

# **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

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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.)

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!

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

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**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.)

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(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!

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**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...

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

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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!  
BOY: Fifty Schillings.

(Pellmann shrugs his shoulders.)

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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!

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!

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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.)

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.)

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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.

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

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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...

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.

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- 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!
- 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.

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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.

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?

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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.)

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

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this. Are you planning to cut the "oh, yes!"es out of your play?

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

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.)

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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.)

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**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?

SON: How did you know?

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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?

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.

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

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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!

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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.

(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

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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.)

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:

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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!*

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**Scene 5**

(Show curtain in front of the roof set. Ten old biddies enter and lift their cracked voices in the prisoners' chorus from Verdi's *Nabucco*. The directress, a Leni Riefenstahl clone, but only around 50, is conducting. Then she stops short.)

DIRECTRESS:           And where is Room thirteen this afternoon?

LADY 1:                AWOL!

LADY 2:                I ain't gonna say nothin', cause ever'time I open mah yap, y'all accuse me o' bein' anti-Semitic, but ever since that young-un o' hers done moved in with her, that old sow has gotten even goofier - or how do them Jew-boys put it: mazurka?

LADY 1:                Meshugge!

LADY 2:                That's one weird lingo.

LADY 1:                You mean weird people!

LADY 2:                Nosiree-bob, you ain't puttin' diddly-squat over on this-here gal, just on account-a I said... you know...

DIRECTRESS:           Well, I may be the head of this Shangri-la, ladies, but I don't get wind of everything that goes on around here. Just what *did* you say?

(Conny, a young nurse, enters with phonograph records - she is, to put it mildly, a girl of the people.)

CONNIE:                Ya want I shud put on the old reckid? I mean time's a-wastin'. I mean, if this tea dance drags on any longah, supper's gonna rot on the plates.

DIRECTRESS:           I would so appreciate it if you'd keep a civil tongue in your head and not exaggerate so shamelessly. Now then, Mrs. Stengel, just what was it you said?

LADY 1:                Go ahead - spit it out!

LADY 2:                I jes' said it cain't o' been no six million Jews, on account o'...

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DIRECTRESS: On account of?

LADY 2: (annoyed) Well, jes' drop into the Café Luitpold in Munich any afternoon - they's all still a-sittin' theah.

CONNYP: That must be one fuckin' humungous café.

DIRECTRESS: Conny, music!

(An old shellac record, music for tea dancing. The ladies dance with each other. The angel, invisible to them all, walks through the group to a lady with Parkinson's disease on the edge of the stage. She is about 80 and has a child-like face. She has a permanent case of the jitters.)

JITTERS: Old Wives' Tale.

ANGEL: Without the old children and the young children, this wretched invisibility would be even harder to take...

JITTERS: I see you...!

ANGEL: I know, my angel.

(The angel raises the old lady from her wheelchair and dances with her. The other ladies are dumbfounded.)

LADY 1: Are ya ready for dat?

LADY 2: Dancin' her gol-darn knickers off!

LADY 1: And all alone!

LADY 2: Ain't nobuddy holdin' 'er up!

(The angel extricates himself from the shaking lady's arms and with it out of our field of vision: Jitters dances on, her head still shaking, joyous, stops, sees her empty arms and collapses. All the ladies rush to help her.)

JITTERS: Old Wives' Tale.

(There is a crack in the record. As Shaky returns to her wheelchair, Conny stops the record.)

CONNYP: How come dat old cow keeps sayin' "Old Wives' Tale". The whole goddamn day, nothin' but "Old Wives'..."

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(An old gentleman in grey enters, about 85. Hat, umbrella, suitcase. This part, however, should be cast with a 70-year old man.)

OLD MAN: Who knows, my pretty little miss, if you'll say anything at all by the time you've reached Mrs. Rosenbaum's age?

CONNYP: Ya know Mrs. Rosenbaum?

OLD MAN: Slightly.

(He seems embarrassed, and the directress seems totally perplexed.)

DIRECTRESS: Hermann?

CONNYP: Ya know da boss, too?

OLD MAN: One might put it that way, my pretty little miss. She is my wife.

DIRECTRESS: I was.

CONNYP: I get it - all woik an' no play.

OLD MAN: I wish I could disagree. But I always try to repress dismal thoughts at my little hacienda down in Paraguay.

