds the hall was silent, save for the hollers and echoes of a thousand feet walking away. For all his consternation and impatience during the applause, he all of sudden felt crippled by the silence. His body temperature was steadily dropping and he could feel something akin to his life-force draining with each receding footstep. He almost jumped forward to yell, “stop, come back and listen,” but he was frozen in his spot, his knees locked and his head starting to feel woozy.

Backstage he found Claudia standing near the red door that led down to the dressing rooms. She saw him immediately and watched him as he crossed through a

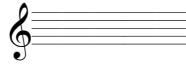
maze of costumes and congratulations. As he approached he broke out into a smile, and she immediately started to act coy, still worried that he didn't want them to be discovered.

“Claudia,” he said, his voice like velvet, “you don't have to be cautious anymore. We don't have anything to hide. Now...” Baur reached into his pocket and fumbled for the ring, worried that it had somehow evaporated, “Now please,” he dropped down again to one knee, peeling the ring out and holding it with the same care one would display while holding an infant, “please tell me that you will marry me.”

Claudia was still in costume and Baur half-expected her to sing an answer. But instead of talking or singing she just started crying, her shimmering brown eyes seeping like the sweat on a bottle of beer. Her slim hand reached down and stroked his chin and lifted him to his feet. He looked into her crying eyes and sensed that he had done the right thing. A crowd circled them and hung on every motion and gesture, as if they were dancing. He wouldn't have known even if they were. Her hand still held his chin and she squeezed emphatically, leaving a momentary rouge spot as she slid her hand up into the small scruff of hair that circled his head like the rings of Saturn. She didn't speak, but merely nodded, her eyes beaming into his through the ocean of tears and the sea of onlookers. Baur mouthed the words, “I love you,” and she seemed to accept his love into her mouth and take it in and become his love. For the second time that evening Pascal Baur was surrounded by clapping, but this time he did not bow, but simply held her hand and could feel the warmth of her body mixing with his.

ACT II

Scene 1



Morriss Greenberg nestled his chubby fingers in the keypad crevices and starting pressing numbers. In his hand was a grey cellphone, about the size of a five-pound dumbbell, with a thick, black antenna that was waving around like a limp penis. The phone was a DynaTAC 8000S, which was all the rave in DC in the fall of 1986. Although basically new, the plastic was a faded grey with specks of tan that made it look like something out of an old sci-fi movie. The phone was larger than any of his pockets, so if he wanted to bring it anywhere he was forced to carry it in his hand, antenna jingling in front like a divining rod. The sight of a man walking with a cordless phone immediately drew stares, which caused Morriss to blush. Then, if the phone ever decided to ring, all around would jump back, startled, and the beat-red man would raise the phone to his flush face and press a series of buttons before beginning to talk.

But Morriss wasn't calling anyone at the present, he was just fooling around with the phone while he waited. He dialed a seemingly random series of numbers and out of the phone popped a song from *Phantom of the Opera*, recognizable and almost correct, except for a few chromatic notes and some wrong rhythms. He was waiting in the lobby of Bushnell Theatre, and when he got bored he tried to figure out songs on his cellphone.

On the walls of the lobby were posters for *Hellfire*, an opera that almost looked like something Morriss would like to see. He wondered how the soldiers were going to sing and still maintain a semblance of masculinity and destruction. The opera was

written by one of the guys he had been sent to meet, Pascal Baur, a guy who was now ten minutes late meeting him.

Morriss was a hefty man who tried to hide it like all large individuals by wearing somewhat baggy clothes. In his case, it was a grey pinstripe suit, single breasted, with pleated pants and shiny black shoes. Underneath the coat was a powder blue shirt, unironed, crumpled silk, with a small, smeared stain right below a crinkled bump made from his right nipple. The shirt was held into place by a tighter than expected gun holster, leaving large wads of silk hanging over the tanned leather of the holster like his belly hung over his belt buckle.

Other than the unique glisten of his shoes, the most notable thing about Morriss was his thick, black, curly hair. It fell from his head as unkempt as everything else, but had a natural resiliency that left it looking styled and sleek. Each curl seemed to be optimized just enough to even out the length and shade his head from the harsh lighting fifty feet overhead. Underneath his mane of hair, Morriss had brown, almost black eyes, and had the sort of beard growth that you assume happens between shaving in the morning and lunch in the afternoon. Morriss had always been the guy who could grow facial hair fast, and by age fifteen had even grown a full mustache for the first day of school. Now all that was gone, and only the stubble of another bleary morning doused in coffee and toothpaste remained, that and his defensive wall of sandpaper that sprung each day from his facial follicles.

Morriss thought about calling his parents and begging off Thanksgiving. He could say something about work (although they would never believe it) and stay home in DC with Chinese food and beer. But maybe calling a week early would give them too

much time to infiltrate and debunk his story. The FBI agent smoked out by his own parents in a lie. He must have learned it from somewhere, and his parents were definitely covert.

With a quick twist, made somewhat comical because of his heft, Morriss put the phone to his side and gave up thinking about the future. Right now he needed to talk with a handful of people, make sure they weren't involved in anti-American activities, and then drive the five hours back down I-95 to his tiny apartment. Maybe if it's too late he'll stay up at a hotel, but he doubts that Hartford would have any nightlife that would be worth staying for. Maybe he'll stay in New York and see *Les Mis*. Sally, his mother's friend that lives in New York told her it was all the rage. But it didn't really look like his kind of show. Now this *Hellfire* might be something he would like.

When he turned to look at the poster, Morriss' jacket swooped open and his black berretta glistened in the same harsh lights fifty feet above, unafraid of shadows or men. The gun had the same sort of 'used' look as the cell phone, faded from constant cleaning and sessions at the firing range, but never needed in the day to day operations of Morriss Greenberg's job. It seemed to him to be a lot like the badge, mostly a matter of show in order to get what he needed. After the McCarthy stuff in the fifties and the hippies in the seventies, the FBI was not everyone's favorite agency, but it definitely carried a lot of weight when yielded correctly.

It was now almost three, and he was annoyed at being left in the foyer of the opera house like some local chump. As if to intimidate the poster, he pulled his FBI badge out of his front suit pocket and flipped it open and shut just like he had done with the phone. From behind him a door opened, and with it escaped the faint sounds of a

voice and piano. A short lady with a noticeable limp wandered past. Morriss opened the badge and presented it to her.

“Hello, My name is Special Agent Greenberg and I’m with the FBI. I was supposed to meet Pascal Baur here fifteen minutes ago. Do you think you could point out where I might find him?”

The lady peered at him quizzically, unsure of what to do. “I do not don’t know Pascal Baur. I am is the cleaning lady. I clean seats.”

Morriss looked her over. She was dressed all in black and was extremely short, stocky like some sort of tree trunk. She didn’t look like a cleaning lady, but he didn’t know why she would lie. Maybe she was illegal or just didn’t know? Maybe she really was the cleaning lady? Either way, Morriss didn’t feel like putting too much effort into such a useless interview.

“Thank you, miss, what was your name?”

“My name is Barbara Bush, like Vice-President wife.”

“Wow, lucky you. Thank you Miss Bush. I’ll just find him myself.”

Barbara limped off, unlocking and then relocking a door by the restrooms. Morriss watched her go and snickered about the ridiculous name. Really, he thought, people should put a little more work into making up fake names.

The music was still barely audible from the direction the short woman had come, so Morriss walked over to the door and slowly opened it. Inside, a woman was sitting at a piano near the corner of the room. She was thin, with hair the color of chocolate. She was playing and singing, and even to Morriss’ untrained ear he could tell she was better at the singing. On the piano she just punched out chord after chord, with maybe a little

stuff in the high part before the next chord. She was singing a jazz song that Morriss didn't know.

*And like a dying lady, lean and pale,
Who totters forth, wrapped in a gauzy veil,
Out of her chamber, led by the insane
And feeble wanderings of her fading brain,
The moon arose up in the murky east,
A white and shapeless mass.*

The women stopped playing and scribbled something into the music. Morriss watched and then shuffled his feet on the slick concrete, making a squeaking sound that caused her to jump slightly and drop the pencil into the piano.

“Oh, shit,” she yelled, really worried about the pencil. Morriss slowly made his way to the stage, on the tips of his toes as if he might spook her further and she'd run away. The scenario reminded him of hunting when he was a child, stalking and slowly approaching deer in the Oregon Cascades. The trees wet from constant rain and the tips of his feet cold from the moisture, yet still holding firm and moving slowly, as if everything depended on it. Morriss moved closer and felt his breath get tight and understood the ridiculousness of his posture. He lowered his heels and smiled his best federal employee smile, assuring and calming, like he had learned at the academy.

“I'm sorry. Can I help you?” Morriss watched her frantically meddle with the lid of the piano. She slowly closed and then reopened the lid, looking underneath and behind for the pencil.

“Do you have a pencil I can use to get this out?” she asked him.

“Sorry, no pencil. What happened to the piano?”

“I dropped my pencil inside and now it is blocking the hammer mechanisms for some of the keys.” She depressed a few notes and Morriss heard a strange buzz from the

piano. “I need to reach something in and get it out or else the piano tech guy will have to come and I’ll be so embarrassed.”

Morriss fumbled through his suit pocket, pulling out nothing. Then, as if it had just occurred to him, he extended the antenna of the cell phone and waved it at her. “Do you think this will work?”

She looked at the extended antenna, unsure at first what the device was meant to do. Without a better option, she nodded and he climbed up on the stage and handed her the phone.

“So where is the pencil...oh, I see. Here.”

Morriss reached the antenna behind the piano lid and with a precision of a surgeon brought out the pencil using the tip of the antenna. He clutched the pencil tight as if it would once again jump into its hiding place. The women smiled with relief and closed the lid over the keys.

“Thanks.”

Morriss smiled and offered her hand. “No problem,” he said, engulfing her delicate fingers with his flabby paw, “sorry to have startled you. Do you work here?”

“Yes, yes I do. I’m a singer. I’m Claudia Ingrassia-Baur, sorry, should have probably introduced myself first, sorry. Can I help you find someone?”

She was wearing a polka dot Laura Ashley dress. The dress had large shoulder pads and Morriss imposed upon her the momentary image of a free safety. Her dark brown hair had the hints of highlights throughout, and a lot of hairspray in it keeping it in place. She had on three necklaces and four bracelets. Going for the Lauper thing, Morriss thought. The bracelets were green, red, white, and pink. Like some sort of

feminista Mexican thing. Her nails were also pink, as was a majority of the make-up on her face. The dress was a nice off-white color, textured as if made by hand. Looking down, Morriss noticed she was wearing keds and white socks. She didn't look like the kind of girl to follow fads even when she was dressed in the latest styles. Morriss thought she had a more timeless look about her that was somewhat ridiculed by the current trendiness of her clothes.

“Actually I'm looking for a Pascal Baur. And from your name I would assume he is your husband, right? My name is Morriss Greenberg and I am with the FBI.” Morriss flipped open his badge and displayed it for Claudia. “Could you direct me to Mr. Baur? I just need to ask him a few questions about some of the past employees of the Hartford Opera Company.”

Claudia looked around the empty hall, half expecting to see some nefarious villain poised to attack. It wasn't often that such unusual circumstances found her out of costume. She sighed and looked at her watch, which Morriss had thought was just a pink bracelet. “Sorry,” she started again, as if somehow she had disappointed Morriss. “I just have lost track of time and don't know where he's supposed to be.” She paused and flipped through her binder. “I, er, actually don't know where he's supposed to be right now, but you can always check his office. If you go through that door and down the hall you will come to it after about fifty feet. His name should be on the door so you shouldn't have any trouble with that. Which past employees, if you don't mind me asking, are you here to ask about?”

Morriss watched the squirminess of Claudia Ingrassia-Baur as she answered his questions. He had been sent on a standard Q&A trip, didn't expect much out of anyone,

but was amused with the worry that seemed to furrow through the face of such a pretty, young girl. She must be no more than twenty-five, he thought, and according to the file he had on Baur he was over a decade older. The idea of such a beautiful young woman stuck with an older man (Morriss had seen his picture, his bald head and wrinkled face), seemed like something that he saw everywhere in his travels. He must have power and personality, and Morriss knew that those two traits could erase years, pounds or disfiguration quite easily and with no side-effects.

I wonder what he thinks about buying these expensive, ugly dresses, he thought.

Morriss looked over his notes and watched Claudia adjust her legs on the piano bench. Claudia rolled her keds behind the legs of the bench, leaning forward, giving Morriss her full attention. She was truly beautiful, and Morriss, always the lonely agent, wished for a moment that things might be like they were in the Bond movies. Why couldn't he seduce the girl in order to get secret information about the Hartford Opera Company?

“According to my directives, I need to speak with everyone that was working at the company last year. I found a few names from a newspaper article. You are actually listed on there, but without the ‘Baur’ addition to your name. I also need to see Rebecca Olundsen, Franklin Pettricone, and anyone else that you can name.”

Claudia stroked her fingers through her hair to help think of any nefarious characters that worked at the company. Pascal was in control of the company, knew every person and had a hand in every decision and would never in a million years be involved in anything sinister. Tony, Franklin, Tom, all the other members of the crew and various stage hands (some of whom Claudia still couldn't put faces with names) scrolled

before her eyes like some sort of line-up. None looked the criminal type, none looked like the kind of Dillinger that the FBI would need to track down. Barbara, the costume mistress had a funky European kind of accent, but was just an old woman who spent all of her time at the Bushnell. Billy Bill, the stage manager, carried himself like a guy that could get into trouble, but she had always thought him very gentle at heart. The orchestra was only here when needed, and the crew were mostly union guys who might only work every other production. No one else was here for every rehearsal regularly. But Pascal would be the best for this man to talk to. Pascal would be able to tell him about everything going on here in the Bushnell; from an illegal poker game to that assistant he fired for taking home office supplies. Pascal was the kind of man that could envision the world in its entirety, while she was simply a singer who was happy to nestle into his arms each night.

“I can’t think of anyone else at the moment,” she offered, her mind still racing through faces and names, “but you really didn’t answer my question, did you? What exactly are you here investigating? Maybe I could help if you told me?”

Claudia expected that this stocky man would now clam up and tell her something about having to kill her if he told her, but that was just in the movies. Morriss shrugged, not considering the matter to be of anything important. “I’m part of a task-force that investigates possible espionage in the United States. We have a vague report about something coming out of here last year. Just a mention of the Hartford Opera Company in a conversation between two targets. Frankly, they could just have come up for the show, but we need to investigate it just to be safe.”

“Are you supposed to be telling me this?”

“Like I said, this is probably nothing, so really it’s no big deal. Now, if you have any Russian emigrates who work here, then we might have something, but according to the employment records that we have on file, all the foreign workers are from neutral or democratic countries. And just between you and me, no one here has a secret FBI file or anything.”

Morriss had a smirk on his face as he finished his attempt at a joke. But Claudia was only passively listening and did not catch his attempt at humor. She was still stuck on the fact that the FBI was here to look into the lives of all the singers and performers at the company. Her body felt heavy and listless, like a boat dead in the water. This sunken feeling was illogical to her, as she was not guilty of anything. But, she understood, it was not a feeling of guilt, just the worry that inadvertently she might be.

She felt in the pit of her stomach that she had been part of a crime and that it was only a matter of time before it caught up with her.

Agent Greenberg had pulled the Nancy Warren article from the previous season and was showing her a list of circled names.

“Like I said,” her voice more than a little warbly, “I don’t know where Pascal is right now, but you could try his office. The best bet is Franklin, ‘cause I just saw him go through that red door down to his dressing room.” She pointed behind Morriss to the red faded exit door that led down the spiraling stairs to the catacombs. “He had a cup of hot water, so he’s probably resting his voice and drinking tea. And do you need to talk with me?”

Morriss ran a finger through his curly hair, trying to get his head around the innocent but guilty feeling woman at the piano. “Thank you,” he started, his breath full

as if ready for a long speech, “I’ll go talk with Mr. Pettricione right now and then find Mr. Baur later. As for you...have you ever seen anything around the company that might point toward espionage with the USSR?”

She giggled at the word espionage. “Sorry,” she reached up and touched him on the shoulder. “Sorry, I can’t think of anything, and I know it’s not funny, but the word, espionage...” she found herself giggling again, “is kinda funny.”

Morriss shrugged and held his breath as her hand rested on his shoulder. Her long, delicate fingers were those of an artist, uncallused and intentional, like the motion of a scale her fingers were never where they were not supposed to be. His mind, the mind of a man who had lost plenty of women, read through the motions and intentions of her fingers. He knew it was nerves, that she was not going to leave this old, but famous man for a lowly FBI agent, that the stretch marks on his belly would not entice her with some cosmic power. This was an empty gesture to get him to leave, nothing more.

Claudia sat still at the piano as the FBI agent nodded thanks and hustled toward the back door. He was a larger man, and moved with a force that seemed unwieldy and almost reckless. Still, Claudia thought, the badge and gun gave him a sort of magnetism that would otherwise not be there. She adjusted the bracelets on her arm. Claudia imagined a life with a gunslinger, a man of action. Pascal was a man of thought and had been since she had met him. His proposal possibly the only exception to a deliberate course of intellectual fervor.

“Claudia”

Or possibly the first of other unexpected occurrences?

Claudia turned toward the whisper and saw Pascal hiding at the edges of the stage. She unwrapped her ankles and stood up from the piano bench, loose pages of sheet music falling off the stand and splaying out on the floor. Startled, she didn't even bother to pick them up, just moved slowly, magically toward Baur who looked hunched and nervous, like some sort of villain.

“Claudia, what did that guy want?” Baur now stood tall and erect, and Claudia wondered if the momentary thought of his nefariousness was like some sort of optical illusion.

“He is just here to ask some questions about last year's season.”

Pascal shook the watch on his left hand and reached it out toward her shoulder. The touch and position created a strange symmetry in Claudia's mind, as if Pascal had been hiding in the wings and had seen Agent Greenberg place his hand on her shoulder.

“What are you doing here Pascal? What's your damage? Why are you hiding?” Her nerves were starting to flare and she could feel her pulse quicken with each question. His eyes, steely and grey, were stoic, unmoving, and Claudia felt a reassurance in them that had been missing from the crouched stance.

Baur, dressed in black slacks and a snug, solid red silk shirt, was cheerful and smiling. He must have been playing a trick on me, she thought. Claudia was excited to take Pascal home for Thanksgiving on Monday, visit the Ives museum in Danbury and watch him squirm at the rustic sight of her childhood home. The forecast called for snow and she was hoping to take him cross-country skiing over the Taconics or down to New York for Madame Butterfly at the Met. Although they had been engaged in October of the previous year, Baur had been forced to make a trip to California over the holidays to

visit a dying family friend. She had asked to accompany him, but he didn't want her to miss the time with her family. So this would be their first holiday together, and since he had no family, they had agreed on a short trip down to Danbury for the week.

Claudia started to smile and felt the joy of married life seep through her. They had been married by a justice of the peace at the state courthouse across the street from the Bushnell. Like stepping out for lunch at a cart in the park, they walked over after rehearsal the fourth of February and were married.

Baur reached down to her left hand and touched the ring, sliding it slightly up her finger and back into place, a gesture he had done since she had allowed him to put the ring on her finger. She had been waiting for him after the premiere of *Orphée Redux*, so proud and happy for his success, and he had immediately dropped to one knee and pulled out the ring, an heirloom with three small diamonds circling a larger diamond. It had been his mothers' and had been entrusted to him by his father shortly after her passing. "Take this," he had said, grumpy, with almost a jealous tone in his voice, "take it and make sure that you can't live without her, because I don't want this to ever leave the family. Got it?" Baur remembered the moment well and had told Claudia about it. Now, like something out of an opera, they were sharing the same memory and living the same dream. He had found that she made him truly happy, and his thoughts of Diane had all but vanished under the weight of her affection.

Pascal smiled again, the oysters under his eyes pronounced but majestic. Claudia had decided that she liked him for all the reasons that she shouldn't: his age, his reputation as a damaged man, the wrinkles under his eyes and the sagging that was starting to occur throughout his body. He had turned forty-one in May, and was until her

birthday on December 6th seventeen years older than her. But he was much older than that. He had said that losing Diane had been like thirty years, and although it had been three to the rest of the world, his body had aged considerably over them. After his proposal he would not allow her to come over to his apartment until he redecorated, “for your sake,” he explained. When the ban had been lifted, she had arrived to a barren landscape, walls void of pictures and bookshelves missing various ceramics and cards. “It was time to bring this place back to life,” he had said, and she could see that with each photo he had taken down, his face, like that of Dorian Gray, had added on the years that he knew he had lost. Still, the accumulated dust around the missing objects gave the room an empty, not promising look. The only spot that had been left intact was a large bookshelf full of scores and books. Claudia couldn’t help but feel sad for her lover, for a man that had been robbed of a dream. He had tried many times that night to explain it. “She was one thing and you are another, no comparisons, just different...” and then, “I love you both, and because you are with me I love you more...” and finally, “I don’t want you to feel like you are challenged by a ghost. I am sorry, but I am not sorry I found you. I might have to carry this burden with me for the rest of my life, but being with you makes it more bearable, being with you makes me happy.”

His hand left her finger and she reached it up and cupped his face in her palm. She could feel his jawbone through the conductive ring, as if it were magnetized. She took her other hand and straightened the collar of his shirt. “The guy who was with me is from the FBI. He’s here to do interviews. He says it’s probably nothing.” Then, with a bit of thrill in her voice, “But what if there is something going on. What if Billy Bill is working for the Ayatollah or something? What if Khomeini has spies because he’s

secretly a big opera buff?” She was starting to get ridiculous and was giggling, her hands swaying him from side to side as if dancing, the bracelets jingling and bobbing.

“I don’t think the Ayatollah has secret opera operatives.”

She gave him a slight shove, as if he didn’t know that she was kidding. Her hair swept across her face, hiding her eyes and when they came back into view Baur caught a fleeting resemblance between Claudia and Diane. Had he known this all along and just let it sift through his subconscious? Had he chased the reflection of ghost to the altar and was now just realizing it? As quick as the hair sweeping across her face it was gone and he was staring into the eyes of his wife. He glanced down at the ring and remembered going to the courthouse and writing his vows. Nothing about the wedding had been glamorous except for the vows. Claudia could have been a writer, he thought. Her vows had carried a whiff of poetry and longing that made him feel vulnerable and almost sad that he was taking that away from her. He knew it sounded strange to think he was somehow diminishing her by marrying her, but he saw what he saw. Her secret longing had a sublime beauty that gave her a timeless quality. Like she was an old soul. Her youth had not been a sort of Ponce de Léonian search for a reversal to aging. He had at times thought of her age almost as a hindrance. But she was an old soul, and he could see through her brown eyes the timeless beauty that graced the great film stars of the bygone era. Hepburn (both of them), Eve Marie Saint, Lauren Bacall. Claudia, the woman who had taken his last name as if a nod to the old tradition, was an old soul and a beautiful soul.

She had left. Baur had heard her leave as if far off in another dimension. I have to run to make-up, she had hollered, her voice echoing through the tunnel of his focus,

like the voices that occasionally come out through the floor vents of their apartment. He had been on autopilot and had said something (he couldn't remember what) and kissed her and she had left. His mind was elsewhere, but that was not something unfamiliar to him.

Baur, like all creative people, had a penchant for the soothing forms of his craft. The news about the FBI agent was disturbing, and he knew that when disturbing news is brought to the attention of an opera character, the most natural reaction is a long aria detailing the character's feelings about the news. He now found himself onstage next to the piano. He wasn't going to sit down and play or anything—that would be too trite. But he was going to think, to dissect and evaluate and create a *stratagem* for the next twenty-four hours.

What did he know?

What did he suspect?

Baur looked back and saw the metaphorical line receding in the distance—he didn't know how it had happened but he had crossed it so long ago, unnoticed to anyone (including himself) and it had been slowly fading from view, like a road fading in the distance, two parallel lines closing ranks in an optical illusion of confinement—he knew how it had started, it had started with Barbara coming to him after Diane's death—and he remembered her telling him the secret, how she was not just another costume mistress, but his long lost aunt (he had thought it was something out of Shakespeare, how he was like Viola washing up on the beach and then finding out in the end that the beach had not been as unfamiliar as she, in this story he, had expected) Barbara Urlington, who, as if doing an acrostic or some other word puzzle had taken her maiden name, Baur, and

transformed it into the two names, Baur, Ba, Ur, Barb, Urlington, and had inconspicuously positioned herself in the line of sight of her long lost nephew (rather she was the lost one, but Pascal was always one to be empathetic and place himself in other people's positions)—and then it had just been a day like any other, rain coming in from the west and a chance of snow later that night, and Barbara had told him all about the real story of his families tragedy—all families are alike in their happiness, she had paraphrased, but we are unique in our despair (and what does this have to do with me?, his question sounding like a petulant child trying to excuse himself from a family picnic) the Baur family had been rehearsing in church, and indeed others were in our same predicament, but it was the Americans who had bombed us, neutral, Switzerland, we were not their enemy but they had killed our family anyway, you were far away, not even born, your father and mother had moved to America, yet their supplication was not enough to halt the crescendoing hiss of war planes and the silent fire of forty-thousand tons of high explosive—how so many had died, and now it was time to take retribution, it was time to elicit justice, to extract revenge on the country that had hidden its shame in a weak apology but in truth was not at all embarrassed with the death of the limp, impotent Swiss—and what do you think they still do today (she had managed to interrupt herself, as if she were two people, just like her name had once been one name and was now two) Baur had shaken his head, dizzy and swimming with new information, and Barbara Urlington, Arisa Baur or Narnl, as she had once been known to him through a few photos and letters addressed to his mother...

“We will take our revenge. The enemy of my enemy—”

Aunt Arisa had introduced Pascal to some very sympathetic Soviets. Like all nefariousness, it was introduced bit by bit, and although now, with that line fading into the sunset he saw the whole sky and it looked pale and frightening, at the time it had been incremental and innocuous. Just a little help sending messages back. What kind? he had asked. Just little things about popular opinion in the states. Nothing sinister and dangerous, just sentiments that could be used as propaganda to keep the bombers from leaving the hangers. A way to shame them and keep them from sending troops to Afghanistan.

Aunt Arisa, Narnl when spoken of by his mother, now Barbara, had been there to help push him along. He was uneasy, but was still mad about Diane's death. And the friends of Barbara had brought him startling news about the man who had killed her. He had never been caught and they thought it was because she had been involved in many anti-war rallies and marches during college. They said that she was much more militant than he could imagine, and that they didn't know if it was nefarious, but they had seen more sinister operations within the American government. Of course Baur had not believed their insinuations, but that doesn't mean that the thought didn't fester. Now, looking back at that line, he believed they had played upon his grief. A man had been arrested and questioned, but then had been let go because there was no evidence. The police had said they were pretty sure he was either involved or the guy, but wouldn't tell Pascal who it was except that he had a long history of burglaries and they were building a case. That had been two years ago and no updates had ever been proffered.

Now he was alone with ghosts. Diane haunted his thoughts and actions like an unseen hand. His forgotten fallen family, long dead and buried, haunted him with their

beckoning cries, admonishing him as if he had been the one that dropped the bombs. How had he gotten here? Through music, he thought. Through a cipher encrypted in the notes of my works. Nothing sinister, but yet he now thought of himself as sinister, so what were the notes? He had asked for full disclosure from the sympathetic Soviets, but the few words he had put into the music meant nothing to him. Another code that he was not privy to. It was easy to pretend like it had never happened, as if he had chosen those notes like Mozart and Verdi before him. No hidden messages or secrets. Well, none nefarious anyway. But this agent of the government arriving was like a flashlight suddenly switched on and pointed to the damp, dark space in his mind where guilt and sorrow festered. He was afraid to look...afraid of what he'd find.

What had he done?

What would he do?

The music of his mournful aria faded out and Pascal Baur found himself alone in the hall. Nothing but him and the heavy guilt weighing down the curtains, pushing him down toward the floor. He sighed and took a deep breath. There was still much to be done.

A maintenance man, Earl he believed, walked slowly onto the stage. He knew who Baur was and didn't want to interrupt him if he was doing something important. Baur saw the hesitancy and waved him forward. The man was wearing overalls and as he quickened his pace the metallic buttons that connected the straps to the bibs increased their chatter. An accelerating crescendo of crotales, he thought, immediately storing the sound in his mind as he often did whenever he heard something that interested him. The

overall crotales had aroused his synesthesia and the room was lightening and fading into a light blue, like the ocean on a summer's day, he thought.

“I need to pick up in the house, do you guys have rehearsal right now?”

Baur thought for a second. “Yes, pretty soon. How about you just close the curtain and then we won't bother you.”

The man in overalls was a near the edge and was leaning down to jump off the lip of the stage. He stopped and headed back to the edge of stage right and started pulling on the rope that moved the curtain across the stage. In metered intervals the curtain swayed across the stage and at the last second Baur stepped back and was gone.

Scene 2



Morriss Greenberg found Franklin Pettricione exactly where Claudia had said he would be. Morriss stood outside a dingy, gray door and raised his hand to knock. But instead of rapping on the door he froze in thought about the woman he had just left. Claudia Ingrassia-Baur was not like any of the girls he had known at Penn State or DC. She had a sophistication and natural grace that lifted her above the stature of most women, and she was to him some unique creature that always eluded capture, a free spirit of pure beauty that would simply die if she was put in a cage. And that's what Morriss always felt like he was doing, putting women in cages. And not just as part of his work. He knew that regardless of the situation, there would come a time with every woman he dated that she would look up at him with the feeling of discontent and captivity. And at that moment Morriss always broke down and dismissed them, knowing the supreme unfairness of keeping the song of these caged birds muted. And he knew it was his fault that they had etiolated and withered in the confines of the relationship. But that they always did this was also Morriss' fault, since he was by nature a creature attracted to the unattainable.

Franklin answered the door rather sheepishly, poking his head out as if he knew who Morriss was before even noticing the badge.

“Sorry, can I help you?”

Morriss shifted his weight from side to side, hoping that Mr. Pettricione would notice the badge. But instead of looking up into his face, Franklin was staring down at his shiny shoes; the kind of shoes that he knew meant trouble.

“Mr. Pettricione? My name is Morriss Greenberg and I with the FBI. I was wondering if you had a minute to speak with me about the production last year?”

Franklin shuffled his hands behind the door in a frantic way that Morriss had seen often when introducing himself to fresh faces that hid behind doors. Franklin was motioning for someone to do something behind the door so that when he finally allowed Morriss into the room whatever it was he didn't want him to see would be gone. Drugs, he assumed, it's always drugs. When will people realize that FBI agents generally don't care about personal stashes hidden behind closed doors? Morriss almost considered explaining this point to Mr. Pettricione, but hesitated and in the split second Franklin ducked back behind the door.

“One second,” his disembodied voice said from behind the pale gray door, “I just need to put on some clothes.”

Morriss considered breaking down the door, or at least threatening too, but his head still ached from lack of caffeine, and any action required the requisite forms, which would just be a big pain in the ass. Instead, he raised the phone toward the closed door and pretended to shoot it open, hoping that this “hide the dope” or whatever wouldn't take too long.

His mind wandered back to the woman at the piano. Her hair, dark like chocolate, or the kind of mud that is used at a spa and looks ironically clean. He could still smell the soft remains of her scent, mostly frankincense and roses, and his olfactory efforts to

keep the odor in his nose was causing him to be slightly light-headed. His hand on her shoulder, warm and soft, a thick cotton blend that effortlessly slid over undoubtedly smooth skin underneath. He imagined somewhat lustily his finger tracing from that spot on her shoulder down her spine to the small of her back. His hand would stop there and as if it were a pool he would unwind his fingers and soak up the sensation of warm skin. No doubt his hand would sweat and he'd make that slight pool in the small of her back, his fingers spreading the water thin and glistening, his sweat warming from the heat of her flesh. With most of his senses complicit, Morriss felt awkward thinking about a married woman while waiting outside the door for one of her compatriots. His hand had taken the cue from his brain and had enacted the slow trip down an imaginary spine, the tips of his fingers painted with tiny beads of sweat. The drop from his middle finger—the closest to the floor—loomed large and dropped, the sound inaudible but the sensation of mass lost almost orgasmic. Morriss, embarrassed, wiped his hand on his suit pant and raised it to knock again.

He hesitated again, but the door opened as if he had knocked. Franklin Pettricione, his hair slicked back as if he had just dumped a cup of water over his head, looked at Morriss Greenberg with equal parts distrust and allure. Morriss could see a little dab of white under Franklin's nose and another on his cheek, and wasn't sure if it was cocaine or make-up. Doesn't matter either way, he thought. Franklin opened the door and swung his arm graciously around the room. Although Morris was sure he had heard voices, the room was empty except for a messy bed with green, rough cotton sheets and a desk that was covered in pictures. A single candle was lit. It was dangling in the top of a champagne bottle and wax had melted down like roots attaching the candle

firmly to the bottle. Franklin waved his arm at the candle but it just flickered and remained lit. He flipped a switch and the overhead light came on. With a speed that made Morriss take note he pushed off the near wall and flung his body over to the candle, blowing it out and then spinning and sitting on the bed in a single gesture.

Morriss watched the familiar motions with a sort of amused pleasure. He figured that he and Franklin were about the same size, and they were both very facile big men with light feet, so in his mind it was sort of like watching himself move across the room. It was an out-of-body experience. The largesse of Franklin made Morriss feel a little self-conscious, but the fluidity of motion was prideful. Now this is the sort of guy that I am, he thought.

“I have some tea if you’d like some,” Franklin said, holding a cup of brown tea with a lemon slice bobbing up and down. Morriss shook his head and reached for the chair that had the thinnest stack of music on it. Franklin watched him for a second and then leaned forward and took the whole pile in his meaty hand and tossed it leisurely onto the bed beside him. He shrugged to Morriss, as if saying, “what can you do?” Morriss took a seat and placed his phone on the desk. He reached into his suit pocket and pulled out a ratty 3x5 notebook. It was spiral-bound at the top and had a green cover. The spine was more oblong than cylindrical and it looked like it might spend a lot of time squished in his rear pocket.

“Do you mind if I ask you some questions about *Orphée Redux*?”

Franklin shook his head and took a sip from his mug. “Wait, you’re FBI right, not like a reporter or something?”

Morriss chuckled, a trick he learned that would put the subject on the defensive. His calm laughter implied that he already knew everything and was merely here to verify it. He looked around the room for some leverage if needed, another one of his tricks, although he couldn't remember if he learned that one at the academy or on television. The desk was messy and a pile of papers was squashed underneath a shirt. Morriss could make out C. Everett Koop on the spine of one of the documents and surmised that Franklin was gay. He tried not to show it, but Morriss leaned back slightly, just in case this guy had the bug. Franklin didn't seem to notice and was instead shifting his attention between Morriss' face and a telephone that rest on the floor by the desk. Morriss wondered from whom Franklin might be expecting a call.

"I'm not in anyway associated with the press," he chuckled, still holding his authority over the opera singer. "Not very often that I have to swear to that and not to being a cop... What I need to ask is not really about the opera but just about all the people associated with the company around that time."

Franklin raised his hand to his double chin and rested it comfortably. His eyes paced from right to left and he seemed to be taking an awful long time thinking through his answer. What is up with these people? thought Morriss. He wasn't as familiar with these artistic types, but the long pauses to consider every question was getting on his nerves. Why can't anybody just answer a simple question simply?

Morriss would swear he could hear the ticking seconds of a clock.

"I remember the production of *Orphée Redux* well. I played David, the musician husband, Rebecca Olundsen, the soprano, played Pamela. Claudia had her first major role as Lydia. Let's see...Jeffrey Pines played Santiago, the owner of the nightclub,

Jessica Wright, Hannah Strum, and Olga Wong played the three singing slut roles, or at least that's what we called them."

"Olga?" Morriss interrupted.

"Yeah, a nice girl from San Francisco. Did her masters out there at the San Francisco conservatory and has been working out of New York over the last few years, I think. Oh...you think because of the Olga that she is Russian. No, my friend, her father was like half Ukrainian, but I think everyone in her family is all surfing-type people from the bay area. After that FBI guy got busted last year as a Soviet spy she was complaining about having a "spy" name. Personally I think the "Wong" clears her. I mean, how many females from the Kremlin have an Asian last name?"

Morriss noted Olga Wong in his notebook. He paused and looked up at Franklin, as if allowing him to continue.

"I think that's all the major characters in the opera. There were some extras and a chorus but they were all from Hartt and I didn't meet all of them. Pascal conducted the opera and kind of co-directed it with Lumeé Chien."

"Is Chien French?"

"Oh no, I don't think so. I think he's from Vermont. His mom though wished he was French. Lumeé isn't even a word in French, just like something that sounds legit. If you are looking for French people then Barbara Urlington, the costume mistress, is the person you are looking for."

"Barbara Urlington? Is she short and kinda...uh, *gros* with a limp?"

"Yeah," Franklin said, leaning in somewhat conspiratorially, "and we can just call her hefty. I don't think it hurts if we say it." He winked slightly at Morriss, or it could

have been just a tick, Morriss was not sure. He felt momentarily angry at being grouped with this lady and Franklin into the “large” category, but quickly got over it. He flipped back two pages in his notes and erased the name Bush and replaced it with Urlington. Morriss underlined the name three times, almost tearing through the thin paper. Franklin watched the furious pen motion nervously, not sure if he had just accidentally gotten Barbara in trouble with the FBI.

“Thank you Mr. Pettricone, you have been most helpful.” He scribbled a few random words in his notebook, just to keep Franklin off guard. “Is there anyone else you can tell me about? Anyone who might have reason to contact Russian immigrants residing in this country?”

He laid on the “Russian” part really thick, making sure that Franklin heard that there were in fact Russians in the country that were suspicious and had some connection with the opera company. He didn’t even blink. Morriss assumed that Franklin with his alternative lifestyle was used to this sort of “fear of discovery”. Franklin ignored the long pause and stared down for a minute at the phone receiver. It did not ring. The candle burning fizzled a little and the flicker caused the phone to pulse in and out of sight.

The candle flickered again and immediately there was a knock at the door. Morriss turned and stared at it then turned back to Franklin who had seemingly gone pale in the intervening seconds. This must be related to the phone call that never came, he thought. Morriss stood so Franklin could move by him, but the large singer simply sat there, staring at his hands as if waiting for them to take action.

“Do you want me to answer that?” Morriss asked.

Franklin shook his head like a kid about ready to be grounded. “No, but this is a private conversation so if you don’t have any more questions...” He trailed off and Morriss got the hint that he should leave as the mystery knocker came in. But no one moved and the candle again flickered.

Three knocks, a little more urgent and a little bit louder. An unidentifiable sound from beyond the door. Finally Franklin stood up and shuffled past Morriss to the door. He opened it and Morriss saw a small man with glasses and slick, black hair parted down the middle. This guy had been in some of the pictures on the desk, he remembered. Morriss lowered his head and shuffled past, mumbling a quick thanks to Franklin for his time. He thought about staying around and pushing his weight around, but the small man had looked so sad that Morriss could almost feel a sympathetic tear race to his eye. He passed the man at the door then remembered his cell phone. He turned around but Franklin had already grabbed it and was shoving it into his chest. “Thanks agent Green,” he said.

Morriss stood with the phone in his hand, the antenna pointing down toward the ground. He was a little dejected that the singer had been unable to remember Greenberg, not “Green”. Still, better than being called a different color, he thought.

The lock turned in the closed door and the hallway seemed small and tight. The walls were covered in faded day-glo that made them seem closer than they were. There was also a battalion of couches creating a maze from the dressing rooms toward the staircase. A light from the opposite direction pulsed on and off. Morriss cradled the phone and headed toward the stairs. As he walked he could hear the start of an argument in the dressing room he had just left. It seemed to Morriss like a lover’s spat. He moved

slowly and the sounds faded until he could hear nothing but the buzz of faded florescent lights overhead. He turned and listened one last time at the base of the stairs but heard nothing. Cell phone in hand, he lifted his right leg and started climbing up toward the stage.

Behind the door the candle flickered with each manic gesture from Franklin's arms. He was waving them about wildly, alternating between pointing at the water-stained ceiling and down at Tony. He reached over to the desk and swept two notebooks of paper to the side, picked up the Surgeon General's report and flung it at Tony.

"You motherfucker, you should have read this. I asked you too, I asked you to be careful and then Koop even says to be careful and you go out and you act the fuckin' stereotype. Some random guy at a club, huh? You son of a bitch, and now you don't even have the guts to tell me until after the test came back positive. This is HIV we're talking here Tony, not crabs or herpes or some shit. This will kill you, and now probably me."

The last part of the sentence pushed Franklin into a dejected tailspin that ended sprawled out on the bed. He reached over with his meaty paw and swung at Tony, hitting him square in the back. But his anger did not propel the attack, it was his fear, and the hand decelerated as it made contact, barely producing a thump as his open palm landed squarely on his blue cotton shirt.

"I'm so sorry..."

Tony was crying, not because he had just found out that he would die of AIDS, but because he had never seen Franklin so upset. There had been the arguments over everything, but none had ever ended in such hopeless tears, as if they were the last

remnants of his future jumping ship off the sinking Titanic. Koop had indeed warned the whole community to be safe, to not risk it, but Tony had always hated the feeling of condoms, the burning sensation like a horrible hidden carpet burn. He had always thought to ask his partners, including Franklin when they had first met. Do you have anything? he would ask. He would watch the back of the head sway and even before he was sure it was sideways rather than vertical he would break his own rule and begin. The feeling without a condom is incredible, he would say, that first feeling of lubrication like going down a waterslide. How could he explain to Franklin what that was like? Of course he knew the sensation himself, but how could Tony make him understand that to him a condom was like becoming celibate, as if he had lost a crucial part of his life as a sexual being.

Franklin was lying still, shivering from the tears strewn down his face. Tony tried to hug him but he pushed him away. There was a grunt, something like “fuckawayfromee” and a shoulder to isolate the victim from the violator.

“Would you please talk to me?” Tony asked, his hands trying to find a spot on Franklin’s shoulder that he couldn’t shake off.

“You have done something that I can never forgive,” he replied calmly, almost ironically when included with the sobs that Tony could feel coursing through his body. “This is the year of tragedy, and I guess I couldn’t expect anything different from you.”

Tony felt like a martyr. He had expected to get assaulted by Franklin, and had built up his expectations to such a height that it almost folded in upon itself and turned him into the victim and Franklin into the aggressor. Like all sentient beings Tony couldn’t survive such tragedy without an outlet to place his guilt. Franklin would have to

do. He tried again to touch his back, but the large man sent a shrug through his crew cut down through his shoulder and shook off the lingering fingers of Tony. Something about the finality of the situation made Tony switch off in his brain, and he started to shed the feelings of love for Franklin and demonize the large man hunkered before him. He started to be repulsed by his largesse, his inability to reciprocate tiny signs of affection, even his tendency to whine at the television during *Together We Stand*, *Head of the Class* or *Dynasty*. Almost like a defensive mechanism, he started to despise all the idiosyncrasies and fetishes of the big man. He even hated his voice and all its limitations. "Give me Pavarotti any day," he mumbled to himself.

"What?" Franklin asked, his heading turning slightly around toward Tony.

"Nothing," he replied. It was too late. There had been a moment when Franklin could have come to an understanding that Tony was a victim as well. But that moment had passed and their paths now were divided forever. Tony ran his hand up to his ear and picked slightly at a pimple behind his ear. When his hand came back down it touched Franklin on the back, but instead of caressing his rotund frame it pushed back and Tony stood up off the bed. Franklin turned around to face his executioner.

"Are you leaving?" he asked.

"Yes, but first I want to say a few things."

Deep inside Tony's body the virus was spreading. He had contacted it anally, and now it had passed through most of his systems and had proliferated to all the extremities.

It was even in his fingertips, albeit behind many layers of skin and tissue. The virus itself had lived through many hosts and a variety of names. Like human beings once upon a time, it had spread from Africa out through trade routes to the other continents. It had survived cold winters and hibernated inside all shapes and sizes of people. Many never even knew they had been infected.

