

# Temporarily Dead

(A Dream Play)

by

**Ilja Richter**

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English Adaptation by Donald Arthur

## Cast of Characters

Theatre Director Pellmann = Angel

Old Woman

Little Boy

The Hanging Man = Son = Author

Mother

Conny = Mrs. Pellmann

2 Ladies in the Senior Citizens' Home

Jitters

Directress of the Senior Citizens' Home

Old Man

Inspector

Nurse

Benjamin, a Cantor

She (dubbing actress)

He (dubbing actor)

Dubbing Editor

2 Police Officers (extras)

Radio Voices: Newscaster

Maxine Fumfe

Prof Timm Ulrichs

3 Children (extras)

Time: the present

Place: Vienna/Berlin

No Intermission

## Temporarily Dead

### Scene 1

(Set: Theatre director Pellmann's study. A desk, a wing armchair. The back of the armchair is turned to the audience. Pellmann is packing. He sorts things out, drops occasional items on the floor, puts others aside for safekeeping, or better said, for taking along, then suddenly, precipitously, he casually knocks all the books off the desk. Now he tranquilly pulls an old suitcase out from under the desk, puts it on the emptied wooden surface and goes back to his packing. He interrupts his work, turns on his old 1950's radio. We can hear "The Blue Danube Waltz". Pellmann picks up a couple of books. The telephone rings, and while he mumbles the names of the authors to himself, he lifts the receiver.)

PELLMANN: Goethe, Schiller, Handke... (into the phone) Pellmann. No, darling, I'm packing right now. Of course. No, no books. Just plays. How I long to read a book again. (Sadly) A book! Ah, but no. Pellmann reads plays. Nothing substantial, clasped in the loving embrace of a pigskin binding, and then... (a beat) Yes, you are... you are interrupting. If you want me to get to the station on time, I'm going to have to keep at it. (another beat) Yes, I can manage that. I can still manage that. (He checks his watch.) No, I'm not going back to the office. For Christ's sake. I'm glad that show has finally punched its last Judy. I sure as hell won't. (beat) I love you, too, snookums. (annoyed) I sure as hell... let me finish. See you soon. (hangs up)

(Pellmann goes back to his packing. He can't resist the temptation and picks up a script he just tossed away. He quotes sarcastically.)

PELLMANN: "Pellmann is dreaming." "Place. The roof of a senior citizens' home. The official house flag waves in the wind."

(He tosses the book aside and mutters.)

PELLMANN: Amateurish stage direction. "The official house flag waves in the wind."

(Pellmann gets up, paces up and down and makes as if the playwright were present.)

PELLMANN:           What else is it supposed to do, you ignorant desk jockey? Flags wave - that's their job. They aren't trained to do anything else, those dimwitted flags. For all I care, let it wave. Except the one on the moon. It doesn't wave; it just stands there looking stupid. It doesn't wave. Call it space paralysis.

(Pellmann reflects for a moment on the expression he just coined and smiles.)

PELLMANN:           "Space paralysis" - not bad.

(He removes a note pad from his pocket and jots it down.)

PELLMANN:           Playwrights wave in the wind.

(He makes a farting noise with his lips and giggles like a little kid.)

PELLMANN:           What does it say on the flag?

(He picks the book up and checks it out. Reading the play:)

PELLMANN:           "On the flag, it says: Senior Citizens' Castle." Asinine! "Act One, Scene one, Pellmann is dreaming..." In a pig's ass, he is! Pellmann is packing!

(But Pellmann just sits down on the armchair, his back to the audience, and lights a cigarette. Now all we can see of him is the cigarette in his left hand. In his right, the script hangs down at floor level. The radio is still playing the Strauss waltz. The music gets louder. Johann Strauss fills the room. Pellmann reads. As the music fades up, the bookshelf parts left and right like a curtain, and the silhouette of Vienna's prestigious *Burgtheater* rises slowly to the sound of the waltz until it stands enthroned as tall as a house, far above Pellmann's chair. A flag now slowly moves up the flagpole, reading: "Senior Citizen's Castle". Pellmann laughs and reads on. Slow light change. The music gets softer. The stage is dark. Then the light comes back up, but the radio keeps on playing. Pellmann falls asleep. Now he wakes up. He picks up the play, then rises from his armchair and reads the title like a question.)