CONNYP: Para-who? Where de fuck izzat?

LADY 1: Toin left at Potsdam and then ten thousand miles straight ahead, you educated slob!

CONNYP: You just tawked yerself outa dizzoit!

OLD MAN: Charming creature.

DIRECTRESS: That's quite enough, Conny. Our tea dance is not over yet. Hermann, do hang up your coat.

CONNYP: Suit yaself!

(She helps the old man out of his coat, saying:)

CONNYP: This joint is a real laff riot!

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JITTERS: Old Wives' Tale.

(The directress turns on the record player. The ladies dance.)

OLD MAN: (sitting) I see you still have a considerable shortage of males in your establishment. As in days of old, back in '72.

DIRECTRESS: (sarcastic) And you've come back for a return engagement. If you don't care for the selection, you're welcome to hit the road. You know, Hermann: old men and Germany in autumn. Leaves do have to fall, oh, and watch out, ladies' choice is coming up.

OLD MAN: (smirking) One needs no eagle eye to miss the fact that I'm the market leader here. Just like the old days, when I set this place up for you.

(He boyishly pats her hand, she pulls it away.)

DIRECTRESS: Not quite. I have offspring.

OLD MAN: Congratulations and three cheers to the codgers' bin. How old is the little tyke? Seventy-five like me or already eighty?

DIRECTRESS: You're eighty-five!

OLD MAN: On the mark as always, my old executive secretary. But when I married you back in fifty-two, *I* was the baby. An over-aged baby.

DIRECTRESS: I'll put on another record.

OLD MAN: Suit yourself. But you really should check the speed. Much too fast. And a couple of these old darlings certainly want to make it to Conny's dessert.

(He starts to dance with the directress - she lets it happen.)

DIRECTRESS: I'll leave the turntable right where it is - at thirty-three. That's when you joined the party, isn't it?

OLD MAN: Is he the one?

DIRECTRESS: What one?

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OLD MAN:           Why, your offspring?

(The son enters, to the merry greetings of the ladies.)

DIRECTRESS:       Yes, it is he.

OLD MAN:           How old?

DIRECTRESS:       Forty, he claims.

OLD MAN:           And what's he doing here?

DIRECTRESS:       Living.

OLD MAN:           He claims.

(They all keep dancing.)

SON:                (to the directress) May I cut in?

OLD MAN:           You may. This is against the rules, but I did the same thing. This is ladies' choice. You see, she's my wife.

DIRECTRESS:       Former...

OLD MAN:           ...in the Dell!

(The old man sits down, waking up Jitters, who sees the man and tries to say something to him. She takes a breath, rises, struggles for words, stands there for a moment with great effort, raises her arm, whereupon the old man also rises, walks toward her, holds up his arm as well, which ends in a kiss of her hand. This kiss generates a disaster. Jitters starts to scream, but can't make a sound. Exhaustedly, she sinks back into her wheelchair. The couples continue dancing without paying any attention to this bizarre scene. Only one of them reacts with a shock - the son. But the directress has him tightly in her clutches and continues dancing around with him. Nevertheless the dance music continues over the blackout and begins fading down.)

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**Scene 7.**

(Old Folk's Home club room. The familiar tea dance music grinds to a halt. Everyone is laughing. The old man stands watching.)

DIRECTRESS: (to the son) Dear guest of honor here in the Grim Reaper's waiting room. After seven years in our home, and perhaps not to the delight of all our residents, no... perhaps to welcome the surprise return of my husband.

OLD MAN: Former...

DIRECTRESS: From far-distant Paraguay...

CONNLY: Toin left at Potsdam.

DIRECTRESS: Perhaps you would favor us with a sample of your neglected skills. Often, but never successfully copied.

SON: Certainly not!

(All the ladies descend on him.)

LADY: Aw, come on... give us a song!

LADY: Or maybe an imitation!

LADY 2: How's about Heinz Rühmann, that'd be jim-dandy.

LADY 1: Yeah, funny old Heinz.

SON: Heinz Rühmann, eh? Is that who you want?

ALL THE LADIES: Oh, yees!

CONNLY: Gwan, give us old Heinzie!

SON: That immortal film star from the thrilling thirties and the fabulous forties!?