The virus had made its way to New York through Paris and Marseilles. An intravenous drug user had brought it up from Alexandria and had spread it to a whole room of junkies in the back room of a music shop on a road that overlooked Notre Dame. They were all injecting smack bought from a local boy near the Rue de Chat Noir. Three were from Germany, one originally from Thailand, and two Americans. One was trying his best to be a modern Hemingway, attending bullfights in Spain and then traveling up to Paris for some “inspiration”. The second American was short, with close-cut hair and looked like he had once been in the military. He had a full sleeve of tattoos on his right arm and a skull that he could manipulate on his back. He had never been that much into hard drugs, but a girl he met from England had gotten him hooked on the thrill of chasing the dragon. He had come to Europe to find himself as many young people often do and had left with the monkey and the virus, although he wouldn’t admit either for a very long time. The tourist spent the next day worshiping at the church and then sightseeing. He wore a shirt advertising a local brewery in Albany, NY. Three days later it had been taken back across the Atlantic in a comfortable seat on an airplane. The first time the virus had ever flown. Once in New York it had initially laid low, mistaken for Pneumocystis carinii pneumonia (PCP) and Kaposi’s Syndrome. Then, inspired by the new

president it pulled on patriotic stripes and started to spread among homosexuals and drug users on both coasts.

They called it various names, like kids on a playground—gay cancer, gay compromise syndrome, none took. Finally AID, then a slight alteration to AIDS (not just pluralized...) and a new war began. It had infiltrated the blood supply and finally was getting the type of press a first-rate virus deserved. C. Everett Koop, the tired face of doctors everywhere, had even recently warned everybody about the dangers of such risky behavior. And they thought it was just degenerative behavior that allowed it to flourish? Now, the virus had found its way up I-95 through New Haven and Middleton and had taken the exit toward the capitol and the Bushnell. It had festered in the fingertips of Anthony Bell for seven months before he even found out. It looked out through his eyes, past the few strands of dangling black hair and saw a whole world waiting ahead.

Scene 3



Pascal Baur blinked.

--

He remembered the sky being blue that day, not the color that it later would be on television, but a brilliant blue, as if the air was pure and calm. The kind of blue that only happens in the winter when the air is crisp and cold. The clouds outside had not moved after he had heard the first screams. He was sitting on a cold bench drinking coffee and someone walked by fast, crying. A street vendor asked what was the matter and she could not help but keep crying. She started raving like a mad-woman, spit flying from the corners of her mouth and the snot from her nose pooling at the base of her jutting upper lip. She was a substitute school teacher, she said, running away crying as if that answered all the vendor's questions.

Later things would be made much clearer. Baur would imagine the cold morning, T=0, the feeling of immense motion. On television it always looked slow, like an old man rising from a chair, but the feeling of propulsion must have been more intense than any terrestrial feeling could ever be. He could feel the slight vibrations shaking off the accumulated ice, probably made even thicker by the unusually cold temperatures that were clouding Florida that morning. He could imagine peering through an exhaust vent and wiggling through the four and a half million pounds of complex moving parts until resting on the right SRB O-ring. The damn thing was hard from the cold and the image reminded him of working on his father's Chevy. He imagined a rough, splintered seal

that was lopsided and warped. The flaming gas passing through would eat it right up, and the extrusion would cause the secondary O-ring to fail. T=+58.788 and the beginning of a plume. Baur, with his fertile and flame-proof imagination weaseled his way out of the right SRB and past the flaming gas that was slowly destroying the interior of the booster. A lucky break almost occurred but for the wind shear. The fire was spreading and the cloudless blue sky was about to fill with tragedy.

He remembered a few days later hearing about cyanide being found in Tylenol capsules. "We'll stop making capsules," they pledged. The world was falling apart fast. Olof Palme was the next to go, and then a TWA flight from Rome to Athens. The two great civilizations of pre-Christianity linked together again by the hatred of extremists. Baur was sitting outside when the lady came by crying. There of course would be more ladies crying throughout the year, and it would soon become a matter of "old hat" to be sitting outside and hear of unspeakable tragedy or terrifying aggression.

The sky was blue and crisp and still. The world had only noticed the deaths through decoded signals on their Sony or Hitachi or Sanyo televisions. The wind had not yet been the bearer of such ill-fortune. That would have to wait until April and August, both sharing the same first letter as well as being linked to Baur in his connections of airborne tragedies. April brought Chernobyl, August, Lake Nios. He didn't even know where Cameroon was on a map but he knew the name of a lake in its northwestern province where fifteen-hundred people had been walking outside, breathing the communal air that our planet provides when the deeper demons of man's creation were unleashed upon them. Invisible, the toxic cloud spread through the area strangling people from the inside out. To not be able to trust the air scared Baur more than the thought of

nuclear bombs. The bomb would be fast and quick. The white flash, a unison of notes all glissing up to beyond human hearing, and then silence. It would end without thought, without knowledge or even regret, but not so such an invisible threat. Not with a bang, but a whimper Eliot had warned, and the thought of clutching his throat and begging Gaia for a breath of fresh air terrified him. Even more than the Challenger, Lake Nios had sowed the seeds of nightmares deep into the fall foliage.

Sometimes when we reach for the stars, we fall short...the sound bite playing on all the networks. Reagan had stalled his state of the union out of respect. But with his popularity now dropping Baur saw the gradual decline of civilization. No longer were we shooting for the stars but merely a reprieve from mutually assured destruction. “We are at the end of times,” some woman had screamed as he sat outside drinking coffee. It was vogue now to scream of the apocalypse. Like a gold ring spinning around a sink, the trajectory slowly falling toward the drain, Baur could feel in his bones that the reason the sky was still and calm was because it was simply waiting us out. We had given it a giant bald spot and like a father with a petulant child it was laying down the law. No more free rides around this globe.

So he sat outside most mornings and watched the clouds. He had started in January in the cold, had continued through the pallid months of spring and the sweltering mugginess of summer. Now it was near winter again, almost Thanksgiving, and what did anyone have left to be thankful for? The clouds seemed to be waiting, silently judging. They all seemed pregnant and pulsing. The explosion had occurred at T+73.162 (not an explosion at all a recent article had said) and the sky in Florida erupted like a volcano, the “Y” shaped cloud looking like the male gene does under a microscope. Hubris it seemed

to say without spelling anything out. Why had you chosen to leave? Gaia asked, her demeanor calm and collected. On a park bench with the state capitol behind him, Baur looked up past the merry-go-round and the Hartford Insurance building and watched the sky move slowly and methodically. He could hear other gasps from attention-seeking drivers as they drove erratically from work to home or vice versa, eager to share the macabre news with anyone who had not yet been inoculated. There were no school children waiting for the merry-go-round, they were all in class watching the horrors live. That night it was replayed over and over, as if it were the winning play in the Super Bowl. A public display of death for seven brave men and women occurring again and again at 73-second increments. Each time Baur wished that as the moment came they would find a way to push through and keep going. It wasn't the explosion that had so depressed him, but rather the knowledge that they had gotten so high at all.

As if the four horsemen had not been blatant enough, he found that tragedy had made him watch the whole thing in reverse only a month later. Air-Traffic Control, waiting at the birthplace of democracy had to watch the sky once again become filled with the sucking sound of death and dismemberment. This time the smoke trail would traverse down to the ground, burying the hatred of such violence under the same dirt through which Socrates once strolled. The irony of the illogical raining down on the birthplace of logic stunk of sulfuric irony. It seeped out of the ground like the summer stench from the sewers.

Out in the streets they would run screaming, wearing their Ralph Lauren sweaters and their Jelly bracelets, all the fads converging on an apex of trendiness and tragedy. The faces were made up with blue eyeliner and pink cheeks. He sometimes felt that his

opera singers actually took make-up off to get ready. Baur felt that the world had pushed on toward the brink without him, that he had taken three years off and been left behind. Claudia was trendy, he thought. She wore outfits that looked like the things on television. He himself had even worn a jean jacket during the early fall months. So why, he asked, did he feel like he no longer understood the rest of humanity?

Why did he feel so alone?

Of course he had Claudia, but she was an old soul that hungered for the things her younger body could offer. Her taut legs wanted the latest acid wash jeans and expensive tennis shoes to pad her feet. Her arms wanted all those bracelets and her ears wanted to be punctured multiple times. Almost like masochists they begged for more. The sky had been calm, the clouds steady. He had sat on the bench waiting for her and she had not come.

Baur had found Claudia later sitting in front of the television that was hooked up downstairs in her dressing room. The faded stars of Rebecca long since peeled off, it had been a dramatic scene when the soprano had departed for a position in Italy. Now the room belonged to Claudia. It had been offered to Franklin, but he declined politely. Baur felt the portly man had been so traumatized by Rebecca that he just couldn't imagine inhabiting something akin to her world every day of his life. So the room had passed to Claudia. Not that she was not a natural talent, but Baur had a worried feeling that many in the crew had seen the departure of Rebecca and the arrival of Claudia similar to those that watched the waxing and waning brides of Henry VIII. Baur had never been involved sexually with Rebecca, but the way she paid attention to him at

rehearsals was so out of character with her normal interactions that he assumed people had been quietly whispering about a forlorn tryst.

The teacher who had cried about the Challenger had the same hair color as Claudia. She was slender also, but wider in the lower part of her body like a pear. Claudia had a more narrow, parallel form, like a telephone pole but seductive. Baur couldn't quite place why she seemed so incredibly sexy. Possibly it was as simple as the fact that she found him sexy, or possibly it was some intangible trait that eluded identification; a wisp of mirth in the corner of her eyes or a tingle that danced up her stride. Whatever it was he couldn't quite place it, but he knew it when he saw her.

The woman who was a teacher had reminded Baur to check his watch. Up till then he had been ensconced in the swirl of the pale, cold clouds. Some sort of vanilla sky—Van Gogh morning, the swirls pushing up toward the deafness of space.

--

Pascal Baur blinked.

Franklin was sitting near the corner of the stage, his head down and body tense. Rehearsals for *Hellfire* were scheduled for forty-five minutes, five times a day. Baur had implemented the intense schedule for two reasons:

1. – He didn't think any of the actors could take more than forty-five minutes of the work at a time.
2. – He had finished the score three weeks later than he had planned and they were behind in putting it together.

Franklin knew of these reasons because Baur had included them in a cover page with the vocal scores as a way of apology. The music was tense and aleatoric, screaming and

moaning with x noteheads half the time and simple instructions on how to proceed. Like he was a jazz singer improvising a scat solo. And now, after weeks of intense sputtering rehearsals they were two away from the premiere. Just one this morning with the rehearsal pianist, then a quick run of some spots with the orchestra an hour later.

The rehearsal pianist raised her gloved hands and pounded out clusters of notes up and down the detuned instrument. The rehearsal piano had been tuned twice in the first week of rehearsals, but the constant pounding continually knocked the squat, stained instrument into a state of horror. Baur had sat by during a particularly violent scene near the end and watched the world change from a saturated yellow to almost orange. Franklin had watched the composer call out the lighting manager and ask if they were experimenting with the stage lights. It had been almost like watching a man go insane. Baur had felt the grip of reality shift fundamentally, the piano strings loosening the rivets in his spine and the jelly rush down and coat his feet.

Franklin stood after fifteen seconds of pounding, his motion constrained, pretending that he was wearing a fifteen pound pack and wet to the skin. He waited and the pianist plunked a low A.

The aria began.

--

As a child Pascal had trouble understanding that the sky was not really blue all the time. He imagined that at night the light was just turned off, and that if he had a candle he could point it up and expose the hiding sound of the daytime sky. His synesthesia, undiagnosed until he was a teenager, initiated the young man into a fraternity of music even before he took his first piano lesson. Looking up on a clear day brought about

sounds of triadic happiness. He saw the sky almost like a stretched out triangle, with singing fundamentals pulsing from the top and the bottom corners of his vision. Although his view never changed, it was almost like his eyes hazed out the upper corners and the sky took the shape of a unilateral triangle. At the three connections of the triangle the points would be pulsing polyrhythmically, almost as if the sky was showing him the ratio of the harmony. He would later explain this phenomenon to people and they would think that his pupils had simply dilated too rapidly and were attempting to correct for the brightness.

Pascal had tried to explain his peculiar tonal outlook to his childhood doctor. How he heard the music of the spheres everywhere. The doctor believed Pascal had an active imagination and had prescribed to his father that he procure for the young boy some piano lessons, stat. His father had laughed at the recommendation and had arranged for his child to take lessons from an old woman who taught out of an Episcopal church. Later, his father had nicknamed him Boethius. Bo sees the world as a collection of musical spheres, he'd happily tell all the guests that would occasionally stop by for drinks.

Like the nickname Bo, the lessons had been short-lived. The old lady had a method that she had inherited and perpetuated for over three decades. It was like an ugly brooch that was passed down through generations of indifferent inheritors. She was insistent that he followed her approach. But her rigid steps didn't suit the strange young boy and his insistence that certain sounds sung to him as if protruding from a rainbow. She had given up on him after a single lesson, but had stuck with it for four months.

Pascal had complained to his father that she didn't know what she was talking about. His mother had listened, but his father had just smiled and nodded.

The sound of cars on I-84 fermented the morning with a nectar of aggression and congestion. Baur woke up dreaming of ambrosia, the sweet taste of bliss dripping from the corners of his mouth. A dog-faced man had offered him a drink. He didn't literally have the face of a dog, but something that, like the Dali painting at the Wadsworth, merely suggested to his eyes a canine appearance. The man was unshaven, his cheeks drooping like jowls and his eyes looking sad and confused. His ears were uneven, and they had the appearance of alertness when the man leaned in toward Baur. But this Pascal was not the Pascal of his current disposition, but a younger version looking back upon himself.

The dog man growled as he handed over the jug. It was large, a used Carlo Rossi wine jug with the word "Ambrosia" written in thick letters over the original contents. Baur nodded thanks to the man as he took a deep swig. It tasted like nothing, but in a dream way that made him happy to be imbibing it. As Baur awoke he tried to hold the taste on his teeth.

It was still dark outside and he could see his breath in the air. Baur slowly reached over and found his glasses. Two minutes later he awoke again with the glasses on his face. He reached over but Claudia was not there. She's in New York for a concert, he remembered, his eyes still not quite open. This time he got up and went to the bathroom. Five minutes later his automated coffee-maker, quite a convenient little item, self-started a brew of Folgers. Baur left the bathroom as the pot was halfway through brewing. He popped two pieces of white bread into the toaster and automatically found

his way to the fridge to get butter and strawberry jam. Like a gymnast, he went through his morning routine with the grace of repeated practice. Once he had taken the first drink of coffee he regained his faculties and paused in step. Each day always began the same, but at some point he took the reins and began the subjugated subroutine that he had worked out the night before. He explained it to people as starting with the trunk of a tree and then taking a new branch each morning as he moved up toward the bright sun of day.

Baur was always one to appreciate and disseminate his plethora of routines, subroutines and variations. A variation, he would explain, was a standardized routine that would be inserted when happenstance required him to alter his predetermined routine. People who were subjected to Pascal's little informational spiel had usually tuned out by the time he was defining various extemporaneous terms that were not employed on standard day but only on special occasion.

Mostly people listened because they knew of the happiness that telling them such trivialities brought Baur. Claudia liked to make fun of him for having terminology for such activities.

After his shower he'd pour the coffee into a thermos and head out for a walk. Baur lived in an apartment on Woodland, near the Mark Twain House. He'd often walk down the street to the light and cross and sit between the Twain house and the Harriet Beecher Stowe house and drink his coffee and think. Most of his recent post-1983 works had been conceived in some aspect in-between the houses. Like funneling the intellect of the two titans into his work, Baur felt a spry pulse of inspiration that he had trouble recreating elsewhere.

That day had been different. He had included a variation. Instead of staying and drinking coffee between the two old houses he had decided on a whim to continue walking down toward the Bushnell. The walk was nice and the movement felt good to his legs. Too many nights coming home and immediately working at the drafting desk until his eyes or hands failed. Baur thought about taking up running again, but doubted he would find the time. It was never a problem with will, just when.

On a wood bench with the gold-capped dome of the capitol behind him, Baur sat and drank his coffee slowly and contemplatively. Above, the sky was rich and blue.

Franklin finished singing and as usual dropped his shoulders and waited for Baur to comment. Since Pascal had taken over the musical director post in 1982, Franklin had become more and more enamored and dependent on the little bald man for encouragement and support. He even went to Baur for career advice when offered various off-season roles around the globe. What have you heard? Who do you know? What do you think? he would ask in a rapid fire staccato, barely waiting for Pascal to answer. And indeed, Baur would sit there, his hands pursed together at the fingertips, thinking through his thoughts before he'd even start his reply. After what was always an unhealthy silence he would begin to answer the question.

Today Baur looked particularly happy with the robust tenor. Franklin had really committed to the role, working out a great deal to turn some of his heft into muscle. He had taken it personally when during a read-through someone had made an inopportune *Full Metal Jacket* joke. Franklin didn't want to be the Pyle of this opera, to be ill-cast and vaguely realistic, so he started a daily regiment of weights and running. And

although the running had faded slowly to a brisk walk, he had stuck with the weights and had increased his bench press considerably in the last four months.

“Good work Franklin,” Baur said. The tenor almost blushed at the mention of his name. “Claudia, remember in this scene that you can’t come on too strong too early, just keep coy and sly and let it develop. Franklin will lead it and you won’t really be in control until the goons show up.”

Claudia had her vocal score out and was scribbling something in a margin. Seated near her were two Yale baritones that were playing the silent roles of the two Nazi guards. They were named Ken and Kelly and were both blond haired and blue eyed and hard to tell apart. They sat next to Claudia as if they were employing some sort of method to their role, or they were simply staying close and soaking up everything they could from the rising Mezzo.

Baur checked a few measures with the rehearsal pianist. Claudia got up from her seat and went over to Franklin. She had sensed that something was wrong and wanted to talk with him.

“What’s up Frank?” she asked as she sat down on a chair next to his. He was folding, unfolding and then refolding his score with much more intensity than usual. She could see that he had shaved haphazardly and there was a small streak of blood under his chin. His shoulders were slumped and when she put her arm around him he tensed up.

“I’m having some problems with Tony,” he replied, almost as if he was at confession and Claudia was a priest. She had initially been nonchalant, but now they had dipped down to a whisper. Claudia, her head dipped low to better catch the whispers, started massaging his shoulders. Franklin loosened up and leaned into her nestled fingers

like a cat. He was closer to Claudia than even Baur (who he saw as a father figure, and somewhat strangely, Claudia as a sister...) but he still felt the stigma of sharing the secret with her. It was one of those conversations that would change their dynamic forever. Franklin loved Claudia and didn't think he would be able to handle her slowly pulling back and disappearing from his life. And quite frankly, he reminded himself with only the slightest sliver of hope, you don't know yet. Just Tony, he said silently, crossing his fingers. It was a horrible thing to think and to say to one's self, but it was all that Franklin had to keep him going. He knew right now that Tony was just lying on his bed, completely frozen into his own decisions. Franklin couldn't be like that; he just couldn't allow such an impulse to enter his mind. I can't give up now, he thought. It was as if he had assumed the old role of David Pindar, had become Orpheus chasing Eurydice down into Hades. And now Franklin understood why Orpheus and David had done it. It had never been for the girl, for someone else. They had gone down to Hades only to save themselves.

Pascal Baur turned away from the rehearsal pianist and raised his hands and clapped twice in quick succession.

"Okay," he began, addressing everyone in earshot from his pulpit on stage, "we need to reset the stage and lower the pit for the orchestra." He pointed out into the seats where forty-five people were sitting, waiting to be called onto the stage. "We will set up the orchestra and reconvene here in thirty minutes for a run through of act one. Any questions?" He scanned the room but most had already turned to prepare for the next little rehearsal. Claudia and Franklin were sitting in the far corner talking and he made his way over toward them.

The first thing Pascal noticed was the streak of blood under Franklin's chin.

Pascal checked his messages on the machine. He makes it through one from Claudia telling him she won't make it back from the concert in New York. Then he has to flip the tape over and instead he goes to the fridge and finds a small container of rice and orange chicken. He gets out a pan and pours some oil into it, turning the heat on the range up to medium. The leftover Chinese food is dumped in with some fresh broccoli and tofu. He had never had tofu until Claudia had introduced him to it. Now he usually would supplement every meal with it.

While the food sizzled in the pan he went over to the record player and put on a new recording of Berg's *Wozzeck*. He found the scene with the Doctor and Captain taunting Wozzeck and let it play. Baur always came back to *Wozzeck* or *Tristan* when considering the larger forms of a new opera. He had developed his own Wagnerian style of leitmotifs and was also fond of using Berg's technique of including existing forms. He listened to the scene while cooking dinner, the triple fugue complementing the thick aroma of Asian spices. The sun had long since gone down but Baur could see through the clear, cold night the moon hanging over the illuminated downtown area of Hartford. The big insurance buildings seemed to push the moon up, like a group of kids with a big white beach ball. He missed Claudia and hoped she would be back in the morning early enough to see him before going to teach at the Conservatory. Tomorrow would be her busy day.

After finishing the leftover Chinese food and tofu, Baur turned off the record player and headed to a small, brown, dented spinet piano near his desk. He had bought a

drafting desk to work on his compositions. The piano, much like the one he imagined Stravinsky had used on *The Rite*, was old and damaged. Most of the notes worked or at least were close enough for what he needed it to do. He sat down at the cherry drafting table and flipped through a few pages of manuscript paper. The 8.5/11 pages were filled with notes and signs of erasure and reworking. He had in his hand a section in the second act where Mags meets with Bud and tries to befriend him. The audience does not yet see the insane Mags of the later acts, and it is almost tender how Bud feels about her. Baur had the words “soft yellow like an Easter color” written in the margin. He had been over the pages so much that they actually had taken on the colors that he had wanted. Some pages were blue, others red, most yellow. It was not like this was an external phenomenon, but rather his brain trying to decipher what he knew was in the pile. Often the page would begin blue or yellow and once he focused in and saw it, like someone trying to watch the clouds change color, the page would just be the correct color. There would be no noticeable change, but his mind would just realize that it had taken place. Almost like a momentary amnesia in order to reconcile his visual life with his aural life.

The page Pascal had in his hand was soaked in large swatches of a light yellow. He read through the music, mostly high strings and winds, with vibraphone and nail pizz harp providing the melody. It was almost tonal, sweet, sugary and such. He liked the contrast and the confusion he was creating in the audience’s mind. It was much like the painting itself, how the triptych seems happy or at least benign for the first two panes, then turns decidedly sour for the final pane.

After ordering the pages, Baur reached down to a large drawer and pulled out a sheath of large manuscript paper. It was around one hundred copies of the same

photocopied page of unfilled orchestra score. He pulled out a fresh sheet and scribbled the scene on top. His hand was delicate yet crisp, and although he seemed to do it haphazardly, the ink from the pen flowed straight and steady, and the result looked ready for performance. He copied the vocal line from the small score and stared intently at the piano part. He started adding harmonics to the strings, each producing a note of the piano chord an octave above. He placed the actual piano pitches in the flutes and clarinets. The left hand of the piano was a slow moving line descending contrary to the voice. He gave this line to muted trombones with a solo violoncello. Baur worked quick and the page was done in just a few minutes. He blew on it to help the ink dry. It was a rich blend that he had been given as a present upon graduating by Babbitt. He liked it enough that he had continued to buy it after the initial supply had run out.

He continued unabashed on the next page. This wasn't the sort of hard intellectual and soul-searching work that the vocal score had been. The orchestra score was merely the work of a craftsman. He had wrestled with all the hard demons during the vocal score.

Baur worked for nearly two hours, until his hand started to feel weary from the writing. There had been a time that he would have been able to work until the sunrise with barely a tingle in his wrist, but those younger days were long past. Now his old trusty Waterman pen was more faded as were his eyes. Age had started to descend on all his earthly possessions, save Claudia, and he was starting to understand the smell that he had always here to now associated with the elderly. He was afraid that his clothes had started to collect the requisite history to be able to produce the smells. What was worse,

to Baur, was that he didn't find himself caring as much about the smell as he had many years ago visiting retirement homes and playing for the inhabitants.

As he was passing to sleep he remembered that he still had not listened to the other side of the answering machine tape.

Baur closed the door behind him. Franklin sat down in one of the chairs opposite of Baur's desk. It was a creaky chair and the large man made a lot of noise finding a comfortable place to sit.

"Okay, now tell me why you have blood on your chin?" Baur asked.

Claudia had not understood that the streak of blood she had assumed came from Franklin cutting himself while shaving was not from any sort of toiletry incident. Franklin looked both angry and embarrassed. The thought of embarrassment made Pascal slightly hopeful. If he was merely embarrassed then it couldn't be that bad, he figured.

"Tony and I got into a fight just a little bit ago," Franklin said quickly, as if the fast confession might make the pain slightly less.

"What happened?"

Baur had his hands up on his chin, as if he was conducting an interview for a newspaper. He took a tissue from a box behind his desk and passed it over to Franklin. He pointed to the mirror image on his own face and Franklin found the streak with the tissue. He rubbed aggressively, getting most of the excess blood, but still leaving a circular red smear that looked a little like razor burn. Baur noticed that Franklin was avoiding the question.

“What happened?” he repeated.

At lunch Baur basked in the unusually sunny day. He had gotten a sandwich from a cart near the capitol and decided to stroll down to the carousel. There was a group of kids lined up for the next ride. Their teacher was tall and had on thick black frames that made him look a little like Christopher Reeves as Clark Kent. The kids were all dressed as astronauts in anticipation of the shuttle launch the next day. Over their winter coats they wore green, blue, and red badges and patches that all had space shuttle scenes hand drawn on them. Three even had on space helmets (some sort of makeshift tuuk over a bike or motorcycle helmet that their mothers must have made at home). Baur watched them gleefully play in line as the carousel slowed down and other kids got off. The operator, probably instigated by the incognito teacher, began a countdown. 10, 9, 8...and the kids started cheering. Baur waited for liftoff then started his trek back up toward the Bushnell. He had started to sweat slightly and the cold air was freezing his moistened skin. The kids looked cherubic and happy jumping around, the lack of snow in January not phasing them in the slightest. The teacher stood by and warmed his arms through a thick wool coat. Baur watched him from the corner of his eye as he climbed back toward Capitol Ave, almost expecting him to take off flying if he looked away. But above in the blue sky only a few birds swerved between the buildings, searching for food on the frozen ground.

Baur asked again, “What happened?”

Franklin had moistened the tissue and was wiping away the last of the blood on his neck. He was avoiding eye contact and had seemingly shrunk into his own body. Baur thought he sort of looked like a turtle.

“I...found out that Tony is sick. You know...HIV...and I...sort of went off on him. I didn't know what I was doing but I just kept swinging. The little bastard didn't even put up a fight. He was just crying...crying like a baby and I couldn't stop...what he'd done to me...”

The last few sentences ran together as he accelerated with the relief of telling another person his plight. Baur sat motionless, his hands still on his chin in a contemplative manner. Franklin was silently sobbing. He had thrown the tissue away, which Baur now regarded with suspicion and fear. He handed Franklin two more tissues from the box, not wanting the tenor to touch him. Franklin noticed the hesitancy in the composer and understood the full ramifications of his confession.

“Where is Tony now?” Baur asked.

“He's still in my dressing room, I think. I left him crying on the bed. I beat him up pretty badly...”

Baur looked at Franklin and saw a man who had lost his future and was simply scared. And like a cornered animal he had struck out at the shadows that he thought were attacking him.

“I'm not going to pretend that I am not a little weary of this Franklin.”

“I'm sorry.”

“Not you, really. Of course you will need to go and get tested. And we'll deal with that then. But for now, you need to think about what you just did. You bloodied

Tony in your dressing room. I don't know much about this thing, but you need to go down to the drug store on Park and get rubber gloves, bleach and some other cleaning things. You need to come back and make sure that every drop of blood gets out of your dressing room and that Tony is cleaned up. If he went into a bathroom then you need to also clean that up extremely well. We just can't have anyone else catching this because your bloodied the poor man in the building. Do you understand?"

Franklin nodded silently, the actual potential of his anger finally dawning on him. He had not even considered the ramifications of attacking Tony. In his mind the moment Tony had knocked on the door this morning he had been a dead man walking through the dark night. There was no daybreak at the end of this journey.

Pascal leaned back and pinched the bridge of his nose. He had gotten a sudden headache. He leaned forward and tried his best to give Franklin a reassuring look, but Franklin was crying, his hands over his eyes, buckled over, sobbing in the way that made Baur feel like a voyeur watching a forbidden scene. He sobbed for quite a long time.

The sky was blue and cloudless. Pascal sat on the bench between the Stowe House and the Twain House sipping his coffee. He was thinking about a short chamber opera that he wanted to write for the next season. Baur was exhausted after *Orphée Redux* and was now in the middle of *Hellfire*, which was equally taxing. He didn't think he'd be able to continue at that pace for much longer. He had been thinking a lot about Berg and wanted to maybe program *Lulu* or *Wozzeck* for the coming season. Maybe premiere something new by a composer from overseas. Either way, he didn't want to

have to contribute another mammoth work for the 1987-88 season. It was only January of 1986 and he already knew that he had run out of time.

Baur stared at the board of trustees for the Twain House: Lynn Collado, Radames Hunter, Maria Shott, Barbara Hunter, Peggy Lynn, Brad Michaels, and Albert Hernandez. He had read the names a hundred times before. Like his morning tradition he had a few routine sensory exercises that he employed while sitting on the bench trying to come up with an idea. The first was to read anything and everything in his sight. The second was to look up at the clouds and try and find a rorschach image embedded in the troposphere.

But the day was cloudless. The sky was blue and crisp, and the steam coming from his thermos was delicate and wispy. He was wearing a stocking cap that was a bright shade of red. Baur had awoken and kissed Claudia, but she was not one to wake with him and the dawn. He had gone through his morning routine and was now sitting on the bench between the houses drinking coffee. He'd finish the coffee and go back to his apartment and try again to awaken Claudia. She didn't respond well to alarm clocks or that sort of immediate awakening, so he did it in stages, first rousing her gently and allowing her to go back to sleep. By nine he would have her fully awake and eating breakfast—two pieces of toast with butter and marmalade—and then they would part for the majority of the day. She had a concert in New York that night and he had work to do on the orchestra score for *Hellfire*.

From his seat on the bench he could see the distant corner of Farmington and Woodland. At the light was a woman crossing slowly, limping slightly on her left leg. She made it to the South side of Farmington and started heading east, closer to Baur's

vantage point. He watched her as she came into focus. She was extremely tall with a very noticeable scar running down the left side of her face. Baur thought she might be Mexican or Puerto Rican. Some sort of Spanish descent anyway. Her sweater was much too small for her arms and she had in her hand an umbrella.

The woman passed Baur on the bench and smiled politely. Baur nodded back and took a long sip from his mug, the thermos resting between his legs to keep him warm. He tried to understand the thought process that would invite such an interesting-looking woman to decide to bring an umbrella on a day with barely a cloud in sight. Maybe it was the lack of snow that frightened her. Baur understood that sort of irrational fear. To live your life as a rational animal, understanding the necessity of balance in the natural world, one comes to sometimes illogical conclusions regarding the expectation of the expected. He thought it through in his head. Maybe the expectation of the expected wasn't exactly the best way to put it. But his logical simian brain told him that it can't not rain all the time, so he should expect rain if it hasn't rained in awhile. This scarred woman must be of the same ilk, must be a rational soul. Baur felt that it must be hard to believe in a god when you carried such a large scar upon your face.

But that wasn't all he was thinking. Lake Nios popped into his head for the second time that week. It seemed too coincidental to him for there to be two horrible toxic disasters in under a week. Lake Nios was first on August 21st, the same day that he had met with the principal singers for the fall production of *Hellfire*. They had all gasped at the news, but Baur didn't think that all had felt the monstrosity of the cloud. But Chernobyl, Chernobyl they had fully understood. It was like AIDS, he thought. All this research about AIDS coming from Africa really didn't matter to anyone until it started

showing up in America. How many Africans died from an unnamed disease until a few deaths in San Francisco and New York brought the attention of the TV-watching public.

Two toxic clouds in under a week. There had been a man walking up and down Prospect downtown that had a placard with various quotes from Revelations. Although Baur generally discredited the Bible for any concrete information (it was mostly a morality and ethics textbook, he would say), it still did get him a little depressed about the end of the world. His mother used to talk about the end of the world, but for her it had a different meaning. For Baur the end of the world was when the music left, and then the world would be nothing but an ashen husk, void of color and life—the whimper of Eliot’s forecast.

Pascal stared down at the beaten path between the houses and thought about ideas for another opera. His mind couldn’t get past the decrepit man holding the placard on Prospect. He was dirty in the way that all homeless people were. It was like a fuzzy sort of dirty that made one apathetic but still not want to get to close. You felt their pain but you were able to avoid the heartache of living it by placing them slightly out of focus. It was like that appearance made them soft in your eyes and your brain was unwilling to process the image. The man had been hard to describe in other words. Baur had remembered a few important details: the slanted writing on the placard that sloped down as if written in utter despair, the coat that seemed to be filled with balled up newspaper, and his eyes—which although he could not recall the color—had a vividness about them that seemed to imply that underneath the grim he was much more than a simple schizoid or a drunk. He had the eyes of someone playing a role, like a movie star playing a homeless man. He seemed in disguise.

In the haze of memories, Baur remembered the man yelling, “And it was said unto them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth...” He was waving at passersby, pointing and taunting each as they scurried from their downtown offices to their cars or the bus stop. Baur had stood on the opposite side of the street and watched for a few minutes. He always appreciated a sincere effort in the face of adversity. The man swung wildly, but each pedestrian seemed to be prepared, seemed to have trained and were quite adept at ducking and jiving past the man with the large, scabbed white placard. It was dotted as if it had been reused a hundred times. Eventually Baur had grown depressed at the site of the man and had turned to go inside the Wadsworth for a quick tour of the medieval art.

Prophets, mused Baur, are those that by chance got it right. But like all the great Greek myths, one can never know a prophet is right unless they don't listen. Baur took out a small notebook in his pocket and wrote a note about rereading Agamemnon. Aeschylus had written his *Oresteia* over two thousand years ago, but it had seemed to come to life for Baur in the form of a placard waving lunatic.

His coffee was nearly gone. Above, a few clouds had faded in seamlessly from the West. They rolled up Farmington like carpoolers on their way to work. Baur finished the Aeschylus note and placed the notebook back into his jacket pocket. He also was interested in writing a love story, something fun and sweet and easy. Maybe even tonal. The blue sky sang out like a brilliant triad, shimmering and beating with the warmth of the sun. Baur watched his breath swirl like Van Gogh clouds up and out of his mouth. He tried to follow them from the tip of his tongue until they had chilled to the morning air. His eyes slightly crossed over the bridge of his nose.

Pascal Baur blinked.

Scene 4



The scene was one of hell on earth. It was a bombed out toy shop on the east side of Dresden. The walls were littered with mannequins in various grotesque positions, arms pinned next to harps and a straight tuba trumpet piercing through a female torso. Barbara Urlington, her hair held up with long silver needles, looked around suspiciously as Pascal Baur paced next to a tall ashwood throne. His hands were swinging in a wild five-four and his shoulders were taugth and coiled, like a snake hearing a mongoose scurry down the hole.

Barbara tried to calm him down. She hushed him with a maternal softness that the daggers in her hair belied. “Quite now,” she almost sang, her voice a rough but respectable alto. “Hush and tell Narnl what the FBI says.”

Baur felt momentarily relieved at the woman’s tenderness. She had been very cautious when they had met four years ago. He was the new Music Director and she was an assistant costume mistress. He was the orphaned son of Swiss immigrants and he immediately recognized that she was his aunt. Baur had stared at her uncomfortably during an informal meal at one of the Board Member’s house. She had motioned him away from the gathering and they had met near the restroom. She had quickly assuaged his suspicions and confessed to being his long lost aunt. She had implored him to keep quite and relax for the rest of the evening and that she would explain everything after the dinner had ended.

“It’s not the FBI really,” he began, still a little discombobulated from his conversation with Franklin. “It was Franklin. He says Tony has AIDS and that he might

also. And he attacked Tony when Tony told him, but Tony wasn't waiting back in the dressing room when Franklin went back to apologize and clean him up. He was just, like, gone." Baur was shaky and rambling, very unlike his usual stoic demeanor. He was not thinking through his sentences before speaking, but merely spouting out the fears so they would escape his mouth and leave the vicinity as soon as possible. He felt that he was more rattled than even he knew.

Barbara listened with what seemed to Baur like indifference. She was much more concerned about the FBI agent snooping around the theatre than a homosexual feud.

"Can you not just fires them both?" she asked.

"No, I would never do that."

"Well, then you must not worry now. FBI. What do he want?"

Baur's stomach started to gurgle with anxiousness and indecision. He had been focused on the FBI agent up through rehearsals when Franklin had dropped the bombshell on him. Now his head swam back and forth, unsure which current to follow at any given time. The coffee from his breakfast seemed to be giving him heartburn and his forehead felt increasingly sweaty. Maybe he was getting sick? He checked his watch. It was past two and he needed to get out of the building for a few hours to stay away from the FBI agent. He had been walking around since noon and Baur had so far been able to avoid him, but he doubted he could keep it up forever.

"The FBI doesn't want anything. They just have a vague report and Claudia says that the guy doesn't even seem serious about talking to people. He's just doing a job he thinks is pointless."

"When does did your wife talk with him?"

Baur shrugged. "She saw him earlier around noon when he showed up. I have been running around since then and I think he left, quite fortuitously I might add, for lunch right as rehearsals were going to start. But I believe Claudia said he'll be back at any moment, so I'm going to go for a walk."

Barbara seemed to really dwell on his words. She had been sneaking around, following Agent Greenberg since he had arrived at the Bushnell. She had seen him waiting in the lobby with his fancy large phone and shiny shoes. She had seen the glimmer of a polished gun hiding in a holster on his side. She had known this day would come and was ready to lie and wait. She had watched him flirt with Claudia, then head down to Franklin's room. They had been talking inside but had then been interrupted by Franklin's boyfriend. She had then followed the man as he sauntered around the stage before rehearsal, talking with random stage hands and even the rehearsal pianist. Then she had seen him again talk to Claudia. Barbara surmised that Pascal was unaware that his wife had again bumped into the portly agent and had again struck up a conversation. Barbara was quite wary of Claudia. She felt protective of Pascal and his talent, and was willing to step in and protect him if he would not protect himself.

Barbara had known about Claudia early in the relationship. Before it had become a deep love it had been mostly a romp in the forbidden desires that young flesh provide. She had caught Baur and the young singer in the costume room. She had not known it at the time but Baur had slyly informed her before she spoke too much about the message to the sympathetic soviets. She had seen Claudia bare-chested, hiding behind his back, her pale goose-flesh excited at the discovery. Barbara had thought the young girl merely playing the role, drunk on rigid Pascal's power and influence. The sort of infatuation that

would run its course. When it didn't, and he proposed, she thought Claudia a gold-digger. Baur was not rich, but wasn't poor either. He owed no money and lived frugally, especially after Diane's death, so his bank account was likely flush. Barbara had warned Pascal about the wiles and dangers of younger women, but he, like most men, did not listen. She loves me for me, he had insisted. But your money, she begged...I have none, and she wouldn't care anyway. He had stormed off and Barbara was left standing, unsure if he could still be trusted.

But Baur had proved himself loyal to a fault. He showed guilt as to his involvement in her extracurricular activities, but seemed to be indebted to Barbara and her cause. Barbara had known many men with tragic pasts and knew the most efficient ways to create a connection and a reason for them to align with her. She had proven herself a master of the maligned man, an operative who had taken many vulnerable men and perverted their grief for her own ends. But never had she had the cushion of family to fall back on. In Paris she had nearly lost her leg to a thin man who had suddenly gotten wise to her act. He had met a prostitute name Chloe who had taken care of his blues, so generous was she in fact, that once he had been cured of his melancholy she had also pointed his serrated blade back toward Barbara. He had gouged it deep into her hip and she had barely escaped.

Pascal was family, and she knew that her lessons in France would serve her well.

"Pascal, darling, do you not know that this agent is been looking at your wife? I see his eyes, they are put on her. She looks back at him too."

Baur did not believe her words. He knew Barbara to be the jealous type, and he doubted that what she said was true. He just shrugged to her, indicating that he didn't

care one way or another. “I trust my wife,” he said, as if completing the sentence in his head. Baur checked his watch. “The rest of the crew will be here in a minute. You should probably leave.” He didn’t want to sound abrupt, but he just was not in the mood for his long-lost aunt’s paranoid suspicions.

Barbara started to walk away. She was used to being dismissed quickly and knew that lingering for a final word could be the difference between a secret kept and a rumor created. Her leg ached with the likelihood of rain. She had brought no umbrella and was worried about being stuck in the cold. The same lingering fear was also true about her nephew. He had never asked for any money or favors for his work with her friends. Pascal was not in any way indebted to them, merely contained through his guilt. The same worry for weather correlated to him. She felt like a storm was coming and he needed to be persuaded to stand with her under the same shared umbrella.

As Barbara left through the red door down to the catacombs she remembered the first time she had approached Pascal about helping her friends. He was still shell-shocked over Diane’s death and was easy to manipulate. With the ascension of Claudia Barbara wondered if he still felt the same way. She turned and looked at him as the door closed, her mind racing through myriad possibilities and scenarios. A storm was coming.

Baur sat and whistled. The uneven footsteps decrescendoeed to nothing and he heard a door open and close. He was alone. A few seconds later four men came in and started removing the walls of the Dresden set. The torso impaled on the wall jiggled as they took it away. Baur remembered the work that James Malloy had put into the torso. He had acquired a mannequin and used it to create a shell to fill with light plaster. He

had then taken a chisel to it to add some grotesque edges to the normally perfect form. He had called it “Michaelangelo’s David if he had lived in the gutter for five months”.

The first torso that James had created had been destroyed by Franklin. He was screaming at Claudia near the end of the opera and ad-libbed a swinging gesture with his arms. He had accidentally knocked over Phil, one of the guards, into the wall and he had impaled the already impaled torso on the plastic knife taped to the end of his pellet gun. The scene had been quite comical and everyone was rolling around laughing, until poor James walked over and realized that the cheap plastic knife had gouged out a large chunk of the poor torso’s abs. The second torso hung on the wall had been filled with a much stronger mix of plaster. But the real reason it remained intact is the look on James’ face. The whole cast saw him wilt, as if he had lost a child. Franklin had almost immediately ceased the improvised step and to an outsider it might look like the portly man was afraid of it.

With the walls removed, the scene was set for the first act. Most of the first act took place in an Army hospital, with the three main characters rehashing how they had enlisted (or been forced to enlist) and ended up sitting in a green medic tent forty miles outside of Dresden. Since the scenes involved many flashbacks, they had decided to simply use a large matte green curtain. The imagination would be asked to fill in the rest, and the flashbacks would be differentiated with changes in lighting.

Baur stayed seated and the stage was slowly filled with the rest of the cast and crew. Claudia came in late, making eye contact as if telling Baur not to ask. Franklin still looked rattled, and Baur had planned on leaving him out of most of the last two rehearsals. And hope that he pulls it together for the performance tonight, he thought.

“Maestro Baur?” a voice asked from behind him.

Baur turned and saw the agent who had been with Claudia earlier. He had on a pinstriped suit that looked baggy. Poorly sized, he thought, probably bought at a store where no one knew how to size him correctly, or they just didn't have his size in the sale rack. Pascal felt like he wanted to be mean to the man, but he wasn't quite sure why. He was a large man, fat really, and not the type of person that he would feel threatened by for the affections of his wife. His only good attribute, Pascal thought, is his hair. Pascal reached up unconsciously and followed the ridgeline of his gray hairs and then in a fluid motion pushed his hand forward to acknowledge to the young agent that he was the man he was looking for.

Morriss reached out his hand. “Pleased to meet you,” he said.

“You too. I'm sorry I skipped our earlier appointment. When it was made I don't think the secretary knew that she had scheduled it for opening night.”