PELLMANN:           "Pellmann is dreaming"?

(He scratches his back and checks his watch.)

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PELLMANN:           God damn it! (roars) What klutz here keeps  
                          leaving the window open? (contemptuously) Fresh  
                          air? Oxygen? Wet paint. We've got to economize!

(He walks into the wings and closes an unseen window.) (off-stage:)

PELLMANN:           Oh, my God! There's somebody hanging out  
                          there!

(Light change) (Bookshelves rise into the flies.)

**Scene 2**

An old garden fence with the initials C and P on it. On one of the high pointed slats, far above, there is a man hanging with a briefcase. (With his back to the audience. Rigid. Pellmann is flabbergasted. He calls up to him.)

PELLMANN:           What are you doing up there? (a beat) Say something! (beat) What are you doing there? (beat) Look, I haven't got much time. My train leaves at 2:15. So, if you'd please sum up what you're doing in my garden... I mean, on my fence...

(Pellmann is not up to this situation. A distant telephone rings. Pellmann stops in his tracks.)

PELLMANN:           Are you dead? Tell me, are you... (telephone rings) He's dead. (phone rings, Pellmann roars) I'm not home! I'm... dead? He's...

(He begins to understand the situation and yells:)

PELLMANN:           Help! Is anybody there?! I've got a guy hanging here, for Christ's sake! Someone's hanging on my fence. And nobody...

(An old woman with a mesh shopping bag comes by.)

PELLMANN:           Hey, you over there. You! Look at this! Somebody's hanging here... what am I going to...

OLD WOMAN:         Say, aren't you that Pellmann fellow, the one with the theatre, who's always...?

PELLMANN:           (livid) No time for that...

OLD WOMAN:         (cool as a cucumber) Sure there is. Watch out somebody doesn't hang *your* buns up there. Much obliged. (exit)

PELLMANN:           (struggling for a really nasty expression) You, you... (Blackout.)

(Scene change. Bookshelves descend back in place. Pellmann races over to the phone.)

PELLMANN: Yes, this is Pellmann. (indignant) Yes, *that* Pellmann. I've got somebody hanging here. What? That's normal for my theatre? Listen, I've got nothing against a cop with a hair-trigger wit, but... my train leaves at 2:15. (very angry) Vacation, get it? My wife. We're in the middle of a marital crisis, and I thought: Venice. Like before. Understand? (stops short) None of your goddamn business. Listen, there's a man hanging in my garden. And I think it's... just a sec', stay on the line...

(He sees something, walks briefly into the wings and comes back even faster, now he roars with delight into the receiver.)

PELLMANN: Oh, my God, he's moving! He is! He's alive... he's alive... (automatically, without reflecting) What is it you want? Call my secretary for an appointment!

(He hangs up.)

(Telephone rings.)

(Pellmann answers the phone.)

PELLMANN: Later!

**Scene 3**

(Fence. The man is hanging rigid on the top slat between C and P. To the tune of Chaplinesque action music, Pellmann puts a ladder against the fence and climbs up it to rescue the man. He misses his mark completely. Now Pellmann is hanging cheek by slat next to the other man on the fence. The old woman comes back and crosses the stage. Her shopping bag is now full.

OLD WOMAN: (passing by) Well, how goes it?

PELLMANN: (hanging) I wish it would.

OLD WOMAN: That's nice.

(The old woman helps herself to the ladder.)

PELLMANN: (hysterical) You can't do this to me!

OLD WOMAN: (remains standing there with the ladder, looks up, butter wouldn't melt in her mouth.) My very words. The whole of last year. "He can't do this to me!" I mean, really. I've been a ticket subscriber for the last thirty years. Used to go with my husband, God rest his soul. But now?

PELLMANN: Well, what about now?