(He goes right into his imitation)

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SON: "Go ahead, old bean, doncha know, have a seat, doncha know, ain't life grand? Grand, I tell you: had a Jewish wife, gave her the old heave-ho. Great. Vacationed by the North Sea in thirty-six, doncha know? Sitting in the bar. Got a letter. How well I remember. Otto Wallburg's wife, doncha know? Where'd I put the blasted thing? I hang onto everything. Sentimental old fool. Gotta stay organized."

(He pantomimes removing a "letter" from a briefcase, slowly, pensively reads it from the palm of his hand.)

SON: "Munich, April first 1935. Dear Mr. Rühmann; My husband is in a concentration camp. He was always very kind to you. Do you suppose you might..."

(He pantomimes scrunching the letter in his fist and goes on talking while inspecting his fingernails.)

SON: "Course I couldn't, doncha know? Had to keep out of that sordid business if I wanted to get in, doncha know? Paul Kemp was breathing down my neck - funny man - same type as me! Thank Heaven he was a faggot! Went back to the North Sea. Made movies - happy ending. Till forty-five."

LADY 2: Lordy, he was a lot funnier on the T and V.

SON: Rühmann?

LADY 2: No, you!

SON: On the level?

LADY 2: No, on the screen.

(goes back to his imitation - turning to the old man)

SON: "Well, Hermann, got my letter? Haven't heard from you in a while. Classmates, doncha know?"

(He slaps the old man on the back. The old man slaps him across the face. An embarrassed silence.)

DIRECTRESS: Hermann!!

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SON: (reacts quick as a flash, and with professional routine starts to sing an old song.)  
"They call him Herman,  
That sexy German.  
He really knows just what do to  
When it comes to pitching woo!  
With every passing season,  
He's just huggin', kissin', squeezin'!  
How I fell for him I really can't determine!"

(after a long, embarrassed silence, as the song slowly dies down.)

CONNLY: Whozis guy Göring?

SON: They call him Hermann. (without a break to the old man)  
Well? Were you a funny man, too?

OLD MAN: (stiffly) No, a lawyer.

SON: A Nazi lawyer - so you *were* a funny man! "Grim Reaper's Waiting Room". A mighty fortress. A show jumper in the kangaroo court! Welcome. That'll put some tabasco in the old waiting room. But, please ladies, don't all run away. It's just getting cozy around here.

LADY 1: Impertinent scamp!

LADY 2: I cain't figger it out - he was a whole lot funnier on the T and V.

SON: That's what my mother always says. (to the old man)  
Who was your producer? Right, the laugh riot of the Third Reich, good old Freissler.

OLD MAN: (rising to his feet) That does it!

MOTHER: (appears, freezes) Hermann!?!?

JITTERS: Old Wive's Tale.

OLD MAN: Eva...

CONNLY: (naïvely) So, you're dis guy Göring?

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(The mother faints, the son and Hermann race of to her, Jitters tries to get out of her wheelchair, drops back.)

SON:                   What's the matter, Mother? Say something. What's wrong?

MOTHER:           (lying there, slowly opening her eyes, imagining) The angel. The angel. Quick, duck!

DIRECTRESS:       Get an ambulance - quickly...!

(Blackout) (In the dark, Pellmann's 1950's radio program goes back on, and we hear a news report.)

RADIO:               Berlin. A fifty-five year old man, still unidentified, survived a jump from the roof of a senior citizens' home. Fortunately for the presumed suicide candidate, he collided with an artwork in progress being put in place by Professor Tim Ullrichs, who was in the process of wrapping the building in seventy-foot high, large-scale plastic sheeting, which involuntarily broke the man's fall. Our correspondent Maxine Fumfe spoke with the artist:

ULLRICHS:           (off stage) Yes, this momentous wrapping project was finally about to come to fruition at the end of a long preparatory phase, and with the aid and support of the Municipal Culture office. The material, by the way an excellent elastic synthetic produced by the Hoechst Company - let me take this opportunity to extend my thanks to all the folks over at Hoechst - depicts an oversized blue, mouldy cheese, intended to heighten our awareness to the ravishment of Mother Earth.

MAXINE FUMFE:     That's very interesting, Professor. And now, quite unexpectedly, a would-be suicide has, so to speak, cut your cheese.

ULLRICHS:           Well, nobody could have kno...