Morriss shook his head, waving a large tan and black device that looked like a phone. The black antenna wiggled side to side. “No worries, I've been able to talk with other people and I think I've seen and heard nearly everything I need to. I just need to ask you a few questions. Everyone who I've talked to has pointed me toward you, so I guess you are the logical end to all my questions. And I don't mean in a bad way, just that you are the man who knows all and can answer all my questions.” Morriss seemed awkward in a way that was forced, as if this was some strategy that he was employing. Baur, who had dealt with actors and singers for years, knew the rigidity of unnatural actions.

“Then I am glad I can be of help.”

Baur released Morriss' hand and looked at the collection of people watching him from all the wings of the stage. Morriss noticed them too and kind of smirked. "Guess we have a bit of an audience. Would later be better for you?"

Baur did not even hesitate. "No, now is fine. I don't want to make you stay around any longer than you need to. Please Mr., pardon, I actually did not get your name..."

Morriss laughed and Baur blushed slightly. "My apologies. I'm special agent Morriss Greenberg with the Soviet infiltration task force."

Baur stood and bowed low, but quick, and Morriss was not sure if this was insulting or overwrought. Baur, his body upright and rigid, motioned Morriss off the stage toward the wing. Morriss followed Baur and they found two small, gray folding chairs near the far curtain. Baur handed one over to Morriss and they unfolded them (almost synchronized) and both sat, arms resting on their legs.

Baur waited for a second then felt the awkwardness wain. "Please begin Agent Greenberg." His voice was not rushed, but Morriss could feel the tension, like he wanted it over as possible. Not uncommon, the agent thought. I am always the guy that everyone wants to leave.

"Mr. Baur, I'm sure that gossip travels fast and that you are aware that I am investigating a possible connection between the Hartford Opera Company and the USSR. We have a vague report of a possible contact within the company."

"Is it a serious report? Do I need to be worried about something horrible?"

Morriss could hear reservation in his voice. But he wasn't sure if it was the reservation of a guilty conscious, or if, like many of the others, he was worried about

some superfluous misdemeanor or some vague notion of company loyalty. Morriss was getting annoyed with the whole company.

“It is just a mention on a wiretap that we have. Most likely it is non-related and they were just opera patrons, or someone they work with or know goes to the opera, or...” Morriss gestures repetitively, indicating ad nauseum and Baur smirks along. To all around they appeared as old friends, joking and laughing, but it was much like two predators feeling each other out. Morriss could not understand why the conductor was posturing like an enemy. He could tell that Baur was tense, sitting stiff and straight, his hands folded over and one finger massaging a knuckle continuously. There was also a slight hint of sweat glistening off the house lights on the top of his hairless head.

Morriss reached into his pocket and took out a napkin from his lunch. He passed it to Baur, pointing slyly to his head. Will probably shake him up a bit, he thought. Baur took the napkin and wiped his brow, smiling coyly.

“A little hot under the lights, huh? Kind of like I assume your interrogation rooms. Or at least what I’ve seen on *Dragnet*.”

Morriss smirked along with him, but in that half-hearted way that indicates he is merely assuaging the nerves of the poor man before eventually pouncing on him like a hungry wolf.

“It is hot, huh? Anyway, I need to know if you saw anything suspicious around the theatre around the time of the...” he checked his notes, “*Orphée Redux* premiere. Anything you have seen or heard that you just didn’t feel right about. Those kind of feelings are often quite correct.”

He stopped his sentence abruptly, as if distracted, and turned and waited for Baur. It was another attempt to unnerve the phlegmatic composer and elicit a response. But Baur seemed unflappable, and Morriss was even more convinced that he was hiding some secret that was more than just a little recreational drug use.

“I can’t think of anything off the top of my head,” the composer began after his usual lengthy pause. “It was a rather busy time for me. *Orphée Redux* was my first large-scale opera. I’m sure you can imagine the kind of work something like that takes. And then I was also the director and conductor, so my head seemed to be split into three pieces for the whole production. I had three hats, if you will.”

“If there was anything we got the feeling it would have happened on opening night. Do you remember anything strange about that night?”

Pascal smiled. “Yes, that was actually the night I proposed to my wife. But I don’t think your spies would be interested in that. It was October 5th,” he turned to Morriss conspiratorially, his hand directing his muffled speech, “I better remember that much at least.”

“I could imagine then that you are rather myopic then when it comes to that night?”

Baur half-shrugged, his head slightly dipping into his collarbone, making him look to Morriss kind of like a turtle. “I can remember most of that day rather presciently,” Baur said, “but I can’t remember anything that was strange or interesting. The show went off marvelously. We had a packed house. There was a reporter here from the Courant who did an article about me, and I think other than that it was just the regular cast and crew and no suspicious looking characters.”

Morriss was becoming annoyed with the creativeness of the opera company. That they felt they were looking for villains wearing capes or evil, thick mustaches angered Morriss to no end. The hyperbole and inventive language was also a pet peeve. He was starting to think that he wanted this small, bald man to be guilty just so he could slam his head against the wall and cuff him. The only thing that he liked about this assignment at all had been this old man's wife, and that she had chosen Baur instead of waiting for someone more her age (like say, Morriss) agitated him even more.

“Mr. Baur, could you please tell me about a few of your employees?”

The light in the room changed slightly and Baur was bathed in the remnants of stage red. He looked up at the lights and shrugged. The lights changed again to a light yellow, the color of an almost ripe banana. It gave the feeling that they were either outside or surrounded in fire. Either way it felt somewhat calming to Morriss.

“Sure, who do you need me to talk about?”

“Two people. The first one is Olga Wong. She was one of the actors for your opera.”

“Olga Wong,” he said, “is a wonderful actress from the bay area. She portrayed Innocence, one of the three rather ironically named sex addicts in the story. Kind of like the trio of women in *The Magic Flute*. She was great, punctual, and very professional. She got the role from an open audition and would commute up from New York for the rehearsals. I think she still lives in the city, maybe going to school for a graduate degree or something to that effect. I don't know much more about her, but I definitely got the impression that she was all about acting and singing, and I don't think she would have the guile to be a spy.”

Morriss wrote something after Baur finished the last sentence. Pascal watched between tightly clenched teeth. He was afraid that he was being transparent, that this agent already knew all about the operas. But nonetheless he stayed calm and relaxed (at least trying to appear relaxed) and felt that as long as he answered the questions slowly and thoughtfully he could make it through and get this guy out of the door before rehearsal started.

Morriss flipped through the green notepad and underlined something. Baur leaned toward him inquisitively, but then retreated before asking about the important underline.

“Do you know if Olga has any relatives in the USSR or that are sympathetic to the Soviets in any way?”

Baur gulped at the word sympathetic. He felt that this large man must know his secret. He imagined that his chest was glowing and that such luminescent layers of skin could not hide his guilt. “I don’t think so,” he began, a little shakily, “but then again I don’t think that is the kind of thing people advertise. I remember her talking about something or hearing about it anyway after they caught that dirty FBI agent, and she said something to that affect that her first name had nothing to do with her lineage. I think, anyway. So I would believe that the answer is no, but I cannot be sure. Like I said, she’s from San Francisco, and I think her parents might be Chinese. But hey, look at the strides they have made in the last decade. Reopening the schools and so forth. I even know a few Chinese composers in New York who are quite talented and interesting. But we artistic people, I just can’t see her being a villain.”

Morriss held back his anger as well as possible. That Baur had mentioned the double agent seemed almost like a counterpunch, and then rambling on until he finally ended by telling him that she wasn't a "villain"? Morriss felt certain that this guy was trying to verbally joust with him. Pascal Baur, capable and manipulative, he thought. Morriss again doodled in his notebook. Something about the sound of scribbling that brought out facial ticks and tells in the people he interviewed. He had on more than one occasion gotten farther by writing nonsense in a notebook then by threatening legal action or violence. The pen mightier, he mused.

The yellow glow from the stage lights faded to maroon. From the pit a few violins could be heard warming up. Baur, his ear always alert and discerning, recognized Mozart, Bach, and Debussy, and thought he also heard a portion of Berlioz from the *Symphony Fantastique*. The fourth movement, he assured himself triumphantly, although not intent on ever checking his suspicion with any of the players. A lonely bassoon started on some long tones. Just checking the reed, thought Baur. That he could hear music was helping his concentration with the FBI agent. Like he had been out of his element for awhile, but was now firmly ensconced back in the world of aural acuity.

Morriss had also drifted off for a second to hear the music. To his ears it was just snippets of radio, as if someone offstage was flipping through the dial. He didn't understand that to Pascal Baur the entire room was changing color with each new auditory sensation.

"It sounds like you need to go, so can I just ask about one more person, then we can be done?"

"Please, Agent Greenberg, take your time and ask all your questions."

“The other person I need to ask about is Barbara Urlington. Do you know her?”

The waves of color and music turned a deathly shade of black before Baur’s eyes. The FBI had an interested in his aunt? Did they know they were related? Baur’s mind rushed through scenario after scenario as he tried to come up with the correct answer. Sitting across, Morriss was enjoying the show. He could see the immediate tension that the name had produced. He had hit a nerve, and now the music wafting in from the pit sounded to him sweet and just.

Baur tried to hold his thoughts together. “Barbara Urlington is the costume mistress here at the opera company. She’s been here long before I got here.”

“Do you know her well?”

Morriss did not try to conceal his grin at the question. Baur had played the game well, but now it was Morriss who was attacking and looking to turn out victorious.

“I have known her for three years, but...” he brushed his small ring of hair back with his right hand, his left conducting a rather brisk four-four behind the shadow of his leg. “But, she is a very private lady and, well, not the kind to go out for drinks after a rehearsal or something.” His attempt at a smile felt forced and transparent. Baur felt the walls closing in and Morriss seemed to be growing larger and taller.

“Mr. Baur, I don’t...”

Once outside Baur looked around for Barbara. He had felt the divine hand of providence when the fire alarm had been pulled. There were large, red fire trucks pulling up, but word had already spread that there was no fire. Kansas Jaffarian had been down in the catacombs hanging out in a makeshift dressing room when the alarm had sounded.

He told Claudia on the way up that he had seen a guy with black hair pull it and run off. Baur wasn't sure if this was Tony or Barbara, but was happy nonetheless for the distraction. Like in a movie, he thought, a scene like this will break the spell of the interviewer and allow the suspect time to regroup. Baur didn't like the fact that he was positing himself as the suspect in such a scenario, but was happy to be free of the man in the large pin-stripe suit.

It was only four in the afternoon, but a cloud system had almost completely obliterated the sun. It was an ominous dark and Franklin could feel it. He had pushed through the crowd to find Baur. He too had heard the rumor of the black-haired fire alarm puller, and was certain it was Tony. He couldn't quite understand why, but once outside he had felt the need to insulate himself from harm. Franklin looked at his scabbed hands and felt like crying. His rage had induced a destructive response that had immediately mortified him after he was able to control himself. In fact, he could remember simultaneously feeling both exhilaration and disgust as he was pounding on the small rib cage of his former lover. He had left Tony lying in the fetal position, crying, blood smeared across his shirt and pants. Franklin could remember taking his bloody hands and wiping them on Tony as if he were a paper towel that he could throw away. He hadn't even considered the possibility that he might only now become infected as a result of his contact with the blood. In his rage he had just assumed he was already infected. They had been together for quite awhile and the use of condoms had subsided rather quickly. Hundreds of times for possible infection. He just assumed. Now, the lingering doubt was what made his skin tickle with goose-flesh. Why had Tony pulled the alarm?

Morriss Greenberg watched Pascal Baur from across a sea of faces. He was trying to not be obvious, but still didn't mind it if the conductor/composer noticed him watching. All part of the game, thought Morriss. The fire alarm had been another annoyance in a day filled with petty problems. He still wasn't sure that there was much going on at the Hartford Opera Company. Most of the people had lied to him, he knew that, but he just didn't see how anything this group did could drastically endanger the United States of America. He watched as Baur slid between two tall men wearing pea coat jackets and when he reemerged he was standing next to Claudia. Now, thought Morriss, that is a reason to hang around longer. He had felt these sorts of pangs before, longing for women he knew to be unattainable, and thus fairly safe in terms of rejection. Morriss was squeezing his hands into fists to keep the blood pumping. He was cold. In the m el e he had left his phone and overcoat sitting on a table next to his chair. It was crisp and cold that afternoon and he was only wearing a pin-stripe suit. Underneath, his silk shirt was damp from sweat, and now outside it caused him to be even colder. Morriss had never been one for the cold, and wished the firemen would quickly clear the building and let them back in. He was even tempted to show his badge and go inside, but still wanted to keep an eye on both Baur and Claudia. Of course, he watched them for different reasons, but he was always one able to compartmentalize.

Barbara Urlington, ne, Arisa Baur, or Narnl had seen the showdown between Pascal and the FBI. She herself was nearly ready to pull an alarm, but instead had found her prayers answered. Not that she had bothered to pray, really pray. She had stopped any and all beliefs and worship after the death of her family in Switzerland in 1944. But still, when times were tight, she would subconsciously wish for help or safety. And low

and behold it had finally happened. A young horn player had been talking about the mysterious black-haired man that had pulled the alarm. She had listened to him and all the other conspiracies that were floating around in the frigid air. She didn't care who the black-haired man really was; she knew that he had been an angel that was sent to save her nephew from thoughtless self-incrimination. But you get only one, she thought. The next time I'm going to have to save him myself. It was like a sign. A sign from above that tells us to keep going, to persevere through the persecution and we will be rewarded. Like those Muslims in Turkey and Afghanistan, she thought. They think they are going to be rewarded in heaven, and I was just promised the same thing.

Tony Bell had stood in front of the fire alarm for almost four minutes before pulling it. He had felt bad even after he had done it, but was scared and hurt and unsure how to get out of the building without being noticed. He remembered an episode of MacGyver when they had pulled the fire alarm to create a diversion. At least he thought it was MacGyver... anyway, he was worried about meeting up with Franklin and needed to get out. He needed to get away and sleep. His head hurt and he had pissed his pants.

Claudia felt unusually warm outside. She had luckily been layering up for a trip to the sandwich shop for coffee when the fire alarm was pulled. She had peered out her door and seen Kansas inspecting the pulled alarm handle. False alarm, he had told her. So she took her time and emerged to the crisp air covered in a sweater, overcoat, gloves, mittens, scarf, and earmuffs. She had seen Pascal standing rigid as normal by the road. He saw her and smiled. She had gone to him and hugged him tight and kept him warm. They had spun a little and her eyes rested on Morriss Greenberg, or Greenwood, she wasn't quite sure. He too was standing in the cold in only his suit coat. He looked cold

and a tiny part of Claudia felt like going over and hugging him as well. But that impulse quickly faded and she just hugged Pascal tighter and tighter. She could tell he was cold (although he would never admit to it), and his breath felt warm on her cheeks.

The fire alarm took nearly forty minutes to silence. Finally, the cast was allowed back into the Bushnell. It was the beginning of rush hour and I-84 was already congested. The rehearsal was technically over, but the union official who was there allowed it to be rescheduled for five. They would only be able to go for half an hour because they would need to rest and eat before the premiere. And the crew would need all that time to set the stage and fill the seats.

Like a procession they all filed into the gray building, each thinking about their own part in the mammoth work to come.

Scene 5 Hellfire



The sound of string harmonics hung above the stage like the planes flying high above this incantation of Dresden. The stage was covered in rubble and as the lights came up three distinct forms could be seen huddling in the corner staring out at the audience. As these characters stared into the souls of those sitting uncomfortably in tuxedos and thousand-dollar dresses, a moment of surreal panic flooded the hall. It was as if the soldiers had picked up the Bushnell and had transported it through time and space back to Dresden near the end of the second great war.

Bud Hudsucker was no longer Franklin Pettricone, but a living and breathing soldier trying to desperately find his way out of Dresden. But this wasn't Vonnegut's Dresden, but something screaming of brimstone and the chalky outlines of the not-to-distant future Hiroshima. It was an amalgamation of fear and death, and the backdrop cried out from the sixteenth century. Indeed, the background was not some modern-art colossus of expressionist blood, but the giant expanded imaginings of the gothic mind.

The Garden of Earthly Delights and all its subbasements...

All the corners were black like a bear's fur. From the infinite darkness sprang the fires and images of hell, distorted and contorted through the prism of a distant dogma. The buildings in the upper corners were all on fire, and below, as if escaping the blaze of suffering were all the grotesqueries that have ever been imagined. There was a set of ears with a knife sticking out from them, and an upper-half of what looked like a porcelain torso, with arms that shot down through the earth like the trunks of great trees.

And below the torso was the path that Bud, John, and Leonard were traveling. The path out of Dresden and fire and through the bestiary vocabulary of Satan.

Abandon all hope.

Etc.

They were huddled in an old, dilapidated music shop. The low rumble of percussion and found objects adding to the unnerving reality of the music. An ondes Martenot spun like a demented harp. Below the stage Pascal Baur and his orchestra were summoning up the sounds of hell through a frenzy of sticks and bows, unadorned mouthpieces and the uniqueness of untrained voices. The bastardization of music was the metaphor with which Baur painted his war.

Reds and greens and shit brown. Yellow.

From the pit a police siren sprung to life, the piercing tone rising and falling, mimicked by the strings and timpani. An oboe and clarinet played a heterophonic duet of Mephistophelean mirth, with the oboe adding myriad grace notes and sliming her way through the melody, the pitch beating through the air like the props from old fighter planes. Bud listened to the air and waited for the sounds to clear.

“Let’s move,” he growled, springing to his feet and dragging along Leonard and John as they crossed through a building and came upon a fresh ditch that had been filled with water. The ditch was quite wide, and in the center was a capsized rowboat. Chained to the boat was the torso (or at least Bud thought it was only a torso) of a plump naked woman. The water surrounding the boat was significantly darker, as if mixed with crude oil. At the far end of the ditch was a second boat with a rudder but no oars. Bud, Leonard and John passed around the field-sized puddle and inspected the boat. It looked

like it had not been there for long, and Bud worried that there could be soldiers or refugees nearby. After seeing the torso, he didn't care who they were, but knew it would be best to keep hidden and away.

“What the fuck happened to her?” Leonard whispered.

“No idea,” John replied.

“What kind of bastard would cut her in half like that?”

Bud gave them both a stern look of silence. Hush you bastards or else you just might find out, he thought.

A rustling sound came from what looked like an old police station. John and Leonard crouched near the boat and aimed their rifles. Bud swiftly ducked behind a brick corner and silently removed his revolver from its holster. It was a Lugar that he had taken from one of the dead guards at the prison. He only had five bullets left, but it would be easier to swing around the corner than his rifle.

The sound ceased, but then returned, a little louder and with more definition. Whatever or whoever it was was getting closer to the front door. Bud pulled back the hammer of the pistol and held his breath.

He thought back to his training, prep school, Christmas at his grandfather's mansion near Providence. His hand needed to be steady and in order to achieve this he needed to find a thought and hold onto it. Something mundane and uncomplicated. He felt like one of the lost boys finding a happy thought, something that would help him fly away from this nightmare.

Christmas with Papa and Pop-pop (if his great-grandfather was alive would he be pup-pup?) was never complicated. A lot was expected, but nothing was ever sprung upon

him like sniper fire from the trees. His father would finish his work at the downtown offices in Boston usually the same day as the employee Christmas party. He would come home that evening smelling of cigars and booze and bring young James (he was after all James Hudsucker IV) a few sweets that were left over from the candy dish at his secretary's desk. James would devour them greedily, always asking for more, and his father would instruct him on temperance and if not abided by, moral turpitude. The lecture from a man reeking of whiskey was never ironic to James. He would sit through his father's lesson and then ask if he could pack for the trip to Pop-pop's. His father would sit and think on it, as if it was one of his major business decisions. Finally, with much strenuous effort he would tell James he could pack and that they would leave in the morning.

“Just don't forget to pack your socks, Bud,” he would conclude, the same every time.

James became Bud slowly over many Christmases. His father had always used the term endearingly, but in a house filled with three James, all the son of another James, it became necessary to differentiate between them. So James II would go by Dad or Pop-pop, James III by son, James or Papa, and James IV by Bud. Later, in a fit of boyhood rebellion, he would stick to the name to avoid giving his father the satisfaction of labeling him. He would refuse to answer to James and soon enough the servants, not feeling anyway about it, ceased using his given name altogether. They thought it was funny that the young man would wish away such a distinguished name for something that rhymed and sounded like a joke from a Marx Brothers' film.

Christmas with James II and III steadied his hand as a small figure appeared in the doorway of the police station. The far-off flames were dim and the only thing that seemed to be illuminated under the giant blanket that emerged was a puff of golden hair. The blanket-covered figure gingerly came down the steps and Bud saw two delicate bare feet grimace with each step on the scattered rubble. The bare feet led up two female legs and finally to the golden mane. Bud knew this lioness and was surprised that she had managed to escape the camp as well.

“Mags,” he called from behind the bricks. She turned toward the empty wall and he dropped low, peering around the corner from barely a foot off the ground, not yet sure if she was one to be trusted.

“Who is that?” she called.

Mags had raised her hand to the golden locks and was trying to find him among the rubble. She stepped forward, her body moving like a sloth, her mud-covered legs quaking and wobbly, bare up until the light stole their luminescence. She was still moving slowly toward Bud when Leonard slung a rock from behind the boat and hit her in the right leg. She jumped up as if something had bit her and reached down to touch the wound. Her leg had started to bleed and her hand was glowing crimson. John and Leonard emerged from behind the boat and took aim with their rifles.

“Don’t move bitch,” John said, the pompousness of the clergy entirely removed from his voice.

Bud watched them approach her from different angles and was momentarily proud as if a father teaching his kids to hunt wild game. Mags looked shook up, but she had been one of the wildest guards at the prison camp and he knew she had a penchant for

deception. Too many other prisoners had made the mistake of assuming her weak because she was a woman, and too many others had assumed other things because of the way she exuded her sexuality. Although only a guard and not a sergeant or warden, Bud had always felt that she did whatever she wanted and got whatever she desired. Margaret Steegmuller had been one evil woman in a time of unheard of atrocities.

“Mags, you have shit for stealth.”

Bud turned the corner with his gun doing his best Peter Lorre impersonation. He nodded approvingly at Leonard and John, waving his pistol at Mags, leading her back toward the police station steps. She sat down obediently, removing the blanket from her head and revealing a dirty and scratched face, three fresh lines running from her right eye socket around her cheek and down to her chin.

“How’d ya get that?” Bud asked, motioning toward the fresh scar with his gun.

She smiled and Bud felt the warmth of the moment leave his body. “I got it,” she answered with a knowing control that worried Bud, “taking care of some of the loose ends before disbanding the internment station.”

“You mean you got it when the fucking camp got bombed.”

“I mean what I say.” Her English was fiery and angry, the same way the German language always sounded to Bud. He removed his helmet and ran his free hand through his greasy, long hair. He wanted to remain collected and not let Mags know that she was getting to him.

“John, Leonard, what do you think we should do with her?”

The two men with rifles looked scared to death. They still had the weapons raised, but looked less likely to pull the trigger than they had a few moments before.

Leonard had always seemed superstitious in the way Bud thought all Indians were. And John, well he was religious so that was basically the same thing. This little act of Mags was crawling under their skins, and it didn't help that the skyline was ablaze and there was a severed torso within eyesight.

"You responsible for that?" Bud asked, motioning with his gun toward the woman's torso in the middle of the pond.

"Maybe," she replied, shrugging as if not able to recall how many bodies she had severed in half. Bud knew that he shouldn't have asked that question, that she would use it to further intimidate John and Leonard. He was worried because she seemed to be stalling. Were there more guards around that they didn't know about? Hadn't most of them died in the initial bombing? He had seen their quarters explode and knew that most had to have been in sleeping. It had been the middle of the night.

The bewitching hour...

Mags pulled a chunk of meat out from under her blanket and took a giant bite. The juices seeped down her dirty cheeks and left slightly cleaner trails that looked like an estuary that met at the dimple in her chin. She took another bite and chewed loud and clumsily, her mouth open with each chomp. Bud watched the meat grind between her small, dirty teeth, sinewy strips tearing apart and slithering down her tongue until she felt ready to swallow. The whole display was disgusting and Bud felt his stomach churn over and his bowels fill with urgency. His intestines squeezed with pain and Bud worried he would shit his pants.

"Watch her," he pleaded, his stomach further turning with each word spoken and he rushed out behind the brick wall that had secluded him moments before. He found a

large slab of wall and undid his belt and yanked down his pants with the utmost urgency. He had barely gotten his posterior over the edge of the slab when his stomach turned for the third and final time and his bowels emptied sloppily over the pile of rubble and shingles that lay two feet below the edge. Bud let out a loud sigh and braced himself for a second wave of revulsion.

I shit on the Third Reich, he thought, trying to make light of his unfortunate situation. He felt embarrassed and slightly worried that John and Leonard might let Mags go while he was indisposed. Why had his stomach revolted against him at such an inopportune time? He tried to go through the scenario again but the mere recollection seemed to trigger his sphincter into another wave of evacuation.

Where did she get the meat? he suddenly thought.

Bud jumped up in fright and slid up his pants. He wiped his hands on his knees and ran back around toward where he had left Leonard and John. Left them with her.

Three men wearing faded and torn Nazi uniforms had surrounded John and Leonard and were now holding all the rifles. Mags was still sitting on the step, licking her fingers and chewing the last few bites of the slab of meat. Who's slab? he thought. What was it?

“You would be kind enough to hand your pistol and rifle over to Jon here. Look, Jon is guarding John, that is funny.” Mags laughed, spitting up small pieces of meat into the air. Her dirty teeth smiled and he knew what she was.

“You fucking bitch, you're a can...”

One of the Nazis had come up from behind and hit him in the head. He was out but still his mouth managed to finish the sentence. Maybe he did remember finishing it,

but his subconscious blocked it out because it was too horrific. Either way, he fell to the floor and his mind was black before the last word finished ringing around the scattered debris like an echo that didn't know to stop.

...nibal.

John and Leonard heard the complete sentence, and for the second time since escaping John pissed himself. Both men were crying and Mags annoyingly signaled to her soldiers and with two quick strikes they had both been knocked out.

Bud, John and Leonard awoke inside the police station. Mags was gone but the three men remained. Once all three had regained consciousness, they gestured for them to stand up and start moving. John and Leonard looked at Bud, who nodded, defeated and worried about what would happen next.

The men in the faded, torn Nazi uniforms led them through a series of halls until they emerged into what had previously been an antique music instrument shop. On the walls still hung various harps, viols, sackbuts, but the center of the store—which no doubt had held more instruments as well as sheet music—had been cleared out and replaced with a giant grotesque throne. It was made of a light ash wood and was circular with four long and spindly legs. The three guards each grabbed a shoulder of an American and pushed him toward the center of the floor. John and Leonard both fell into heaps of fear, but Bud only dropped to one knee. The guard that was forcing him down, a big brute with dyed blond hair and gnarly teeth pulled back his rifle and socked Bud across the face. Blood sprayed across the faces of John and Leonard and Bud fell to the floor, his head spinning and resolve about gone.

“Bud, are you alright?” John asked, his voice barely able to produce more than a whimper.

Bud curled up and wished it would all go away. He closed his eyes and prayed for a voice to call out to him, “James,” not Bud. Bud was now as good as dead. How he wished that James could just dream himself out of the devil’s band room and away on a train to Providence or Boston or even upstate New York. Anywhere but Dresden and this lampoonish collection of humanity.

“Bud.” John was distraught, and needed Bud to answer.

“Where are we?” Bud asked, his hope that some thought into the situation might get their minds off of Mags and what they saw.

Who was it? Bud thought. His mind was now deep into his own heart of darkness and he tried to remember how they had gotten away from the demented Kurtz. His eyes searched the walls for some glimmer of hope. The instruments could be used as a weapon, he thought, maybe something that could stab. He found a long tubicen trumpet that might be able to be used like a spear, but he wasn’t sure he could get over the harpsichord and to it in time. The guards had gone but Bud felt that they were still not alone, as if there were still eyes watching him. The room was dark and they could not see all the walls.

Leonard and John watched Bud take account of their surroundings. He was now their everything, and both understood that Bud was their only shot out of here. John was silently mouthing the Lord’s Prayer and pausing after the first line so that He knew that John really meant it.

Deliver me from evil.

But it was another biblical quote that came from the darkness.

“Let there be light...”

A flint struck and Mags’ face appeared above the dancing flame of the lighter. She reached up and lit a torch and the room erupted in light. The light seemed to bounce off the walls and fill every space of the endless room. The sudden brightness took all by surprise and when Bud’s eyes had adjusted he found himself staring at his own reflection in a mirror. Mags had rigged the room like an old Egyptian tomb to reflect the small amount of light all over. Bud looked around and found that the instruments that weren’t the only things nailed to the walls. There were bodies, some crucified, others impaled and dismembered. Most were dead, but some were still alive, wallowing and screaming out in pain, having been awoken by the bright light of their otherwise dark and demented captor.

“Like my little chamber?” Mags asked, smiling and happy.

“You’re fucking insane,” Bud replied, wondering exactly when it was that she lost her mind.

“Really, you think so? I think I’m just, what do you call it, evolved as your Darwin would say.” Her face was ashy and the fresh scars glowed in the torchlight. Bud thought she had lost all the noxious beauty that had infuriated him in the camp. How he had secretly desired her, as had everyone else. Now, like a banana peeled, he was staring at a something that was more of a grotesque than a woman.

“I am the ant queen,” she said, as if reading his mind. She reached over to her throne and produced a giant ushanka and put it on her head. The hat had lost the softness of fur and looked like repeated coatings of blood like lacquer had left it more cylindrical

and solid than it would normally be. She wore the hat like some sort of crown and once again produced a large slice of meat from beneath her coat. This time there was no mistaking where the meat came from, and she used the hand like some sort of handle, rotating the forearm like a corncob and tearing into the meat. Bud rose and thought about grabbing the trumpet, but fear got him and he just started running. John and Leonard tried to rise and follow him, but were pinned down by two of Mags' guards. The third, the one with the dyed blonde hair, watched the two for a second excited as they hacked at John and Leonard with the bayonets from their rifles, blood flying all over the face of Mags and the two men. But Mags was not basking in the blood as normal. She turned to the dyed blonde soldier and screamed, "What are you waiting for, go after him."

Bud had made it out of the labyrinth and was hiding around a corner when the dyed blonde man caught up. Bud pulled his knife out of the ankle holster and sliced the blonde man in the throat. He turned and lunged at Bud, his blood fanning out from below his chin. Bud pushed him aside and swung his knife at him wildly, catching him in the hand. The knife got caught on bone and Bud lost his grip as the blond soldier fell to the ground. Bud watched the blood spray up and down onto the man's face. He heard the screams of John and Leonard behind him but he couldn't make his body turn around. For the rest of his life Bud would assure himself that it was the hand of God pushing him toward an exit, that he was absolved because the men were already dead. He would never tell anyone of the events, not even the American soldiers who would find him wandering toward Berlin two days later. This was his own hell and he would feel that the greatest thing he ever did for anyone was not telling them about Mags and the lair of the ant queen.

Bud turned away from the blonde soldier was startled by the discovery of even more bodies. They were strewn throughout the hallway and a few feet away it looked like a nun was tending to the departed. Bud closed in, his fists clenched even for a nun.

“Hello,” he whispered.

The habit turned toward him and let out a sloppy oink. It was a giant pig dressed in nun’s clothing. It was busy eating the face off of a corpse. Bud revolted in horror at the discovery of edible meat feasting on the decayed flesh of human beings. Later, when people would ask if he knew what the holocaust was like, he would nod silently. He had seen the epitome of the Nazi fever in the hands of a woman and a swine as they dined in hell on the souls of the unfortunate.

The music was a mass of unorganized (yet tightly organized) sound. The pit seemed to be moaning labored and decadent grunts, slowing as the light faded and the wails diminished. The audience was aghast and the unpleasant sounds of women dry heaving into napkins trickled through the audience. Baur had been adamant that there should be a warning label to the work, that it was as dark as anything previously written.

The music ended and the stomachs settled, but no one screamed out in protest.

No one booed. In fact, there was only a splatter of clapping and most of the crowd moved out slowly, as if in a processional for a wake. Baur beamed from the pit. He knew that this sort of reaction might come. In fact, he had wanted them to fester, to feel unease at the thought of the atrocities of war. He wanted the audience to go home and get physically ill the next time they heard about an American invasion of some communist country. Not that he cared one bit about the communists, but rather he cared about the innocents that die in the quest for what was really nothing more than

economics. It was a battle between a group of people that wanted to share everything equally and a group that wanted to allow anyone to get whatever they could. And ironically, it was the latter that always talked about all men being equal..

Franklin and Claudia were both waiting backstage for Baur. He shuffled by the large battery of percussion and found the two still clad in their outfits. Claudia, with her darkened eyes and rouge face looked quite unnerving. Before rehearsals had started Baur had asked her if she really wanted the role of Mags, or if she'd rather take a gig she had been offered with the Vermont Opera. They were doing *Carmen* and he knew she would be great for the part. Baur and Claudia had talked about the role, about the demand and whether the atrocities written by him and committed by her would strain their relationship. In the end she agreed that if he could live with her immersion for a few weeks into the character then she thought they'd be fine. Baur had never heard of anyone dealing with such strain during a production, but he wasn't sure he had ever heard of any operas that involved such an incantation of pure evil. A week in he had confessed that he had been worried that as she became more entrenched in the character that she might become uneasy with the thought that his psyche had been able to create such a monster.

"I love you, and I know you, and just because you can take yourself to such a dark place doesn't alter anything about who you are the rest of the time."

Her words had been comforting, and now, she was standing with Franklin, her make-up grotesque and fierce as if she had put it on during hurricane winds. She had weathered the storm of opening night, and he could see in her slightly lopsided smile that she was happy to see him.

"I thought it went really well."

Franklin nodded in agreement, his face preoccupied with other thoughts. He was rocking slowly side to side, his cracked brown shoes swaying like waves in a dank swamp. Baur wondered if he had found Tony yet. He wondered how badly Tony was hurt and if he'd be pressing charges against Franklin.

“What did you think Franklin?” Baur asked, trying to show his concern in his voice.

“I thought it went really well also, but I'm not sure if the audience understood all the background that was in the first act. They laughed a few times when there really wasn't a joke...kinda like they were uncomfortable. Don't you think?”

Claudia looked at Franklin a little worried for the big guy. He had nearly told her about Tony and the virus, but had held back. He didn't want to burden her with such horrible news. But she still knew that he was hurting, that he was harboring a secret that he didn't want her to know. Baur looked back and forth between the two, tired and not sure what was going to happen to the talented tenor. His mind paced from the fire alarm to the end of the opera. He had turned after the overture and had seen Morriss Greenberg, the large FBI agent, near the front of the mezzanine. That the man had decided to stick around felt ominous to Baur, and he worried that another confrontation was imminent.

A buzz of commotion was swirling around the three pillars of the show. Many touched and patted as they passed, hands trying to maneuver in for congratulatory handshakes or a grip as to reel in a hug. The three were tired and happy, but each carried a secret worry that the evening still had more in store for them. Claudia too had seen Morriss, had felt the momentary magnetism of his pin-stripe suit and shiny shoes. She

had considered finding him before the house cleared, but resisted. Her swollen make-up gave the impression of death and malady, and she did not want him to think of her like that. She didn't quite understand why she felt attracted to Morriss, but for the first time since she had met Pascal, Claudia felt the whimpering pangs of regret and the soft whisper of "what if?". What if he was waiting with flowers? What if he was the one she should be with? To think, even fleetingly, of her time with Pascal as a mistake frightened her. The smeared make-up on her face stayed in place as a single tear crept down toward her lips.

The three stood there, silently thinking and planning. The Bushnell slowly performed its own decrescendo, as all things eventually do, and within twenty minutes the place was empty and silent.

Scene 6



Franklin stood impatiently by the curtain. The last of the audience had long since left and the auditorium had a ghostly emptiness. The pall of the set made Franklin feel as if the Bushnell had been shelled by bombs and was teetering on the brink of total collapse. During depressing daydreams like that the architecture of the hall looked ludicrous. The balcony seemed to hang from the edges, with almost a perceptible dip toward the middle, like it was bowing toward the orchestra seats. The luxury boxes on the sides looked like the tattered remnants of wrecking balls. The few small cough drop wrappers that littered the floor gave it an ancient, abandoned quality that was not hindered by the slightly cracked ceiling. Above, Franklin could see the better angels of man watching down, the night sky luminous and the moon full, oh Pierrot must be out causing mischief. Only a few stars were able to sneak out of the thick coat of blackish-blue paint and the clouds were almost black and looked like slicks of oil. It was if the Sistine Chapel was the day and now the sun had set. And with it the luminous discovery of awaiting faces down below.

He stood on a small black X. It was his spot for the long aria in the second act. It was an aria about dedication and responsibility. Bud is trying to get Leonard and John to go back for James Hampton, a character that was prominent in act one but then is injured during the escape and left behind. John and Leonard are too frightened to retread their steps and save their fallen friend. Bud threatens to leave them and go back alone. Eventually he discovers that he too is afraid, but not to return. He is afraid to escape, to leave, and is trying to find a way to stay. Bud doesn't understand this, but recognizes the

contradictory nature in himself. In the end they leave James behind, and it is this act that will eventually give Bud the courage to escape from Mags' Lair. Franklin was not entirely sure he understood all of it, but like his character it had a true feeling when he tried to enact it. Baur had often told him that he was not sure what kind of opera character Bud Hudsucker was, that he was not really a hero, even a tragic one. Franklin felt that Bud Hudsucker was just a man, and that his frailties and faults were some of the most interesting things in the opera.

From Bud, Franklin's mind raced to Tony. He had been unable to forget their confrontation for even a second, but felt that his immersion into the character might be some sort of coping mechanism for what he faced. The thought of impending death was dramatic and a little hyperbolic. But, nonetheless, it was a real possibility with the potential killer of the human race. Such dreary thoughts haunted the waking moments of Franklin's night. He had tried to sleep after the show, but had been kept awake due to the adrenaline of the performance and the impending crash of Tony's disastrous news. It had just become so much work to hold it together, he thought. And with this thought Franklin, somewhat masochistically, reminded himself of all the times he had whined for drama, for something truly catastrophic to occur within his circle of existence, and now, like Scrooge at the grave of Tiny Tim, he cried out within his soul to relinquish such thoughts, to give them up cold and allow his body to forget the true drama that it now beheld. Franklin, spinning down the drain of his own demise, for the first time felt truly alone. He had beaten mercilessly his one love. Tony, he whined, his head exhausted with reminiscing, why Tony, why did you do this to me?

A lingering memory of Christmas in Vermont. Tony sitting by the fire, shirtless, a six-pack of beer on ice in a bucket with a hotel's label faded on the side. The bed and breakfast must have stolen it from the Holiday Inn a few miles down the road, Franklin had joked. They had checked in separately, scared of possible local retaliation. But that first night at dinner they had not been hassled. Burlington seemed to be a friendly place, a safe haven in a world that seemed to loathe and hate them. Tony had sat there shirtless, and for a brief second Franklin had not felt the pressure of a world that did not think they were compatible, and he had gone over and kissed Tony passionately and wondered how anyone who witnessed such a moment could not think it the most natural thing in the world.

But that Christmas in Vermont was now just a memory like any other. He waited in the empty Bushnell auditorium for Baur to arrive and help him make sense of what to do next. Franklin was sure it was Tony who had pulled the fire alarm right before the afternoon rehearsal. The evacuation had left dread in his chest like a lingering cold. What had been the message Tony was trying to send? Franklin was not sure, but the macabre nature of the opera, coupled with his explosive assault of his former lover, had left the night open to anything. He was the artist now betwixt with a bout of deep depression and longing. This Symphony Fantastique of horrors was grinding to a halt and the *idée fixe* that remained was malformed and grotesque. It was the Witch's Sabbath and he was being roasted alive by the guilt of choices not made and love lost.

The ghastly call of vicious double reeds echoed throughout the auditorium of his mind. Franklin stood hastily and waited, his mind dreaming of cracked, falling concrete and absolute silence. His life, he thought, should have, could have been different. He

could have lived happily ever after with a nice boy from Wichita or Denver. As the spiraling continued Franklin started to second-guess every choice he had ever made. It was the kind of thing that was maddening to experience. To not have the courage to even admit that you were glad to have lived your life. Franklin was on the precipice.

He was wearing all black, a turtleneck and slacks. His hair was still slick with grease from the performance, but he had combed it into a more modern look. He waited, knowing that Baur would be there shortly as he had promised. In his hand he had a small duffle bag full of bloody clothes. The evidence of my guilt, he thought, his mind punishing itself for choices made and not. Franklin left the taped line of the performance and sat down at the edge of the stage, his legs wadding into the pit like a young child into a swimming pool. He placed the bag on the edge of the pit and watched as it dangled, half on, half off. He wanted to push it off and follow it, but lacked the courage to do anything. He was there waiting, indecisive.

Straddling the line between the pit and the light.

A sound came from behind the red door and Franklin turned like a spooked deer. He quietly lifted his legs and bobbed to his feet. As he got to the shadows his black attire blended him in and he seamlessly disappeared. The stage was quiet with anticipation as the door creaked open. Not for dramatic effect, but more because it was an old, heavy door that required a good amount of shoulder to get moving.

Out of the door came Pascal and Claudia. They were mirthful and oblivious like two people in love. Pascal was still wearing his tails from the performance, but Claudia (almost as fast as possible) had changed from her costume into an interesting outfit of

acid-washed jeans and a purple jacket with large shoulder pads. She had on a frilly, tan blouse that was cut very low and Baur was having trouble not staring at her cleavage.

The red door closed and they gathered in the center of the stage. Franklin assumed that Baur was there to meet him as they had arranged, but was unsure why he had brought Claudia along. He was still embarrassed (embarrassed was too weak of a word, he thought) to tell her the situation, and he cringed with worry wondering if Baur had already spilled the beans.

“So you are meeting Franklin here?” she asked.

Baur nodded, looking around as if he knew someone was watching.

“Why?” she asked, a little irritated that he was hesitant to speak in the empty theatre. It gave the situation more gravitas than she was comfortable with, and when he did things like that she really felt the age difference between them widen to almost an unreachable divide.

“I’m here to help him with Tony.”

“Why? What happened?”

Baur ran his hand along his hairline, a nervous tick that Claudia recognized as one of his stalling tactics.

“Is everything okay? What happened between Franklin and Tony?” Claudia was growing worried, and wanted, like a child having a band-aid removed, to have it pulled as quick as possible to avoid elongating the misery.

“Franklin and Tony had a falling out,” Pascal said, his tone still hesitant. “I cannot tell you anything else as it is not my business. Kind of like Doctor-Patient confidentiality. When Franklin gets here you may ask him.”

Claudia folded her arms, her bracelets clumping together toward her wrists. The arms around her chest pushed and enhanced her breasts even more, and Baur stared at them lustfully. Claudia noticed and curtsied slightly, her upper torso bending over to give her husband a good look. He smiled at her and reached out his hand. She unfolded her arms and took it, rubbing his ring finger gently and absent-mindedly. Pascal took her hand and maneuvered in for a kiss. It was deep and passionate, as if she knew his worries about the FBI agent and was assuaging his fears. Pascal held her tight, knowing that regardless of what happened, he could always have this happy moment. He opened his eyes slowly and saw a single tear on her cheek. He lifted his right hand and lifted the tear off her face. It spread upon his finger but he did not reach down to wipe off his hand, he merely held it, wet but connected, and felt the warmth of her breathing on his neck.

As Pascal looked again to his wet finger, now outstretched, almost pointing toward the opposite side of the stage from where they had come in, he saw Barbara watching from the shadows. She had an anxious stance and her hands were knotted together, clenching a piece of fabric. Her eyes shook as she tried to communicate silently with Baur. She was pleading with him to send Claudia away so they could talk. Baur understood her fear, but was not sure how to get Claudia to leave.

From his spot in the shadows, Franklin could not see Barbara, and she could not see him.