OLD WOMAN: (sadly, in parting) I can't even look. (exits)

(Pellmann is hanging face forward, the other man, as indicated, with his back to the audience.)

PELLMANN: (to the other man) Say something!

(Change of light. Pellmann has now been hooked on this fence a bit longer. A shadowy atmosphere, autumnal, Viennese wine garden music from the distance [Schubert's G-Major Piano Sonata]. Suddenly a sound from the hanging man, as several sheets of paper fall from his briefcase to the ground. Pellmann tries to read the writing on the pages - no luck. The sound of a child laughing in the distance. Pellmann takes his glasses from his breast pocket, and tries reading the pages again.)

PELLMANN: Semi... no, Senator? Shit... well, what's it called? Too far... too old...

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(A ball rolls onto the stage. A boy of about 10 in short pants fetches the ball.)

PELLMANN: Hey, kid!  
BOY: 'Zup?  
PELLMANN: I am - help!  
BOY: Why?  
PELLMANN: Why not?  
BOY: You ain't Viennese!  
PELLMANN: No - but help me anyway.  
BOY: Twenty Schillings.

(Pellmann searches his pockets.)

PELLMANN: (struggling to make a joke) Oh, I ain't got a barrel of money...!  
BOY: (pointing to the other man) Ask him.  
PELLMANN: I think he's asleep.  
BOY: Then check his pockets.  
PELLMANN: I can't do that. I don't even know him.  
BOY: What are you two guys doing up there anyway?  
PELLMANN: (forcing good humor) Hanging around, you dope!

(The boy takes the ball and starts to exit.)

PELLMANN: Hey, kid!  
BOY: (annoyed) What?!  
PELLMANN: Get help!

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BOY: Fifty Schillings.

(Pellmann shrugs his shoulders.)

PELLMANN: It was just twenty, you little turd!

BOY: Inflation.

(After a brief hesitation, Pellmann finally does stick his hand in the stranger's pocket, but finds nothing inside.)

PELLMANN: He doesn't have any either.

BOY: You lie! (counting rhyme) "If you're a Jew, you got money, too, and then the world belongs to you."

PELLMANN: Why, you're a regular little Brecht.

BOY: (now very annoyed) My name is Josef, you dork! My buddies are waiting for me. (starts to exit)

PELLMANN: (like a schoolteacher) Well, well, so it's Josef. Very nice. That's a Jewish name.

(With a bitter sensation in the pit of his stomach.)

PELLMANN: Are all your little friends like you?

BOY: (drily) At least they're all Viennese, droopy drawers!

PELLMANN: Charming. Well, there'll always be a Vienna. Never again will I claim there's a scarcity of playwrights. Now, how did that counting rhyme go: (he writes in his notebook) "If you're a Jew, you got money, too..."

BOY: Ah, go fuck yourself!

PELLMANN: (drily) "Go fuck yourself" doesn't fit the meter, Bertolt.

BOY: (irked) My name is Josef!

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PELLMANN: Right again! Read me something, Josef.

BOY: (on his way off stage) Why?

PELLMANN: (drily) I'm getting bored.

BOY: Get your grandma to do it, grandpa!

PELLMANN: (playing for sympathy) Mine doesn't read any more. Grandma is dead.

BOY: Waddaya mean, dead? Gassed?

PELLMANN: (thrown off balance) What do you mean?

BOY: My mom says you're the King of Jewburg. And the Jews either have money, or they were gassed. But you're broke. So long! (Boy is almost off stage.)

PELLMANN: So you can't read! Okay, then forget it.

(He says demonstratively loud to the hanging man:)

PELLMANN: One less dyslectic.

(Now the hanging man speaks for the first time.)

HANGING MAN: No, one more businessman! Later on.

PELLMANN: You're alive! Well, that's a relief. Where do you keep your money? He's got us where he wants us.

HANGING MAN: Left breast pocket.

(Pellmann looks, the hanging man laughs.)

HANGING MAN: That tickles!

PELLMANN: Here you go!