MAXINE FUMFE:     Incidentally, does your artwork have a name?

ULLRICHS:           Super Gouda.

MAXINE FUMFE:     Well, that's it for me. Thank you, Professor Ullrichs, and now let's spin another platter.

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**Scene 8:**

(Shadow play wall. A police inspector is interrogating the would-be suicide underneath one of those third-degree lamps. Bandaged from head to foot. Seated.)

INSPECTOR:           Why the hell did you jump off the goddamn roof? Don't you know you can fuck up a guy's whole afternoon with those monkeyshines? (Silence) Who are you anyway? (Silence) Where do you come from? (Silence) Where's your ID? (Silence) For the last time: who...? (He shakes the bandaged man.) We have ways...

(The inspector unwraps the bandaged man. At the last moment, the shadow play wall rises. The inspector is flabbergasted! There is nothing underneath the bandages. Empty air.)

INSPECTOR:           (roars) Schulz!!

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**Scene 9:**

(The shadow of a woman becomes visible in Pellmann's library. Two suitcases drop to the floor. We can hear footsteps approaching the radio. A floor lamp is turned on. The actress who had been playing Conny is now also Mrs. Pellmann. She demonstratively turns up the volume on the radio, which proceeds to spew out hostile techno music. An argument, the substance of which is inaudible, drowned out by the music. Pellmann walks over to the radio and turns it off. Exhausted and upset, he drops back into his armchair and lights a cigarette.)

PELLMANN:                   (babbling to himself) Fuck Venice!

(A short pause, two, three puffs, then he picks up the script again and reads. The son appears in the library.)

PELLMANN:                   Is somebody there?

SON:                         "There's always somebody there, not just the one you think it is." Page five.

(Pellmann can't see the son, because he is virtually invisible, just as he is invisible as the angel in the dream play setting. He leafs through the script and comes to page 5.

PELLMANN:                   "THE ANGEL: There's always somebody there, not just the one you thi..." No kidding. Page five.

(Pellmann looks around his library again, shrugs his shoulders, then sits down again in the armchair and continues reading. He stops briefly, takes a puff, then walks over to the bookshelves... Change of light. The desk and armchair, with Pellmann on it, are rolled off stage.)

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**Scene 10:**

(Hospital room)

MOTHER: (lying in bed, fantasizing) The Angel. The Angel. Quick, duck!

NURSE: Your son.

MOTHER: (sinks back) Quick, duck! Duck!

SON: Why, Mother? Why do I have to duck?

MOTHER: Duck...(she moans) Ow!

SON: Duck? Ow? Dachau!?

MOTHER: (very weakly) Pleased to meet you, Auschwitz.

SON: Mama, you're getting your concentration camps all mixed up. (almost in tears) But if you're being witty again, that's a great relief. Comedy relief.

MOTHER: Auschwitty...

SON: Mother Garbage, you're not Elie Wiesel!

MOTHER: Wiesel-Schmiesel... you know Ibsen?

SON & MOTHER: (in unison) I didn't know Ib *had* a son!

(A weary laugh, a hysterical one from the son. He tries to keep her in good spirits. The old man enters from the side, baffled.)

SON: I remember - you know Ibsen? Page fifteen. Rancid House Publishers - "Hans Müller's Joke Book".

OLD MAN: What are you doing here?

SON: What are *you* doing here? You just bring bad luck!

OLD MAN: What are you doing with your mother? Is this the right way to treat a sick woman?

SON: Couldn't be righter. Comedy games. Not only does she

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know all the jokes, she even knows what page they're on.

(Turns back to the mother, forcing himself to be jolly.)

SON:                   What did the General say to the tired comedian at the party? "Howdja do, I'm General Nussbaum." Okay, Mama, what does the comedian say?

(The mother is exhausted.)

OLD MAN:            Will you please leave the poor soul in peace!

SON:                   Get lost! (turns back to his mother) What did the tired comedian say?

MOTHER:            (with her last strength) General Nussbaum? You look more like a general nuisance to me!

SON:                   (hysterically) Good, very good, Mother. As long as you can do the B-material, everything's just hunky-dory. And now will you please tell me, what's the angel routine all about?

OLD MAN:            Heavens above, an angel is an angel, why don't you leave the poor old lady alone?