Claudia leaned into his chest and started kissing his arm. Baur watched as she made her way from his bicep out to his elbow, and worried that as she followed his arm to his finger he would see Barbara. Preemptively, he pulled his arm in and wrapped her up, spinning her counter-clockwise and into his arms. His hand was on her waist and

they were both facing out into the empty theatre. He started kissing her neck, pulling back the collar of the purple jacket and running his still-damp finger a few inches down her spine. She shivered at the moist touch and turned into his arms. He held her tight and gave her two successive squeezes, something he almost did unconsciously as a symbol of his affection.

“Claudia, I don’t know when Franklin is going to get here, but how about you go back to my office and wait for me? It’s pretty chilly and I don’t want you to get sick.”

She brought her face out of his warm chest and kissed him once on his dimpled chin. “That sounds okay. But only if you tell me that Franklin is okay? He is, isn’t he?”

Pascal paused and she could feel his measured breathing cease. “I’ll make sure he is fine and come find you and tell you everything,” he said.

“I love you Pascal.”

“I love you too, my laude.”

Claudia squeezed him tight, much like what he always would do to her, and entangled herself from his arms. She walked slowly, wistfully toward the double doors that lead to Pascal’s office and the make-up and costume departments. He watched her leave, thinking happily of her rosy cheeks and supple breasts. He found himself a little aroused when Barbara emerged from the shadows, her *notes inégales* informing him of her approach.

On the opposite side Franklin prepared to walk out as well, but then noticed that the costume mistress was not passing through. He had never seen Baur and Barbara interact, and was unsure what this could mean. Surely, he thought, this was not some sort

of ridiculous affair. Intrigued, he slipped back into the shadows and allowed this new scene to play itself out.

Baur turned to face Barbara. The piece of cloth in her hand was white, with frills like an ornate handkerchief. He could not tell if she was here to show him some fabric or if it was just a red herring. Barbara's hair was up and held in place by two silver knitting needles and as she stopped in front of him she removed one of the needles and stabbed it through the lacey piece of fabric. Baur jerked back, unsure where her hostility was headed.

“This I find in your wife's dressing room.”

Pascal cocked his head to the side and looked at her as if from a different angle, as if she was out of phase. He shrugged his shoulders and raised his left hand, rotating it toward an open palm as if asking her to please explain the outburst.

Barbara huffed. “I find this in her dressing room, but not from you.”

Pascal smiled. “It's a piece of fabric, not a love note or unmentionables, or anything. I trust my wife.”

“I've seen her with him. She laughs and flirts and bats eyes and he smiles. No good.”

“Aunt Arisa, you need to be calm. The FBI agent was here but will shortly be gone. No one is a suspect. Nothing has been confirmed or even hinted at. This will not be a problem if you simply relax.”

“I have been at this for long time. I know when to relax and when to run. We need to be careful. I tell you how the government allowed your wife to die. She, did

done nothing wrong and they come in—kill her. She was doing an innocent thing, cooking pasta, and then suddenly is dead. These men are not to be trust. Danger.”

Franklin listened incredulously to their conversation. It was as if the two people he knew had been removed and replaced with complete strangers. Pascal he trusted like a father, and had never suspected any sort of subversion or inconsistency in his behavior. Barbara was a strange duck, but Franklin had trouble believing that her and Baur were somehow related. What was this Aunt Arisa stuff?

The temperature in the dark seemed to rise. Franklin could feel the sweat pool around his brow and feared that the shimmer would alert the two to his presence. He was suddenly frightened of Pascal and Barbara, as if they were capable of all the despicable atrocities he could imagine. His own problems disappeared with the realization that he was witnessing treason. Franklin, who had been lamenting his certain demise only a few minutes before, now feared for his life at the hands of cutthroat spies.

Pascal was shaking his head, somewhat annoyed with the short costume mistress. He reached out and ripped the fabric out of her hand and tore it to pieces. This time she stepped back as if he would strike her next. Baur pocketed the scraps and squared up to his aunt, his neck pulsing with adrenaline.

“Why do you constantly think she is playing me for a fool?”

Barbara shrugged then sliced the knitting needle through the empty air. “She are is younger and she is too happy when not around you.” Barbara looked up as if counting in her head. “She keeps to herself and does not give up her friends. She is not good for you; she does ruin what is here. She will get you discovered.”

Barbara was frantic, her control of the English language growing looser as her agitation rose. Franklin had always snickered at her confusion of tenses and verbs, but never had he heard it like this—and been that terrified.

Baur dismissed her. “Please. You are talking nonsense. She does not know anything and is completely happy with how things are. I don’t really even do anything. Just a few notes here and there. What does it matter if it’s a C or a C#? I can make both work. You showed me the messages being sent and I know they are not deadly. No one will die. It’s just what we know, so they know what we know, big deal. We probably do the same to know what they know.”

Franklin watched the two argue. He didn’t think Baur saw it, but when he mentioned was talking about notes and messages, Franklin saw Barbara roll her eyes, as if he had no idea what he was talking about. Franklin had trouble believing Baur to be nefarious, but Barbara he could suddenly imagine, as if a veil had been lifted and her true nature revealed. In her Franklin saw the pain of loss and the intention of infliction to others. She must be using him, he thought. It must be all Barbara—Pascal is just a dupe, a pawn in a much more evil enterprise.

Franklin thought about approaching them. He had regained some of his composure and felt that if he interceded he might be able to help Baur out. After all that had happened today, Franklin felt like it time he got a little lucky. But first he needed to spook Barbara. They were arguing quietly again and Franklin picked a penny out of his pocket and threw it toward the red door. It struck it and the sound filled the hall. Both Baur and Barbara jumped, scanning the back of the stage terrified. Barbara slowly crept

back toward the shadows and disappeared. Franklin stood still and listened. A door closed softly on the left side of the stage. She was gone.

Baur remained on stage, his hands up as if preparing to defend himself. Franklin stepped from the shadow in which he was hiding and nodded solemnly to Baur. Baur was still looking at the door and realized that there was no way Franklin could have gotten to where he was unless he had been there the whole time. Meticulously, he scanned back through his memory for any incriminating statements or implications. His face returned to a prescient look and then dropped with sorrow. Franklin must have heard everything, and to Baur this was the worst situation he could have imagined.

“How long have you been standing there?” he asked.

Franklin thought about it. “How long have you been a traitor?” he responded.

“It’s not like that. I just send messages. It helps keep tensions down. If they thought we were deadlier than we are there could be a war. I’m simply doing what I can to keep the violence from happening.”

“Really?” Franklin was starting to get angry at such coy answers. “You really think what you are doing is helping our country defeat the USSR? What the fuck do you think you are doing, tricking them? Are you a double-agent or some bullshit like that?”

Baur could feel the loathing ooze from Franklin. The same man that had beat his lover to a pulp earlier today was now chastising him for his lack of moral certitude. Baur was not sure if attacking him was the right tactic, but his heart was pumping fast and he was having trouble holding back his emotions.

“Franklin, listen, there is a good explanation...”

Franklin interrupted him. “Really? What the fuck Pascal? Really...”

Franklin had stepped back and had his back foot planted as if ready for a fight. Baur about made a crack about how he must be used to fighting by now, but held back. He was the kind of person who always held back—words, actions, inhibitions. Pascal Baur was reserved and stoic in every part of his life. He was sweating and could feel the heat of his body preparing for a fight that had never happened. He could remember many times in his youth standing before another boy in the playground. The young boy would make remarks about his mother or father, some joke about his name, call him a Baur Cower or something original like that. But he had never swung at another in anger, never struck out. He had always held it in, reserved, thoughtful and diligent, and had never been pushed past his boiling point. Often he wondered if he even had one. He was like tungsten or some other metal that would stay solid even in the worst infernos. But maybe his time had come. Maybe all this combined had finally pushed him over and it was time to erupt.

Pascal held his fist clenched, tight. Franklin too, was in a holding pattern, waiting for Baur to make his move. Neither could succinctly remember how it had gotten to this point so fast, but an impasse had been reached and one or the other would need to push through it. Baur looked over toward the curtain and saw Barbara waiting in the wings. She had snuck back in and was gauging what needed to be done. There was a momentary recognition between Pascal and Arisa, as if all their secrets were exposed and perusable. He could see through her charade and understood what she was about to do. He turned to Franklin, his face contorted into something more like panic than anger, although to Franklin it looked like a scared push toward him. Baur screamed and Franklin lunged at him, his shoulders down and his large legs pushing off the ground. From above, in slow-

motion (or at least that's what it would seem like later) came the opening splinters of a crackling symphony. The sound started high and quickly glided down as the pieces became bigger. A chain reaction. Baur looked up as he moved toward the wing and leaped at the last second. He landed on his back and watched as the entire back wall, nearly one ton of wood, metal and props, came crashing down onto the stage. He closed his eyes and, as he had been taught by his mother, he prayed.

Scene 7



Baur's office light was off when Claudia knocked. She wasn't sure why she would think he would be sitting in the dark, but felt the need to make sure she did not walk in on her husband unannounced. Her head was spinning with the newfound knowledge of Franklin's confrontation with Tony, the fight, and his possible infection. She had been walking back to his office as she had promised when she had seen Tony lurking near the emergency exit. Even in the dim light she had noticed the swelling and blackness around his eyes and nose. And when he finally talked he sounded like he had a pound of gauze in his mouth.

He explained what happened, the fight, his disease, even the fire alarm. To him, Claudia was like a confessional, and it had been quite a long time. Claudia listened, nonjudgmental, but still unnerved by the whole situation. She did not even think to play the game where you hold open your mouth and wait for a chance to talk. It was not the time for such frivolities.

That one of her closest friends might have the bug scared her. She remembered when they had first met, how she had been naïve and thought Franklin attractive in the way that powerful men often are. She had come on to him for no real reason at all and he had been a gentleman and not made a big scene. She thought about how if things were different she might be with him and might also be dealing with infection. Her head was so perturbed that she could hardly even say the name internally, and although she tried, had also been unable to even say the word aloud. AIDS, she thought, her internal voice

like that of a child saying a swear only for the reckless thrill of saying it. How she loathed herself for harboring such callow thoughts.

There was no sound from inside the office so Claudia opened the door and went inside. She fumbled through the dark and found the standing lamp by the filing cabinet. She followed the beveled pole up to the bulb. Her fingers fumbled around the side until they came upon the switch. She pushed in the button and there was light in the room. Why she hadn't just flipped the switch by the door for the overhead fluorescents she wasn't sure. Now just seemed like a time for softer lighting.

The walls were the same musty shade of white as always. Pascal had recently posted a few concert posters near the filing cabinet, but the majority of the office was the seemingly same littered mess it always was. Scores strewn about, loose papers and mail and other materials in large piles on wooden chairs. Pascal kept at least seven chairs in his office, and she knew that a majority of them were only there to be thrones for large piles of papers. He was a messy, neat person.

On the black, matte desk was the usual collection of loose pages of sheet music. Most were for *Hellfire*, although there were a few that were not in Pascal's handwriting. Claudia sat down at the desk and rifled through the random sheets. There were rough drafts that dated from before *Orphée Redux* as well as final pages from only a few weeks ago. It looked like Pascal had just taken a big wad of papers out of his filing cabinet and haphazardly strewn them upon the desk, like a puzzle. Claudia wondered what he was looking for.

She found a sheet that was tattered and old, but had a melody she recognized from *Orphée Redux*. It was part of Lydia's theme. The strange thing was that it was not

Pascal's handwriting. Claudia immediately jumped to the worst conclusion she could think of and wondered if he had stolen the work from someone else. Was he a plagiarist?

There was a name written at the bottom of the foreign sheet. The name looked like "Aleksander", but she was not sure. The k and s were not the way she thought the name was spelled. Also on the page was a time and place. October 3rd, 1985. Claudia remembered that the fifth was the day Pascal proposed, but couldn't remember anything specific about the third. But, if the date was when the page was written, then that eliminated her fear of Pascal stealing someone else's music.

Why she thought him capable of such a thing was surprising. In their year of marriage he had proven to be inexplicably honest, even in the most benign situations. If someone gave him back too much change he would feel guilty and return it. One time he did not notice until he got home, and Claudia had thought that there was no mistake, but Pascal had been insistent, so to be safe he had gone back and tipped the guy double the amount missing. He seemed to be almost perfectly honest at times, so that her brain immediately shot to thoughts of dishonesty made her question whether she had any latent doubts about her husband.

The paper also had a series of numbers that looked somewhat familiar. One set was (0,1,4) and the other was (0,1,3,6). The second set was crossed out and replaced with (0,1,5,6). She remembered a little about set theory from her time at the Hartt School, and thought that maybe they had to do with composition. She knew that Baur used serialism in his work, but didn't know that he had used set theory.

Claudia set down the sheet and flipped through Pascal's handwritten pages for *Hellfire*. There were a few that had been crossed out. They looked to be from the third

act, when Bud, Leonard, and John are trying to escape out of Dresden. The word “Dresden” was crossed out and replaced underneath by a hurried “Hieronymus”. Claudia had not been familiar with *The Garden of Earthly Delights* until she had read his first draft of the opera. He had taken her into New York where it was on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. She remembered the rainy day that they drove down 684 to the Saw Mill and then on the Henry Hudson toward Central Park. Baur had lived in New York for almost a decade and knew the city well. He even had some composer friends who had driven taxis to make ends meet and had learned from them the short cuts that connected the far reaches of the city.

The rain broke as they parked on the 5th avenue. Pascal remarked how lucky they had been to find a spot. The meter still had ten minutes in it, but they put in enough coins for two hours more. This was not a day of sightseeing, he had told her:

“This is a mission to see one of the greatest, most horrifying works of all time.”

Claudia hugged his hand close to her body as they walked down 5th toward the museum. The trees were green and the city had a pungent mid-summer stink. The few times Claudia had been to New York had usually occurred in the fall, so the smell was a new attraction.

“Why does it stink so bad?”

Pascal smiled, the kind of grin that he had often given many tourists asking such questions. “How many times have you been to New York?” he asked.

“A handful, why?”

“When did you come?”

“Usually for an opera in the fall or to skate or shop in the winter.”

The knowing smile widened into a full-out, tooth-flashing face. “It’s a peculiarity of summer here in such a large city.” Pascal stopped walking and turned toward her. “In the fall and winter all the garbage and stuff still goes out, but it’s too cold so anything left on the street or in cracks is somewhat solid and less rank. Then...in the spring and summer, when the sun warms up the alleys and the pavement, those cold slicks of garbage that had not been too bad, well, they heat up and the smell gets much worse.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, and it doesn’t help that there is so much tourism in the summer, and all these hillbillies from Kansas and Oklahoma don’t give a damn and they just throw their trash anywhere on the street.”

“It kind of looks like everyone does that.”

“Well, yeah, but it’s our city, not theirs.”

Pascal was still smiling and he reached out and grabbed her hand again and led her toward the museum. They climbed up the steps that always reminded Pascal of Washington, DC, and went in through the big swinging doors. Inside, the place erupted into a sea of people and ambient noise. The front hall echoed from all corners creating a cacophony of random noise. To Pascal the whole room lit up like a rainbow. So many sounds in so many timbres and pitches, it was like watching the northern lights. Except such sensory overload could only be appreciated for so long, then it would start to be agonizing.

“Let’s get inside,” he suggested, pulling her along toward the donation box.

He put in a dollar for each of them and they crossed over and went up a set of bright red stairs. The sound had diminished and Pascal no longer seemed to be in quite a

hurry. Once in the galleries, the two stayed close, holding hands. Pascal rubbed the outside of her hand absent-mindedly, his fingers swirling into a neat five-four pattern. The Bosch was on a special display near the Egyptian mummies. Claudia stayed in tight to Pascal's body as he maneuvered through collections of people admiring a collection of early Impressionist work. Pascal paused at a drinking fountain outside the Impressionist gallery for a drink, and Claudia went ahead to admire the music room.

Inside the next door was a large collection of old and unique musical instruments. She had been to the museum a few times, and always enjoyed spending time in the music room. The walls were the color of parchment, and it almost felt to her like they were giant canvases for composers to create marvelous works for these rarities. They had at least seven distinct piano-like instruments, including harpsichords and even an organ. One of the pianos was from 1703 and had supposedly been played by Beethoven. Claudia stretched out her hand and allowed it to swim in the latent music that at one time had emanated from the instrument. She imagined the notes still lingering, having grown too soft to be heard. She imagined that if she tried hard enough, listened intently enough, she could hear the memory of Ludwig Van echo throughout the chamber.

Behind her Pascal watched happily. She was an incredible woman and he felt fortunate to have found her when he did. It wasn't when they were holding each other, or having sex that he really felt connected, but when he watched her and felt that he understood what she was thinking. He saw her hand sway with an illusory music and knew she was imagining the owner of that piano performing some great work. From five feet away he could feel her love and warmth for a make-believe scenario, and knew that he was quite a lucky man.

Claudia had finished the first few bars of the second movement of the fifth symphony when she felt the familiar touch of Pascal's hand. He gripped her shoulder firmly through her plaid sundress. She turned and caught a tender look and decided to hug him tight. He held her as well and kissed her on the forehead. "Ready to go to see the Bosch?" he said.

Claudia nodded, as if she was being led through some rite of passage. They passed by some Stradivarius violins and a bone flute from early Greece and out toward the mummies. The painting was in a special exhibit to the west of the enclave. Pascal and Claudia went through it quickly and up a set of stairs. The walls changed from the innocuous tan of below to a disturbing red like the blood-walls of *The Shining*. The air-conditioner was on, but the room still was muggy and Pascal could feel the warmth of other hearts beating fast as they viewed the works. On the wall was black lettering, raised up as if like Braille. Both Pascal and Claudia took their hands and silently traced the words. "To Hell and Back" it said.

"Nothing like Dante and Bosch to make your heart race," Pascal said. Claudia reached her hand down and groped for Pascal's. She found his pocket and then he found her hand. He held it tight and relished the rising temperature of their palms. It was not a day to skirt warmth and sweat, and he enjoyed the feeling of her touching him.

Pascal and Claudia passed by the title display and turned around the tight corner and were enveloped in darkness. It was not pitch black, but the walls were a dark maroon and the lights were soft and dim. Everything about the area seemed dark, but ahead, in the largely empty room was the Bosch, evinced as if bathed in a divine light. The Bours approached in unison, as if heading toward the altar of a holy relic. Pascal headed

immediately toward the right panel, the vision of hell that had led him to create his macabre brushstroke of surrealism. Claudia turned toward the left, excited by the beauty of the heavenly scene. Christ, standing in the center, his hand touching Eve's as if lovers. Adam sitting patiently by, watching the women of his own birth touch another. Claudia was confused by the scene, how the upper corner contained a flock of crows spinning in solitary line, almost making the symbol of infinity. To Claudia, this was not what she imagined when, as a little girl in Sunday school, she learned the finer details of heaven and hell. To her this triptych looked a lot more like a slow progression rather than definitive sides of a coin. She looked over at Pascal and wanted to tell him her thought about the work. He would no doubt have many thoughts, as well as a lot of the history of the work, but she liked that even if he knew she was wrong, he would listen and nod and then slowly lead her toward what he knew to be correct.

Pascal was leaning in, staring at what looked to Claudia like a giant ant king. He was sitting on a spindly-tall, tan chair and wore a cauldron on his head as if the prince of hell. Claudia looked down and saw that Pascal was on the tips of his toes, excited as if seeing the painting itself somehow enlarged or expanded the opera that he had written, or maybe solidified its meaning. He had often told her that he was unsure whether the true painting had the same emotion as the prints he had purchased. He worried that upon seeing the actual masterpiece the timbre would change or the colors would be different, and to Pascal, who saw music and color as synonyms, that would be disastrous. With that in mind she had been hesitant all morning, worried that the real work would not be able to stand up to the perfectly invoked, subjective triptych that Pascal had painted in his head.

The tiptoes seemed to Claudia like a good thing. He brought his heels down and turned to her, smiling, his face slightly red from the exertion and emotion combined. Claudia smiled and bobbed down a little. Pascal stepped coyly toward her and reached out his hand to close the distance. She could feel his moist palm as her fingers felt through to his. Fingers entwined, Pascal turned to his bride and planted a subtle kiss on her cheek. “Do you like it?” he asked.

“I like this side,” she said, motioning her shoulders toward the introduction of Adam and Eve, “but not that side so much. It’s definitely dark, and strange, and well, it seems too real to me. Does that make sense?”

Pascal thought about what she said for a minute. “I think I do. Is it because everything in the picture is to a greater or lesser extent real?”

“That might be it, I’m not sure. I love your opera, but I think I can’t look at that side for too long. Which I think is okay.”

“Absolutely.”

Claudia paused, then decided to tell Pascal about her thought on the left side of the work. “So, I was looking at this side, and I think it’s very interesting. You probably know, but is it me or is the situation between Jesus and Adam and Eve kind of strange?”

Pascal lips parted in a familiar grin. It was the look that Claudia associated with his professorial moments. If she brought up something that was likely to inspire him to run off on a tangent of learned fancy it almost always began with a sly smile and a definitive nod of the head. Pascal, dressed in a green polo shirt and slacks, looked like a substitute teacher, and as he nodded he seemed to get the solemn look of serious business. Much like the game that the cast and crew often played with Tony, holding

their mouths agape as he monopolized the conversation, a similar game could be created utilizing the standard progressions of Pascal's lessons. He was like a pitcher going through a warm-up routine. First the grin, an acknowledgement of attempt and aptitude, but also slightly (although he was always profusely apologetic) pompous, as if acceding the limitations of the questioner and then pushing beyond by sheer force of will. Then, he would remove himself from whatever body position he was currently situated and stand, his shoulders and legs slightly apart, as if readying to sing. His voice would change from a conversational pattern to a more declared, authoritative cadence. It was a complete transformation yet still seemed to leave him the same. Each aspect of his manner had changed slightly, yet the aggregate remained thoroughly the same, and uniquely Pascal.

Pascal reached up his hand and massaged her shoulder. "That part of the triptych is where Christ presents Eve to Adam. Some people think that Adam has a lustful look in his eyes, but I'm a little skeptical, especially now that I've seen it in person. Did you know that this painting was called *La Lujuria*, which means lust."

"So, is this supposed to be heaven and hell? Because I don't really see it as black and white, but rather as a slow progression."

"It's not supposed to be heaven, really, but a meditation on temptation. If you look," he pointed toward the left panel, "you'll see that everything is as it should be. Adam and Eve are happy and the place is as near paradise as possible. Now, in the center panel, is the implementation of temptation. Everybody fornicating with everybody else, including animals; the order has been disrupted. And as a result," he shifted his feet and transitioned to the right panel, "you get hell, where the temptation has perverted the

natural order. Animals ruling humans, etc. I think it is best to not think of this as heaven and hell, as you said, but rather to think of it as a cautionary tale. A Christian morality tale if you will.”

Claudia watched as Pascal finished his lecture. He still had his hand on her shoulder and had led her through the progression from left to right, from order to disorder. His body was still leading her toward the right panel when two men approached the triptych. They moved with authority and passed through the obligatory barrier placed by the public before the work. Their moves were synchronized, as if a routine they had rehearsed ad nauseum. Most of the viewing gallery was watching them with agape gazes, unsure of what could require such pomp. The men approached the painting and raised their hands, and for most of the viewing gallery this was the first time they noticed that each man had on glorious, antiseptic white cotton gloves. Their hands, delicate and preparatory, reached up and simultaneously gripped the unfolded flaps of the triptych. They looked at one another with knowing stares, and closed the tri-fold design upon itself, exposing the glorious fourth panel, which was only visible when the panels were closed. While everyone was watching the two men close the Bosch, a third had inconspicuously slipped through the crowd with a small sign attached to what looked to Claudia like a repurposed music stand. The sign said, “In order for all to view the entire work, the triptych will remain closed for the next thirty minutes. Thank you for your patience.”

Claudia was entranced with the two men, who after finishing the folding had moved to the side and glared back at the work, as if worried it would reopen out of spite. She watched them slowly slacken, and eventually start to shift away toward a hidden

door where she assumed they must wait until they were beckoned back again to reopen the triptych.

Baur's sweaty palm enclosed in hers and she turned away from the display. He had a look of displeasure, and she assumed he felt slighted by the sudden and unannounced closing of the part of the painting Baur had come to see. "Are you ready to go?" she asked.

Baur shuffled his feet restlessly and she didn't need him to answer. She squeezed his hand and started moving toward the way they came in. The bottleneck entrance was crowded and like a pouting child, Baur pointed toward an exit sign on the wall that pointed beyond the Bosch.

Claudia understood the childish moods of Baur. At times he almost regressed to the same state that her nieces and nephew had represented between seven and ten. Yet, he still had that drive to him, it just was not focused. She almost expected his legs to be wobbly and his muscle control disjointed. These moods were like possession. Claudia knew that pointing it out would only further the furrow, so she merely stayed silent and waited for the red walls to revert to tan and hopefully steal away some of the foul mood with it.

Claudia shuffled the papers in her memory and refocused on the disorganized black, matte desk. The petulant Baur in her memory had triggered a queasy feeling about something she saw. Something about it seemed not like him. Rifling through the papers, she once again stared at the set theory sheet. He had been trained by a serialist, and this sort of analysis did not seem congruent with what she had ever seen him. Claudia tried to create the syntax in her mind for what she felt, but fell far short.

The feeling of dread was stronger as the words failed her.

She looked at the notes and sang them. There was a wrong note, she realized. The melody had not had the slight mordent on the third note. But the mordent was one-hundred percent Baur. She had gone through a song cycle of his after they had started dating, and turns, trills and mordents were constantly in the work. Lydia's theme had originally had a mordent in it, but then why does this sheet take it out?

To non-musicians, Claudia thought, such a small change would be insignificant. Like changing the punctuation in a line of poetry. But if Baur was like ee cummings, this was the equivalent of adding a coma—it was just so uncharacteristic.

She could feel the moment of understanding spread through her much like she had felt at the first sight of the Bosch. But the feeling of dread still lagged, and Claudia could not understand why it bothered her so. Baur had changed his compositional style for some reason in this melody. So what? But this other page of melody, written in a different hand, this page contained the dread and burden that was infesting her mind. Why?

Claudia flipped through the rest of the loose pages, looking for some other page to put things in perspective. There were similar pages for *Hellfire*, but none had to do with her part. And none had to do with mordents or trills. The second page had melodies that were instrumental only. During the bombing of Dresden, the violins played a disjunct, leaping melody from the low open strings up to the near stratosphere. The version on the foreign page was the final version, much different than Baur's hand-written draft. Baur's was simple, a twelve-note row that she could see coming a mile away. The foreign page, though, had a distinct tonal beginning that she thought familiar from music history class.

Claudia sang the pitches:

“D, Eb, C, B...”

Her mind immediately orchestrated it in low strings, and she placed the melody as the opening of the 8th Shostakovich string quartet. It was the quartet they had listened to in some class and then were shown how the first four notes spelled out Dimitri Shostakovich’s name.

Why the quote? she asked herself.

Baur had often railed on composers like Crumb when they used quotes. He had spoken disparagingly about such music as hack-work by unoriginal fools. To not be original would be like dying, he melodramatically intoned.

In Baur’s terms, the idea of quotation was like tracing a masterwork. So why, she tried to understand, did he include such a famous and recognizable melody? Next to the fragment in an unrecognizable hand was the term “primer”. What was a primer?

The mystery surrounding the here-to-now unknown sheets was startling to Claudia. Since they started dating she had felt the layers of Baur unfold and open up to her. He didn’t seem too complicated once the theory behind him was made understood. Baur was a predictable man who valued creativity and originality, yet implemented both as if in a process-oriented way.

That was the contradiction that defined him.

Baur, with all his processes and routines, was only comfortable creating spontaneity through organized steps. So to find things in his work that appeared random was something of a misnomer. Nothing was random, and like a tree, could be dug up and

understood through its roots. These pages were so discombobulating because they were the first contradictions in the theory of Pascal Baur.

Claudia brushed back her dark hair, her wristbands rolling with the sticky texture of the hairspray. The loose collection of papers were starting to be placed into organized piles. She had started a benign pile for sheets that seemed to have no value in her search. Others, with distinctly non-Baur hands were placed in a near pile to her left. A third of indeterminate value was slowly piling on the floor under her feet. Two sheets were sitting right in front of her and they seemed to be the key to everything she had uncovered.

The first sheet was on yellowed staff paper in a hand that Claudia had never seen. It was not Baur's, and in fact seemed to be unfamiliar with music notation in general. Still, it was a beautiful hand, with letters that flowed effortlessly across the page and a pacing that seemed to anticipate the complete sentence. On the page was written a series of notes, almost a serialist row, but with symbols underneath each that did not correspond to any musical shorthand she was familiar with. The symbols might be Russian, she thought, although her knowledge of the language was the stylized art of anti-communist fare. Still the strange N and reverse R seemed to scream out dubious thoughts of possible connections with the far side of the Berlin Wall. Claudia worried that this dread she had felt was connected to Morriss Greenberg and his investigation. She now had the first serious thoughts that her husband might be hiding something from her.

The second page in front of her was a typed document littered with the same symbols and then a collection of seemingly random letters. The only thing that kept her

from thinking the page entirely gibberish was the reappearance throughout of the same letter combinations.

To Claudia the idea that it was a code seemed obvious. But like the cryptogram she had learned in primary school, she knew a cipher was needed in order to decode anything. She flipped through a few sheets on her left and found the page that had the word “primer” on it. The word was written above a passage from Wagner that appeared normal, then transposed up a major third. Claudia took this idea of transposition and started to apply it to the typed paper. A major third could mean a couple different things, she thought. First, it could just be three as in a third, or it could be four if it was thought of by chromatic half-step. She applied both possibilities to the first word, trying it up three and four letters, then down three and four letters. Up three seemed to produce a less-gibberish Soviet-sounding dialect, but Claudia did not know for sure if it was correct. If that was the case, then she was nowhere, since she did not speak the language. Although, she realized, if this was some sort of code then that meant Pascal was somehow involved in some nefarious business.

She looked again at the Wagner passage and realized she had not yet exhausted her options. The passage was transposed up a major-third, but the clef had changed and in fact it was really down a minor-sixth. Again, she applied the two possibilities, six and eight, to the seven-letter word. By substituting for each letter a corresponding letter eight above it, an english word suddenly appeared. Claudia looked at the word and was frozen with the dread she had felt latently for the last twenty minutes.

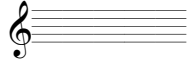
In her scrawled hand on a piece of scrap paper was the word “CONTACT”.

Later, she would remember the series of events much more clearly, as if she had in fact watched them in a film rather than experienced them. She would remember the discovery, the feeling of terror and worry fill her body as she started to translate the other words. What she wrote on the paper was the terminology of a traitor. It was spy stuff and she felt the betrayal from Pascal as if he had been unfaithful to her. But, at the same time she understood the grand impact of this discovery. Her husband was a spy and was sending messages in his work. How it was sent she did not know, but it was being put out through the notes, through the very notes she sang. She had sung them for him, but now understood that this whole time he had co-opted her love and had perverted it for some Soviet benefactor. The rage filled her as had the dread before, but before she could leap up and head toward the stage to confront him, she heard the crash.

She leapt up, unsure whether it was an attack or an accident. She grabbed the two sheets and her scrap cipher and folded them tightly and slipped them in her bra. The clearest memory from those moments was the slight giggle she uttered, when, after slipping the paper inside her brassiere, she had come to the realization that she was now like some cliché in a bad espionage movie.

Claudia rushed out of the office and into the midst of the same sort of carnage she had been responsible for portraying only hours earlier.

Scene 8



A loud crash...blood...screams...an impaled torso and a broken tuba trumpet...three fingers wiggling, trying to grip the shiny wooden floor...lights coming to life...pin-stripes...she stood sobbing, a sheet of paper making an unnatural outline in the midsection of her dress...tears...splintered wood and a paramedic cursing the splinters...three hands lifting a large flat board and a fourth reaching under to remove the leg...a severed finger...uhhh, the sound of moaning mixed with light tears...nerve damage and paralysis, they say as he is carted out...a thick, ruffled score opened on a large music stand...the gleam of a clean gun, black and shiny like a pool of oil, held in a chestnut holster...*I am speaking, giving a lecture. I see Claudia arrive, her face contorted into that of a man. With her is a group of angry people, led by Agent Greenberg. They have clubs and maces and other ancient weapons that seem antiquated and malicious, as if they wanted to create suffering more than death...* a moan from underneath, the first signs of possible survival...jagged chunks of wood with twisted tetanus-looking nails strewn about as if done by some aesthetic-interested vanguard artist...a white stripe of bone protruding from rose-colored skin, trembling as if being pushed out from within...a silver knitting needle kicked out of the way as two men try to lift up the largest area... *I know she had a signal to tell Greenberg: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him." She stepped forward, her eyes scanning the empty horizon. I was the only one there, hiding in plain sight, but yet she made the whole thing theatrical, a*

complete production. She even sang a song to me. "Isa," she said, her tongue forked like a serpents'...a man in pinstripes meeting the paramedics at the door...outside the capital dome shining a gaudy gold in the evening light, yellow, sad taxis passing quickly from all directions...the low strings of the piano rolling and rumbling like thunder in the distance...long drug names screamed out the front entrance, a black ambulance driver, his teeth and eyes scarily white in the dark night, rushing up with two syringes and a bag of clear liquid...she walks away, her hands covered in deep rope burns...a light, ashwood chair smashed and mingled with the coarser plywood and pine of the background...the first drops of snow, landing on the stretcher...three people sitting in seats as if forgotten from the earlier performance...the carousal in the park lit up, serving as a gorgeous backdrop to what would be an enchanting late evening...an X taped on the stage...a bag filled with clothes lying unclaimed on the precipice, teetering as if ready to fall into the pit...quiet, shhhhhhhhhhhhhhh...I look at her and know what she is doing. She reaches up her hands and cradles my face. She kisses me fiercely, lovingly, but also terminally. I can sense the dread and feel her tears even with my eyes close...the sound of heavy breathing, grunting and lumber rising...The lingering scent of frankincense...a first aid kit brought from a storage room, upturned, empty and discarded...hands holding hands tightly, white as clean sheets...a second crash, bringing tears and apologies from the firemen...a limp body still on the ground, but a perceived motion emanating from it as the lights create a shimmer over the greasy streaks of blood...a woman bending down at the waist, her hands holding her cheeks...he thinks he might die. The pain is such that he thinks he might die, and without explaining anything. How did I get here? he asks himself, his eyes trying to focus on a light hanging high on the ceiling. The smell of wood

all around him as if he were lost in a dense forest. A muted trumpet playing somewhere in his imagination, and the colors of the room changing with each phrase. Is this heaven, he thinks, staring at the remaining two walls of the Dresden set, people engulfed in house lights looking like lithe-like angels with back-lit halos...a stocky man in pinstripes walking around, his hands waving erratically as he talks to himself...a woman in black, limping away silently...a man holding his leg, blood soaked through the tux pants...ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, rhythmic breathing as if someone was giving birth...three firemen congregating near a severed torso, no one paying any attention...the sound of an axe splintering through the top of a piano...a phone ringing through a closed door...a bruised man with black hair parted down the middle rushes in, his face swollen purple like a ripe grape...the grumbling of piano strings makes his world change colors. The blood pooled near his head is slowly flowing down his neck. It is sticky and warm, but quickly chilling to the slight breeze that he assumes is coming from the backstage double doors...the groups of lights lying on the ground shining upward a hazy red...the moon painted on the ceiling of the theatre...more snow covering a few remaining cars on the street, a blue sedan and a red sedan...a large, tan cellphone set near two haphazardly thrown jackets...I-84 moving steadily and unabashed, the cars unable to see the commotion at the theatre...a conversation between two men that leads to shouting...a bouquet of flowers picked up among many and brought in the ambulance, they are red and are wet, giving them the same consistency as the fresh blood on the shiny metal parts of the stretcher, a green bow ties them at the waist like a belt...a slow gliss down as the ambulance drives away...a slow congealing of people band together and start to walk toward the hospital, the snow falling softly on their coats and hats as if to assuage their

sadness...blah, eh, oh, someone had brought coffee that was too hot...the plaid man remains and starts to sweep up reddened splinters...a scrap of black fabric is found caught up in a few exposed nails...*the few faces that come within his line of vision are all familiar, all family. She looks strange when she should look worried. Worry is an easy emotion, he thinks, and she is not making it well. She is not worried, yet, he thinks she is, but just not in the way he would expect. As if there were more happening then even he knew. He attempts to lift his head but is held down but a meaty, warm paw. He tries to see who the paw belongs to but the lights are too bright from that direction...*the sound of a heater turning on when all the commotion has ended and the bodies have left...why did this happen, those that are unaffected ask, their face the contorted expectation of sincere sorrow...from the street those remaining can hear its entire journey through the seven or so blocks to the hospital...the snow continues to fall through the night...a splinter of set is kicked away so she can get through the red door...a man wearing plaid watches impatiently from the back, his cart and cleaning supplies resting against the last row of seats...*more lights, all bright, some moving. Reminds him of movies involving aliens. Lots of long words spoken quickly. Sounds like a foreign language, but without an accent. In and out, the lights fading and dimming as if someone was checking the house lights. Yet, he thinks they are no longer in the house. Hospital? His head is swimming, and he assumes he has been given drugs. The lights dim and then brighten instantaneously. How long? The room is white, and for the first time in a long time nothing changes hue as he lies in wait. His mind is swimming and forgetting and not focusing. He regrets much about his life...*the news the next morning talks about the tragedy...one body is left in the ambulance when they arrive, the other rushed in the

automatic doors through a long white hallway...a woman and a man follow the stretcher until they are stopped by nurses who plead for them to stay calm and wait in the lobby...in the hospital the sound of the dying reminds them of the previous nights music...it is a sweet sound, high and harmonious, as if a choir of angels were singing Schoenberg...the beep of a heart monitor...if there is one thing the human condition is predisposed to, it is dying.....

Intermezzo



And She Loved Him by Pascal Baur

I.

Lynn Hunter first fell in love with Radames Collado as a voice on the distant end of a telephone conference call. She was listening in as the board of directors at the Mark Twain House outlined the plan to boost funding for the author's one-time home and establish it as a first-tier museum for the Asylum Hill neighborhood. After a discussion of the recent National Endowment of the Humanities Challenge Grant, Radames was asked to speak about funding possibilities through private donations.

After a short pause a soft voice started speaking.

“What we will need is to hold various fundraisers and use the challenge grant as a basis for achieving a much larger endowment,” he said.

Lynn could feel the velvet touch of his words trickle down the small of her back, the rolling r's tickling her and causing her to roll her ankles and flex her calves. His voice had the cadence of a confident man, and Lynn had always been driven toward confident men. Her last lover, the head of insurance sales at The Hartford, had carried himself like a drill sergeant, upright and forceful, with a deliberateness of gait that made one follow him everywhere he went. She could tell just from his voice that Radames Collado was the kind of man who led other men. He was strong, with brown eyes (she would think), and a way of looking at you that made you roll your ankles and flex your calves in excitement.

Lynn sat in her office with the phone pressed hard and tight to her ear, squeezing out every syllable like bathwater from a washcloth. She took her free hand and twisted her brown, layered hair out of the way of the phone receiver, exposing a long scar in the shape of a crescent on her left cheek. She took care not to touch it, to avoid it at all costs. Her bright red fingernail traced the outline of her lips and she mouthed his name, rolling her “r”s and letting the tingle explode through her cheeks and the back of her throat.

“...and we need to also try and reach out to the local businesses for support. They can view a donation as a way of helping schools, since we be a standard destination for all the areas junior highs and high schools. Hartford Public High School is only a few blocks away, so I would think that every student in that building will be brought to the Twain Museum a minimum of once a year.”

Lynn worked as the school coordinator for the museum. That Radames Collado was directly referencing her position made her blush with pride. She thought she should say something, that he was now talking to her and only her and she would need to respond to his velvet voice with an equal temperament.

“Lynn,” Tom Wilkinson said, his voice prodding her out of a fantasy of soft colors and abundant flowers. “Lynn, how are we this year with the school numbers?”

“We have so far had 25 classes from the general area visit the museum,” she said, her voice slightly husky from its prolonged silence. “We also have 10 more scheduled as of this minute. Most are paying for the tour, but a few from Bloomfield are asking for an educational discount due to funding issues.”

“Lynn,” Radames interjected, “what are we currently charging per class for a full tour?”

Lynn could feel his tongue flick the front of his straight, white teeth as he finished the “r” in “tour”. She could feel her chest flush warmly to the very mention of her own name, and almost lost her train of thought and said something inappropriate over the phone.

“What are we charging? Well...we generally charge \$2 a student, but often we just quote a flat fee of \$40 a class. So far this year we’ve brought in \$860 from these fees, and we get those funds matched from a local donor, so actually it’s \$1700. We’re not raking in the money, but it shows the foundations that are in charge of grants that we are an important local commodity.”

“I like that, we can use that for promotion,” Radames added.

“Thank you, *glad* I can help.”

Lynn closed her eyes and winced at her statement. She felt so lame saying that. *Glad* I can help? What the hell was that about? She silently rebuked herself for the strange accent on the word glad. Tom had once again taken control of the call, and Lynn tried to focus the silken voice of Radames Collado out of her head and focus on the annoying tone of Tom Wilkinson.

That leader of men, Radames Collado did not speak for the rest of the call. Lynn waited patiently through redundancy after redundancy after redundancy until the call finally winded down and concluded. Her ear burned from the pressure of the receiver for the last 45 minutes. She hung up the phone and rubbed her ear slowly, trying to avoid jettisoning the sweet echoes of Radames Collado.

Lynn’s office at the Mark Twain House was tight but quiet. It could barely contain her desk and file cabinet, and an exposed capped water pipe in the corner pushed

her mostly empty bookshelf to hang slightly out into the doorway, forcing her rather stocky boss to turn in order to enter the office. Her desk was a murky tan, made of cheap metal and held together by a truckload of screws, about half of them missing washers. Lynn would always count the washers to no washers, and at one point when the count had changed wondered if maintenance men had pillaged her desk late at night for supplies. The next day the count had returned to normal and she chalked the whole thing up to a lack of sleep.

The day of the Radames Collado conference call, Lynn's desk was littered in thank you drawings from Simsbury Elementary Students. Most of them were the standard picture of a bunch of stick kids with a stick Mark Twain, all the characters shaded in different primary colors, and all waving approval. The words "Thank You" were printed at the top in an unsteady hand that seemed to be a stock cliché in the annals of elementary education. The conference call had ended a little before eleven, and Lynn needed to sort through the drawings, find a few exceptional examples of what all the kids always did, and tape them behind the front desk in the museum. The rest would be filed away in the bottom drawer of the four-tier murky tan filing cabinet, filed away until the space was needed and they would be thrown out.

But first Lynn needed to refill her coffee mug.

Behind her desk Lynn looked small and scrawny. Her chair sat exceptionally low and forced her to either tuck her legs behind the chair or let them stretch out stiff and straight in front of her. And Lynn had long legs. She often thought her legs to be her best quality. They were long like a models', toned like a runners, and especially flattering when dressed in panty hose and some version of heels. She had calves that

flexed into a taugth sculpture that looked more at home on a Greek statue than a living, walking woman. Lynn wore heels everyday, even in the frozen winter days when the parking lot was more suitable for a Whalers' practice. She would rather have men look at her legs than any other part of her body.

Lynn stood up, reached for the ceiling, and headed to the coffee maker. Once out of her office, she headed down a long hallway, past the Jans, and to the coffee/break room. Lynn refilled her cup, spilling a little on the floor and her left hand. She set down her bland green mug and reached for a towel. As she was wiping up the small muddy puddle off the decaying linoleum Jan Domino walked in carrying her dark blue UCONN basketball coffee mug.

“Hey sister, what’s up?”

Lynn looked up to the ever-looming toothpick that was Jan Domino. Crouched near the floor, Jan looked near seven feet tall. Even when Lynn stood back up the height difference still seemed comical. Lynn was nothing more than 5’6”, and Jan was well over six feet tall.