(He tosses two coins to the boy.)

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BOY: This is just twenty.

HANGING MAN: A businessman!

PELLMANN: (roars) Now, cut that out! You go call the fire department, and God help you if you don't!

BOY: See ya.

(The little boy runs off with the ball. A long pause, then the boy comes back with a ladder, which he leans against the garden fence.)

BOY: You don't get no fire department for twenty Schillings - just a ladder.

(Boy exits.)

HANGING MAN: Have a nice day.

(To the sound of Chaplinesque music, Pellmann first frees himself, then the hanging man from the fence. He is a man in his early forties, dressed in old-fashioned clothes. He finds his beret on the ground, puts it back on. Then he gathers up his manuscripts and puts them back in his old briefcase. Pellmann helps him, then suddenly stops.)

PELLMANN: (reads) Just a second! "Pellmann is dreaming?" "Senior Citizens' Castle." I know that play. I just...

(N.B.: As he is no longer hanging, we will now refer to the hanging man simply as "Son".)

SON: ...threw it in the wastebasket, I presume. I sent you my play. Several times. And to your literary advisor... and to several members of your company...

PELLMANN: Great suffering Christ, an actor!

SON: Not any more - I write.

PELLMANN: Even worse. A writing non-actor, right? So, you were coming to see me?

SON: Yes.

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PELLMANN: Listen, I don't receive unknown playwrights in my home.

SON: Home, I like that. It's a goddamn mansion...

PELLMANN: And you thought, where there's a mansion, there's a... no way, José! No, my dear friend! Make an appointment with my secretary, or better yet with my literary advisor. After vacation time. Now, if you'll please excuse me... I've got to get to the station. My wife is waiting. Venice. You understand. It was a plea...

(The son takes a pistol out of his briefcase and points it at Pellmann.)

SON: "If we do not hang together, then surely we shall all hang separately." Benjamin Franklin.

PELLMANN: (touchy) Look I've got better things to do with my life than listen to you prove your erudition. (He suddenly decides to try another tack.) Is that a water pistol or gas?

SON: I'm allergic to gas - runs in the family.

PELLMANN: Leave me alone - I've got to finish packing.

SON: (cynically) Great idea, very effective: "Pellmann keeps packing right till the end."

(The son now loads the pistol. A clicking sound freezes Pellmann's blood in his veins. He looks over at the pistol.)

PELLMANN: You're just a crackpot!

SON: Try me!

PELLMANN: You're bluffing. (He looks at his watch.) Look, I really have to go...

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SON: "Didja ever get the feeling that you wanted to go, and then you got the feeling that you wanted to stay?"

PELLMANN: (joking but still unnerved) Sure, I'm a Jimmy Durante fan, too. Now, have a nice life!

SON: I'm certainly no Durante.

PELLMANN: You said it!

SON: But I am an injured... how did you put it?

PELLMANN: Crackpot!

SON: And you, Pellmann, are not John Lennon. I definitely don't want you to give me your autograph prior to blowing your brains out.

PELLMANN: (now very nervous) Very well, now what is it you *do* want?

SON: A reading.

PELLMANN: A what!??? Sure. What would you like to read: *The Catcher in the Rye*? Good bye! (starts to go.)

SON: I have been trying to get my foot through the door of your fortress for the last year. A meeting.

PELLMANN: Lots of people want one.

SON: They keep stringing me along - your secretary. Your literary advisor's secretary. Even you...

PELLMANN: Me? Have we ever met? I mean, have we ever...?

SON: I know you, but you don't know me. Well, hardly. Once or twice, in the cafeteria... You know, I was a stagehand for a while. In your Punch and Judy show. Very humiliating. I was once a star!

PELLMANN: (incredulously) You don't say!

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SON: A child star. I thought we might get together if I worked as a stagehand.

PELLMANN: What do you know, a celebrated stagehand!

SON: No, a terminated one. I was too weak. I'm more brain-oriented.

PELLMANN: Nothing like an oriental brain.