SON:                   (jumps to his feet) Get out of this room! Right now! (screams) My mother needs peace and quiet!

OLD MAN:            (Yells back) Then you stop yammering about Dachau and Auschwitz! And tired comedians.

SON:                   Will you shut up! First you kill all the comedians, then you can't stand the jokes!

MOTHER:            Round and round we go - it's a morgue-go-round! General Nuisance - General Nuisance!

SON:                   (calling) Nurse! Nurse! Will you get the hell out of here!

NURSE:               You called, sir?

SON:                   This gentleman would like to...

MOTHER:            The new ones never get old, and the old ones are forever

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new.

NURSE: What's she talking about?

SON: Gags.

NURSE: Gags?

SON: Yeah, we used to write comedy sketches.

NURSE: Got it. (totally confused)

SON: You ain't got nothin', honey. Now, get this.

(suddenly riddled with panic, he speaks staccato)

SON: Doctor says to a stockbroker: "You can't go to the exchange, you've got a hundred and two fever." And the stock broker answers... okay, Mother. Come on, tell us what the stock broker says! Mother, Mother, say something.

OLD MAN: Will you leave that woman alone!

SON: So the stockbroker says... (weeping) "When it hits a hundred and ten, sell..."

(The nurse thinks this all over. The son kisses the mother. The nurse gently leads the son out of the room. The old man follows them. A wall covers the hospital room. There is a bench in front of the wall.)

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**Scene 11:**

(The old man and the son are sitting on opposite ends of the bench.)

SON:                   How long have you known my mother?

OLD MAN:            Since forty-one.

NURSE:               (comes back, beaming) "When it hits a hundred and ten, sell!" That's a good one.

(The old man and the son look confusedly over at the departing nurse. A beat. The mother suddenly laughs uproariously, almost hysterically, behind the wall. The old man and the son look at one another, then go racing back into the hospital room. The wall is struck.)

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**Scene 12:**

MOTHER: (sitting up in bed, laughing) Well, how was I?

OLD MAN: When?

MOTHER: In my death scene?

SON: (realizes before the old man does that she was bluffing) As always.

MOTHER: Perfect!

SON: Perfidious!

OLD MAN: Was at least your attack in the old folk's home genuine?

MOTHER: What are you talking about, Hermann?

OLD MAN: I'd say...

SON: Do you two see one another often.

MOTHER: (drily) Oh, every fifty years or so.

OLD MAN: Now then, young fellow, to make a long story short. I came over from Paraguay to clear up a couple of matters, and before you find out through the grapevine, I'll tell you straight out: I may have been a committed National Socialist, but as far as the Jewish question was concerned...

SON: Asshole.

OLD MAN: That asshole, my dear friend, still managed to produce a son. With a Jewish woman!

MOTHER: (grabs her heart - now she's not kidding) For Christ's sake, shut up!

SON: (completely calm) With a Jewish woman, eh?

OLD MAN: You got it.

MOTHER: You stupid idiot! Get out of here! Both of you!

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SON: Mama, don't tell me you and this Crystal Night Soil...

NURSE: Gentlemen, please!

SON: (to the nurse) But my father was a Communist, do you understand?! What is this asshole yammering about? Nine and half years in a concentration camp, and then this old scum bag shows up and tells me he's my...

MOTHER: (frantically) He isn't your father! Believe me, he is... you don't have a Nazi father! He just... He's...  
(she collapses)

NURSE: Now we're in for it.

SON: (applauding) What a professional!

OLD MAN: Listen, why don't we step outside. I can explain...

NURSE: (picks up the phone) Gentlemen, please leave! Right now! Wait outside. (on the phone) Dr. Niedelmann, please come quickly. Room five-fourteen.

(The two men silently leave the sick room. The wall returns in front of the sick room. The two men return to their positions on either end of the bench - far apart.)

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**Scene 13:**

OLD MAN: That last attack was no fake.

SON: You seem to know her very well, Mr. Justice of the Putz! How did you conceive me with her? From behind? From the front? Under a human-skin lampshade or the picture of the Führer?

(The old man slaps him hard across the face.)

SON: (after a long pause) Now finally I know why I'm sharing my mother's reparation pension in the Old Folk's Home. First she squandered our money from the sketches. Now I'm squandering the hush money for my gassed grandmother.

(He screams at the hospital wall.)