“Just finishing up the lottery from Simsbury Middle. Most of the same stuff, but some kid drew a lion.”

“A lion? Really? Did he confuse Twain with Allan Quartermain or something?”

“What? No, he was actually making a joke. He wrote, ‘I’d be lion if I said I didn’t enjoy the Mark Twain House.’”

Jan was filling up her mug and burst out laughing. She too dribbled some coffee down the southern face of her mug and onto the floor. Lynn looked at the soggy rag in her hand and then quickly tossed it back into the sink.

“What’s so funny?” Janet Swan barked as she entered the break room. Janet was the antithesis to Jan. While Jan was tall and lengthy, a former college basketball player at UCONN, Janet was short and plump, a dedicated librarian who had worked at the Mark Twain House for the last two decades. It was funny to Lynn that in an office of three, two shared the same name. On Janet Domino’s first day there had been much confusion the first time Lynn had called out for Janet, but the problem was soon remedied by the indomitable will of Janet Swan. She simply walked into Jan’s office, twisting around the narrow doorframe and said, “Hey, Jan, I think I solved it. Sound good?” and walked back out. And that was how the college basketball standout Janet Domino had been whittled down and dominated by a plump old woman who had to hold her breath when squeezing through doorways.

Lynn retold the lion story to Janet, who chuckled slightly in her motorbike putt-putt style, filled her mug, a NLA relic from ‘69, and went back to her desk. Jan and Lynn stood there, sipping slowly from the steaming mugs. Once they heard the click of Janet’s door they started to giggle.

“That lady is ridiculous,” Jan said, mimicking Janet’s chuckle with the utmost precision. Putt-putt-putt-putt lowering in tempo, putt-putt-putt, and lowering in pitch until just a silent facetious facial flinch. “But I’m always impressed when she sneaks up on me.”

“She had me listen in on the board phone call today,” Lynn started, thinking about Radames, “and I met, at least by phone, the new board member.”

“Who is it again?”

“Radames Collado. Man, he has an accent.”

“Radames?” Jan attempted, her tongue tripping up on the rolled “R” making it sound like she was blowing a raspberry on the stomach of a child.

“No, Radames,” Lynn answered, drawing out the “R” and rolling it a little longer than needed, her tongue massaging and sliding down the roof of her mouth. The sensual tone of her voice even caught her unprepared.

“Wow, lady. Sounds sexy.”

“Yeah, I bet.”

“Did you talk to him?”

“A little. They asked about the school figures.”

“Oh, did they,” Jan teased, pretending to put on long satin gloves and pearl earrings, “Did the uber-money ask you about your figure....s? Aren’t we old money all of a sudden?”

Lynn blushed deep and felt a tingle in her face. She was always drawing attention to her legs because she felt extremely self-conscious about the scar. And especially when she blushed, the left side of her face would tingle and the two-inch scar would turn a bright purple, glowing and she suspected protruding from her face. The scar had healed poorly a very long time ago, leaving her with a raised, shiny road from just above her mouth to just up above her nose. Lynn felt the tingle and reflexively combed her medium auburn hair over her face, looking sheepishly at Jan.

“Oh, stop with your hair. Come on, it’s okay to blush.”

Lynn picked up her mug and took a long pull, trying to avoid eye contact with Jan. She waited another twenty seconds in silence, sipping slowly, and walked out of the break room.

II.

The second time Lynn Hunter fell in love with Radames Collado was two weeks later. It was a Tuesday, and she had arrived at work a few minutes late. As she approached her office she could hear the rising pitch of the telephone. As she moved closer the phone seemed to grow with urgency. There was no answering machine attached to her phone, so there was no way to know how long ago it had started ringing. She slid through her doorway, past the dusty bookshelf and grabbed the receiver as she dropped her purse onto the cracked, duct-tape-seamed office chair.

“Hello, Mark Twain House, this is Lynn Hunter.”

She was still a little out of breath from hustling to the phone, but the moment she heard the anticipatory breath on the other end her heart ceased to beat entirely.

“Hello Miss Hunter, this is Radames Collado calling. How are you today?”

She wanted to tell him how happy she was to hear his voice, how her calves pulsed with each word, and how each night as she fell asleep reading *One Hundred Years of Solitude* or *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* she thought of him and his soft, kind voice. How she longed for him to demand her to love him, to not beg but tell her that she now belonged to him and that loving him was no longer a choice. She wanted his steady hands on her, guiding her, loving her. But most of all, she wanted him to just keep talking, to never stop talking.

Silence, the usual purveyor of distraction and dreams, instead, brought her out of her inner thoughts and struck terror in her heart that he had hung up the telephone.

“Mr. Collado, hello?” she winced, not wanting to overplay it.

“Yes Miss Hunter, I’m here. I asked you how you are doing?”

“Oh, sorry, must be a bad connection. I’m great. How are you?”

“Wonderful. Thanks for asking. I have needed to call you for a few days and I am embarrassed to say, well, that no one had given me a phone list, and no one seems to answer the main line.”

“I’m sorry,” she interrupted, already absolving him in her heart, wondering if he really had not had her number this entire time. “No one answers that phone. It’s one of those answering machine that tells people our hours and days we are closed.”

“Okay, noted. Listen, I needed to call you so I could run down some information regarding the school tours. I wanted to have some solid figures for potential donors, as well as some quotes or art or something. Jan Swan says you have a filing cabinet full of thank you cards from the students. If at all possible, I’d like to get my hand on a few drawings and have them displayed during our donor receptions. Do you think you could help me out?”

Lynn listened to his proposal, or at least what she thought was an invitation to meet. “Yes,” she replied the moment he had finished, “I think that’s completely doable. Would you like to have me drop off the materials at your office, or would you like to meet for coffee or something?”

“If you don’t mind, I’d just like to stop by and pick them up this afternoon.”

“Oh,” she said, caught off guard and worried about the state of her lipstick, “that would probably be fine. What time will you be stopping by?”

“It’s a little after 9 now, how about 11:30, right before lunch?”

“That’ll work for me. I’m back in the offices. Do you know where that is?”

“Yeah. I’ve had to meet Jan a few times this last week. Does your office have a number or your name outside?”

“No, but it’s at the end of the hallway. It’s hard to miss, and if I leave my door open I can see down the hall, so if I see you I’ll just wave.”

“Sounds great. Thanks again. I really think this is going to help us a lot with the donors who don’t have children.”

“Why’s that?”

“Oh, it’s a lot of strategy. Uh, pardon, sorry, I just got waved about an incoming call, so I have to go. Remind me and I’ll explain the childless thing later.”

“Okay. Thanks. I’ll see you at 11:30. Is there anything specific you want me to look for, or any styles or anything?” She paused for a response, but there was only static on the other end. Radames Collado had hung up the phone.

Must not have heard my question, she thought.

Lynn spent the next hour going through manila envelopes that had been licked shut and filed away into the dark nether-reaches of the lower portion of the filing cabinet. With each successive envelope she had to rip it open carefully, making sure to not damage any of the art that Radames wanted, sort through for potential works that would appeal to “childless donors” as he had suggested, and make an effort to find any that mentioned her by name specifically. Even after five years of filing away the childhood masterpieces of the greater Hartford area, Lynn was still unsure of how to separate them by quality. She generally did this instinctively, allowing formal considerations to be trumped by cute backwards letters and creativeness in subject matter. Mostly she was just concerned whether the young Rothko had actually spelled Mark Twain’s name

correctly. Usually the poorly spelled were immediately retired into oblivion, but she would be mortified if such a bad example of her work was found or witnessed by Radames Collado.

Each drawing offered a different shape and structure to Mr. Twain, and with each depiction she attempted to usurp the image and craft the unknowing likeness of Radames upon the frame. Was he tall or short? Obviously tall, she thought, a leader like him was tall and broad shouldered. Was he muscular or agile? This weighed on her because he was probably fast and flexible—cunning, but in his voice she also detected an inner strength that could lift the same weight as Atlas himself. Did he have a moustache? Well, she told herself in a mocking tone, of course he has a moustache. It's thick, sturdy and every morning he combs soap through it to give it a strong, clean shine. His mustache had the air of an old Norse God, as if he'd be equally at home in the Wadsworth or Valhalla. Of course he has a mustache she teased, her hands gesturing wildly about, as if they were also taking part in this imaginary conversation. But, she tried to counter between the giggles, if he's so great why isn't he married?

But Lynn had an answer for this question as well. She rifled through her thoughts and proffered a sad tale of love and loss, how his college fiancée had died from cancer, or how he had never found a woman who truly understood him, and had just played the field, knowing that it was nothing more than biding time. She imagined that maybe he had been married, but his wife had left him for some disco dancer or coke fiend. Maybe he had been in a band and had never had a permanent address until recently. These thoughts swirled around the inside of her skull cavity like teenagers at a roller-skating rink; caroming out of control and bumping together, sometimes accumulating until the

story became convoluted, like that he had been married but had then gotten divorced because he knew she wasn't "the one" and she had eventually died after developing cancer after running away with a surfer. Like a bad run-on sentence they kept skating laps, never tiring of the supposition game.

Lynn kept the rink open until 11:25, then shut down the disco ball and shooed away the clingers, locked the fantasies inside and turned all her attention to the eminent arrival of Radames Collado. She watched the clock switch to 11:30, and impatiently peered around the protruding corner of the bookshelf and down the empty hall. She blinked shut and then opened her lids rapidly, like a child trying to catch Tinkerbell out of the corner of her eye. At 11:35 she started to worry for his safety. At 11:40 she got up and went for more coffee, making an excuse involving boiling water.

The coffee maker was no longer on, but enough steam was still winding up from the half-full pot that Lynn figured the coffee to still be fresh enough for consumption. She looked over her shoulder back down the hall to her office and shrugged. She started filling her mug. She could hear Jan's footsteps from behind, but was too intent on not dribbling and didn't bother to turn around. The footsteps stopped, and a disembodied, velvety voice broke the rising crescendo from the coffee pot.

"Miss Hunter I presume." His voice had the same steadiness she had catalogued over the phone. The tone made her think he was looking at her legs, and that's exactly what she wanted. She flexed her calves, feeling the endorphins cascade through her bloodstream up to her briskly beating heart. She set down the pot and turned around.

"Mr. Collado, it is a pleasure."

Upon coming face to face with Radames Collado, Lynn missed her intended gaze into his eyes by about half a foot. She quickly corrected and lowered her gaze to the moderately tall, moderately portly man wearing glasses and a light pink shirt. He was clean-shaven, with a full head of straight, black hair and a light brown complexion. He had broad shoulders and meaty fingers, a slender butt and a doughy stomach. His nose was producing a slight high-pitched tone every time he exhaled. And worse of all for Lynn, he wore a dingy golden band on his left hand.

“I’m sorry I’m late.”

Lynn looked down at her wrist, but she wasn’t wearing a watch. “No problem. Would you like to come back to my office and check out the samples?”

They started walking back to her office, Lynn walking ahead of Radames Collado. As he started to talk she closed her eyes, engulfing the voice and making concessions for her eyes.

“I’m really sorry I’m late,” he apologized again, “I had to stop and pick up the dry cleaning and they couldn’t find my suits, and it took longer than I thought it would.”

Lynn, her eyes still trying to soft focus the pink shirt out of her mind, slipped past the bookshelf and bent over the desk to grab the pictures. She knew that he was not what she had expected, but his voice still excited her in a way that she had not felt in a long time. She grabbed the stack of pictures and turned around and sat on her desk. Leaning back and crossing her legs, she daintily passed the stack to Radames, who had just maneuvered around the bookshelf and was stuffed tight into the office, positioned less than two feet from the sleek, crossed legs of Lynn Hunter.

“Which ones do you like best?” he asked, his eyes catching a quick reflection of fluorescent light off her shiny legs.

“I like the top two. They have decent depictions of Mr. Twain, and also are kind of cute in the way that kids can be when they are sloppy with their writing.”

“I see what you mean. Like this sloping sentence that kind of trails off.”

“Exactly.”

Lynn followed his eyes as he scanned the drawings. He had wide, wet eyes, a glistening brown that seemed to sing out like two round pieces of amber. He had the kind of eyes she wanted, and the rest she could work with. She thought she could tell by his slightly askew posture that he was unhappy, that he lacked excitement and generosity in his life. He had probably married young, and they were now so different that he could hardly understand her.

“I think I’ll take these three. I can have them blown up and laminated. That should work.”

“I’m glad you like them,” she purred, erupting her face into a smile while simultaneously turning left to hide the scar. She watched him out of her right eye, smiling, trying to be coy about staring at her body.

“Thank you.”

“Listen, you want to thank me, why don’t you buy me lunch, and I’ll tell you about the schools that we’ve worked with this year?” She was being bold and forward, but she was skilled and knew he wouldn’t turn her down. She could see it in his glistening eyes and his clenched forearms and his slightly open mouth. She knew how to trap a man; she had always been a skilled predator.

III.

The last time Lynn Hunter fell in love with Radames Collado was in a hotel room in downtown Springfield. He was dressing and she was lying in the bed, her breasts exposed and resting on top of her chest like melted marshmallows. She had wrapped her arms around a pillow, and was watching him run his belt through the loops on his striped slacks.

“You were pretty special Dom,” she said, her voice slightly husky, prolonging the rolled “r” she added to pretty.

“It’s you that’s special my love. You are absolutely gifted.”

“Thank you.” She paused and stretched her legs, rolling her ankles underneath the thin white sheet. “While we’re passing out the sexy compliments, I want to let you know that you are the greatest lover I’ve ever had.”

Radames tightened the clasp on his belt and spun around, his rotund belly following like an echo. He puffed in his chest and jumped back onto the bed, besieging her breasts with his hands and mouth. Lynn reared back her head, laughing, and kicked her feet. Radames raised his head from her breasts and pushed himself up to her face, taking her in a long and lasting embrace, their tongues searching with familiarity within each other’s mouth. Lynn brought her tongue back and bit down on his tongue, holding it snug and applying a small amount of pressure. Radames eyes widened and his hands passionately grabbed again for her breasts, holding her tight as the pain endorphins spread through his body and down to his loins. She could feel him getting hard, and deftly undid his black, leather belt, pulling it through the loops fast, slightly burning Radames’ overhanging stomach from the friction.

The lights were on and the television news had shifted to a speech by Ronald Reagan. Radames ignored the other sounds and focused on her eyes. Then he did something he had not done before, her reached up and caressed the scar on her left cheek. He just wanted to feel her under his fingertips, to know all of her. The moment he started she recoiled, which had happened before, early in their lovemaking. But instead of stopping, as he had learned to do, he kept his hand on the scar, letting her cheek pulse through the shimmering purple scar tissue. He watched her eyes and tried to silently tell her to not worry, that he loved her and that he wanted to love her, all of her. Her eyes kept growing, and were even shivering and starting to water. Before he could understand, she had pushed him to the side and had rolled over, her whole body covered in small dimpled goose bumps.

“Baby, what’s the matter? I love you, and I just want you to know I think you’re beautiful. The most beautiful woman I’ve ever met. All of you.”

Lynn didn’t respond. She was still shivering and he tried to cover her with the stiff, cheap hotel sheet but she shrugged it away. Radames couldn’t understand why she had reacted like that. He had done everything that she had asked. He had left his wife and family and had given her jewelry and trips and everything she had asked. All he wanted now was her, her completely, with no secrets or emotional scars. Physical scars he could handle, but he couldn’t love a woman who he couldn’t understand.

“Darling. Help me understand. Why are you so worried about the scar? I don’t care about it. I think you’re beautiful, and I don’t care that you have a scar. Just talk to me. Tell me why you are so emotional over the scar, why you can’t let it be and just let it out.”

Lynn heard his pleas and had heard them before, from others. She didn't know why things always ended this way, but knew that her scar had been the agent of all of it. John, Harrison, Edward, Paul, they had all left after touching the scar, and she had loved them. And she loved him. Radames Collado. Why couldn't they just learn not to touch the scar? She loved him and wanted him and now knew that he would leave and she would be back to nothing—just her and the mark of shame that had been sliced into her when she was still a child.

Radames Collado lied in bed still and thoughtful. He tried to understand her and where they would go from here. He felt his left hand and the worn patch on his finger that was still indented from all those years of wearing his wedding ring. He wanted to explain that he too knew of scars and indelible marks, but didn't want to further upset her. Lynn kept her back to him and continued shivering, hoping that maybe this time would be different and he would stay. Maybe this time things could be different.

“Radames,” she pleaded, her voice buzzing from the combination of sobbing and running nostrils. “Radames, don't leave. Please, don't leave me. Please don't leave me like all the rest.”

Radames Collado reached over and draped his meaty paw over her body. He hugged her tight and tried to comfort her, but she continued to sob and apologize. This is how it always started, she thought. This is how the end always starts.

ACT III



Claudia ran her hand along the edge of the mirror then wiped the thick clumps of dust onto a tissue. It had been only two nights, but the jetlag made it feel longer. She had two bags with her and she deposited them on top of a well-made but ancient looking bed. It had that fine shiver of dust that one imagined covered bodies in caskets. Claudia had not bothered to go home, but had lingered at Bradley and then brought her luggage to her dressing room. The room had the stale smell of peach-fuzzed bread. The door's wall, complete with a faded constellation that announced the departed star, Rebecca Olundsen, seemed to be bulging out near the running boards, as if pregnant. Near the back was the bed hoisted up on a raised platform, like the difference between the shallow end and deep end of a swimming pool. It was as if the back of the dressing room was built on a pedestal. The bed rested about three feet from the splattered ceiling, and anytime Claudia fell asleep she would awake with a start as if she had awoke in Wonderland. The walls were the same off-white color as always, but now, after the long absences, had inundated a feeling of gravity and stress, as if the paint was merely seconds from peeling toward the ground. The light fixtures were filled with low-watt bulbs, making the whole room look aged and dark. All in all, it felt depressing and sullen, gangrenous almost.

She knew Pascal was in the building, but had not seen him when she came in. Claudia had told him over the phone that she would be arriving today, but was unsure whether he had been paying attention. Their conversations over the phone had been

growing more and more peculiar and strange. Pascal would tell her everything about his day, in the same child-like way as usual, but then, instead of ending and asking her about her day, he would start to talk about the past. He would tell her stories she had never heard, stories about his mother's illness and his father's sternness. Leaving home after her death and trekking across the country in search of an answer. He would talk vaguely like that, searching for answers and understanding the inner truth of things. It was not that he was saying things so horrendous to cause her worry, but that he was speaking so loosely and unreserved. Pascal seemed to just not want to stop talking. He rambled on and on and Claudia would sit on the other end of the phone and feel more and more uncomfortable.

It was this slowly widening chasm with Pascal that had led her to accept performances and travel for nearly the last four months. She had come back for days at a time for rehearsals, but would then jet off to Europe or the west coast, or somewhere that had offered her any sort of travel expense to come and sing. She had performed Bizet, Wagner, Glass, Schubert, Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Stravinsky, Schumann, Berg, Webern (but surprisingly no Schoenberg!), Boulez, Garcia-Abril, Hindemith, Weill, Haydn, Monteverdi, Josquin, Babbitt, Baur (but only once), young composers at San Francisco State, more Wagner, Sibelius, Tippett, Del Tredici, and a collection of works by Chinese composers at Columbia. The concert world had seemed to decide her fate as a traveling hired gun, brought in often at the last second to perform works she should otherwise have taken months to learn. Claudia had always shown an intense propensity for memorization and immediate inoculation. It was as if she learned works quickly, then would suffer from a slow degrading loss of material the long she spent with it. It was

partially the reason she had been able to travel through the last four months of rehearsal. Pascal had scheduled a lot of the rehearsals around her travels, but was not as worried about her (he understood her peculiar method of memorization), and was anyway still somewhat shell-shocked from the accident and was not as confident as before. There had been a few attempts at intimacy after the accident, but all had ended badly. Claudia felt that it was these failures more than anything else that had created the distance (in Pascal's eyes at least) and that her absences were almost relieving to her husband, who was only now starting to acknowledge and dwell on their age difference.

After the accident she had stayed by his bedside day and night. The few times she had been sent home by Pascal to get rest she had dreamed of him dying. Having woken up in a robe of sweat more than once she had started to dislike sleeping in her own, now non-symmetrical bed. And after three months of rehab, even with Pascal home beside her she still couldn't get the dream to go away. She had tried to tell him that she knew about the code, that she knew he was the one that Agent Greenberg had been looking for. You are a spy, Pascal, a traitor. Claudia thought that if she could simply tell him, the dark weight that sunk her heart would be relieved. But she couldn't. He too had brought a terrible weight with him out of the accident. Claudia didn't think Baur could have killed Franklin, but she worried that he might find himself guilty.

Morriss Greenberg had visited Pascal in the hospital after the four surgeries; two emergency surgeries in order to live, two in order to regain a small amount of motion in the leg. The doctors had fortunately been able to save the leg, but had disclosed to her that he would be lame and in pain for the rest of his life. Morriss had visited and had slyly asked a handful of questions. They suspected Tony Bell for the accident. They still

called it an accident and she had never heard from Pascal or anyone else if charges had been filed against Tony. Morriss had been coy with her and had cornered her flustered and sweaty. He had tried to ask her out, but Claudia had seen the attempt coming and had slyly maneuvered him, his baggy suit and shiny shoes, away from the subject. She had felt bad for the portly man, and was glad when he had left back to Washington, DC a few days later.

Now, back in her old dressing room, which had been the dressing room of Rebecca Olundsen only a few years before, Claudia felt the weight of the world return to her shoulders. Her four-month intermittent streak throughout Europe and the Americas had been a chance to ignore the pressing matters that she had left in Hartford. Just learning and memorizing music. Claudia had been able to pressure herself with that alone and block out all other problems for a later time. Baur had been indifferent about her departures, but her parents, who she had confided some, but not all of her marital problems, had encouraged her to take the time and continue to build her own career. The problem she faced was simple—she still loved him.

Upon discovering the code, Claudia had thought that at this point in the future she would have left him and he would be in jail. That had sounded logical as the shock still washed through her, but as the numbness subsided, her strong feelings toward Pascal had grown back. Why couldn't she just stop loving him? It was the sort of illogical emotions that left her breathless with fury. Claudia so wanted to be able to control how she felt, to do the proper thing and just push past her love for the man that was sending messages to the Soviets. But apparently it did not work like that. Her heart, as they say, made up its own mind.

In the dressing room she unzipped the suitcase and opened it flat on the floor. The bed, covered in generic green sheets and three pillows, was too high to put anything on, so she had to constantly stack things on the floor. In the suitcase she found the brown package with a thick, bound score. The new work was called *Cassandra's Aria*, and although she had been working on her role during the trips, she had not taken the cipher with her and had not been able to decode the secret message in the work. She pulled the vocal score from the package and pulled up a black music stand that had been placed in the corner. A sweater was hanging over the stand and she wadded it up and tossed it up onto the bed. It was a sad story for sure, the fall of the house of Atreus at the hands of Clytemnestra. But the story had taken on an even sadder symbolism to Claudia as she flipped through the character list. It was an opera written for two powerful leads, one a mezzo, the other a tenor. It had been conceived and written for Claudia and Franklin. By the opening night of *Hellfire*, the same night that Franklin died, the work had been started as a sort of surprise. It was a kind of magnum opus for Pascal, a grand opera like *Macbeth*, *Tristan*, or Tippet's *King Priam*. He had told Claudia one evening that he felt he was going to shoot well beyond *Orphée Redux* or *Hellfire*. He had even completed *And She Loved Him* the summer before starting *Cassandra*, but had withheld the work for the spring. He wanted the fall to himself, to his mammoth testament of determinism and pluralism.

The opera was in three acts and followed much the same story as Aeschylus' drama. She was to play Cassandra, the somewhat heroine of the work. In the original work, Clytemnestra enjoys the majority of the lines, sort of setting up the political debate that will be resolved in the later plays. But in this reimagined version, Clytemnestra is

drastically reduced, with a majority of the work rather focusing on Cassandra's knowledge of the future, the implications, and other interests in determinism and time. It was definitely an opera that shared the same sort of preoccupations as Pascal. Franklin would have played Agamemnon, but with his demise the role went to Kansas Jaffarian, a tenor capable of the same sort of power that Franklin had possessed. Still, unlike other companies where people come and go, The Hartford Opera Company had been a sort of family for the last three years. Claudia felt a connection to the entire cast and crew. Of course this was made slightly more firm because of her relationship with Pascal, but even before that she had respected and thought of Franklin as a brother figure. To have him die suddenly and tragically left her in a strange limbo.

Today's rehearsal, one of the last few before the opening, was going to focus on Act III. Claudia flipped open her score to a stuck in post-it that indicated where she began her climactic aria in the second scene. Instead of singing through her part she wanted to look at the accompaniment. Claudia had discovered the cipher had a gesture that indicated when the message would start. She had been looking for it in *Cassandra* and was pretty sure she had found the headstone (how she had termed that starting gesture) during her flight from Lisbon back to New York.

Agamemnon had been murdered at the end of the second act. Pascal and Hans Smigler, the librettist who wrote *Hellfire* had reimagined some of the plot of the story, venturing slightly away from Aeschylus in order to relate better to a modern audience. Gone was the red (or purple) carpet that Clytemnestra tricks Agamemnon into stepping on. Hans and Pascal had argued over whether they could use internal dialogue to indicate the hubris that would have been attached to such an act. Finally, they had forgone the

scene (although they still planned to have him traipse on a red carpet upon arriving home) and instead wrote a scene where Agamemnon actually makes it to the feast. He does in fact sit at the head of the table; Aegisthus is there, as is Cassandra. The four dine with the awkwardness of a Woody Allen film. During the meal Clytemnestra argues with Agamemnon over the virtues of the Trojan War. In her argument she is able to trick Agamemnon into admitting the sacrifice of Iphigenia. This is all she needs in order to decide his fate. Cassandra, already knowing what will happen to them all, including herself, leaves the table. It is this passive allowance of foreknowledge that allows Clytemnestra and Aegisthus to murder Agamemnon.

Act III scene one involves the clean-up of the crime scene and a debate/fight between the queen and her lover. Claudia skims through it, not interested in it at the moment. She flips the page to scene two, which finds Cassandra waiting in Agamemnon's chamber, knowing that soon enough Clytemnestra and Aegisthus will come in to kill her. She rehashes the curse of the house of Atreus, following the lineage like tracing a river on a map. From Pelops to Atreus to Agamemnon. She looks forward to Orestes, speaking blandly of the future as if it had already passed. It is during this section that she saw the chord. If Claudia had really studied music history she would know it as the mystic chord from Scriabin. As it was, she just noticed a rolled chord and a distinctive rhythm, something she had seen at certain spots in Pascal's two other operas. She had also seen it at the bottom of the page of the cipher. She knew that the hidden message was encoded in proceeding aria. And this time the aria belonged to her.

In the desk toward the non-door wall (north she thought) was her desk. Claudia pulled out the second drawer on the left side. It was empty, but instead of pushing it back

in she lifted it off its rollers and pulled the entire thing out. Taped to the back of the drawer was a yellowed envelope containing the cipher page that she had taken from Pascal's office. From the top of her desk she grabbed a legal pad and a pencil and sat down in front of the music stand, rotating the letters with the notes on a piece of paper, the message being descrambled one letter at a time.

Claudia rushed out of the office and into the midst of the same sort of carnage she had been responsible for portraying only hours earlier. The stage lights were on, but many had fallen or been knocked out of place, causing the hall to have drastically uneven magnitudes of lighting. The smell of wood was strong, and large pile of rubble littered the stage, spilling out into the seats. She could see that the background for the final scene of *Hellfire*, a mock wall of an instrument shop with grotesque images hung like family portraits, had fallen down upon the stage. But that in itself would not have been tragic. What had appeared to happen is that the fake wall, upon falling, had brought with it part of the rafters, lights and curtains. A massive infarction of stage right had careened down on the floor. She could see an arm underneath the largest collection of debris. It was a thick arm, hairy, and without needing more than a second she decided it was Franklin. Later she would try and figure out how she had come to such a quick conclusion, but the thought, like many of that night, would just trail off as the horror swept through her like undulating waves.

With the sight of the arm had come a scream. Pascal would later tell Claudia that it was the hysterics of her voice that had brought him back to consciousness. He was lying on the far side of the pile and the scream had woken him from the delirium of

shock. He was imagining himself as some sort of Christ figure being betrayed by Judas. The shriek had not played any role in the fabrication, but had caused a sort of triangulation of his senses, allowing him to focus for the first time since the walls had fallen. He heard the scampering of feet and the long strides of people running toward and away from the scene. He recognized the scream the way a husband can, and let out a guttural moan. Claudia, still on the far side, frozen and unable to go any closer to the distended arm, heard the moan and started to pull herself around the debris.

The sight of Claudia coming around a slew of splintered beams and bent brass was almost fearful to the suddenly alert Baur. She moved with such a paralytic slowness that he assumed she was some sort of delusion, and that it symbolized the growing darkness of death come to take him away. The woman who kills us becomes our mother in the next life, he thought, abstractly, unable to recall the source. He didn't believe Claudia to be the one that had killed him. No, that role was reserved for Arisa.

The flight to Bradley was direct from Lisbon. Claudia had been bought first-class tickets from Bradley to Lisbon and back by the Teatro Nacional De São Carlos for a concert of featuring music by the Spanish composer Anton Garcia-Abril. She had been allowed to choose half the program and had taken the allotted time to perform a set of art songs that Baur had written for her the year before. They were reworkings of previous arias from *Pamela* and *Hellfire*, and in performing them Claudia herself felt like she was simply recycling previous material, performing works that were in no way new or fresh to her. It might have been a smart accident on her part, as the reviews praised the Garcia-

Abril songs while contrasting their “freshness” with the staleness of the modernist aesthetic for which Baur had always ardently adhered.

The leg room in first class always made her feel guilty. Claudia had long legs, but at only 5’6” she could still feel comfortable near the back in the coach section. She also liked first class because there were generally less smokers, or at least less obnoxious smokers. Once, in 1985 she had taken a flight and been stuck between two men who had lit up pipes. This was even after the 1979 ban on pipe and cigar smoking on airplanes. Their response had been a meaty shrug and a plethora of sexist comments. The leg room and air quality of first class might make her feel guilty for others, but that didn’t mean she would in any way change places with them.

Claudia held her breath during takeoff. That first weightless moment left her legs with a tingle as if all the blood was being pushed toward her toes. A man on a flight to Phoenix had taught her the trick of chewing gum to reduce the ear popping. Another man on a flight to Boston had told her that it was all about your ears, and if you swallowed or held your nose and attempted to blow through it, you would pop your ears without the gum. Trust me, he had said; I’m a scuba diver.

Claudia preferred bubblicious, watermelon or some other fruity flavor if possible. She didn’t blow bubbles while sitting in first class, her knuckles white from the clenched fists, but just rhythmically chewed, her teeth clattering in a steady waltz.

After the plane had reached a comfortable cruising altitude the captain had turned off the no smoking and announced that electronics were now acceptable. Claudia had her Walkman with her, but chose to leave it in her bag, rather instead to study the score for *Cassandra’s Aria*. Her decision to do the Baur art songs had not been as easy as it might

have appeared. She worried after discovering the hidden messages that there might be something hidden in the art songs as well. She had scoured through them for the headstone, but had not been able to find it. Still, her tentative performance (and occasional wrong notes) which led to the less-than-stellar reviews, were all part of a new, complex response to the music upon the discovery that her husband was some sort of spy. It was like learning that your favorite actor was a child-abuser. She no longer knew how to deal with his work without the baggage of her knowledge. And for Claudia to have such superfluous thoughts about Pascal's music underscored her repressed and as yet unfulfilled reaction to Pascal as her lover, confidant, and husband.

The page was open to the overture. Unlike *Hellfire*, the music for *Cassandra's Aria* was much less abrasive and not anywhere near as disturbing. She hummed the melodies softly as her finger scrolled across the page. The buzz of the airplane made the humming more of an internal thing, hearing it through the vibrations in her skull rather than her ears, like when she put a finger up over her ear to check the pitch. As she absently read through the music, hearing it replayed in her head as she had on the Steinway in the Bushnell during a recent rehearsal, the only thing she could focus on was her husband.

Pascal had been a generous and loving man throughout their courtship. He had liked it when she talked with words like "courtship". He had always referred to her as an old soul, not the kind of shallow person to be caught up in fads and the latest phraseology. She had been raised by teachers and had an antiquated sense of social norms. It was maybe this sort of Jane Austen sensibility that had led her toward older men. Marrying Pascal might have come as a shock to her parents, but he was by no

means the first older man she had dated. There had been Frank Elianos, the insurance man (something of a staple in Hartford), her high school chemistry teacher Milton Succup, but only after she had graduated high school, and then during her undergrad at the Hartt School she had spent a majority of her time with graduate students from both the University of Hartford and UCONN. Of course, she acquiesced, there were a few boys her own age in high school and college, but they had not held the allure that a more mature man brought to a relationship. And to Claudia it simply felt like that such relationships were more rewarding to her in all regards. She anticipated that a psychologist would have a field day with such thoughts and tell her she had daddy issues. And maybe she did, but it was nothing rotten. Her father was a wonderful man. It just seemed that she had been raised to be of a style that was a few decades before her time. She was like Audrey Hepburn, but with neon leggings and a lot of plastic jewelry.

On long flights she liked to make long lists in her head and then go through each check box and recount the tale to herself, as if she were a narrator in a film.

The first box she had checked had been Milton Succup, a chemistry teacher with one of the worst high school names imaginable. And he wasn't really much older than her, just five years. He had gone to college at Dartmouth and had gotten a job in Danbury right out of school. He wasn't a snotty academic or anything either, he was hip to the counter-culture movement and would even play records in class while the students would be mixing solutions in their lab groups. He was a Beatlemaniac, and would play *Abbey Road* again and again. Claudia liked the Beatles as well, and one day had stayed later to talk about the song "Imagine". Milton had gotten so enraptured in the concepts of the song, and had almost seemed ready to kiss her in enthusiasm.

Claudia was unsure what to think of such an advance. But she did admit to herself that it had been exciting, and the thought of a man with such passion for music had given her sweet, soft dreams at night. After graduation she had stopped by his classroom during that small session when the students are all gone, but the teachers are still there. He was cleaning out beakers or something stereotypical. She had just come out and asked him out to dinner. Milton had been hesitant at first, unsure of how to gauge his own feelings and resolve the issues of student vs. former student and so on. Finally, she had convinced him that it would be a good idea.

They had dated secretly throughout the entire summer, arranging accidental meetings and exchanging long letters and poems (not to her surprise was he a poet). It had torn him up when she had left for Hartt in August. He had known she was leaving, that this was a fleeting escapade, but had still professed love and even seemed broken up enough to possibly propose. It was then that Claudia knew where the power of such relationships truly stood. She had been enamored with him and enjoyed his company because of the feeling of power and control that he seemingly exerted, but in reality it was she who wielded all the power. And as she racked up elder boyfriends during her college years, they all proved to be as love-torn as poor Milton Succup. She had gone and seen him the summer before joining the Hartford Opera Company. It had been four years and he had not aged particularly well. Gone were the resolute chin and his powerful shoulders. Now he was a hunched man with outdated, unfashionably large and thick glasses. His shirt was covered in stains and Claudia could tell that he was still living a bachelor lifestyle. Like a child standing once again in a sandbox, she all of a

sudden felt too tall for her surroundings, too mature and old for the withered man who had once read poetry to her as they lay post-coital in the back of his car.

The stewardess, dressed in a plaid dress and an oversized gold peace medallion for a necklace, tapped her on the shoulder and asked for her drink order. Claudia ordered a beer (she had always been masculine in her adult beverage choices) and asked for a pillow. She was in a window seat and wanted to block the emanating cold from the window.

The stewardess left toward the front of the cabin and Claudia resumed her cathartic list of former lovers.

Morriss Greenberg mauled the piece of paper in his sweaty hands. The ink had spread across from the perspiration, and he was no longer sure if it was a one or a seven. He walked down the disinfected hallway, smelling the familiar hospital smells. The walls were the same sterilized white that Morriss saw in his FBI office. He was moving slowly, calculating his approach for both Baur and his wife. The evidence was pointing toward Franklin and his lover Tony as being somehow implicit in something illegal, but Morriss still felt certain that Baur had some involvement as well. His suspicions were piqued through the tragic accident. That Baur was injured and Franklin killed seemed incriminating in its own right. By his own logical progress, Morriss assumed that if he was right about Franklin, then Baur must also be involved, and if Baur was the intended target or somehow the perpetrator... Morriss let his mind trail through the logic, but always came to the same dead end. Without Franklin all he had left was Baur. They had tracked down Anthony Bell and although he seemed to have gotten into a fight with

Franklin Pettricione, in Morriss' opinion he didn't have the cajones to be the one that started the stage avalanche.

That's how I'll write it in my report, he thought, that Suspect Bell did not have the cajones in the reasoned opinion of the Senior Officer.

Morriss came upon room 511 and looked in. It was empty except for a bed with a discarded pair of crutches lying crossed near the bottom. Must be a seven, not a one. He turned and moved down toward the end of the corridor and saw Claudia Ingrassia-Baur standing outside of 517 staring at him. He tried to smile, but it looked quite forced. He sped up his gait and shrugged his suit jacket into place as he stopped in front of her. He stretched his neck to the left, an unconscious habit that seemed to predict inclement weather, and tried the smile again. This time he felt he was more successful.

Claudia was holding her arms tight to her body as if she was cold. She was rocking slightly, her oversized bracelets protruding out from her exposed wrists like ribs. She didn't seem to react to either the forced or the less-forced smiles and her eyes pulsed slightly as she seemed to try and remain still and stoic.

"Miss Ingrassia-Baur," Morriss said.

"Agent Greenberg, Morriss..." she replied.

A nurse walking by felt the chilled formality of their visit. She had seen such situations before between estranged siblings at the eminent death of a parent. This was the sort of meeting that often involved heated and taunted whispering. The nurse continued past, picking up her gate. She looked at Claudia, unaware of the complex layers upon which she was trying to conceal and simultaneously inform to the portly FBI agent. What she was picking up on was the latent sexual chemistry.

“Are you here again to try and speak with Pascal?” Claudia asked.

“Yes, as well as talk with you about the accident.”

“That’s what you call it, an accident?”

“What else could it be?”

Claudia felt trapped by Morriss, as if they were playing chess and he was obviously superior. She saw the ghosts of his strategy in every word he spoke, and attempted to parse and break down every syllable for compound logic and meaning. In her own mind she had already lost a thousand times over, and worried that every time she was proffered to speak would end in Morriss pulling back an imaginary curtain to reveal that she was now trapped in a cage of her own words. She recalled the soliloquy in *Henry IV, part II*, and felt the pressure of the crown of knowledge upon her own head. To be young and ignorant again, she mused, not really sure if that would be the answer to all her problems.

Morriss shifted his girth from one straight leg to another, shaking out his suit jacket again as he did it. Claudia stood motionless, waiting for him to press the situation, ask the questions. She was in a defensive sort of strategy, the less she said the safer she felt.

“Miss Baur, could you tell me what you saw the night of your husband’s accident?”

Claudia ordered her thoughts like she did with her lists. “I spoke with both Pascal and Franklin before their meeting. Apparently Franklin had had some trouble with Anthony Bell, but not about any of the things you had mentioned. It was a medical matter.”

“How so?”

“Franklin thought that he might have AIDS.”

Morriss looked unprepared for this revelation. “Who told you this?”

“Tony Bell. He told me that evening.”

“He was at the Bushnell?”

“Yes.”

“When?”

The pace of the interrogation had picked up, but then suddenly froze. Claudia did not want to lie, but did not want to implicate Tony through word choice. She breathed deep, her head a little fuzzy from the sudden intake of oxygen and antiseptics. She parsed her language and finally found a phrase she thought would be best.

“He told me that evening after the performance. We bumped into each other right outside Pascal’s office. He did not look secretive or stalking, merely injured and rattled.”

“Is there anything else you can tell me about his appearance or behavior?”

“He was bruised badly from a fight with Franklin. He said when Franklin found out about the possible infection he went berserk and pummeled Tony.”

“Now, that wasn’t that hard, was it?”

Claudia scowled at the patronization. She was just glad that she could report what she saw truthfully, without saying the whole truth.

“Anything else?” she asked. If Morriss hadn’t been so focused on checking out her breasts he might have noticed the slight grimace in her hand as she tried not to rush.

Agent Greenberg pulled the worn pad of paper out of his suit breast pocket. He reached for a pen, but didn’t find one. He looked around and found a bic attached to a

patient chart and borrowed it, showing it to Claudia as if he had found some sort of treasure. He wrote in what she said, mumbling it back to no one in particular as his hand passed across the small page. He was the sort of person who mouthed the words as he wrote.

With the business end of the job out of the way, Morriss felt the sudden pang of lust for Claudia. He had held it back through his investigation, but had been unable to keep it cloistered as he stood in front of her. In the way that men's minds often do, it became a single-track, goal-oriented sort of quest. He put the pad away and placed the pen back with the medical chart. His heart started beating faster and he slowly inched in toward her, picking up a strong whiff of her perfume as the distance closed. Claudia watched this with a waning eye. There had been moments in their interactions, all pre-accident, that she had felt the tension coalesce into a tangible attraction toward the agent. She had even guiltily dreamed of him while alone in bed during Pascal's recuperation. But those isolated moments had passed, much with the holiday season, and now, she had firmly established a sort of aversion toward him due to his almost fanatical pursuit of members of the company. An easier way to think about was that he had simply worn out his welcome.

As Morriss leaned in toward Claudia, taking in her scent, she likewise got an almost toxic amount of his cologne in her olfactory senses. Morriss, a constant sweater, had doused himself with Aqua-Blue before leaving the hotel room that morning. He had thought it would mask his usually strong, sweet, sweat smell, but instead had created an impenetrable wall of pugnacity that pushed Claudia back for air within two seconds of

proximity. It was a self-destruction of intent. Claudia, even if she had wanted to, could not stand to be close to him for more than a few seconds.

As she leaned back, Morriss tried to speed up his approach. Claudia pushed out a braceleted hand and felt the squishy expanse of his stomach through the silk shirt. His body wiggled slightly, a small stomach spasm, with the introduction of her touch. But Morriss knew this was not what his body had been hoping for. He looked up from her hand to her eyes, which were likewise keeping him at a distance. They did not speak, but he understood what she was saying. It was not an unforeseen event for Morriss. It had always been a given that he was the one that inevitably fell for the girl that was not interested.

He leaned back from her, bringing his cologne cloud with him, and sulkily turned and headed toward the end of the hall and the flickering red sign that pointed toward the exit.

Claudia had a notebook that she had started, feigning it as a diary complete with numerical lock, where she kept the status of her research into Pascal and his Soviet connection. After the accident had forced *Hellfire* to shut down, she had spent half of her time at Pascal's side and the other half at the library, doing research into all aspects of espionage.

She started by taking the cipher and going back to decode the messages in the previous operas. It had seemed that any of Baur's works could include messages, but since the found page only mentioned *Orphée Redux* and *Hellfire*, she worked for the moment on the assumption that it was only in the operas that he had encoded messages.

The literature about ciphers, codes, protocol, etc about spying was quite limited at the downtown branch of the Hartford Public Library, and Claudia was afraid to check out any books for fear that her name would appear on the back flap in case some Soviet agent was perusing the library for something akin to an autobiography. She would write down the call number from the catalog, and then wander through the stacks, creating a weaving maze toward the section (UB270) and pick up Ronald Seth's book or something similar. Then, on her return route to her secluded desk, she would stop near the M1600's and grab an opera, and maybe stop in a random aisle on biology or Prussian history and select a title or two. It was a classic deceptive maneuver she had felt was straight out of the spy genre.

Her notebook was complete with a plethora of lists and assumptions (as well as pros and cons and relevant citations) that she constantly reiterated and rehashed in order to clarify what Pascal was doing and how he was doing it.