SON: Go ahead and make fun of me. But he who shoots last... (holds the pistol to his temple) Shouldn't we go inside. It's so hard to converse outdoors.

PELLMANN: (frightened) Right. As far as the eye can see, money-hungry children, venomous grannies and aging child stars with firearms, purchased at great expense from "Toys 'R' Us". Is that a Milton Bradley?

SON: No, a Steyr. Made in Austria.

PELLMANN: Bravo. A patriot.

SON: Migrant worker.

PELLMANN: Very well, come along...

(The son lowers the pistol. Pellmann walks one step, then gets a shock as he sees the time.)

PELLMANN: God damn, my train is just leaving...

(Viennese music begins, like the action music for an imaginary film.)

PELLMANN: I see her standing there before me: my wife on the platform, watching our train leave the station. Looking daggers at the phone booth, as if *it* could do anything. I mean, I heard it ring.

SON: So did I.

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PELLMANN: I can recognize my wife by her ring. (startles) You heard it ring? From up there?

SON: Yeah. Eight times. I counted them.

(The music stops.)

PELLMANN: What's that supposed to mean? (a beat) You mean, you were only pretending to...

(The son answers with a smile.)

PELLMANN: Tell me, do you usually hang around someone's fen...

SON: You're not just someone.

PELLMANN: (flattered) Thank you.

SON: You're Pellmann. (pointedly continuing) And for years you've been harping on the same old "no playwrights" chord, but ignoring my play, and it's really a good play. Such a good...

PELLMANN: If you had only hanged yourself in the Burgtheater - with some sense of tradition - your play certainly would have had a chance. Later, perhaps. But they would have done it.

SON: At least *you'll* see it.

PELLMANN: What?

SON: My play. You're going to read it.

PELLMANN: Thanks to you, my wife is standing on the station platform, sweating, cursing. (looks at his watch) Well, maybe not any longer.

(For a moment he forgets the man is threatening him and begins treating him like a close friend who needs the plot of a film explained to him.)

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PELLMANN: You know, Venice was our last chance. Our first vacation in five years. And now this. (Now he sees him again as his torturer.) Now, where were we?

SON: With your sweating, cursing wife.

PELLMANN: Thank you. She leaves the station without her luggage.

SON: I getcha - so you'll buy her new stuff.

PELLMANN: Exactly.

SON: Matched designer cases.

PELLMANN: You got it! My wife's got taste. (startles) You know my wife?

SON: Oh, yes.

PELLMANN: (now all director, forgetting the present situation.) That reading on "oh, yes!" Now, if you were a member of my company, we'd have some hard work to do on that "oh, yes". I know those "oh, yes" actors. Good thing you're not acting any more. Write. Write your fingers to the nubbins! But keep your mandibles off "oh, yes"! I hate that. When actors bug out their eyes like characters in soap commercials, and they spell everything out for the audience, then they say: "Oh, yes!"

(The son asks Pellmann to hold the pistol, so he can note that down.)

SON: Hold this a sec, please. (notes down) "Oh yes" actors. Soap commercials. Spelling everything out. Oh, yes.

PELLMANN: No. "Oh, yes!" Got it? (startles) What's the point of all this. Are you planning to cut the "oh, yes!"es out of your play?

SON: No, I'm just padding your part.

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PELLMANN: What are you talking about!? (a bead) Oh, yes, right. "Pellmann is dreaming." (roars) Bullshit! "Pellmann is leaving!"

(He lets fly with another cascade of verbiage.)

PELLMANN: Look, I'm having a marital crisis. The theatre is on vacation. My wife is about to come storming in. Now, be a good sport and get the hell out of here! Go anywhere you want, just leave me al...

(Pellmann now notices for the first time that he has the pistol in his hand.)

SON: It's a fake.

PELLMANN: Bluff.

SON: Pull the trigger. The only good writer is a dead writer!

(Pellmann shoots. Nothing happens.)

PELLMANN: I knew it!

SON: But this one *is* real!

(The son takes a small, dainty lady's pistol out of his briefcase.)