The cipher page had the initial metric and musical progression that would signify the start of the coded message. It just didn't begin at the start or at a prearranged spot, but rather could show up at any moment in the 2+ hour opera, and even then would only last at most five minutes. It was completely hidden in the world of twentieth century atonalism and cognitive dissonance.

In *Orphée Redux* the headstone had shown up early in the first act. It was an innocent scene setting up the relationship between Pamela and David. But, at about two minutes into the scene, the orchestra cleared out and the strings had the progression and rhythm in a pizzicato passage. From that moment Claudia had analyzed all the important lines of the opera, but nothing resembling a coherent message emerged until David came

back in with a small segment about his life growing up in New Jersey. Then, the message had started to make sense. Claudia quickly pressed through the remaining lines of the mini-aria, writing out the notes on a separate sheet of staff paper. Underneath she applied the cipher. The phrase: “Contact, message relay awaiting instruction” emerged in block letters underneath the transcribed line. After David’s section was over, the code reverted back to gibberish.

Claudia next went through *Hellfire*. This time the message read: “In position will await go code.”

The line froze her hand on the paper. Where were these messages being sent? She couldn’t figure out if the Soviet agents were coming to the operas or how they were getting the information. But suddenly the answer became abundantly clear. Both premieres were broadcast live on 88.9 NPR. The Hartford Opera Company had brokered an exclusive contract with the station to broadcast live premieres of new works commissioned by the company. Since Claudia had first performed with the company they had premiered four new works, two of the Baur’s. If the message was meant to be translated through the airwaves, then it meant that someone was listening on the other end, oblivious to anything performance related except for the cipher. The listener waited for the cipher and then transcribed the notes that came afterwards.

Claudia copied all that she had found into the notebook. After Baur had recouped, Claudia stopped going to library, afraid that the sudden change might arouse suspicion. She kept the diary on her at all times, and hid the incriminating pages behind a drawer in the old desk in her dressing room. It was a sort of divide to protect scheme that she had read in one of the books.

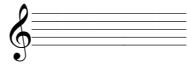
The accident had caused a lot of damage, and before the Bushnell could reopen that spring, everything in the offices was boxed up and moved to a secondary site, as a construction crew worked on repairing some of the stage left wall that an inspector had worried might be damaged from the accident. When he moved back into his office, Claudia helped him unload, and although she had tensed up when the box containing his loose papers was scattered about on the desk for filing, Pascal had seemed to notice nothing amiss. She worried about what she knew, but hoped (and possibly deluded herself) into believing that maybe with the loss of the cipher pages, Pascal would be unable to code in a message in *Cassandra's Aria*, that maybe this close call had mandated for him to cease the messages completely. Her love for him, although strained, was still silently holding her tongue, and she merely waited, hoping that it was over and that the next opera would not have any sort of message included.

Back in the present, her mind returned from the wandering cascade of thoughts that she used to keep from looking at the paper. She had completed the transcription, and although had written down each letter as she decoded the message, she had tried (like trying to avoid staring at some hideously deformed person) to keep her mind from combining the innocent letters into forming guilty words. She wanted to hold back, not know what it was she was going to sing to some voyeuristic Soviet listener, what she was going to be forced to tell the enemy through her voice. The message had been placed at the end of the opera, in her climactic aria. It was a somewhat ironic placement by Pascal, as it was the same aria in which Cassandra explains everything, tells her awaiting murderers of Orestes' revenge and even the eventual fall of Rome. It was an aria that

screamed through thirty-two hundred years of recorded history toward the cold war and beyond. It was an aria of determinism as well as pluralism.

The decoded message on the paper read: "Operation go. Proceed."

Scene 2



Pascal Baur felt like he was stuck in a strange loop. The low hum of the lights infected his brain like a knowing cancer, splintering about to the point of diminishing returns. The office had been repainted a deep red, a tell-tale heart of guilt and hubris. It had been Baur's idea, after Franklin had bit the big one in the grimy backstage like some soft extra. Barbara had presented herself then as the great Beelzebub, a specter of his past that he had never really known but had somehow always feared. Now, he was sitting in his office and worried for everything. The lights were humming a nefarious tone and the zeitgeist of revenge hung through the halls like holiday holly.

Baur was feeling old these days. His joints were sore and his hair seemed to be thinning in the small treeline that still surrounded his polished peak. After thirty he had thought his hair loss was over, that what he had left was what was there to stay, but now a mixture of stress and more stress was contributing well to the fear of total decay and destruction. Baur felt like some sort of milk product, long past his pull-date trying for one last desperate grab at conclusion.

The lights still hummed, but now were joined by distant trumpets.

The room color had caused his synesthesia to freak out like some hippy at a Dead show. A Day-Glo skeleton of long nights staring at walls greeted him every time he closed his eyes. His nose itched with the lingering musk of incense, a frankincense bouquet that stung the guilty thoughts within him like myriad bees.

Baur felt like he was stuck in a strange loop. Pascal would find that his thoughts were circular, he was himself a strange loop which his thoughts would find that circular or possibly twisted into some loop of strange thoughts and circular and never-ending.

It was like being stuck in a maze where the final end of the road merely led back to the beginning. Like that Bach canon. Like *Finnegan's Wake*. But somehow the beginning was still even further back than the original. He was neck-deep in a river of Platonic forms and was flowing further and further from the source. His driftwood existence was heavy with excess water and too much caffeine. His nights were spent screaming into a pillow of down and hemp. He had been told the odor would help him sleep, but so far it was not accomplishing its tactical goal.

Eeeeeeeee, like a screaming rocket coursing through his head from ear to ear in stereo sound, breaking glasses like some damned Memorex recording. Each repetition growing out of phase until it was simply static that was scratching across the magnetized head toward his phased ears.

Baur was starting to distrust his own logical precision. His hand had stood motionless through the whirlwind of thoughts and now was anxious to try and get some work done. *Cassandra's Aria* was well overdue, and although the work was done in short score, he was not even close to finishing the orchestra score or get parts copied. But wait, he couldn't trust even his own recollection because he recalled that it was done. The premiere was tonight. Had been since like forever, but how then could the parts and score not be done? His mind would wander and it would be history, his story would seem disjunct and corroded like a wheelbarrow left out in the rain. A red wheelbarrow, WCW would say.

His mind would wander and then it would be two, three days later. He was a prisoner, disoriented and disrobed in his own office of blood-red walls. And that lingering scent of frankincense, a smell that brought him back to childhood and Christmas and his mother sitting softly by the tree crying. I'm sorry, she would say, her eyes red from the running water and rigid rebukes of Pascal's father. Her mouth would open again and she would apologize, but for what the young Pascal could never be sure. Only later would he understand that she was the one that was ill, not that young dimpled talented Pascal who all the old ladies adored like their own. He was not secretly bad or sick or a burden, as he would often go to sleep thinking. It was his mother, his mum and he was nothing but her sweet angel, but not the class of angel that rebels and looks back in anger at the heaven he had been removed from. No, young Pascal was not that kind of angel.

It was snowing that Christmas, but not anymore. His mind had forgotten the snow and instead all he could feel was the strange clamminess of his mother's hands, how he thought she was so loving and warm but instead was cold. It wasn't her fault, but in Pascal's steely sound mind it seemed like evidence that could not be ignored. And so in his fevered dream he would listen again and again as his mother apologized for Christmas. He would again and again ensure her that the presents were there, that she had not been inadequate or unloving. He would hug her as long as his frail, chilled body would allow, until his arms were numb to her cold, and then he would let go and she would again start crying. She would always cry when he let go, and then he would immediately hug her tighter, but like some heroin junky (or so he would later equate it),

the new hug would always be inadequate to a previous hug, and he would always be chasing himself through the maze. It felt like hell, felt like misery.

Felt like he was stuck in a strange loop. Pascal Baur, the young child who could not make his mother happy.

Now Pascal Baur the composer who felt like his walls were turning in and retreating, and the world was becoming engulfed in such a profusely rich gas of frankincense that soon the air would be forever flavored, forever feigned fragrance futile.

Harumph, the sound of his lips buzzing with the florescent lights. An animal like a walrus responding with a throaty call. But it was not a walrus but some daemon that would guide him through the ether and past the moon. Lucretius, the great creator of mother earth, calls for him like an invalid for morphine. That bastard who really doesn't care for him but still needs him nonetheless. Why do you torment me? Baur screams, but no sound resounds from his voice. He is mute in his dementia, and not with the moon hovering close like a clock on the wall he knows that he is far beyond the pale truth of the old philosophers and has passed through that retched ether beyond the moon and is now standing before god—lowercase g—like some simpleton about to be scolded.

But what could this be? Must it be?

Kundera would scream at Baur if he could, his invocation of Beethoven now used for some crap philosophical stumbling. What a worthless reference he would scream at Baur, why don't you just grab that pale hand and walk away and let us be.

Must it be?

Like he was stuck in a strange loop, Pascal Baur felt that the walls just continued around and around. They never ended and never began. It was like being stuck in a

bubble, trying to find the beginning of a circle that he knows is futile. Brandishing his cognitive loops and strange thoughts like some problem to be solved, he wandered around the office, picking up scores and flipping through them, hoping an answer might lie in the music or at least it would provide some momentary relief from the blitzkrieg of synapses screaming up through his head toward the citadel of his soul.

The lights pulsed like the beats of a major second. Baur, the Technicolor tactician, found the soft blue to be comforting and serene. His mind was no longer screaming towards the distant ground like a rocket, but was more stable, more there.

He was no longer sundowning, but it was no longer important. All he could hope was that he wouldn't be stuck in time, strung around like some Vonnegut character through the fourth dimension, a Trafaladorian, a Doctor, Who, or what, he could no longer be sure. He just needed to be placed somewhere, and then he could focus and finish. It didn't matter when; just that it remain stable, or else his thoughts would again split and scream across the sky, away from him and toward the ether.

His mother had been sick for a long time, but he had only known about it much later. Her fits and trances to the young Pascal were as inexplicable as the disappearance of the sun at night. For in his mind the revolutions of all things revolved around his head, and, like all children his age, anything that was removed from his sight was removed from him. As if at such a young age he could feel the shredded remnants of his mother's soul, he felt that he was nothing but a ticking clock, and at some point it would all expire and the entire world would grow dark and cold, cold like his mother's clammy hands.

Eeeeeeeeee.

He was stuck in a strange loop. Pascal Baur felt like that was the one truth he could finally hold inside and it would not freeze his heart like those clammy hands. It was a truth that would not diminish in his glistening thoughts or fade through the conceited draw of father time.

But what cost is the cost of success? He thought back to his first meeting with the sympathetic Soviets and how they had hinted, however haphazardly, harrowing stories about government and what might have happened.

What *did* happen to Diane? He could no longer be sure. He had left for the interview, that much he could recreate with almost pristine accuracy. He could recall the slight blemish on her cheek, the dangling thread on her skirt. The smell of day old macaroni and cheese that was wafting from the sink. They lived near a subway line, and on some nights he could still feel the slight vibrations of the number 9 train passing below, carrying the nightowls from clubs up in the Bronx down to Greenwich Village. The vibration had an effect like music, and in his dreams he could vividly recall the pale green glow that would infect his memories when the train passed. Even waking he sometimes felt the room strangely tinted, or would ask Diane randomly if she was feeling sick. The vibrations, like a forest surrounding him, would encroach him until he felt the soft tickle of roots running over his toes. Diane had been alone with the soft tickle and then something horrible had happened.

It was the cost of doing business he had heard a cop say in passing to another cop. He had turned angrily toward the short man, his uniform tight as if he had recently gained some weight. Pascal's look had taken the man by surprise, and he lowered his eyes and

looked away long before Baur could summon the words of reproach he so desperately needed to spit at someone.

The macaroni was still in the sink. He can't remember if the smell had still been prescient, but his recall associated the pungent odor with the darkness of that night. It had been a new moon, or at least he couldn't recall ever seeing the moon, and a thick blanket of clouds hung low over the snow-capped city. If he had been down on 35th, he assumed that he would at most only be able to see twenty-five stories of the Empire State Building.

She had already been taken away by the time he got there. A neighbor had heard a sound at some point during the evening news and had peeked her head out of the door to check it out. The old woman, a much better target Baur would later think in a drunken stupor, had seen the door ajar and had knocked...tap, tap, tap...then gone in to make sure everything was alright. She found Diane lying by the coach, her dress torn as if she had been slung around. She was still breathing when the old woman found her, but it seemed that twice as much blood was exiting with each shallow inhalation. The ambulance had been nearby, but it didn't matter. Baur had gotten home at midnight and they all shared their sympathies and most said that there was nothing he could have done. That he was almost skipping until he saw the red and blue lights he later would hate himself for. He would hide out in the apartment for nearly two months in almost complete and utter motionlessness. He was a zombie, and only a call telling him he had gotten the Hartford Opera Company job even registered in his memory for those listless days. It was just a repetition of night and day, day and night, but unlike the song, she was no longer there. Her smells remained on the sheets, and he had trouble washing them and in the end just

threw them out, as if it were less painful to discard her memory than to live with it fading through each successive wash cycle. His life became a routine of inaction, and he felt like he was slowly circling the drain of an ultimate despair. He...

Was stuck in a strange loop. Pascal Baur felt like he would never get out of it. He had come home to find her gone, dead, chilling at the morgue (No—chilled, as in the past-tense). He was taken by two cops, one white and one black, down to the morgue to identify the body. He had not cried when he saw her pale and motionless, her hair seemingly darker because of her pallor. The black cop asked if he'd like a moment alone to say goodbye. He almost said no, but held back, and his inaction served as a silent affirmation. Baur, his steely green eyes still devoid of tears, stood and watched her, pretending for his own sake that she was merely sleeping, or he was in some sort of dream. The lights above hummed an E and all the light that came down carried a silvery tint. It was like he was in some sort of movie. He watched her and waited, then, as if he had finally been given a script, he leaned down and hugged her. He held her cold body tight, taking in the cold like he used to for his mother. The promise of a fresh, clean decade was not supposed to go like this. Crime was supposed to go down. It was during a slight shiver that he finally started crying. He held her for quite a long time, tears flowing freely down his arms, creating a thin membrane of liquid between him and her, and as he held her the tears warmed to his body and he felt as if her body was warming, as if he was somehow bringing her back. He kept his eyes shut, tears barely able to escape the locked ducts, and whispered softly to her. Stay with me...don't give up...I love you. His convulsions were slowing and he felt tired and alone.

Baur opened his eyes, but she was still dead. Her body was shiny and wet, glistening as if touched by the dew of daybreak, but remained white and motionless. Eurydice please, he begged, as if enough belief in mythology, like a belief in God, would somehow redistribute the natural order of the world and allow her like a legal loophole from which to follow him back through Hades. But all was for not anyway, for he had opened his eyes and looked. He wondered if Orpheus had managed to make it to the surface if he would have dared open his eyes. Baur imagined a never-ending decree of separation—that the moment he opened his eyes and saw her again, experienced her again alive and cherubic and there, she would disappear, be it fifteen seconds or fifteen years from their ascent from death.

Heavy with the weight of ghosts and dreams, Pascal Baur limped around the red room, his cane left by his desk in its familiar spot. His leg was like a map of undiscovered country, lines leading to nowhere and dips and swirls of an unnatural hue. It was hard to even call it his leg after so many surgeries. No longer could his fingers run familiarly up his leg, and the necessity of a cane seemed to be like the first domino that was slowly cascading a whole ocean of other problems. Since he used the other leg more it had started to hurt, and his wrist was often sore because of the cane, his balance was off because of the constant tilt of his head, and he even thought that his penis was starting to curve the other way as if to counteract the lean. The falling set had crushed Franklin, killing him instantly, merely winging Baur, pinning his leg underneath. The remaining crew in the building had organized an effort to lift up the set, but in the initial struggle the textured scenery had ground his leg into a bloody mess of what looked like raw

hamburger. The doctors had merely shrugged at the contorted body of Franklin and immediately prepared Pascal for surgery.

He awoke, groggy and sick two days later. Claudia told him that he had been speaking little phrases for the last two days but he remembered nothing. He watched her nervously for any sign that he had divulged the terrible secret of Franklin's demise, but the fact that she was with him had almost immediately soothed his fragile sanity into some sort of holding pattern.

Stuck in a strange loop, Pascal Baur felt like he was halfway between the start and the end. Midway through my life's journey, he mused.

On a...

descent.

Staring into the abyss of his beleaguered soul, Pascal thought of the women who had loved him. His mother, in her own unusual way, had loved him. Diane had loved him even up through her death. Claudia had loved him.

Claudia did love him?

Shortly after he had returned from the hospital he had noticed the change in her demeanor. She was distant, but not in the way you see on television. She wasn't pouting in the corner or shrugging off his hand from her shoulder—she just seemed to be moving at a different frequency than he. It was as if they had been knocked out of phase. The falling wall had pushed him through the fourth wall, beyond the opera in which he existed into a world where life was unusual. It was an interesting feeling, Baur thought, to exist in a place where they don't want you to be, where you don't belong. He had written of the atrocities of Dresden and the Nazis but until he felt the cold pallor of

isolation and separation did he understand the psychological turmoil that trailed the physical torment of the concentration camps. His horrific opera and the tragic death of the star attracted national attention. Sickly, it had boosted the credibility of the work and he was now in constant demand to direct and conduct the work. It was being done this season in Mantua, Sydney, Detroit, and Seattle. They had all called to offer him a large stipend to oversee their production. He had begged off due to his injury. Baur had become something of a macabre celebrity.

The reviews had all used ghastly language, but more or less positively, and in a way that enticed people. It was like watching a car crash for two hours, one review had said. And there were even talks of releasing the premiere on a VHS. It had been taped for public television (somewhat strangely, considering that the subject matter would probably keep it from ever being aired). He had published the work through Boosey & Hawkes and was now being asked to send even more works. Another *Hellfire* would be great, they said. The death of Franklin Pettricone and the suspense of the short-lived investigation had been nothing but gold for Baur. And now, his star on the rise, he couldn't help but prepare for the eventual fall.

And all he had to give up was his leg and any chance at peaceful rest.

His head pulsed with the crimson walls. Now, in his office he had the constant presence of E major. The entire Intermezzo had been written in E major. A sort of Stravinskian tonality that would push through normally but then change on a dime. His head buzzing, Baur brought to his lips a can of ice tea and drank. The warm liquid fizzled on his tongue and the intense searching of his psyche momentarily dipped to a low murmur. The only side effect of the relief would be the sudden memories of his

mother. Life a specter, she haunted him from the recesses of his mind. She would show up in random memories like an imprint, a watermark that would sit still in the background. As he closed his eyes and imagined the scenes of his operas, she would invariably walk out with the chorus or be hidden in the back of the violins. She was a ghost in the machine of his fragile reality.

He had written *Cassandra's Aria* for her.

She had been a sort of sad prophet in regards to many things, but no one would listen, especially her young son. Pascal would come home from school, another day of nondescript High School and find her rearranging the furniture or cooking multiple desserts. Each sounded benign when abstracted, but the thing with his mother was that she brought an intensity to each task that gobbled up everything else in her life. The desserts were the only thing she would have thought of, which included getting dressed or feeding the dog. Pascal would always check the poor mutt before retiring to homework or reading or practicing, as he knew that if he didn't feed Tchaik (his father named him after the composer, much like he nicknamed Pascal after Boethius) then the animal would go hungry. His father, a determined and focused man, did not even notice such banal details. He was a big-picture, big-idea kind of guy.

But his mother, so focused that it seemed painful, was right about many things. She was right about her impending death. I'm dying, she would scream, melodramatic with a sense of neediness, and young Pascal would come running. He knew better than to take her literally, but he would comfort her and whisper calming statements into her ear as she sobbed. She at one point had grown quite distant and had even said that the cancer of her sadness was eating her from the inside. Such statements were not uncommon, but

this one had the distant look of someone taking commands from outside the brain stem. Her eyes had appeared milky, like those of visionaries in films or descriptions in Homer. She was not diagnosed for two more years, and even then the cancer had occurred quick and without many signs. Ursina Baur died within a year, and even though her son knew that she had not been prescient or omnipotent, had not been a prophet or a seer, he still felt that she had been warning them all along, that she had been crying out and that no one was listening.

Cassandra, the heroine of his latest opera, was his mother.

And in a strange way, that made Agamemnon his father.

Pascal, who one would think would consider himself the Orestes of the story, always had had an affinity towards Iphigenia. He was not of the temperament to avenge with the sword. How he had gotten involved with the sympathetic Soviets still baffled him. He felt himself tied up on the rocks, his father ceremoniously slaughtering him to appease Artemis. Why? he would ask. And always he would get the same reply. Because you are my son and this is your use.

His mother had also been quite keen when it came to her young son. She had been the only one to believe his claim of seeing colors. Even though his father was a literature professor and well-read, and actually knew what synesthesia was, it was more a question of believing the young boy. Gregor Baur had never believed Pascal. Empirical evidence, he would ask whenever Pascal would make a claim. But his mother had believed him and nurtured him. Pascal had no reason to bother for a diagnosis until she died. It didn't matter that his ability or abnormality (whatever it really was) had a name; to her it was just another facet of such a marvelous gift.

Pascal had of course missed the optimism after her death. Both him and his father had remained stoic through the end. The pungent smell of the hospital sheets, the clicking sounds of dialysis and heart monitors. Pascal and Gregor sat motionless. Gregor was wearing a tie and jacket as if he was going to an interview. Pascal hated him for that for many years. He begged with his eyes for his father to show some emotion, to help him understand how much he should miss her. The stoic professor merely kissed her on the forehead. Goodbye. Pascal wanted to hold her and hug her and never let her go, but he knew his father would not approve. Gregor would scold his son if he showed too much emotion. You must remain even keeled and not let your feelings get the best of you, he had told him on his tenth birthday.

The dreams that haunted his sleep were Dali-like in their insanity. Ursina crying out from the morgue. Help me, she begged. I really wasn't dead, but no one checked. I'm here, inside, deep inside, you just need to get closer and you'll see. Baur cried secretly for a week, every night after leaving the salon where he and his father would read. The professor had Pascal reading *Dr. Faustus*. You are so interested in music, he said, try this, you'll like it.

In a strange loop, Pascal Baur felt like he was stuck staring at his disassociated body climb the stairs again and again. Night after night until he graduated from High School. His father had wanted him to go on immediately for college. Pascal's defiance was to skip college and try and study and teach music. He had started to try and write music, and in-between lessons he would play chords and watch the room change colors. Five years after leaving home, Baur found himself in Seattle playing for dance recitals. His big break was with Merce Cunningham, who had returned to his old stomping

grounds for some sort of benefit show. This is where he was first exposed to John Cage and the current state of modern music composition. At twenty-five he felt enough removed to finally enjoy college without the lingering path that his father had laid before him. Baur graduated from the University of Indiana and then had gone on to Juilliard for his Masters.

Pascal viewed the seven years between leaving home and enrolling in college as a sort of pilgrimage toward music. He worked at various positions within the music industry. His natural talent as a pianist led to gigging and performing. His ears led him toward recording and mixing. His latent understanding of music theory led him to teaching. Each step was a dead end that required more education. And it was not that Pascal was averse to learning, but rather, like a child who ate too many cherries, he had been sickened of academia through the gorging of his father. The stoic professor had tried his best to interest his son in his life and instead had turned Pascal away from his calling for almost a decade.

Now he felt that he was his father's son. Pascal, his leg aching from the constant pressure, sat stoic and silent.

A Strange Loop. Pascal Baur felt like he was stuck in the throngs of the harmonic convergence. He had been hopeful that entire week in August. Claudia had been gone on one of the many summer concert trips she had scheduled. He was not sure if she was getting away from him or simply staying active. They talked about the same amount as ever, but the depth of their conversation was significantly shallowed. Claudia seemed guarded, possibly afraid he thought, after his accident and the newfound understanding of his mortality.

She was in Europe, Madrid if he remembered right, during the harmonic convergence. He had called her the morning of the sixteenth, wishing her a beloved evening (the time difference) and telling her to look up at the stars and make a wish. Her voice seemed worried for him, and the sudden manic shift to joy had even startled himself to a point, but he had such hope for the convergence. Many of them had.

He had first learned of the event during his physical therapy. It was early March and he was sitting on a bench raising and lowering his leg. A double amputee from a traffic accident had been rolled in in a wheelchair. Pascal had tried not to stare, but he was still under the influence of a variety of painkillers and had trouble adjusting his gaze. He just tended to stare (but man had the pills helped with compositional focus, and he had finished his latest work well ahead of schedule). The man returned his gaze, mocking him by looking at the bare disfigured leg that he had raised about three inches off the ground. It was all he could manage. The double-amputee had smiled.

“Hi, I’m Albert.”

“Pascal.”

Albert wheeled over and offered his hand. Baur shook it and looked up into his eyes. He expected to see the destroyed look that he had become accustomed to in the mirror every morning. The sort of glazed, dim look of someone who was no longer complete. But instead of hurt, Baur sensed a weird manic pride. Albert was smiling.

The sudden shift in dominance took Pascal aback. “Why are you smiling?” he asked bluntly.

“Just happy to still be living.”

Pascal scoured. “Why?”

“Because a great time is at hand.”

“Please elaborate.”

The man looked at Pascal and seemed to hold back for a second, not sure if he was serious. He then leaned in, rising amazingly up slightly onto the stumps that ended in what was like big socks near where his knees should be. He smiled even wider and started to tell Pascal about the harmonic convergence.

The story seemed new-agey and farcical. But it had a sort of deep-seeded logic that made it easy to relate to. He was not asking for money or claiming anything too outrageous. Merely that the world had been living in a “hellish” (but not as the Christians understand it, he said) state since 1519, and that it was about to end. It was about to shift back to a peaceful time.

Pascal, always quick with numbers and dates, noted how the 1519 was shortly after Martin Luther and the ninety-five theses. Albert adds that 1519 was also the year that Cortés landed in South America and began to exterminate the Mayans, who had predicted it long before. Baur listened to Albert explain many more signifiers and startling coincidences with the Mayan calendar (from which the harmonic convergence is drawn). Albert seemed excited about the prospect of a new age of peace. Baur wondered if he had some sort of deluded expectation that it would also somehow cure him.

“The calendar is circular,” explained Albert. “And our loop, the fifth age, will end in 2012. Now that’s some strange shit.”

Strange loop. Pascal Baur felt like he was stuck in a fit of wishful thinking. He had gone home and told Claudia about the harmonic convergence. They had gone together to the library and looked for books on the subject. Claudia had been an amazing

help, with an almost uncanny ability to find the right rack in what Baur thought was a rather confused library. He had found two books and checked them out. That night he had read to her selected passages. He liked to do that. It was something his father had done for him and his mother, and although twenty years ago he might have scoffed at the idea of doing anything the same way as Gregor Baur, he now found the idea of sitting together and reading passages rather relaxing. His leg hurt less.

Claudia had not wanted to believe the possibility of the harmonic convergence. She had started scheduling concerts to supplement their income as early as April, and he had asked her to be with him in mid-August, but she had nonetheless taken a concert in Madrid for that entire weekend. He had asked her to fly before the sixteenth, and felt slightly astrological in asking. Still, when the flight in Detroit had crashed that morning, he had felt a grand sweep of relief in knowing that his wife was safe on the ground.

Nothing magical or incredible had happened over that weekend. Baur, unbeknownst even to his fellow friends in the movement, had secretly held the wish that the cold war would end on that day. Barbara had brought him the latest message in July to encode in the opera. He had lost the cipher page in the move from the Bushnell to the small office on Main and then back, but since Barbara merely gave him a small scrap with the leading cadence (his term for the section marking the beginning of the message) and then the notes of the message (rhythm was up to him) he had no trouble putting it in. In fact, he had felt a small amount of relief in not being able to understand what it was he was passing on. His mind, once so lucid, was a train-wreck of paranoid thoughts, and the ability to at least shut out one further patriotic atrocity provided the smallest of reprieves.

The harmonic convergence came and went and the Soviet machine continued.

The red room pulsed with the overhead lights. He looked down at his cluttered desk and found his copy of *Cassandra's Aria*. He flipped toward the end of the score and saw the familiar rhythm in the low winds. Then repeated in the brass. Double-intoned. Then, as a sort of message to Arisa and the Soviets, he had used Cassandra's final aria, the one about the future and the rise of democracy and the abandonment of the corrupt and feckless leaders who rule through a double-speak of ideas and implementations. He had taken some of the ideas from *1984*, and no doubt felt the Kremlin would realize the same wordsmith that called them nothing but pigs had contributed to their own coded message. He wanted to be through. He intended to give his resignation and leave with Claudia for any of the dozen of offers that had come in from around the world. He could direct *Hellfire* or write light symphonic fare and live a comfortable life all around the globe. As long as she came with him he felt it would be something his now frail body could achieve.

From above the lights caught his attention. As his focus shifted his field of vision changed from the red of Poe's telltale heart to that of complete darkness.

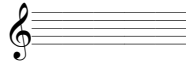
Baur awoke on the floor, his cane knocked over and splayed out in the middle of the office. He had fallen from his chair to the right, his head missing a stack of records by three or four inches. He surveyed his body and seemed to be uninjured, or at least no more than usual. His head spun from the sudden lightness and pulsed. He scrolled his eyes through his field of vision, like a satellite orbiting the planet in some sort of...

Loop. Pascal Baur felt like he was stuck in a strange atmospheric condition where the air tasted thin. His head was throbbing and his leg ached, created a complex

polyrhythm that he attempted to analyze. He felt on the verge of a sudden truth, as if the fainting spell and dislodged some unanalyzed fact in the recesses of his mind and that it held the key to everything he needed. He could almost smell it, like pasta bubbling on the stove. His tongue creased his lips and he could feel the faint texture of powdered cheese. The room turned a stucco orange and he heard a giant A major chord in high flutes, like an epiphany had just been dropped upon him. His mind was trying to tell him something about macaroni and cheese.

Pascal Baur felt like he was stuck in a strange loop.

Scene 3



“So the story goes...”

Kansas Jaffarian was sitting on a couch outside his dressing room. The walls were still covered with the day-glo stickers from the *Orphée Redux* production two years earlier. They now had the faded and dusty look of relics, as if left by a previous generation and almost imperceptible to those that spent any time down in the dressing room catacombs. Three young girls from the chorus were sitting side by side on the couch opposite. Kansas didn’t know their names and really didn’t care.

“Did you hear about Franklin Pettricione?” asked one of the girls, her hair a two-toned streak of purple and red. “I heard that he was killed by his lover, Tony something. Did you ever meet him?”

Kansas was sitting royally on the couch, holding court with the young and gossip-prone girls. He brought his hands together under his chin and proceeded to pop his knuckles. Three on the left, four on the right. He knew how to treat a captivated audience.

“Yeah, I knew Franklin and Tony. I was in *Hellfire*, as you know, I played Leonard Bitterroot. So I spent a lot of time with Franklin rehearsing. And you know, I remember Tony getting weirder and weirder as we got closer and closer to opening night. And I have since the accident put together my own opinions and a narrative and research and first-hand accounts from a myriad of people, and I have a little story that I think explains what really happened.”

He took a dramatic pause.

“...”

“So Tony was a bit of a whore, and I say this about a guy so it can’t be taken derogatorily. Ehm... He had a reputation that everyone in the company knew. He’d come up to visit Franklin and just make his life a mess. There was even a game that we used to play with him where you’d try and keep your mouth open through the whole time he talked...because he didn’t shut up ever. Ehm, and then you’d try and interrupt and see if you could get a word in.”

“...”

“So from what I’ve learned, Tony went out on the town every night he was in New York alone, which was quite a lot, per se. Tony would go out to all the fag bars and pick up men. So one night, he was out dancing, when he met just the fuckin’ cutest guy he ever saw (and I say this without judging, being a straight man myself). Anyway, they dance, and the guy is just too good to be true. He tells Tony his name is Ricardo, and Tony believes him because he looks kind of Puerto Rican or something. Ehm...and then things pick up. They’re just dancin’ at first, but then the guy at some point reaches down and like cups Tony, you know where, and is just so forward about the whole thing.

“And this continues for a few more hours. They are both drinkin’ and Tony and the guy get some pills and take them as well. Some coke too, I’d bet. Ehm...and then the party starts to wind down. Now for those that have never seen Tony, this guy is pretty small. He’s got like hair that’s the color of a moonless night, it’s that black. And it’s parted directly down the middle, but not in the casual way that some people do it. No, his hair is perfectly parted down the middle. Straight as a ruler (and I could make a

straight/gay joke here, but I won't). And he's not like tan or anything, and even if he was it wouldn't continue up to his scalp or anything, so the contrast between his like oil-black hair and his white scalp part makes it look like the way those stickers up on the wall glow. The perfectly straight line like draws attention to itself as if it was hungry for attention or something.

“So I don't know why Tony wouldn't be suspicious that this stud Puerto Rican had decided to take an interest in him. Who knows, ehm...he was probably too high or drunk or just thanking the many gods that a bronzed statue of a man was coming back to his house. Anyway, so they go back and, ehm...well I'm not going to get into the details, but to say that I'm sure you young beauties need not have your ears sullied by such degradations, ehm...and then you would assume that, like all males, Tony quickly fell asleep post-coital, snoozing like a log as they say.

“Well, in the morning, after waking up and smiling at the now cold dent in the bed next to him, he went into the bathroom to wash his face/brush his teeth/urinate, basically begin the beautification/purification process that was a daily routine. And to his horror he found that the Puerto Rican, Ricardo or whatever he said his name was, had left him a message on the previously immaculate and non-written on mirror. And while some of you romantic young girls might immediately think this to be a good thing (as Tony probably thought as well), it was not. For written on the mirror in permanent marker or sharpie or something one supposes, was a message that vehemently chilled his blood to the core.”

“...”

“The message read, ‘Welcome, my disconcerting compadre, to the world of AIDS’.”

Kansas paused to let the girls shiver and wave their bracelet-covered arms in the air, as if shooing away the imaginary spider of AIDS that came with the story. Kansas knew when he had a captivated audience.

“And that, ehm...is how Tony got AIDS, to the best of my research. Now, what happened next was almost as tragic. For you see, Tony was humiliated and scared and simply blocked the whole thing out of his mind. He thought it a sick joke played by a guy who awoke with regret and didn’t want Tony to try and contact him again. So scared was he of the possible truth of the sharpied message that he would much rather rationalize it as a disappointment with himself, that he was too flabby or boring or whatever, and that that was the real horror to the guy, not some AIDS-Harry story that had been concocted by a rejecting lover.

“So Tony went on as he always did. He drove up that weekend to see Franklin. As they always did, they had intercourse, and Tony felt fine and tried to hide his nervousness. Of course they fought, but to have not fought would have been the unusual scenario. Ehm...so this continued for a while. To the best of my research I believe the Ricardo situation was probably shortly after the premiere of *Orphée Redux*, so it was almost a year before he started to feel sick and got worried again and finally grew the courage to go and get tested.”

One of the girls, a blond who had been in the chorus for *Hellfire* as well, then raised her hand as if it was a seminar that Kansas was conducting. Kansas nodded in her

direction, slyly smiling as she reciprocated and pulled down her shoulders, readying to speak.

“Isn’t it true that then the FBI agent came and interviewed Franklin?”

Kansas nodded knowingly, leaning forward as if imparting a state secret to the captivated girls.

“I was interviewed as well. The agent, Greenman, if I remember, was here with a preposterous claim of communist sympathies. Now, that might sound unrelated, but I think it was simply a ruse to investigate Franklin and the AIDS-Harry scheme. You see, I believe that as the story got passed from one authority to another, the culprit and the victim got reversed, or that suspicious mouths made connections that were tenuous at best, and Tony was targeted as the original “AIDS-Harry”, or, as I have designated him in my research, A.H.1. Greenman was investigating Tony and trying to tie him to the infection of twenty people in Manhattan alone. The communist trick was to lure Franklin into a false sense of security, and to also keep him from overreacting, which, in case you don’t know, he ended up doing anyway.”

“...”

“So the day the agent arrived was opening night of *Hellfire*. Many of us were interviewed earlier that morning by Greenman. I saw Baur, Claudia and like I said, myself, get interviewed. Of course the agent kept up the pretense of “communism”, but a lot of his questions were directed toward Franklin and any “suspicious” behavior that we had experienced.

“And so I was walking through the halls after my interview (I was like a rock, unflappable, impenetrable...) when I saw Tony acting queer (no pun intended). He was

waiting outside Franklin's room. I then saw him knock and wait, but Franklin did not answer. He knocked again and finally Franklin opened the door, and the agent left and Tony went inside. I sat quietly as the agent passed, nodding in my direction as if he knew he had been outmatched. Acknowledging defeat, more than likely. Anyway, ehm...so the agent went by and headed toward the stairs and left. Luckily for Franklin he didn't wait around, because the yelling started to get louder, and then I heard what sounded like violence from behind the door. The door opened and Franklin walked out, pushing his feet into the ground with the force of anger I had never seen in him. He didn't see me, but walked the opposite direction, toward the doors that would lead to the pit.

“A few minutes after Franklin left, Tony lamely opened the door. Even in the dim light down here I could see that his face was a mess. He had blood on his shirt smeared in a death mask like facial image. He headed toward me and I just played still and uninterested. He seemed to be okay with it, because he walked by without saying anything. As he got toward the staircase I saw him pull the fire alarm.”

“...”

“It was cold outside, and I had to go out without my coat, even though I knew it was a false alarm.”

“...”

“I should have turned him in, but I didn't want to get involved in a lovers spat. I mean, that's maybe the one thing about gays that I think is kinda strange. I mean, they take on traits of husband and wife like roles, yet often both are pretty tough, and so the propensity for violence is so high.”

“...”

“I guess that there are also lots of women who are pretty buff, but I think you understand what I mean. It’s like the difference between alpha and submissive personalities. To have two strong alpha personalities in a relationship, like some guys are, is just like mixing dynamite and gunpowder.”

“...”

“Anyway, ehm...so that is most of what I know regarding Tony and Franklin. I had left after the show, which was pretty nasty (if I might add as a side comment) in its own right. But from what I have gathered from others, Tony must have come back to get his revenge on Franklin, for like kicking his ass and so forth. So Franklin was talking with Baur on the stage, probably getting some notes about the performance and ways to improve it for the next three shows, and then Tony must have shown up and pushed over the set, aiming for Franklin. They say it crushed him and killed him instantly. And it was not luck that the rest of the rafters, lights and such came down too. Tony, I was told, had spent some time as a carpenter or something on sets during some small productions at Wesleyan College up in Middleton, ehm...Middletown, where he had gone to school. So he would have known what he was doing by pushing over a load-bearing wall. So he was not only trying to kill Tony, but really kill him. Like demolish him, mutilate, and obfuscate him. Baur was just a casualty of the avalanche of wood and metal.

“I was told, confidentially, that the FBI agent, Green, had visited Baur in the hospital, or hôpital, if you speak French. They had tried to build a case against Tony, because obviously this sort of brutal murder showed that he was indeed the same sort of serial killer, and indeed he must be they thought, who would purposely infect people with AIDS. They thought the attack on the stage was their smoking gun, so to speak.

“But, as I’m sure you all know, Tony was never charged and is back in New York. I have it from sources that the FBI and the NYPD have tabs on him most of the time, but that he’s either too smart, or just not entirely the guy they think he is, to get caught. I’ve tried to inform them of my discoveries regarding his initial infection. I mean they should be looking for this “Ricardo” guy, Tony’s own one-armed man.”

“...”

“Ehm...I guess you are all too young to know Richard Kimble...”

“...”

“Well, that’s all I know regarding Tony and Franklin.” Kansas sat back, with the sort of finality in his posture that prosecutors show after a convincing final summation. The girls were sitting there, giggling at times with him when they thought he was making jokes. Kansas Jaffarian was the sort of guy that held court wherever he went, not because he was pristinely charismatic, but because he would simply leave any situation where he was not holding the rapt attention of everyone. And he knew when he had a captivated audience.

The blond girl, who seemed to be functioning as the alpha of the trio, leaned in conspiratorially, using a long, slender finger to pull Kansas toward her bright-red lips.

“What do you know about Claudia and Baur? I heard they are on the outs.”

Kansas smiled, his eyes scrunching together in way he thought imbued an encyclopedic understanding of the situation. Something he had learned from Pacino in that last scene in *The Godfather*.

“Well, my dear. You’ve come to the right place if you want to know what is going on between the, ehm...patriarch and matriarch of the opera company...”

“...”

“So the story goes...”

Scene 4



“Pascal, are you there?”

Claudia stood in front of the door, her hand raised to knock again. She could see through the sliver of open space under the door that a light was on inside. Claudia didn't know when she had reverted to knocking and waiting. There had been a time, shortly after the honeymoon, that she would merely stride in and he would without hesitation take her up in his arms and embrace her. Now, they had acquired a working formality. She did her best not to treat him as her husband, but rather as her boss, and he would almost ignore her at times as if overcompensating for their intimate moments later. And it was not like it had just come out of the blue. They had had many talks about how they should interact at work, the idea of formality and being professional. But she couldn't remember when either had decided to start adhering to their plan. She couldn't remember that first time when she had knocked instead of simply walking in and waiting to be scooped up in his arms.

A rustle from the other side of the blood red door alerted Claudia to Pascal's presence. She could hear his uneven gait as he pulled the injured leg along the carpet. He sounded like jazz in the way that the second eighth note swings back a little. A click came from behind the doorknob and Pascal opened the door. Claudia smiled at him as she reached down to kiss him. Even with all her knowledge of the code and his espionage, she still couldn't help but smile when she saw him. She imagined this must be the same feeling that women get upon visiting their spouse in jail. The conflicting urge

to be angry and aloof is replaced by the simple joy of their presence. Her body and mind where in a late-stage fight for her emotional control, and the very presence of Pascal always tilted the bout toward her heart.

Their kiss was long and bittersweet. Claudia just wanted to the moment to last forever, and Baur found the prolonged embrace overly imbued with passion, and he worried that it was a preparation for something tragic that was going to happen. They slowly broke facial contact, Claudia continuing to lean in slightly, with the consistency of a metronome, and plant light kisses on the corners of his warm mouth. Baur stood motionless, living in the moment of sudden and complete happiness.

“I’ve missed you,” he said.

“I’ve missed you too,” she replied.

Baur turned and she followed him in, closing the door and heading toward the couch, which had been moved to the far wall. They both sat down, Claudia fast and brazen, Baur slow and methodical, slightly shaking as he arranged to push out the bad leg and use the good one to lower himself onto the cushions. He felt old next to his nubile bride. She tried to avoid watching him sit, hiding his weakness from her direct stare. He had been in a sort of shell when they had met, due to the tragic death of his fiancé Diane, but she had been able to bring him out of it. She had saved him. It was this sort of ability that insinuated within her the belief that she could also save him from the mess he was now in. It was Claudia who could bring him back from the precipice.

Baur sat back against the couch and Claudia scooted in towards him.

“Does pasta mean anything to you?” he asked.

Claudia looked at him confused. She shook her head slow and almost unsure, as if she felt it should mean something, but what she simply could not recall. He looked away toward the door, staring for at least five long seconds. Then he turned back and inhaled deeply.

“I just have been thinking about it all morning, and I’m not sure what it means. It’s like my olfactory senses are trying to tell me a secret, but in code.”

Claudia flinched at the mention of coded messages. Baur was not paying attention to her and did not notice. He was staring beyond her, toward the wall and the stacks of boxes still unpacked. She had the sudden urge to hold him, as if he were a lost child.

“It’s funny. I’ve just been sitting here thinking, and then I got such a strong whiff of macaroni and cheese. I don’t know if I ever told you, but that is the last meal Diane cooked before she was killed. I found the pot in the sink when they finally let me into the apartment. The whole room smelled of burnt pasta. It’s funny. I’ve just been sitting here thinking, and all of a sudden that smell came into my head. But I have no idea why or what my brain is trying to tell me.”

Claudia reached out her hand and caressed his. Their wedding rings touched ever so slightly. Baur seemed to drift back towards her reality and turned toward her and smiled. “How was your trip?” he asked.

“Long. Long plane ride, long concert. I performed your Mallarmé settings. The Spanish audience didn’t get them I don’t think. They liked the Garcia-Abril better.”

“Well, he’s their guy, so I would expect as much.”

“How did the rehearsals go?”

“Kansas is doing quite well. I think the performance will be great. It was tense here with you being gone for two days right before opening night, but I think everyone understood and accepted it.”

“I booked the gig three months ago, and that was before the Bushnell booking mishap. We were not supposed to premiere the work until the 30th.”

Baur shrugged. “Should have assumed they’d have a Halloween concert and should have made sure our booking was confirmed.”

“Still, it’s not your fault.”

“Isn’t that nice of you to say.”

The conversation stopped and they sat in silence, staring at each other as if unfamiliar. This was the dichotomy of their relationship, she thought. She could still feel the love and joy of being together, but circumstance had wedged a slew of problems between them. They were the couple that loved each other even though they shouldn’t.

*Du doigt que, sans le vieux santal
Ni le vieux livre, elle balance
Sur le plumage instrumental,
Musicienne du silence.*

A stanza from the song cycle popped up in her head as they sat there in quiet. Claudia hummed a little aloud and Baur looked at her with a knowing smile. When all the talking stopped, when the confines of their confounded relationship proved too heavy for words, music still was able to bring them close. He hummed back a little of the melody, his voice a raspy but respectable baritone. His pitch was always perfect, but his voice had the untrained quality that granted the perfect tone little support or depth. It was almost like he sang in sine waves. The pitch was pure but weak, and Claudia could tell that he was always a little embarrassed with his lack of vocal ability. After finishing the

little snippet he cleared his throat, a habit she had seen more than once. Not really a habit, she thought, more like an effect of the lack of use his singing voice received. Baur leaned in on the hip of his good leg and reached for her hand. She reached it out, her pointer finger outstretched much like Adam on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, straight but slightly bent at the middle joint. Her finger curved around and hooked his outstretched hand and she performed a series of shifts to get closer. Claudia leaned into his chest slowly, listening for any sounds of discomfort or pain. His breathing had a slight wheeze to it, but Pascal seemed to be okay. She snuggled into a crook near his shoulder blade and exhaled with profound relief. The tenseness of earlier had momentarily melted away. She knew such a relief was fleeting, but tried to hold on to it as long as she could. Baur lied there, slowly breathing in and out, his hand steadily brushing her cotton shirt near the elbow.

In his arms she started to fade out, traveling back toward her notebook and the uncovered message. She tried to look away, to not read it, but the words seemed to be able to burn through her eyelids and become immediately prescient. In this dreamstate Claudia reached up and tried to claw at the paper, to destroy it. When that didn't work she started to claw at her own eyes, her fingernails digging in and scraping out large clumps of skin and blood. Yet the more of her face she removed the more clearly she could see the words. She tried to scream but immediately covered her mouth, suppressing in the gasp as well as cutting off the air. It was strange vision of self-mutilation and attempted suicide, but each successive assault merely brought things into a more clear understanding. She eventually felt she had removed all the remaining skin and blood in her body, yet she was still sitting there, looking through the clearest possible

field of vision (it was possible there was not even air between her and the notebook) and understanding the futility of her actions. She tried to look away, but found that her face would not move, nor her eyeballs or even her hands any longer. The words burned into her retinas, and even after all had seemed to go dark, the hand-written deciphered code remained, etched in white on a pitch-black background.

Claudia, her frantic self-destruction ebbing, calmly read the message again and again. The operation was a go. That meant something was going to happen. The music was going to allow something to happen. She thought of ways that the message might be stopped. She could refuse to sing, tell Pascal she knew of the message and would not perform. But then, she worried, someone else might just take her place, someone naïve or in cahoots with the Soviets. No, the only true way to control what happened was to go on as if nothing happened. She could sing all wrong notes, she thought, send a jumbled indecipherable message. But they might be expecting that, and it's possible that no message will just lead them to get it out some other way.

Her mind stopped, as if it had been spinning a slew of possible answers around this entire time. And now it had stopped and the most obvious and correct answer came to her as if out of the blue. She could change the message.

She had the code, she had the role. She could go back to her dressing room and see what notes would change the message to something different. She could simply change one letter.

From Go to No.

The operation is No.

And all would end. No attack, invasion, whatever was planned. Everything would merely end and she could tell Pascal and they could leave, move away, hide out in far away cities that were not infested with communists or capitalists. Somewhere where they could start over.

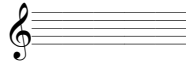
Claudia opened her eyes and realized that only a few moments had passed. Pascal lay silently below her, his breath shifting regularly, his heart beating slow and steady.

She turned her head toward him. "I love you," she said.

"I know," he answered.

Claudia turned back into his shoulder and let his gentle scent and body rhythms lull her into a deep and undisturbed sleep.

Scene 5



**translated from the French (except for the German Singing...)*

*“I first found love in the foothills of the Rhine falls. He was a young goat herder, I know that sounds cliché and silly, but I was young too and he was strappingly handsome, like the kind of man one saw in the silent films. Bright blue eyes and constantly fluttering golden hair, as if he were always walking into a breeze. He carried himself with a sense of promise, I don’t know how else to say it. Instead of walking through the green valley with goats, he seemed to be leading lesser men toward a better future. It could have been the way the light hid in the jagged incisors of the mountains, or the shimmering, wobbly effect that it created bouncing back from the falls, but he didn’t seem to walk when he led the goats. He seemed to simply...flow.

His name was Pascal.

I met him at church, which was the only way to meet young men in Schaffhausen. The American depression had spread like a virus around the world, choking up commerce. Schaffhausen was an agricultural town, but also a tourist town. This was before the war when young Germans and their wives would travel down by train and spend the weekend writing stanzas of poetry in the damp rooms as they tried to prove their love for one another. So much love around me that I had sort of a natural repulsion to it. Not that I hated love, but just the silly artifice of love that men and women who obviously didn’t have it tried to build up.

Pascal did not just one day walk into church and I heard bells. No, nothing silly like that. I had grown up knowing him my whole life. I had always liked him, but I had never felt the knowing look come my way from his direction. And in that way that love blossoms with the understanding of reciprocation, I felt nothing for him until the day he found my locket and returned it. Oh, to tell it now seems to be like reading back Jane Austen to you cynical youths. Television and popular music tell you how to love, and it is such a cynical love. But when I was a young girl it was something different. Yes, I had railed against the young pretentious German couples, but they were not cynical like you. They were simply ignorant. Having never felt love they simply imagined it out of thin air. Like a child pondering the tooth fairy or Santa Claus. They did not know love so they created it in a stereotypical German fashion. You now may know love, but it bites you as you try and pet it. Such a cynical love that has been rendered in this nuclear age.

I first noticed Pascal when he first noticed me. It was as simple as that. I had come home after church with my brothers and sister and as we sat down for lunch I noticed that my necklace was missing. In those days I always wore a locket with a picture on my father and mother when they were young. A sort of good luck charm I though would propel me into the arms of a wonderful man. I wore it everyday, rain or shine, summer or winter. Then one day after church I realized that its familiar weight was no longer around my neck. I had screamed out in worry, my two brothers storming into the kitchen afraid some animal had gotten loose. My hand around my neck, they searched the room for an attacker. My locket, I said, gasping as if it had just taken off through the shuttered window that overlooked a cherry tree and a small vegetable garden.

Soon enough my brothers and sister were all helping me search through the house for the locket. I held a secret belief that my younger sister Alma had taken it out of jealousy. She had coveted the locket since it had been given to me the Christmas two years before. My brothers tore apart the downstairs, lifting and rotating and moving every piece of furniture, even my father's heavy, oak desk. Of course they were careful not to disturb any of his papers or books. They knew that a lashing would greet them if they were found out.

My parents had stayed behind for a church meeting. My father, Roger, was a member of the Vestry and they had a standing Sunday afternoon meeting. My mother, Anna, was also very prominent in the church (although she could officially hold no position) and was thus invited often into meetings for her opinion. She was also a very talented musician and would perform both with the choir and on the organ if needed.

Anyway, my brothers were busy pushing and moving furniture back when we heard the hum of an engine approaching. You must understand, it was not like today with cars passing by every second. So to hear an engine meant either our parents were home or a visitor was approaching. No questions. The sound spooked Alma, who scurried up the stairs and went to her room to read. Gregor and Albert, my brothers, frantically put back all the furniture. I stood in the middle of the room, my dress swaying with the scattered movement of the boys. I was giving directions. Pointing and calling out final instructions on how to arrange the room correctly and especially so no one would notice.

But all was for naught. Instead of my parents opening the door and walking in, a solitary set of footsteps approached, stopped still, and knocked on the door. The sudden

ceasing of movement caused a sort of lagging tide through out the room, and it almost felt hard to remain still. Yet, me, Gregor and Albert all stood motionless, watching the door. I still remember distinctly watching a bead of sweat appear at the edge of the forest that was Albert's hair, cascading down his face and resting like a hanging stalagmite at the base of his chin. The drop hung motionless for a split second, then fell to the floor. To me it was like being shook awake. I walked to the door and opened it.

Now, Pascal was much taller than me, so instead of coming face to face with him, I opened the door and came face to face with my locket and his adam's apple. He was still wearing his church clothes, (we would often be required to take them off so as to keep them from getting dirty), and he had this coy look about him that made me understand that he really was looking at me—in that way. He held the locket between two of his fingers like one might hold a string in front of a kitten. I instinctively reached up for the locket, not even saying hello, and he slyly pulled it back towards his chest, causing me to lean in toward him. My senses took in the pungent smell of his sweat and up close I noticed that he had cut himself often while shaving (although it didn't really look he even needed to shave, really). That was when I first really saw Pascal and by the time he had handed over the locket and I had leaned back it no longer mattered. His smells were inside me and twisting me about like some sort of puppet. I greeted him and apologized for my rudeness. I turned around but Gregor and Albert had disappeared. I invited Pascal in for water and a piece of bread. He politely accepted, his cheeks rosy with embarrassment.

Now, I tell you, girls notice these sorts of things, even back before the magazines that told you what to look for. 'How do I know if he likes me?', ha. It is the same that it

was since man and women left the Garden of Eden. They were made for each other, compliment each other, and when you are in front of a man and he likes you, you know.

After he returned my necklace, Pascal started coming by more and more frequently. At first my parents were unsure what to make of the sudden interest. I was the oldest girl (my brother Albert was older than me), and they had never seemed to be ready for any of my steps toward womanhood. I played the piano, like my mother, and soon found out that Pascal did also. He loved music and we started playing duets together. My mother had acquired a collection of Brahms and Mendelssohn for piano four-hands and we had made it through both volumes well before the leaves fell from the trees. Now, I haven't told anyone this in a long time, but it was about the same time that we had gotten through the music books that Pascal first kissed me. We were seated next to one another on the piano and were in the middle of the wedding scene from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. After a fairly triumphant rendering of the Allegro vivace he slammed down the last chord, and right when I imagined people would start clapping, he leaned over and kissed me dryly and quickly on the lips. Later he would admit it to being the first time he had kissed a woman. I stood there frozen, unsure what to do. My body was hot and I could feel my hands pulse with my heartbeat. I nearly turned toward him and reciprocated when my mother came into the room. She had heard the music from the dining room and wanted to give notes.

Of course, we soon kissed many more times and Pascal became much more confident and I started to understand what the pulse of my hands and the flush of my neck meant. You see, it is not like it is now with television teaching you all how to perform the sexual act. We did not have that. Even our books (even the dirty ones) were

more concerned with a sort of symbolist representation than with the blunt and often guttural act of coitus. One our wedding night (because we were after all, both virgins), it was a disaster. So much worry and talking and even a little shame. I'm glad to say that things got better very quickly, and within two years I had given birth to my first child.

The first child was the hardest. I was up for twenty hours in labor. He stayed in almost a week longer than thought, and I swear grew too large for me to easily get him out. Pascal and I lived with his family on the farm near the Rhine. It was a farmhouse that teetered on the town, the closest farm actually to the town being that it was only an hour walk in on Landstrasse road. We had hired a German wet nurse and I had been prepared for everything by Pascal's mother, Olga, a large woman with mammoth sized breasts that swung with each step. She always seemed to tower over me, and the cliff that was her chest created this sort of barrier that an experience rock climber would have found daunting. She was impenetrable in the way that domineering mothers are. Pascal's father, Paul, was a farmer (as Pascal would also become) who tended to avoid his wife at all times. He would spend hours out tilling, mowing, painting and fixing portions of the farm, slowly making his way home around sunset, and could often be seen staring up at the mountains as if plotting an escape.

Paul was the second generation of Huber to work the land out on Landstrasse, about halfway between Schaffhausen and Benken. His father had purchased the land shortly after the revised constitution of 1891. His father had moved from Basil-Stadt in order to find his riches in the bastion of the Rhine. A closet Germanophile, Edmund Huber would try and inundate his children with all things German. They learned nothing but Beethoven, Brahms and Wagner at their piano lessons and would only speak German

in the home. His son, Pascal's father, would rebel against the Germanic tinge to his life and especially after the Great War steadily induced more and more French into the family discussion. Edmund had died in 1915 before the war and Paul often lamented that the stern Deutsch Task-maker had not lived to see the Great German man besieged and bagged during the Great War.

My family also primarily spoke German in the home, although because my father was a teacher we learned Italian, French and Graubünden—all the common languages in Switzerland. As a child I fell in love with all things French and dreamed of moving to Paris and living near the Seine in the shadow of Notre Dame. In the Huber house we slowly pushed toward French all the time. Of course we spoke German in town and at church, but unlike you today, the idea of speaking three or four languages in a single conversation was not strange or uncommon. In fact in school we would often change the language at the will of a student. The teacher of course being versed in all four of the national languages. You see, my teacher, Mme. Messmer would ask a question, let's say, in German and then point to a child to answer. If the child started answering in Italian then Mme. Messmer would continue the conversation in Italian until another child switched back to German or maybe waylaid to French, or, if the child wanted to be coy, English. Mme. Messmer would tolerate it all, and felt that this was a sort of European Quadrivium that was unique and important to a national Swiss character.

As I was saying, the first child was the hardest. We named him Edmund after Pascal's grandfather. Edmund was followed eighteen months later by Hedi, a girl. This was 1939 and early 1941. The Germans had already moved through Poland and into France, but General Guisan had fortified the borders and we were never invaded.

Edmund looked and acted a lot like his father. They both had the same way of chewing their nails when nervous and smiling with open teeth when happy. Edmund was a happy, rotund child, who was not in any way dramatic. He simply seemed to understand how things worked long before he said his first words. We made a conscious effort to speak French around him and were delighted when the first word he spoke was Père. He said it the same day that we found out I was pregnant again.

Nine months later he was almost speaking in complete sentences. He was so bright. Hedi, like her brother, waited a week longer than expected, but the labor was not as pronounced. If Edmund was knowledgeable in the ways of life, Hedi was the opposite. She was a delightful girl, but lived in a sort of bubble of expectation. She would cry when she did not get her way and would be relentless and merciless until her desire was met. She looked more like me, probably more because she was a girl than anything else. Her eyes were the sort of piercing blue that I worried would drive men to her bidding. Still, she was my daughter and I loved her absolutely. Pascal was devoted to his children. He played and interacted with them in a way that I had not seen with my own father. My older brother Albert was also a recent father, but he seemed more interested in the University than his son. Pascal was exactly what a young mother could wish for a husband.

In the mornings he would leave with his father and head out into the farm. I would stay with Olga and cook and clean, the sort of chores she felt a woman must do for her family. I did not disagree, but I wished with a secret desire to be left alone with my children and the piano. I don't know when it had happened, probably during my duet-courtship with Pascal, but I had become absolutely enraptured with the piano. If given

the time I would spend hours playing everything I could find in the house. Pascal had given up the instrument when he had been married. His father, though a big music fan as well, didn't feel that Pascal could adequately keep such a time-consuming hobby and simultaneously run a farm and raise a family. You see, Pascal, although not the oldest son, was the one chosen to take over the farm when Herr Huber was too old. It was an enormous responsibility and Pascal was the kind of man that dwelled on responsibility and fretted and worried that he would not be able to live up to his end of the deal.

As the war dragged on it became harder and harder. Not that we were under siege or invaded, heavens no, but because embargos from both sides kept crops from leaving and supplies from reaching us. The Huber Farm mostly sold its crops to local places, but a few deals in place with German companies were voided or never paid for. It seemed that as the Third Reich became more brazen and evil, many of the normal citizens and businesses, people the Huber's had been doing business with for decades, took on those attributes and began pushing their weight around. Some sort of psychic pulse of pain that spread from Berlin. In 1943 three German businesses refused payment for a delivery of vegetables. Herr Huber tried to contact them, speaking in his best German to get them to pay. They simply refused, stating a known fact that the Swiss loved Jews, and that therefore German businesses were free to treat them with hostility.

As the war ebbed on, Pascal became more and more interested in the music that he had so haphazardly given up. He would sit in the evenings and listen to me play, occasionally getting up and joining me on the bench, our legs touching as they first did when we were young. He still would not play, but his fingers would rest on the keys and I could feel his body relax and I would play twice as hard for him. Edmund was also

interested in the piano (mostly because his father seemed so enthralled) and would imitate his father during the afternoons, sitting at the bench next to me, resting his little chubby hands on the keys.

Edmund was turning five when his father once again took up the piano. It was a small gathering of my family and his. My parents were there as was my older sister Alma; Gregor and his wife Ursina had left for America, but Albert and his wife and son were there, Pascal's parents and his younger brother Werner, who was preparing to leave for seminary school. The time came in the evening when I would sit at the piano and play, but that night was special so I was preparing the cake. Pascal was in the living/music room and noticed that poor Edmund was starting to feel uncomfortable. The doting father went up to his son and asked him what was the matter. The young boy told him that it felt strange that his mother was not at the piano playing. Pascal picked up Edmund and hugged him and took him over to the piano, setting him down at his familiar seat. Then, to the joy of the child, his father sat next to him and placed his hands down on the keys. Both sat silently, as if waiting for the music to start on its own. My mother had noticed the sweet event and pulled me out of the kitchen to watch from the wings.

My lovely husband and my beautiful son sat at the piano in silence. Then, as if suddenly remembering how, Pascal reached up his grizzled and dry hands and slammed down a giant chord. Edmund nearly leapt back from the piano. Pascal giggled and then deftly and effortlessly started Op. 53, the lovely Waldstein. Edmund's eyes nearly jumped out of his head as his father flew across the piano. He started low, right in front of the child, the chords pulsing fast and crisp, then his right hand shot up and answered the low figure with a run down from the high D. The boy watched again as the motion

started low, this time only reaching up to a high C—then—with gusto he slammed his dirty hand up on the F and started running down the keys, his fingers doing a dance that carried joy out to all in the room. Before he had even moved into the E major second section he had the entire room standing around the piano, watching and listening.

Pascal played the entire first movement from memory. He was as crisp as ever, his hands belying the constant torture and toil that accompanied a day at the farm. When he finished, as he let the final chord ring through the house, he seemed to remember his fast, his decision to stop playing and focus on the family. He looked embarrassed, as if he had hit constant wrong notes. Edmund was still and pensive, as if he had the maturity to appreciate such a work of brilliance. In the days to come he would tell me that it had been the greatest gift he had ever received. In that way he was an old soul he told me that to understand the depth of his father (although he actually said, “To know father plays music”), to understand such an artistic and personal depth made him happy to no end.

And in his son Pascal found a sort of muse. Within a matter of weeks he had worked up to playing more and more until he was playing for at least an hour nightly. I relished the feeling of his hip next to mine. It felt like how it did when we were married. Side by side, finishing the thoughts and phrases of the other, joining together to create something splendid and new.

Werner, The Huber studying to be a priest, had told the deacon at our church of Pascal’s sudden reappearance upon the music scene. The old gray-haired deacon approached us after the morning service and asked us if we would be interested in playing for the services, as a duo. It was a little unusual, but he liked the idea of a husband and wife expressing a sort of communal love through music. We couldn’t say

no, and that was how our family happened to be at the church on the day of the American bombings.

It was an afternoon rehearsal. Pascal had been able to get his father to allow him to miss his afternoon work in order to attend. We brought Edmund and Hedi because they both immensely enjoyed the time we spent together, Pascal and I. Edmund loved the music and Hedi loved the attention that having both her parents in the same room would supply. Either way, it was a joyous sort of trip up the road. We decided to walk rather take the car, to stretch our legs and really soak in the afternoon. And it was a splendid afternoon.

The rehearsal was Pascal, myself, and the leaders of the choir. We were going to perform Beethoven's ninth for a church function in the coming weeks. I can't even remember the exact detail of the function, just that it needed a big musical number near the end. Pascal and I were going to play the piano four-hands version of the orchestra score. It was a big event, such a lengthy and prominent piece.

We were in the fifth movement, I only know this because we had the soloists and thus wouldn't have rehearsed anything else that day. I remember the "Freude, schöner Götterfunken" and the sound of an intruding orchestra far off. Pascal and I were playing loud, Edmund and Hedi sitting nearby watching, happy. It is only in hindsight that I remember the unusual far-off sounds of bombs and explosion—at least I believe I heard those sounds. We were building through the movement:

Alle Menschen werden Brüder...

The first discernable bombs dropped behind us. I stopped playing, but Pascal continued, loud, his hands slamming down the notes as if to hide the hideous sounds of

war from the rest of us. His face had a determined, possessed look, the same way it had as he sat at the keyboard and played the Op. 53. But he was also my husband, and I, unlike others, could also see the fear in his face.

Wer ein holdes Weib errungen...

His hands stayed stretched across the keyboard, covering both of our parts as I watched. He had a slight tear in his eye and he seemed to be pushing me toward the door. My husband kept pounding the keys, his hands looking more like clubs than fingers.

Und wer's nie gekonnt, der stehle
Weinend sich aus diesem Bund!

His eyes pushed me toward the door. I grabbed Hedi up in my arms and pulled Edmund behind me. The singers had stopped, but Pascal kept going. He opened his mouth and started shouting the words, a tense baritone trying not to crack. Edmund had stopped following and I was dragging him by his feet. Both the children were crying. The singers had started to disperse.

Freude, schöner Götterfunken
Tochter aus Elysium,
Freude, schöner Götterfunken...

The sound of his voice faded as we pushed through the front doors. Outside there was chaos, people screaming and running, planes flying overhead and bombs falling toward us below. I remember turning back toward Pascal, screaming his name, begging him to leave the keyboard and follow us to safety. Edmund slipped from my grip and ran back toward his father, waving his hands. Pascal had tears across his face and looked unable to contain the music anymore. Edmund jumped up onto the bench and wrapped his arms around his father. At that exact moment Pascal let his hands fall from the keys

and he reached down to hug his son.

Freude, schöner Götterfunken...

The church was immensely quiet for a split second, then it was engulfed by fire.

Seid umschlungen, Millionen!
Diesen Kuß der ganzen Welt!
Brüder, über'm Sternenzelt
Muss ein lieber Vater wohnen.
Ihr stürzt nieder, Millionen?
Ahnest du den Schöpfer, Welt?
Such' ihn über'm Sternenzelt!
Über Sternen muss er wohnen.

Seid umschlungen, Millionen!
Diesen Kuß der ganzen Welt!
Brüder, über'm Sternenzelt
Muss ein lieber Vater wohnen.
Seid umschlungen,
Diesen Kuß der ganzen Welt!
Freude, schöner Götterfunken
Tochter aus Elysium,
Freude, schöner Götterfunken

We all died that day in Schaffhausen. Pascal, Edmund, Hedi, and myself.”

Scene 6



The streets outside the Bushnell all converged on a cropped hill to the southwest of the theatre. It was still early in the evening, but the night was already preternaturally dark, the moon hidden behind clouds as if it were a peephole into the lit room beyond. Pascal limped out toward the apex of the hill and a park bench that lay at the northeastern foot of the capitol building. The dome was lit from below, and Pascal moved toward it like a sailor following a beacon. Through the matte dark he could see the squat shape of his aunt sitting on the bench, her legs so short they barely touched the ground. He had never met his aunt before joining the Hartford Opera Company, but had heard of her his whole life. His mother would tell stories, sad stories that always ended with the bombing of Schaffhausen, and through their iterations Baur had formed a mental image of his aunt Arisa. And when he had met Barbara Urlington, even though he is now sure he can see the familial resemblance, she was so drastically not what he had pictured through his adolescence and through the descriptions of his mother, that any inkling, six sense, intuition that he thought he had belied even the remote possibility of kinship. He had simply found the woman scary and slightly repulsive, and often he wonders if these thoughts bind him out of guilt and self-loathing more than any call to family retribution.

The wind was low and flighty, just occasional slight gusts that rattled the long cut of his London Fog trench coat. He crossed Capitol in a diagonal, holding up a bus as it tried to turn left. Baur's limp seemed even more dramatic, as if it were an attempt at an explanation to the impatient public transporter. He tried to move quicker, but his leg was

completely stiff, and any acceleration merely exhausted the good leg faster. Arisa, Barbara, sat still, swaying slightly with the occasional swifts of air that seemed to be traveling east toward downtown.

Baur came to the curb and had to reposition his feet, so his good leg could go first. With the wind came the smell of sulfur from a garbage can Baur could see entrenched in the capitol building. Barbara watched him silently as he strode up and sat down on the bench. To Baur this sort of rendezvous seemed more insidious than a simple meeting in his office, but Arisa had insisted and so it must be done. He had tried to instill some will early in their relationship, but she was as immovable as his father (Pascal's mother had always claimed it was a gene they had both inherited from Roger Baur). He would try and change a meeting time or location, but she would not acknowledge the change, and show up at the earlier determined time and place. It was a maneuver that Baur knew well from his father. Gregor would often feign compromise with his son, but in the end would manipulate the result in his favor. Pascal, as a teenager, had tried to rebel against this, but had been similarly stonewalled. And in what might be described as a familial game of "chicken", Pascal always blinked first. He would undoubtedly show up at the original time or place, making his attempted change moot.

Arisa sat in a sea of black cloth, her coat engulfing her as if she were drowning. Her rosy cheeks peeked out from the behind a tightly wrapped scarf. Baur, dressed in slacks and a gray sweater underneath the black coat, wrapped the coat snugly around his midsection and stretched out his leg, allowing it to dangle directly in front of him as if he were waiting to trip up some passerby. The sound of traffic passing was sporadic, and they sat in the darkness for a moment in what was almost crystalline silence. Finally,

Barbara turned toward Pascal and started to unravel her arm from the mountain of layers covering it. In her hand she had a small slip of paper. It was a small fragment of melody that he recognized from Cassandra's final aria. It was a segment of the code.

"I am to ask if you are okay with message," she said in a chilled voice.

Baur looked at the scrap. It was the segment near the end, when Cassandra spoke of the future and built toward her highest note. He had thought himself fortunate that the latest message had a sort of pinnacle to it, as if it all lead toward the high C at the end of the aria. He was not sure what Barbara was implying with the scrap of paper. He didn't want her to know that he had lost the cipher, that he didn't even know what the message read.

"I am okay with it. Why wouldn't I be?"

"It is a very important message. You would be best to remember that."

Barbara worried about Pascal's dedication. She had gotten a distinct impression after the accident that he knew it was her that dropped the set onto Franklin. He had never mentioned it to her one way or the other, and the silence more than any admonition was what truly worried her. The moment Baur started questioning her motives the farther back he might go and the worse things would get. There were things that he simply could not know, must not know.

Baur took the slip of paper from her shivering fingers. She immediately rescinded the hand back underneath the waves of clothing. He looked at the melody, the slow build from the E up toward the C, the moment of the work, when Cassandra sang out the fall of the wicked hypocrites. He had inserted the lines as a silent gesture of protest. He felt almost ambivalent toward the cause he was supporting. The fervent cry of permanent

revolution did not flow naturally from his tongue. It was merely circumstance, he told himself, that had brought him down into an abyss from which he was never going to resurface. The messages had mattered not at all in the same way that he rationalized his silence regarding Franklin's death and his suspicions surrounding his long lost aunt.

Pascal Baur obsessively replayed the scribble of notes again and again, trying to understand what Barbara was implying. He was at a loss. "Why do you think I don't understand that it is an important message?" he asked.

Barbara held her head back as if to sneeze, but didn't. She reached back over and grabbed the slip from his hand. "This is the message," she said.

"And..."

"The go message," she said, her voice rising as if he was being purposely dense.

"I just put it in the music, I don't want to know specifics, I've told you that."

"But this is most important message. If it does not go through our mission will be a failure. Failures is not allowed to continue. Must be crushed."

Baur's face contorted with worry. What was in the message?

Barbara took the piece of paper and placed it on her tongue. She chewed it slowly, as if savoring the notes, then swallowed in an exaggerated recoil of her neck and throat. "If message does not go through, then we will be disappeared."

Pascal felt the first shivers of dread seep in through his coat and infect his bones.

"Why are you telling me this?" he asked.

"So you know what must happen."

"Why?"

"Your words are cynical, misplaced. You need to be focused, dedicate."

She slowly rocked herself off the bench and looked back at him, her eyes showing the slightest glimmer of a tear.

“You promise no mistakes?” she asked.

Baur stood silent, unsure what to say. Her face gave the expression of a scenario she had been preparing for since the day he took the job. His first thought, rather altruistically, he thought, was of Claudia and what might happen to her. Franklin’s accident had gone too well to be a first time event. How many others had she killed?

The wind picked up and Barbara turned and left without hearing him answer. She was halfway across the road when Baur even noticed her gone. His mind had gone back to the macaroni and cheese. He now knew what his mind was telling him, what his heart had possibly known all along.

Diane.

It was snowing and the clouds were low in Manhattan. Arisa Baur stood outside her nephews loft and waited for the man to reappear. She had sent him in ten minutes before, told him exactly how to handle it, what to do. Don’t listen to the pleading, she had instructed in a brisk French. Don’t give her the chance to beg.

The man came out of the front door at a brisk pace. He had his hands up as if reaching for something. He had the hands of a new murderer, she thought. Arisa had seen the dead in a killer’s eyes and the mnemonic recitation of the death blow many times. How their bodies seemed to be understanding the actions that the brain had instructed. Like a child grasping with an abstract concept, sometimes the newly initiated

into the homicidal fraternity remained almost frozen in the position from which they took their first life.

Arisa began to walk away from the building, around the corner, the tall man following. He rounded the corner and removed his stocking cap, revealing a mass of red, curly hair. Underneath his tuuk he had looked almost bald, and the contrast, Arisa thought, would help keep his identity a mystery if anyone were to have seen.

“It’s done,” he said in a sort of monotone emptiness.

“Good.”

“She was cooking pasta. I can’t get that cheese smell out of my nose.”

“This happens, you must allow it to move through you and past you. Holding on to it will leave you shell-shocked.”

“I understand.”

The man walked away toward the darkness of the next block. She lost his shape in the snow and mist. Arisa Baur pulled out a small notebook and tore out a piece of paper, crumpled it and placed it in her mouth. The chewing was hard, but not forced, as if she had done it many times before.

The snow continued to fall and she walked three more blocks before hailing a cab, her hiccupped gait echoing in the empty night.

“You look wonderful in that outfit.”

Claudia blushed at the compliment, her chin jutting out and her neck rotating softly, as if covering as much of herself with his words as she could. She had just finished dressing and was ready to leave toward make-up when Pascal had come in, his

cheeks cold. She had asked why he had gone outside and instead of replying had looked her over with a sort of gaze that was meant to take a permanent image. You look wonderful in that outfit, he had said.

Pascal watched her as she took in the compliment, her face rotating slightly as if she had a sore joint. He wanted to reach up and cup her cheek, but held off, not wanting to draw further attention to his cold hands. What should I tell her, he thought, the idea of lying and then compounding more lies a daunting and physically exhausting task. He would much rather tell her the truth, but since talking with Barbara was afraid that he could be endangering her life. The veiled threat had brought about the desired result. If he had been irresolute in his approach to the latest opera and the coded message, he now firmly understood the importance and aftershocks that failure would create. He rubbed his hands together, trying to circulate the blood into his outer extremities. She watched with a latent mixture of the his previous statement with what to him seemed the understanding that he had purposely detoured the conversation, changed the subject to avoid talking about outside.

His hands are cold too. What did he do outside that he doesn't want me to know? Wait, is that a seam showing on my left. No, not a seam, just a loose thread that looked like some sort of stitch. Weird. Look at him and his cute cheeks. I see the pain in the leg from the cold, maybe that's what he doesn't want to talk about—the pain, maybe he is worried that I am leaving because he is not as mobile as he used to be. He can't know that I know about the code—if he knew then I would see it. But shouldn't he see that I know, that I'm holding back? He must know.

Cold. She sees the cold and is now curious, even more so than before. She can't know or else she might be in danger—she could end up like Diane or Franklin. Why my mind can't create the anger over Diane I don't know. Am I a monster? Have I become a dull instrument of an evil woman? But we're related, how could I have known. My mother had spoken so well of her, how she was such a talented and wonderful person. I thought that our reunion would be joyous, but instead she almost immediately must have started using me for her own ends. I didn't want to encode the messages. She had said that the government was responsible for our family's death. I had cousins that were killed in the bombing, she said. She tried to imagine what it was like. I was too weak and empathetic, I know now. Should have been stronger and thus less prone to coercion. Her words had poisoned me. Now I am here and I must protect Claudia. I love her and can't allow anything to happen. We'll perform the work, as written, nothing changes, and then I'll get her and we'll leave. We'll leave this very night and go and move and...and I will not compose anymore, I'll do something menial that will allow us to remain hidden. I'll give up music for her; give up my name and everything that I have worked for. I'd do it for her.

I should tell him that I know the secret. I'll tell him that I don't care what he did before, that I still love him and that I'll leave with him right now. We can leave before the curtain. I'll even wear this dress and we'll run out into the street and get a cab and go to our apartment, pack and go to Bradley and go...just go...Maybe they'll be waiting at the apartment, maybe we just go. That would be best. We'll just go to Bradley and get on the first flight that takes us away from the east coast. We'll be gone and we can start over. I will never be able to call my parents again. Maybe I can warn them, bring them

with us, hide them out in a ranch in Wyoming or on the Oregon coast near Portland. I won't sing again. I'd be mute for him if that helped us stay together. I'd even...I'd even give up my parents, I'd leave tonight, never call, never write, and they'd never see me again and they'd have to know that I was safe because they would just know. The way you can just feel the life of those you love. I can feel the love in Pascal...he must know that. I can feel the love and I want to be with him. I don't care what he's done; he's done nothing really. And I knew, knew for almost a year and have done nothing. I'm just as culpable as he is, just as guilty. We'd both be thrown into jail, no key ever to unlock the cages they'd place us. We'd be apart, and that is what I cannot stand. So we'll leave...

We could leave, but would she leave with me. My accident left her aloof. She might even be thinking about ways out at this very moment. I can't force her to come with me. And they'd know, the sympathetic soviets and Barbara. How could Claudia love me when she knows that Barbara is my aunt? Barbara who killed Franklin, and maybe...yes, maybe Diane? She is the same blood as me, I was always told that I had the same gifts. I thought it was a compliment, that I wanted to be like my martyred aunt, that I wanted to live a life of unfettered creativity and exploration. But not this. I am even named after her husband. We are intrinsically intertwined in this web of treason. I lament my choices, but they were mine. I made them and even though I was persuaded, I was the one who chose to revenge my namesake. I heard the story and was angry, I wanted to get back at him, to show him all the pain that he caused me, that he took my mother and her memory and hid it from me my whole life. He was at fault and I chose to act and I chose to help her. I was named after her husband, she told me.

In the opera there are ways to change things. I could change that one note. Just one note and then it would be a different message. No one would attack; we'd be heroes, saviors, and patriots. All I have to do is sing a C#. I could do that in my sleep. I can tell him it was a wrong note, let him keep his secret as long as he agrees to come with me. I'll tell him that I don't care about the leg, about his injury, that I love him for the same reasons I've always loved him, and that won't change. I just need him to come with me, to escape. I'll sing the wrong note, and we can leave. Can't we? What could they do? They won't know that it is the wrong note, they'll just get a different message. I could tell him that I screwed up, that I shanked it like sports guys do on occasion. Everybody hits wrong notes, so why can't I? He'll understand, and we'll leave and everything will be okay.

How can I ask her to come with me unless I have some redeeming quality that makes me worthy of her? She won't know what I did, but I'll know, and my mind is already receding under the weight of all the other lies. She can see it already, and I can't ask her to come with me unless I am worthy of her. But they'll kill us both. They know the message. She'll know and she'll make sure Claudia doesn't make it. I don't know how but she will. My mother had said they were the same. Same absolute temperament. How can I win if they won't ever allow it?

I can just change the note. Change the message. It will solve everything.

They will find us if we leave. If the message doesn't go through she said that we would be crushed. Her English isn't always the best, but that's the right word. We are like insects and regardless of how fast we scurry she'll always be there, waiting to place us under a boot or a rolled newspaper or some other device. We'll be gone. I can't let

that happen to her. She must go through the show exactly as it is, and then I'll disappear. I'll do that for her.

I can save him. I can.

The answer is not the one I wanted, but it is the one I needed. I can do this for her and she'll be safe and I'll let my consequences be my own. I must do it for her.

Claudia reaches out her hands and cups his in hers. They are cold but she warms them with her own. She wants him to understand that her warmth is his warmth, that they are connected and that she can't live without him. He feels her hands and understands that all he is doing is stealing from her. She is supporting him and he does not deserve her love. The things I've done, he thinks.

The world revolves around the concept of eternal love. But it is not the lofty congruities that create the spin. No, the spin comes from the contradictions, the poles pushing each other away. Claudia lets go of his hands and silently stands up and heads toward make-up. He stays seated and allows her to leave without so much as a goodbye. He feels this is his gift to her. He can keep her safe and let her go at the same time. The lights fade on Pascal Baur sitting in the chair, his leg sticking out straight in front of him. He leans on the good leg with his chin cupped in his cold hands and lets the low rumble of the ambient noise play him out until it is completely dark and completely silent.

Scene 7



“I hear the sounds of your footsteps. Not as they are now, but as they will be before you are slaughtered.”

Cassandra, the proud queen of the future, solemnly looked at her King of the present. “I hear the sounds of your footsteps fading,” she said again. Agamemnon, the conqueror of Troy, his crown crooked on his head, seemed oddly at ease in his long forgotten home. Cassandra could smell the stench of another man, but knew that any truth she spoke would be immediately dismissed by the proud ruler. He had arrived home a conquering hero, his wife greeting him at the steps with wine and food. The salty meat, to Cassandra, seemed little more than a lame attempt to cover the smell of dissent. She did not need to see the future to see the woman’s unhappiness.

Now, they waited in his dusty, long-abandoned chamber as Clytemnestra prepared a feast for them. The lingering scent of meats and bread, the finest olive oil imported from the land of the Etruscans. The meat, fresh from the expansive plains of Mycenae, from shepherds hearing of the return of the king and as a tribute offering their finest cattle and fattest swine. The piquant scent... Cassandra already knew this to be penultimate breath, the last chance for any sort of earthly pleasure before Clytemnestra and Aegisthus chopped them to bits. Strange, she thought, the ability to see one’s body destroyed. The sun was just starting to set and Cassandra searched her human body for any indication of pleasure.

To explain her premonitions to a layman was like explaining music to the deaf. There was something in the way she saw the world that she could not translate to others. It was like trying to describe colors. The closest she could get in her Priamian tongue was to talk of the feeling of the gods and belief. To have true faith left you bound to that understanding, unable to reconcile anything other than the belief you held. Without verification or sustenance. That was what the premonitions were like to Cassandra, it was like faith. She had no reason to ever believe on of her premonitions, except to have faith that it will be as accurate as the last.

Agamemnon lay on the bed, his bare feet eliciting an odorous mix of grime and human sweat. They also had the latent stench of a thousand washings, slave hands massaging and caressing calluses and then bathed in oils. It wasn't the smell of the feet themselves that was so rancid, it was the unnatural mixture of the natural smell of travel and the lingering scents of beatitudes. Cassandra knew the routine well. She had known even before he had stolen her from Troy. They horse, the sacrifice, how she had told them all to beware. Using plain speech and guile, she still was unable to convince the simple and superstitious Trojans from taking apart their fortitude in order to bring the gift inside. Supplicants, she thought, what a foolish downfall.

Cassandra, her body already dressed in her best, flowing robe, stood patiently in her chamber as the members of Priam's royal guard were slaughtered by the hidden forces. The sounds, happening lives, were like an echo to her as she packed her satchel with necessities for the long trip. The surprised Mycenaeans had barged in, sweaty and bloodthirsty, and although she knew their wish, she held firm and passive. The three in front, a Spartan among them, licked their lips at the sight of a clean, beautiful woman.

Cassandra could feel their manhood grow sturdy as they approached. The Spartan drooled slightly from his misaligned mouth. The one in the middle, not the Spartan, but a thin and tall Athenian, with a wad of cloth covering one of his eyes, reached out his arm to touch her cheek. A sort of vile attempt at seducing the unwilling woman. His hand touched her cheek right next to her ear, wiping a thin trail of dirt the cover of shit across her face toward her mouth, making her look like she was a fish caught with a hook. The Spartan stepped in, but a looming figure, the one she had been waiting for, blocked out the flickering torch near the door. The sudden darkness caused the three men to leer back, bowing to the house of Atreus and its king.

That was how Cassandra had met Agamemnon, as a shadow looming in her chamber. By the time she had met him she already knew his fate, their voyage from Troy back to Argos and his death at the hands of his own wife. How she had thought of leaving, or somehow changing fate through her own actions. Yet, every attempt failed, her musing with events simply led them around the bend of tragedy back to the original target. As if being punished, she knew that to attempt to change fate was to ask for tragedy. She, like every human alive on the planet, was a vessel that would one day sink. Only the gods got to decide how long they each got to float the ocean of existence.

Agamemnon had fallen asleep. His snoring bespoke the rhythm of his relaxation. Cassandra had tried through their voyage to properly prepare him for the end. She had hinted at messages from the gods divulging his wife's infidelities. But each séance at which she spoke the pure and unfiltered truth brought derision and chastisement from her master. He had called the gods themselves liars, spoke of Apollo and a hatred that fell back through the generations of his house. Cassandra, for the moment in the present,

reached over and ran her fingers along his rising belly. His breaths were long and deep, and she traced the symbol of Apollo over his stomach as he slept.

“I’d like a few words more, a kind of dirge, a sentiment,” she said quietly.

Agamemnon replied with a slight snort, and she continued to draw the symbol upon his stomach, her hands almost reflexively trying to ward off the fate her mind had long ago accepted.

“And that, I think that breaks the heart of both men and gods.”

The music faded to a solo euphonium. The melody was high and sweet, long tones that moved slowly like the counterpoint of Palestrina. Claudia was offstage near the red door, her costume half removed as she prepared for the supper.

The supper had been Pascal’s idea.

“...and the seer’s techniques have brought but terror and the eternal wisdom of truth” she sang softly to her self. It was not a difficult line, but one that had given her problems in the dress rehearsals leading up to the performance. The onstage drama was between Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. Aegisthus wanted to kill Agamemnon immediately, not wait for some confession that might not ever come. Clytemnestra was arguing the need for evidence. For proof. “You can’t convict from conjecture alone,” she sang to a Phrygian melody. Like good opera characters, they then sang through their plan to incriminate Agamemnon through his own words. Claudia half-listened as she changed into her evening robe. Barbara was standing next to her, listening and occasionally humming along. Claudia was impressed that she would know that much of the music. It was just something she didn’t see from Barbara.