PELLMANN: Cute.

SON: Petite - but loaded.

PELLMANN: Just like my wife. So long.

(The son loads the pistol and aims at the initials on the garden gate. Shot. Part of the "C" falls down. Pellmann, after his initial shock over the pistol really being loaded, tosses the toy gun on the ground and does something totally unexpected. He leans the ladder against the garden gate, climbs up and hangs himself calmly back on one of the slats. The son is taken aback. Pellmann lights a cigarette.)

(Cigarette break.)

PELLMANN: Now read the sucker! I'm all ears, you asshole!

(The sun pulls himself together, sits down, after some initial hesitation, in front of the garden gate, and puts the lady's pistol away. He gathers the remaining pages from the ground, sorts them into a pile, takes the second pile out of his briefcase. Of course, this generates a break in the action. As he is about to start reading, a group of three to four boys starts frolicking across the stage, playing catch, among them our "little businessman". The boy briefly looks up, sees Pellmann, sees the son, discovers the toy pistol, picks it up, has a good laugh and then runs off after the others, shooting as he goes.)

SON: (starting to read) "Pellmann is dreaming. A flag waves on the roof of the senior citizens' home.

PELLMANN: (hanging, smoking, impatient) It says "Senior Citizens' Castle" on it. Right. Get on with it. I'm on vacation.

(As the son continues reading, the things he describes become visible to the audience. That is to say: a roof with a neon sign reading "Senior Citizens' Castle". Although the background is clearly the Berlin skyline, the roof has a peculiar similarity to the Burgtheater in Vienna. An old woman (the mother) is sitting on the roof drinking Lydia Pinkham's tonic. Her face is made-up in white, like a circus clown, her hair parted in the middle and tied in a bun, her mouth made up with a fire-engine red kissy mouth. Claus Pellmann's garden gate is still visible. He is still hanging on the slat. The new set, the roof, is bifurcated by the garden fence - in other words, the two sets have mated.)

**Scene 4.**

SON: (reads) Act one, scene one, skyscraper roof.

PELLMANN: I see it more as an old building, you know, somewhat ornate, little angels, trumpets.

(The son briefly points the pistol at him.)

SON: Shut up, Pellmann.

PELLMANN: Talked me into it. "Pellmann is dreaming."

(The son notices that the set is not modern, and says:)

SON: Talked me into it. "Old building". (Pellmann closes his eyes.) "Son on the ground."

PELLMANN: (hanging) Yeah, sure. Scraping his way through the bottom of the barrel.

SON: "The son is reading his script, the mother drinking Lydia Pinkham. In the sky: an angel over Berlin, getting ready to land."

PELLMANN: (opens his eyes) Anyway an angel. With our without the trumpet, Mr. Benny?

SON: (threateningly sets down his script, takes off Pellmann's left shoe and sock and now points the pistol at the sole of his foot.) Pellmann, this is my play! Now, either you play along, or else...

PELLMANN: (can't help laughing, because the pistol is tickling his foot.) Talked me into it. I can see it all before me. Clear as day. The play's the thi...

SON: You call me Jack Benny one more time, and I pull the trigger!

PELLMANN: (looks over at the mother) You mean to tell me that clown over there is your mother?

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SON: How did you know?

PELLMANN: My God, I have an overview of the situation - call it angelic perception, get me? (seamlessly) Just incidentally, you know Jack Benny...

(Pellmann stops for a second, not knowing how the other man will react to Benny.)

PELLMANN: ...didn't blow his horn in that movie, despite the liars and cheats and con artists and all that crap. Left them right there where they were.

(While Pellmann is talking about liars and cheats and con artists, the garden fence sinks down below the roof. This puts Pellmann's feet back on the ground and will, in the course of the evening, put in an occasional appearance to restore a touch of "reality" to our dream play. Pellmann reads the part of the angel like an underrehearsed understudy who hasn't quite gotten into the part. The characters around him all behave with great pathos, but even Pellmann will begin getting into the drama in the course of the constant change between roof and library. Roof: neon sign "Senior Citizens' Castle". And old lady in a dressing gown, white make-up, red bee-sting lips. [86, hair parted in the middle and coiffed into a tight bun in the back, stands agitatedly at the edge of the roof.]