The lights lowered onstage and both Claudia and Barbara leaned in toward the purple desk lamp shining toward the far wall. With the lights low it was now the only source of illumination as she tied slipped on the robe. Not that the robe was really hard to get one, but it was so bulbous with excess fabric that she could easily put it on upside down and still be able to cover every part of her body. Claudia could sense Barbara watching her as she spun the robe around on her neck and made sure her arms went through the correct slots. Barbara had a small piece of cloth in her hands and was sewing a small button onto it. Claudia had never seen the piece before and wondered what it was for. Onstage, Clytemnestra chastised Aegisthus for his bloodlust. She tried to explain that it was not a thirst for death that led her down this path, but an absolute resolve for justice. This led, Claudia knew, into the Iphigenia Aria. She had been slightly jealous upon first hearing it. The aria was beautiful, sad, and carried such a wide array of emotions that it was easily going to be one of the most memorable moments of the first two acts. The only reason she did not insist on the Clytemnestra role was the even more incredible aria that Cassandra has near the end. It is long and complex, using some of the same lines as Clytemnestra and then surging beyond the Queen's music to something even more sublime and beautiful. It was as if the entire work was a preterit for Cassandra's ending aria.

Claudia had her dining gown on and turned toward Barbara for a final inspection. The costume mistress barely looked up and then nodded her out toward the stage. Scene one was ending and she would be needed with the rest of the quartet for scene two momentarily. She sang the line once more to herself, "It is the past that tells us all of the future. You stand afraid not because of the future but because it will acknowledge the

truth of the past. Myself and the seer's techniques have brought but terror and the eternal wisdom of truth." Claudia smiled to no one in particular and headed toward the left curtain and her entrance point.

"You speak as if the gods had ever given man a choice," Agamemnon said to Clytemnestra. He was waving his hand wildly in the air, as if threatening the sky with his fist. Clytemnestra sat patient and quiet. She knew her husband's propensity for anger and stubbornness. He had been raised as a king, and this outlook had left him immobile in his pursuits and desires. She looked across the table at his latest concubine. Oh, how the house of Atreus and the rest of the Achaeans believed they were so much more civilized than the rest of the world. She could see the same base characteristics between a Trojan and a Mycenaean without needing anything more than a side of meat or a beautiful woman. They both took what they wanted, and would exhaust all manner of cruelty in their pursuit for pleasure. This was the kingdom of Dionysus.

Agamemnon had finished his curtailing of the gods. He looked across to Clytemnestra and over at Aegisthus. She had invited him as a representative of the people, welcoming and inviting him back to his land. Agamemnon had not needed Cassandra's warning to know the stench of betrayal and infidelity. He could see the smug posture of a man who had lain in another's bed. But he was not ready to punish yet. He had other matters to deal with, and a weakling like Aegisthus would be easily dispatched at a later time. For the while he would have his soldiers watch him, informing their king of his every move. And then, like the cobra that can be found in the eastern lands beyond Troy, he would strike.

“But why would the gods be so cruel?” Clytemnestra asked.

“They are cruel because they choose to be. Those with power have such a choice, and we, the lesser beings, must obey their dictations.”

Aegisthus cleared his throat, preparing to speak for the first time. “I believe, my king, you are making a very strong point regarding the inability for man to choose his own fate. If the gods demand a sacrifice, then who are we to deny it?”

Agamemnon froze, the shank of lamb raised halfway toward his mouth. It was the first time in a long time he had felt fear. This whole time he had anticipated that his wife was chastising him for the sacrifice of Achilles in battle, or the hundreds of other men who had been lost. It had been a seemingly benign argument about war. She should not have known about Iphigenia. It had been made clear that under no circumstances was she ever to know. But here, now, this usurper, philandering coward was all but accusing him of killing his own daughter. Agamemnon feared that Aegisthus knew the fate of Iphigenia, and worried that he had shared the vile details while in the bedchamber with Clytemnestra.

“We must contain our respect for the gods within our own respect for man.”

Agamemnon answered, his voice steady, belying his racing heart.

Cassandra watched the exchange as she had many times before. She knew the next line and cringed as the trap was set.

Clytemnestra: You are right, we must respect the life of all men...and women.

Aegisthus: You are right my queen, it is too bad your child...Orestes, is not here to concur. For he is a learned and true man in the law and one of the wisest of the house of Atreus.

Clytemnestra: Our children, the bond that exists most firmly between man and wife, they are the very reason to live and die. For with their death so surely would come my own. I feel the connection strong within me, as I feel the connection to the gods.

Agamemnon: I am glad to have a wife who feels such joy and love at the simple creation of children.

Clytemnestra: True, creating children is not the same as winning a war, but with each child comes a positive force upon the world. Your victory over the mighty Priam is like the creation of your own child. And true, you lost many deserving warriors, sons to grieving fathers, they gladly sacrificed themselves for the idea of Greece, the one true child of every father and mother in the land.

Agamemnon: I feel the pain of loss for all those sacrificed for victory.

Aegisthus: But would not Priam have done the same in your stead?

Agamemnon: He is a true and great leader, a favorite of the gods. He lost many in the battles merely to save a philandering son.

Clytemnestra: So he sacrificed all for his child.

Agamemnon: Yes.

Clytemnestra: And what did you sacrifice?

Agamemnon: We just spoke of the men I lost. The great Achilles, his beloved Patroclus and many others. Even now Odysseus is feared lost at sea. We lost many for my brother Menelaus. But we won and brought back the spoils of war to our great land.

Aegisthus: What about the ships lost during the voyage?

Agamemnon: Yes, we lost ships. Artemis was angry and we were held back.

Aegisthus: So you defied the gods will?

Agamemnon: No, we placated the gods and took their blessings across the waters to Troy. And it was the gods that allowed us victory and gave us might during the many years of war.

Clytemnestra: But how, my king, did you placate the gods?

Agamemnon: Through a sacrifice.

Clytemnestra: Was it a goat? A calf?

Agamemnon: No.

Cassandra: Excuse my insolence my king. I am uncivilized and unable to hold my bowels at the table. May I be excused to relive myself?

Agamemnon: That is a disgusting sentiment Cassandra. Even if I did not allow you leave I would still now want you out of my sight.

Cassandra: Then I will leave your sight. Oh, how I think you should not tell the sad story of the death of the dear to the queen. She would not handle it well with dinner.

Agamemnon: Leave now! I am the king and I choose the discourse at the table and throughout my kingdom.

Cassandra: I implore you...

Agamemnon: Leave!

Cassandra leaves.

Claudia, Lydia, Mags, Cassandra – they all stood offstage waiting for the music to sing them in. Claudia was breathing quickly, almost hyperventilating at the thought of improvisation. The note just needed to change a half step, up from a Bb to a B, a minor second change that would reverberate throughout the two remaining superpowers like

some sort of shock wave. And it was such an easy change, a mistake that could have happened anyway, something she could shrug off backstage as a tension in her throat that threw her voice up a little too high. She knew the rest of the instruments would be playing her note, she knew that she would have to resist all the pulling forces of the pit – to not fall victim to the drag down to a tortured future. She would sing above everyone, her voice piercing through the piccolo and the violins, past the percussion and beyond the bassoons, up into the stratosphere of change. That it still might not work, she feared. What if her voice cannot break through the din of the orchestra? Her fears lauded upon her like layers of blankets, stifling her screams of protest, her cries for the deceit to stop. Her role as Cassandra, the sooth-sayer, future seer, ribbed her particularly for the irony inherent in her decision to revise the work. She was able to do the one thing Cassandra could not. She was able to change the future.

From onstage she could hear the wails of brass that accompanied Agamemnon's death. It was a prolonged and torturous feat, almost balletic in a contorted prison of wails and grimaces. Kansas was bellowing out all sorts of supplications, damning his wife and her lover, his own inability to recognize Cassandra's warning, calling upon Orestes to avenge him, and all other manner of deathbed incantations.

Claudia sang through the scale once more to try and slow her thumping heart. Just a major scale, but instead of going up to the tonic she would push up toward the B, living in the unnaturalness of the whole-tone ascent, the clash of the unison orchestra fighting her renegade tone. Her voice hiccupped slightly near the top, a side product of her nerves, she thought. Claudia held her breath for as long as she could, focusing on her body, cycling through the complex components that effortlessly kept her blood flowing.

Last, before Agamemnon finally croaked, she bowed her head and prayed. The idea seemed strange to her, having left the church shortly after leaving for college. Yet, like riding a bike the humble call for help came through her effortlessly and without protest. She could feel her heart slow and her nerves set. The strings had slowed to a sul ponticello tremolo, a low cluster near the bottom of the violins. The timpani pulsed slowly, beating out the time. A lonely clarinet called out from amidst the phasing strings, and Claudia, drawn towards it as she always was, raised her head, wiped her chin, and tenuously stepped out into the blazing light of the stage.

Cassandra knew the time had come. She had barely left the room when the rush of screams began. Even though she hoped for Agamemnon's success, she already lamented his death. How can one be so hopeful yet know so much? she had once been asked. Her response had been peculiar, and the god Hermes, who had asked her (although not in the past, but in the future, well after her death), had felt she was trying to trick him. I am hopeful, she had said, her voice scooping up with the word "hopeful", because it is all I can be, for I know that every story always ends. It does not take a fortuneteller to know this. I know it as all mortals know it. Why I am hopeful is because I, like my brethren, all believe that that one truth does not apply to me.

She had seen the future, not just her own, but everyone's. She had seen the fall of Athens, the rise of the Romans, the crossing of the ocean. The world, she knew, always waited for history to reshape it as if nothing had come before. But everything had already come before, and it would come again. She knew that Troy and Mycenae would not be the end of the great wars. She could see incantations of evil truly horrendous,

truly grotesque in the abomination of learned men and calls from the gods. She could see a time even when the gods would leave. Be it the trochaic tetrameter of Väinämöinen who leads his newly named, yet same deities away from the world of man and usher in a new age of new gods. She could see the differences that every civilization would point to and scream, you see, we are not the same, and yet they looked the same to her. Maybe she was colorblind to the subtleties of consternation. Maybe she just didn't understand the desperate.

Her slow thoughts (which were not necessarily slow, but focused considering the unnecessary restriction of time in her case) piled upon one another, associations and futures. She did this often, and she knew she would continue to do it until her death a few minutes from now. From her thoughts of Hermes she sidestepped to the metal dinosaurs that would ravage the northern world in the late age of petroleum. That's how she broke things up in her mind, by the commodity, which always changed, but yet always remained the same aesthetically, that controlled the movements and age of the world. She could see the stone and gold and iron, the coal and petroleum and silicone. She could see beyond the zero, beyond the point of internal combustion to the age of photosynthesis, or growth as she called. She could see past humanity and past the next thing and even past that. She was able, as a writer would posit in a book at some point in the future, able to experience the world in four dimensions.

It was not that she could necessarily focus her ability on a single object, but rather a single object might focus her on some sort of process. She would see a linear collection of images, individually nothing special, but at some point in her consciousness they would expand as if mixed with a reactive compound, and the explosion would fill her

with the energy of knowledge. She could grip any floating future that she wanted, but to put it into words that made sense to the rest of her homosapien relatives was beyond her ability. She felt like she was not the entire mechanism of such an ability, merely a cog. In her visions she imagined that there were others at other times that were responsible for placing everything into digestible and understandable contexts. She was like a cook in a kitchen, and her responsibility was for a single item, not for the entire entrée.

Even her analogies had transcended her date and time. She could see herself onstage being portrayed a thousand different ways. She could see the stone seats and the Athenian Festival. She could see oil lamps and wigged heads. She could see herself projected like a shadow upon vast surfaces and even traveling through the air toward handheld devices. She could see her image in the vast web of correlation and entertainment that spun from such a tale. But in all her visions nothing even remotely seemed to find the truth. It was always about the future, but all she ever dwelled upon was the past.

To Cassandra, the past was the most elusive of sensations. She could experience the future almost instantaneously, in living color without the delayed synaptic pixilation of remembrance. But the past, hers and all that came before had the filmy haze of inconsistency, as if it for some reason was not as reliable as the events that had not yet happened (at least to the rest of the world). One time she had decided to lay out the entire envelope of history in her vision, from the edges of her left eye to a small trail that tilted from the corner of her right. She had laid out everything she could see, as if taking stock of her possession, her eyes scanning the solitary line that was produced for any sort of indication of wear or stress. But that is what it was, a single, solitary, uniformly thin line

of what was almost a silver, metallic thread. History, like the great authors had always represented, was nothing more than a thin string pulled across the eyes. It was in this context that she found individual actions to be irrelevant. This was when she began to disassociate from the human condition and the fear of the future. Before this event (or simply before she understood this event, which was different) she had tried to warn those that were about to go down the wrong path, fall off the string so to speak. But after the long thin line, after seeing that nothing really made an impression when the zoom was pulled back far enough, that was when she lost the fear that had led her to try and change the future. She now simply followed the lines she was given the way a bored actor might read the script set in front of him.

Cassandra could remember her childhood with about as much accuracy as anyone else. She could see the man walking toward her in the street, his robe flowing with the wind as if directed. He comes to her and tells her he is a god. She believes him because that is what she is supposed to believe. As she sits with him she already knows the outcome of everything that will befall both of them. She can see his murder by a crowd a few years later, his body pierced with swords from twenty fathers, his remains scattered and burned and then displayed in the town square as a warning. Her father, Priam, sitting in his chamber gravely as she retells what she has always known she was to tell. The story angers him, but she knows no other way to tell it, no way to not anger her father with the events of her life. Her mother cries. Cassandra tries to explain, but it is of no use. Even during the event, she can see her father's anger, and that is what she holds on to as he sits with her, she sees his pulsing, fiery eyes, the veins in his arms pulse with each question. She looks into his eyes and holds the stare. She tries to focus her own

eyes as he did, looking into the god's eyes and through the ghost of time make him see the look of her father, the look he will never see because he is dead and dismembered and burnt and gone.

She remembers this event because it is the sort that one remembers, but as she tries to recall the days preceding it, playing in her room, going to the market, she can only see her father's eyes and the man's flowing robe. Cassandra cries in the empty chamber, her memories rushing through her. She does not cry for her death, which is now only moments away.

The sun had set and the room was illuminate with a single candle. Cassandra moves toward it and warms her hands to the small flame. Every so often she is allotted a few moments of uninterrupted present, and she loathes wasting it. And although a snide man might ask why she doesn't go back to those moments using her omnipotence, they would be confused when told that there was a difference between the living moment and the sensation of zooming in on that long silver strand of time. Cassandra warms her hands and allows her thoughts to slow and then finally stop. The screams of Agamemnon have ceased, and she can see Clytemnestra and Aegisthus feuding over what to do with her. As Clytemnestra argues for blood it is Aegisthus, who truthfully has no stomach for murder that tries and talks her into letting Cassandra live. Clytemnestra, her face sprinkled with blood that is almost dried, bares her teeth in disgust for his weakness. She cries out toward him, scaring him into a ghostly pale, and then reaches down and pulls the blade out of her cold, dead husband. She gestures toward the door with it, the remnant blood slinging off and coating the plaster wall in a half crescent slope. Aegisthus raises his hands, trying to calm the murderous queen, but as she steps toward

him his cowardice reigns and he steps aside, giving her a clean path toward the chamber where Cassandra stands by the lone flickering candle.

The discombobulating clash of her visions and her present cause Cassandra to leer back from the candle. She seems ready to swoon when Clytemnestra enters the darkened room, the knife blade in her hand shining slightly from the lone illuminant.

“You have killed Agamemnon, and am now here to kill me,” she says, turning toward a startled Clytemnestra.

“You know the truth of all the lies,” she replied. “Tell me prophet, will I be successful?”

“No man is ever successful, for every man will eventually die. Success, like life, is relative.”

“You speak in nonsense and supposition.”

“You will be successful in killing me, but you yourself will also be killed.”

“By who?”

“Your actions.”

“Speak truth, not riddles.”

“I speak what I have always spoken, what I was supposed to say. What I say now I have said a thousand times. Yet, even with a plethora of chances, you still kill me, you still die, and nothing changes.”

“Then how do I not die?”

“The only way to not die is to not live.”

“Aiiiiii.”

“I’d like a few more words, a kind of dirge...”

Clytemnestra steps forward, quickly, stabbing the knife into Cassandra's chest. The seer leans back, her hands raised high almost in praise. She feels the final sensation that had been so prescient for so long. Now, it had the numbness of memory, the present had left her at last. She sighed deep, breathing in and then spitting out blood. Clytemnestra reeled back, her hand held out, daggerless, as if she was not sure what had happened.

"Your hand tells the tale of how fate works," Cassandra began, her words heavy and distant, as if she was speaking from underwater. "Fate will be the ruler of your world from here on. It is the god that all worship, the truth at the end of all life. You are simply a messenger, as we all are, a voice that adds to the chorus of truths that weave that silver thread that I see so potently. I see the rise and fall of empires, the ashes and dung from which the great lies of all time are sprung. I see you forgotten and the world united behind the tenants that are achieved through your son. But to achieve this you must be gone. So I die for all to happen, and I die willingly, as we all would if given the gift I have been bestowed. The end of the world is near, but not in the way you understand. I see a time when ideas kill and enslave more than people. I see genocide and atrocities that make your simple action insubstantial, yet, like the seed that grows the tree I see how you are the begetter of so much. I see a red haze, like the mist of blood covering your face, and I see it try to destroy the world. I see everything, noble or evil, come to an end. In my final sentence I say it is only a matter of time."

Clytemnestra falls to her knees and grabs Cassandra's sunken body by the shoulders. She shakes her, rocking her neck back and forth like a doll's. Cassandra opens her eyes for the final time, and whispers something into Clytemnestra's ear. The

shock of defying her own omnipotence leaves Cassandra surprised. Her eyes are opened wide as if she was seeing for the first time. She slumped back into Clytemnestra's arms, her body stiff and dead. Clytemnestra stares off into the void, almost seeing the world of which Cassandra spoke. She stares hard, her eyes finding eyes out in the audience of the theatre. She gasps in horror and the curtain falls.

Scene 8



Ruin...ruin, ruin, ruin... words in rhythm, how could she? I trusted her with everything and this, that wink, the images flooding through, she kissed me standing in the cold rain, her hands running up my chest making my skin pebble underneath her touch and down on one knee, feeling the arthritis start to kick in, the ring in my suit pocket, my keys in my pants pockets digging into my hip, the pain, the pleasure, as if they mix into a concoction of ambrosia that sits just perfectly in my stomach...finally, the look on her face, the betrayal, the lying that she must have endured, but I lied, she lied, who is more at fault? The sound of strings and brass hanging high, holding a perfect note, the beats pulsing in my eyes like a pretty pink, I shaded it for her she must know that, if not I will tell her, where did she hide—the message, what must it now say what will it mean for me? I can smell the sickly scent of aftershave, reminds me of Franklin why am I thinking of him the note could have been wrong I could tell Arisa and have her inform the correct people that won't expose anything it will be alright – I see Claudia coming toward me the tears flowing from her face she knows and wants me to know she knows what should I do to help her, what should I say? The ruin is not just for me we were going to leave I had decided she, packed and ready, maybe the answer is not as simple, the room has gone red, as if the lights have malfunctioned and the ringing sound of sirens, but not for me or for her, the thought of losing her is hard to comprehend the betrayal is easy to see, why didn't I stop it so long ago? What is that smell, sweet, my nose itches from the rich textures and I can't decide if it is cheese or if I am imagining it or where it is coming

from and I try and identify a source but it just lingers, not dissipating like a smell should, must be in my head, just like before, the smell of macaroni, torturing me from the dirty sink at my apartment, saying why weren't you here to save me Pascal? But that is not the macaroni screaming, but Diane, and it seems to be coming from the macaroni in the sink but I simply stare at it and can't think and the smell overwhelms me and I think I might vomit but I have no understanding of why or how my mind is torturing my stomach with such a crescendoing raucous smell that I cannot even eat anymore because of the latent association with Diane's death but that's not all I could in fact eat macaroni and did for awhile, but the sweats and stomach convulsions and the bending over with pain and suffering is fresh, new to the last year, like the pain in my leg and maybe they are related but how am I to know I am not a doctor or a psychologist and I want to understand what my subconscious is trying to tell me but I am also afraid and the impasse is spread out in front of me like a giant dam, as tall as Hoover and as wide as Grand Coulee and I can't even fit the entire monolithic slab in my field of vision and I can't even begin to pass it, so I stand, my cheek touching the cold concrete, feeling the (although it is impossible) acres and miles of water built up behind it, feeling it flow across my cheek like a wet wash cloth and I stand next to the giant drab gray slab and I start to push and nothing happens and I just keep pushing and although nothing happens the entire time I push, I can feel in my heart that it is the right thing to do and I must keep pushing and keep the pressure on and that at some point I will break through the impenetrable wall and unlock the flowing streams of thought that await behind it, shrouded from the light of the fading sun and kept nearly still in the deep recesses of the silt-covered waterbed.

The music starts slow and pulsing, like the Glass at the Met, except that was fast and incomprehensible, my thoughts followed for as long as I could, how could four hours actually seem longer? The trajectory of modern music is crashing and I can't stop it but I should not be twisting my head toward such ethereal thoughts, should be focusing on what to do next, what I can say to Claudia as she approaches, slow motion—her hips moving from side to side with just the slightest jiggle—on the beach last summer, down in Rhode Island, lots of people sitting under umbrellas, their stomachs covered with magazines or sandwiches, her wet hips moving toward me, glistening in the sun with the slightest chill in the air, my legs cold and goose-fleshed from inactivity, she looked so beautiful in the crisp afternoon, noticing many others staring as she approached, smiling, one corner of her mouth slightly lower than the other, no teeth showing when she smiled, kind of a grin more than a smile, could possibly even be mistaken for a grimace, and I see her now walking toward me in the same way, the same loving way that makes me hopefully, horny, myriad emotions, but all colored in fear which is why the room is red my emotions coloring the synesthesia the same way music colors my eyes with hazy hues—the day I proposed I did so out of haste and worry, I am able to admit that now I saw Nancy Warren who looked terrific and was throwing herself at me I didn't think I could resist so I refocused my lust toward her is that unfair? I love her more than I should, I see in her the best traits I try and cultivate in myself the hips glistening and Nancy walking toward me, chest out, her breasts supple and younger than her age should allow which is maybe one of the reasons I wanted her then and not before because before she was merely pedantic, ordinary, plain just like a hundred other giggling undergrads at Juilliard it was the seventies and it would have been easy to use that free love crap to

sleep with all of them, but there was Diane and I couldn't do that to her, and maybe that's what led me to propose, to lock myself in the way I did with Diane, to hide my animal instincts I worry sometimes that my father near the end of my mother's life went astray I could sometimes smell the grad student cologne, the same thing could have happened to me probably will still happen to me unless I lock myself in, a sort of bondage of the libido to keep me in check how I love Diane and Claudia both I can't explain even to myself why that can not be duplicitous or in some way tacky but they both complete me in a way I didn't expect I remember meeting Diane in Seattle, she was walking into a bookstore in Pike's Market and I was browsing the trade paperbacks, looking for Nelson Algren or something the monkey never stops you understand, something like that and she walked in and we made eye contact and I felt the first pangs of love deep inside—I had never felt anything like it before it was like being placed on a bike and immediately being able to pop a wheelie it was so liberating and exhilarating and she smiled as I put down the Algren and picked up something by Kierkegaard or Kant, something on the opposite shelf that looked all educated and smart because I had not yet gone to college although that day I already knew I had been accepted to Indiana on a full scholarship but that was mostly due to the help of Merce and not really anything I'd done on my own so I wanted to look the academic type sadly wanted to look like my father's son and I pretended to consider the Kant to the Kierkegaard as she slowly swaggered towards me she didn't even look at the books in my hands but came up to me and reached out her hand and told me her name—she was direct like that and I was immediately in love and thought she was as well so I asked her to drink some coffee with me at a diner up the street so we left the store I didn't even buy the books to impress her because I thought I already had and

we walked up the steep hill on the north side of the market up toward a little diner I frequented and we sat and talked it seemed that easy but Diane Ferston was not as immediately in love with me I tried to kiss her and she pulled away, unsure and confused I told her I loved her I was romantic like that and her lips looked wet like they had been dipped in oil and they seemed to grow bigger before my eyes as I stared at them, pursed but unwilling and I felt the drop in my stomach of despair the feeling of sadness that had permeated my love life for the first twenty four years but that feeling is not with me now and it is hard to remember what it felt like that pit of my stomach feeling that wiggles slightly as if I had eaten something bad or really had to defecate or something it's hard to think about and feel because I haven't felt it in so long—The pain has changed.

The pain of loss is not like the pain of not knowing love at least I can say that with the utmost conviction, that I know both manners of pain and that they are unrelated but...they both ache deep within, but while the pain of not knowing love is like in your stomach, like there is a problem inside you, but the feeling of losing love, well loss is different, it's not that pregnant feeling of pain, but the absence of happiness, the stinging pain of a numb hand as opposed to slicing into a finger that's how I can best describe it at least and I have felt both and they both started and ended with coffee and Diane and her oily lips that looked kind of like worms, but not in a disgusting way, just that they were wet and glistening and they seemed to pulse slightly as she spoke I tried to kiss her but she pulled away and I felt the red heat of shame but unlike other times I decided right then not to give up which was unusual for me I was usually so timid that I would simply hide from the pain rather than confront it as I did so I decided to confront it and I put my arm on hers and she gripped my hand and all of a sudden I could feel the renewed rush of

adrenaline and passion I could literally feel the love that coursed through our arms like an arc that small magnetic or electrical pulse (I'm not sure which as I am not a scientist) jiggling the immediate contact between my skin and hers and the soft, warm feeling of her skin and the smell of her skin in such proximity with mine and although I am such an auditory person I am a firm believer in the power of scent and that people have complimentary scents that make them compatible, like animals I guess and at that moment, for the first time I believe I could smell the enticing aroma of her scent mingled with mine and the explosive perfection of the combination, as if we were a bouquet waiting to be picked and placed together and she was all I needed forever and for at least a decade more that's how it felt and then she was killed—we lived together happy for the next ten years or so we didn't feel that marriage had to happen, it was the end of the sixties and the start of the seventies the free love thing and we were in Bloomington and then New York, what a city, the lights that stayed on all night not like the lights in Bloomington and the latent smell of horses from the trucks that drove in from the local farms you could almost smell the rural parts of the state seep in at times as we learned about Leonin and Schoenberg and Mozart and Hildegard, a whole level of composers and musicians that I never knew existed and it was like getting a present everyday, a new color for my paint brush as I began to fully understand my synesthesia and my compositional voice I made it through with Diane at my side I was older than most of the other undergraduates, and I believe they were simultaneously threatened by someone with such life experience as well as trite with someone who came to the academic party a little overmature and I made friends with the truly bright and talented musicians at the school, the ones that could handle my music, which was a blend of serialism and the sort

of sonic experiments that I admired in Cage, like the *Sonatas and Interludes* we would sit and talk after seminars with the man himself or one of the cavalcade of other lecturers and composers and artists that would pop in for a few days, gorge themselves on mushrooms with the man and then speak for thirty minutes as if searching for disciples, espousing a whole new concept of art in the soul each week like a badly written television show and we would meet later, sometimes with the guest at a bar for drinks, but the real later was at my house and Diane would have coffee made and we would talk about the inherent contradictions between the flavor of the week and the previous week and we would dissect and analyze and by snobby in the way that undergrads are one they learn a little something and we would try our own hand at grand theories and in this way, like the child of an alcoholic stealing his father's bottle, we too became the ones looking for disciples and trying to counter and revolutionize the system of composition that seemed to be nothing but math anymore and then one by one the friends I had made would graduate or leave school for some festival and never return, many went out west to see what was happening at Mills with Berio or at Cal Berkeley with Shifrin, they found the guys like Glass and Reich that would become big name composers, but they didn't understand that it wasn't about creating a new art, about being true to art, it was simply about the new and they were just a fresh face and that if they wanted to be like Glass and Reich then they had to do what those two did and find a small niche and cling to it with claws made of granite (or some other banal substance, which as a reference to the ABC's I chuckle internally, even while internally making such a reference to the joke which in itself is not that funny) and one by one they tried to become taxi drivers and carpenters and make music in the evenings at art galleries, and one by one they stopped making

music because someone got pregnant or their small pot habit became a little bit bigger cocaine habit and the money from the “real” work was more important than art anymore and I was left to finish my fourth year at Indiana with a bunch of young, horn-rimmed freshmen that thought Babbitt was the end-all-save-all of music and Diane and I decided to move on after I graduated, and the thought of another town with the smell of horses or cattle or just chalky layers of dust that required constant cleaning was no longer even the tiniest bit appealing, no longer would the Copland Americana quaintness of anything be my guide or influence or appreciation, and I tried to go abroad, to study with Boulanger or someone else in Paris, I tried for a Rome Prize, but was not even a finalist for any of the dozens of things I applied for. My music was problematic for judges because it was conservative in many regards, so it would be discarded by the avant garde and yet contained trace elements of serialism and other “systems” so that the nationalist group, those that still thought Copland was the one true prophet would discard me for my lack of a clear melodic focus so I was stuck somewhere in the middle, without a real champion at Indiana and my music was not getting known anywhere other than local Bloomington concerts but somehow I ended up at Juilliard and Diane and I moved there and I can remember that first day we met and her luscious lips and how my thoughts, always cyclic as if contained on a circular web that simple rotates like the wheel of a bicycle, but I digress, I see her and I smell the invisible odor, the imaginary odor and my thoughts, the strange loops that I live in, have all started to run together, and they only say the same thing—it’s now a rousing unison in my thoughts, the dense polyphony of nuance long gone from my temporal lobe—it says a single word and I listen and I will follow because I know it is the right thing but my story is not yet over, and how am I supposed to live

without having left an impression and how is my life supposed to be even known if I can simply disappear—still the one word circulates, in with my breath and out with the exhalation, and this dark hallway is lit up with the bright lights of chatter, the A major of the chorus up toward the far end, as if they can't not talk with some sort of functionality, but the colors are a warning, much like everything else, telling me the one word that I must listen, follow, go—

Run...

and like that my brain hiccups for a split second, all other traces dissipating and the one word, the true direction of the rest of my life becomes apparent and I can't blame anyone not even Arisa, who might be evil but did not push me anywhere I did not want to go but I can't leave without Claudia, just like I could not have left without Diane, and my mind is fragmented because we are taught that that sort of love cannot come twice, you cannot feel the same about two people, regardless of who they are, but I think they are wrong and I think that I can feel the same about two people, not because they are the same, but because I choose to be and that is where the love comes from and I feel I can admit that it might not be a pure love in their direction, but partially a reflection on my own self-love, how they reflect on me and make me feel about my own life as much as anything because we can't experience our lives through anyone else's lenses, regardless of your ability to empathize or associate or whatever methods one has developed, it is simply a mirror placed over your own face, a mask we attempt to wear, to act, to persuade, not even necessarily ourselves but others and I have just realized what others can't or won't face, that we are all truly alone, and our only method of coping is to pretend we are not.

And I see her coming toward me, slow motion almost, her body not the perfect body, but the perfect reflection of myself, the accumulation of the things I want in a woman, but that isn't really true either, as all men might profess to wanting their spouses to have bigger breasts or thinner stomach, but that isn't how I know she is the perfect woman for me, and she is completely different in many aspects than Diane, who was also perfect for me, and it seems to not be that their bodies are perfect, but that I make them perfect, that I love them because they love me and that all concessions can be derived from that love, and I have made concessions, which is not really the right word for it, but rather like Plato, I've allowed for the ideal form to be realized in a slightly skewed, not necessarily flawed, but merely distorted (once again not the word I want to use as I don't want any sort of negative connotation) and that they represent the perfection of that form to me and I want her to know that, that she is perfect to me and that's all I need and I can give up my name, music, everything for her if she will just come with me, and her tears make me happy in a weird way because it seems to mean she has that conviction that can only be due to a deep and true love, not merely a dissatisfaction with me, but a pleading desire for me to be better, and I will be better, for her, I will.

The latent scent of cheese lingered in Pascal Baur's olfactory as he stood outside his blood red office door. He couldn't tell if the cheese was a psychosomatic event or if part of the opening night buffet table had wafted down the halls and into his piquant nose. He could see Claudia walking towards him, his thoughts racing through her betrayal, yes, he was sure it was a betrayal and not an accident. She knows about the message, he thought, and that means she knows that I have been colluding with the Soviets. His mind

was possessed with thoughts about Claudia and Diane, the cheese smell reminding him of the macaroni in the sink when he was finally allowed into his apartment. That was the last smell she ever experienced, he thought. A slight tear began to form at the corner of his left eye.

Claudia closed the distance and raised her hand and hit him in the chest. He stood, letting her rage escape her arms through her fists, pounding his chest with the sort of fury that indicated a deep betrayal. “I love you, you bastard,” she sobbed in between punches. Pascal let her arms wear themselves out, and when she started to tire from the assault he wrapped her in his arms and held her tight. They both were crying now, their sobs creating a polyrhythm that almost violently pushed their bodies apart. Still, he held on and she squeezed him with what remained of her strength. He could feel the wetness of her face through his silk shirt, and imagined that upon pulling away she would leave a death mask looking impression on his shirt. She was mumbling words into his chest, but Pascal could not make out what she was saying. He released her slightly and bent his head down close to her mouth; her voice was almost horse from the performance. “I love you, I did it for you, I’m so sorry, can you forgive me...” her words trailing off as if she was going to pass out.

Pascal held her tight and shushed her slowly. “It’s okay, he said, I was going to tell you, I was going to leave tonight, take you with me and disappear. Will you leave with me?”

Claudia sobbed strongly again into his chest. She remained silent for a while, her heavy tears turning slowly into a throbbing, pulsing wave of sorrow that he could feel entering his extremities like the beginnings of frostbite. The slow din of Bushnell sounds

started to reappear upon his radar, and he could see the people walking toward them, but then turning around, giving them a wide berth. He saw Arisa standing toward the shadows at the end of the hall, her stare penetrating through the conglomeration of bodies that were chatting and congratulating throughout the area. It was as if she was able to push them apart with her mind, separate a shallow corridor that let her express her rage face to face with Pascal. He felt the worry of that stare, the sort of unflappable attitude that would back up even the wildest possibilities. He tried to dismiss such thoughts from his mind, but found them lingering, returning. He finally felt that he understood what the stare and his senses had been telling him. The stare was the stare of somebody who'd already hurt you, he realized. He wasn't staring at the threat of future violence, but a shrill reminder of the violence that had already befallen him. He had danced around the realization for months, but now knew the truth about his aunt. She was the devil and she had led him down the wrong path, made a deal with him, turned him into Leverkühn and then used his own hubris to destroy him anyway.

He could see it all in her eyes.

Pascal broke his gaze and buried his face into Claudia's hair. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry," he muttered, not just to her, but to everyone. She pulled him back from her hair and looked into his eyes, hers red from crying. "I love you, too," she said, "and I will go away with you. Let's go right now!"

Pascal turned his head back toward Arisa, but she was gone. Puzzled, he grabbed Claudia's hand and turned toward the rear exit. He would not even stop to grab his scores or his books or anything from his office. They would simply leave, get as much cash as they could by hocking jewelry, and leave the known world. Pascal smiled for the

first time in days, and he gripped Claudia's hand tight, leading her down the hallway toward the outside air. The swarm of congratulators and performers thinned as they maneuvered through toward the exit door. Pascal almost dragged Claudia along, afraid to look back, afraid that she would disappear. But they made it to the exit door, and he could feel the first tingle of the cold outside air. He turned and looked back at Claudia, looked into her deep, brown eyes and saw his own reflection. Her face was happy, carefree, and he felt that everything was going to be alright.

As he reached for the door it opened from the outside. Five people pushed their way through and Pascal and Claudia stood by the wall and waited for them to pass. The last man stopped in the doorway and removed his stocking cap. From underneath popped a thick expanse of curly, red hair. He put the cap in his pocket and held the door for Pascal and Claudia as they made their way out into the dark night. They disappeared into a haze of fog and tree cover, the thin crescent moon hidden behind a thick mousse of clouds. The man remained holding the door for a second, then took the stocking cap back out of his pocket and put it back on his head, heading back through the door the way he came.

Epilogue – Washington D.C., July 1988



The streetlights were still on when Morriss Greenberg awoke at 6 a.m. He rolled from side to side to stretch his injured back, eventually gaining enough momentum to swing his legs off the edge of his queen bed and onto the floor. Standing up took another two minutes, but once upright, motion was considerably easier. He went through the slim bathroom door and turned on the fluorescent lights. His hair was flat on one side and wildly parted on the other. He ran a finger through his curly locks and reached for the toothbrush. Five minutes later he left the bathroom, his teeth clean and his face washed. The back injury, which he had received during a training session with a younger recruit at a local YMCA, made his motions stiff and mechanical, as if he was imitating a robot. His legs stayed preternaturally straight and his strides were short and labored, which looked comical on a man with such long legs and wide stance.

In the kitchen he found the coffee filter and ground beans that he had laid out the previous night. He placed both into the Black & Decker machine and filled the coffee pot and started the process. As he waited for the coffee to percolate he went to the refrigerator and found two remaining eggs in the door. As he set them down close to the stove he went back to the fridge and took the pen that was magnetically attached to the door and wrote “eggs” on a neat grocery list that was located in the top right-hand corner. The sound of coffee brewing ambiently paved the backdrop of his morning egg routine. He turned the burner slightly past six and spread a small amount of butter over a well-

worn pan. He cracked the two eggs and dropped them into the pan, using a spatula to break apart the yolks and stir them into a messy mixture of yellow and white.

The next part of Morriss Greenberg's routine was to flip through the mail, but as he side-stepped from the stove to the cluttered counter he remembered that he had come in late the previous night and had left the mail in the box out front. He looked at the coffee and the eggs, both had barely started, and he slowly made his way back to the bedroom and found a pair of slippers near the bathroom door. He also grabbed a Georgetown t-shirt, something he had purchased as part of a seemingly right-of-passage for professionals living in D.C. He slipped the t-shirt on and slowly headed toward the front door. Once outside he paused at the two steps that connected his porch to stone path that led down toward the mailbox. He had to turn sideways and slowly lower himself one stair at a time. The pain was quick but sharp, and he relished the fact that he had not bought a two-story house as he had originally considered. He reached the end of the stone path and opened up the mailbox, reaching in without looking and grabbed the rubber-banded brick of mail. The sun was starting to peek through the trees of the house across the street and the sudden spikes of light made him think of the steps and the back pain.

The trip back to the kitchen was uneventful. Morriss had no problem ascending stairs, just the sudden weightlessness of descending caused his back to attack his nerves with sudden rushes of pain. Once back into the kitchen Morriss tossed the collection of letters and what looked like a brown envelope onto the counter, where it would have been if he had gotten it the previous evening. A creature of habit, Morriss then waddled back to his room, removed the slippers and t-shirt, and came back to the kitchen as it

pretending that his little sojourn had not taken place. He flipped the eggs and placed the spatula in the familiar spot on the counter, then turned his attention to the mail.

The first two envelopes were monthly bills, and he took them and placed them in a small basket that nestled a series of similarly sized envelopes, some opened, some still shut. The third envelope was a credit card invitation, which Morriss ripped up without opening and tossed into the garbage. The large brown envelope was addressed to him but didn't have a return address. He placed it aside for the moment and examined the final two letters, one a correspondence from a college buddy, while the other had the IRS stamp on the front and looked to be his tax return check.

He opened the return check and ripped it off the attached sheet. Morriss was the kind of guy that immediately signed checks sent to him, placing them in his wallet until he could make it to the bank. He figured he'd make it either later that day or the next, maybe up in New York if he was indeed sent up to investigate some of the Stock Market fiasco from the previous fall. He took the unopened correspondence from his college friend and put it in a neat pile near the bills. There were a series of unopened letters, some with postmarks as early as 1987, compiling dust until Morriss found time to open, read, and respond.

The large brown envelope was next. He walked over to the Black & Decker and poured a cup of hot coffee, adding a little sugar to sweeten the drink. He placed the sugar container back its spot and brought the coffee over to the counter. He opened the large envelope and poured the contents out onto the table. There was a few cut out newspaper articles, a small note with what looked like a cipher scribbled on one side, and a sheet of folded music paper, the kind with five lines that you saw in scores. Morriss opened one

of the folded newspaper articles and saw the familiar article about the disappearance of Pascal and Claudia Baur. He had seen it in the paper when it had come out, forwarded to his desk by someone in archives who watches the papers for familiar names. He wasn't sure what it meant to the case that he had investigated. There had been some things going on in Hartford, but they had never gotten further than innuendo. He had figured the disappearance unrelated.

The second article was a review of the last Baur opera. It was mostly positive, but the reviewer, Ms. Nancy Warren, had said some rather cruel things about Claudia's performance. "Obvious and unmistakable errors," she had written.

Morriss took a sip of his coffee and looked at the folded sheet of music paper. It had a series of notes and melodies written out across the page. He could make nothing out of it, his musical knowledge barely rudimentary. He sipped his coffee and looked through the material again, his eyes trying to see what it was the sender had hoped he would see. His thought was interrupted by the sudden blaring scream of his smoke alarm, alerting Morriss to seriously burnt eggs. He jumped up, almost screaming at the sudden flare in his back, but still managed to grab the pot holder, pulling the pan off the burner and placing it in the sink, the eggs white on the top, but with smoke billowing from underneath. He flipped on the faucet and drew back his head as the heated pan spit off a plume of steam from the running water. The smoke alarm continued, and he bent over, his back sizzling with pain from the sudden motion. He remembered the smile of Claudia Ingrassia-Baur, and his thoughts returned to her, as they sometimes did, when the pain or the stress was too much to deal.

Morriss stood upright, the pain slightly abated. He started to whistle the tune she had sung when he had met her, a jazzy song that he had somehow remembered even though he had never heard it since. The whistling slowly turned into humming, which then spread through his mouth until he was singing full-throated, his voice harsh but relatively in tune. Outside, the streetlights went off and the sun bobbed up from behind the trees, rising up toward the heavens.

VITA

Ryan Jespersen (1981) is a composer whose music is steeped in the modern practice of blurring genres and skewing expectations. With a taste for eccentric rhythms and dissonant chord progressions, Ryan's music alludes to his jazz and rock roots while still firmly ensconced in the modern classical tradition. In 2011 Ryan completed a Doctorate in Music Composition at the University of Missouri-Kansas City where he was a Chancellor's Doctoral Fellow, President of the Composer's GUILD, and student senator. Ryan also holds an MM and an AD from the University of Hartford, and a BM and BA from Washington State University. His principal compositions teachers included Chen Yi, Zhou Long, James Mobberley, Larry Alan Smith, Robert Carl, Stephen Gryc, Charles Argersinger and Gregory Yasinitsky.

Ryan's compositions have been performed across the country and abroad, with performances at numerous SCI and NACUSA concerts, the UCM New Music Festival, the Nebraska at Kearney New Music Festival, the Kalv Festival, and the ReJoyce Festival among others. Recent performances include *Indeed, this very Love*, by the grammy-winning Kansas City Chorale, *Hebdomas Squatinae* by the Luna Nova Ensemble, *Farbenmusik* by Amanda Arrington in Nebraska, Missouri, and New York City, and the premiere of *I. Jest* by Robert Olson and the UMKC Orchestra. Upcoming performances include *Orphée Redux* by Rhymes with Opera and the West End String Quartet, *Not Death, but Love* by the Ineo Saxophone Quartet, *BA(da)SS* by Ryan Ford, and *Rhapsody for Dean Moriarty* by jazz legend Bobby Watson and the UMKC Jazz Band. Ryan

recently completed a full-length opera, *Songs from Behind the Curtain*, which served as his doctoral dissertation.

Winner of the 2011 Gerald Kemner Prize for Orchestral Composition, the 2010 Beethoven Club/Belvedere Chamber Festival Composition Contest, the 2010 KC Chorale Composition Competition, the 2009 British Trombone Society Composition Contest, and the 2009 Kalv Festival Composition Contest, Ryan has also been honored by NACUSA, the College Music Society, ASCAPLUS, the Lionel Hampton Jazz Festival, FASR, and Phi Beta Kappa. Also an educator, Ryan was a member of the music faculty at the Hartford Conservatory and has taught at the University of Missouri-Kansas City and the University of Hartford. He is currently teaching computer applications in Hartford and was married in August to the love of his life. Ryan is published through Sound Music Publications and Warwick Music, as well as his own imprint, Jazzperson Music. You can find out more at www.ryanjesperson.com.