MOTHER: "I'm just a piece of shit!" I'm just a piece of shit.

...

(Drinks her Lydia Pinkham.) (Sings softly.)

MOTHER: Berlin is such a raunchy place,  
Berlin is such a raunchy place (bursts into tears.)  
A city with a fresh-washed face.  
There ain't no better town than that,  
The city where my heart is at.  
My heart is at, my heart is in?  
How should I know? I talk like I talk.  
(laughing through her tears.)  
Since my poor heart away you took,  
Ain't got no time to check the grammar book.

(The son appears on the extreme upstage side of the roof, about 40, pale, trench coat, briefcase, beret. He sees the danger on the edge of the roof and makes a forced joke.)

SON: Why? You got something against grammar?

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MOTHER: (stops singing, smiles, then goes on singing.)  
Can't put no staples on my heart.

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SON: (moves toward the mother, singing along)  
There ain't no better place than that!  
The city where my heart is at!

MOTHER: My heart is at, my heart is in...? (screams at him) I  
talk like I talk!

SON: (trying to calm his mother) Okay, Mama, now  
come on home.

MOTHER: (screams even louder) Home!? Are you out of your  
tiny Hebrew mind?!

SON: (yells back at her) That matter has yet to be settled!

MOTHER: The matter of your tiny mind?

SON: The Hebrew issue...

MOTHER: (takes another slug from the bottle) You're always  
what your mother is. And when you shit in your  
bed at night, drink Lydia Pinkham, and your  
mother is...

...

SON: (interrupts his mother, quoting) "A piece of shit", I  
know! But that's just a quote, for...

MOTHER: For shit's sake, that's what you were going to say!  
That's how you talk about your poor mother in  
your play. (drinks) Shitty play!

SON: A quote from your daughter. (drinks)

MOTHER: She isn't my daughter any more.

SON: When was she? And what about the other three  
specimens?

MOTHER: (drinks) Yeah. Priced for every budget.

*Ilja Richter*

SON:

But I did the best marketing. (now again gentler to his mother) Now, will you please come home.

*Ilja Richter*

MOTHER: Marketing? You sold out your own mother!  
(mocking her son) "Please come home." Room  
thirteen in the Senior Citizens' Castle. Some home!  
A bunch of old biddies and a directress who looks  
like a stand-in for Leni Riefenstahl.

(The neon sign goes out.)

MOTHER: And a cheapskate to boot! She probably thinks if  
an old lady jumps off her roof, she doesn't need to  
advertise it.

SON: You aren't going to jump!

MOTHER: Are you sure?

SON: (very softly to his mother) Absolutely. Now, give  
me that Blue Nun... (His mother hands him the  
bottle.)

MOTHER: (weeping while her son drinks) It's all I've got left!  
(The bottle is empty.)

SON: And now you haven't got any more of this!  
Mother, you've got me!

MOTHER: Yes, and I hate you! Bottle!

SON: (distracting her) What do blue nuns shit?

MOTHER: (answers crying) The cream of the crap.

(Both of them alternate between laughter and tears. They sit down on the edge of the  
roof. She strokes him.)

MOTHER: Mind you, I've got nothing against nuns. It was  
Catholic nuns that...

SON: (wearily) "...saved your mother and brother..."

MOTHER: (annoyed) Yes, indeed! Saved them from the gas  
man!

*Ilja Richter*

SON: I'm not making fun of anything, but what do you think your cheap imitation son in Tel Aviv is going to think of you? He's asking for it! Uncircumcised - good luck! They'll drop him like a pit from the Mount of Olives. And as he falls, there'll be a word from King Shloimele on his lips. Something pious about fallen mothers, no doubt, will occur to him, the sacred touchas of the family.

MOTHER: Oy, such a failure. A voice like Gigli, but no, he's got to become a cantor! (a beat) He could be a musical star today.

SON: Hot shit, said the Fiddler on the Roof and crapped down the chimney.

MOTHER: Tasteless.

SON: Who did I learn it from?

MOTHER: You could have been right at the top if only you'd listened to me. And now here I stand on the edge of the abyss.

SON: You're sitting down. (a beat) Look, Mama, if that desk clerk in Munich hadn't mistakenly put my script in your cubbyhole, you wouldn't be...

MOTHER: ...here in Berlin now - on the brink of a nervous breakdown. That's the emmes!

(She rises to her feet, looking down contemptuously at her son.)

MOTHER: I would at least have waited until that maternal exorcism of yours came out. The title alone: "Sonny Boy - the Eternal Child Star". (hysterical) What the hell is that supposed to mean?

SON: (yelling even louder) It means, Mamalebber, that as far as you're concerned I'm still running around in a sailor suit at the age of forty! Unfortunately, those parts get a little sparse at my age.

*Ilja Richter*

(He sobs. She sobs. They embrace. A shooting star appears in the sky.)

- MOTHER: Look, precious, a shooting star. Make a wish.
- SON: A wish? There's none of the nun left, what else could happen. Oh, yes! I wish...
- MOTHER: Already granted! What did you wish?
- SON: ...that I wouldn't have to get fined in Munich.
- MOTHER: Fined?
- SON: (looks at his watch, then drily) Because I should be taking my final bow there at this very minute. In Munich. Closing performance. In that crummy little theatre down the hill from the Bavarian Parliament building, so Mommy dearest can thwack her palms together again.
- MOTHER: (appalled) How many time have I told you: the show must go on. It's the first rule of the theatre.
- SON: (sarcastically) Is it? Does it also apply to sons who get that kind of message in their hotel cubbyhole?

(He takes the script out of his briefcase. Mother is embarrassed. Pellmann takes the script away from him, leafs through it. Pellmann is [still!] invisible to the mother and son. The son takes out a piece of message paper.)

- MOTHER: I know what I wrote you before I left, you don't need to...
- SON: Oh, yes I do! I enjoy it! (a hostile scream) Berlin, awake, and laugh at Mother Garbage and her latest message: "That play - made of the same shit that you are made of - is flying back to Berlin where it will first commit suicide!" I have seldom seen the desk clerk at The Four Seasons look so pale - at least *that* was good for a laugh.

(He repeats the last sentence with a theatrical tone, holding the message up for deaf heaven to witness.)

*Ilja Richter*

SON: "...where it will first commit suicide."

MOTHER: It must have looked just like this when Moses, the headwaiter of the Old Testament, took the Lord's order.

(A thunderclap.)

SON: "...where it will first commit suicide." I really have to let that "first" melt in my mouth. So: summing things up: first dead, right, Mamacakes? Fine, and what do we do in the afternoon?

(Another thunderclap, he takes her in his arms. Both exit.)

(Viennese music.)

PELLMANN: (quoting Friedrich Holländer in *Sprechgesang* from the script.)  
He stayed for lunch, remained to dine.  
Before bed, he drank his magic wine.  
His got lethargic, fell asleep.  
At the time, he was a pretty ancient creep.  
Then came summer's sun and winter's tears.  
In all, I think, that bastard stuck around for seven years!

(Pellmann strolls behind a chimney. When he reappears, there are two very beautiful, snow-white angel wings on his back. He is still unaware of this transformation. The wings are crudely attached to wide suspenders over his suit. He leafs through the script like a bureaucrat.)

ANGEL: (babbling) Well, what's on today's schedule? Oh, yes, right: *Nabucco* sing-along in the club room under the direction of our charming directress. Honestly! I could be in Macedonia now, where a couple of mercenaries are getting ready to rape a five-year-old child, or... (he leafs through the pages) Right: or in the Dominican Republic. (He looks off in the distance.) Where a Republican is just putting out his cigar on a Cuban, of all people. For meddling in some internal Dominican business. No such luck: what do I get? *Nabucco!*