SON: I'm helping myself! You should only live to a hundred!

OLD MAN: Listen to me...

SON: I've heard enough. Now I know: Nazi bangs Jewess. Even Goebbels was more restrained. All he did was beat his meat into a book by Heinrich Heine.

(The son exits at the end of his strength. The nurse runs after him.)

NURSE: Before you go, could I have your autograph?

SON: Get my mother's, why don't you? It's all the same.

NURSE: (confused) I don't understand.

SON: Makes no difference.

NURSE: Aren't you performing anywhere any more?

SON: Sure I am - in the court.

NURSE: Royal Court Theatre in London?

SON: No, the courtyard of the old folks' home. (exiting) Talent night - for my gals. Unless I drown first in that sea of silver

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threads.

(with one last look over at the old man.)

SON: After all, the Reich was designed to last a thousand years.

(demonstratively over at the old man)

SON: Hey, Pops! You still haven't answered my question: how did you make me on my mother? From the back? The front? Or from...

OLD MAN: (screaming) You pornographic pig!

SON: (cynically quiet) I dub pornos! You say, I'm not totally inactive. Shalom, asshole! (a long pause)

(The old man and the nurse look off after the son. Finally, after the long pause, the nurse says.)

NURSE: Dreadful!

OLD MAN: Listen, I am not the father of th...

NURSE: That porno business. And I was such a fan of that one...

(Nurse exits sadly.)

(An orthodox Jew, Benjamin, about 53-55, with a zaimel, payess, caftan, tzitzis, walks down the hall.)

BENJAMIN: Excuse me please, where is Room five fourteen?

OLD MAN: You're standing right in front of it.

(He looks the chasid up and down.)

OLD MAN: So, you're the son from Tel Aviv?

BENJAMIN: Yes, what of it? Can you see that? And you?

OLD MAN: (after a long pause) I am your father, sir. Can you see that?

MOTHER: (calling from behind the wall) Hermann!!!

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BENJAMIN: (after a long pause) You're Jewish?

OLD MAN: On the contrary. I was a party member... (a beat) Nazi Party!

BENJAMIN: You're lying.

OLD MAN: Afraid not.

BENJAMIN: Mother always told me I had a Jewish...

OLD MAN: That was the lie. I know this is all a bit sudden for you. But, you see, I just had a most unpleasant experience with your younger brother. Sometimes it's not such a good idea to wait too long with the tru...

BENJAMIN: (apathetically) Oh, please go on. Rabbi Rosenfeld may always say: "Truth is such a valuable resource we should use it sparingly." But in this case... So, you're my father.

OLD MAN: Yes, if you like.

BENJAMIN: I didn't like it. Then again, nobody asked me. But apparently that's what my mother wanted.

OLD MAN: That's not quite correct. Your mother did...

BENJAMIN: Just tell me my mother didn't have anything to do with it, and I'll kick the living shit out of my natural father right here in the Jewish Hospital - just the right place!

OLD MAN: Now, listen to me. Your mother is...

(Benjamin punches the old man out, then storms offstage. The nurse enters from the left. She saw the whole thing.)

NURSE: Good Heavens! What was that all about?

OLD MAN: That family is utterly incapable of listening!

*Ilja Richter*

**Scene 14:**

(Dubbing studio. Lights on. An actor and actress are standing at the microphone by the dubber's rostrum. A sound editor sits at a table beside them. We can hear the sound track from an imaginary Japanese porno film. The actors stare into the audience, turning the fourth wall to an imaginary movie screen. White, moving light simulates the individual loops. We hear three reference beeps before every sentence.)

SHE: (actress unemotionally reads the sentence from the script).  
Come on, baby, shoot your load of love lotion right up my  
sweet syrup hole, you pile-driving stud.

EDITOR: (matter-of-fact) Take "shoot your load" a little longer, then  
speed up "pile-driving".

SHE: You got it.

(The actress takes a sip of coffee. The actor, still without any lines to say, moans his way through this take. We hear the three reference beeps, then the loop comes on.)

SHE: (this time passionately) Come on, babycakes, shoot your  
load of love lotion right up my sweet syrup hole, you  
pile-driving stud.

EDITOR: Thank you.

(We hear the voice of the dubbing director - it is the son.)

DIRECTOR: Yes, that's fine.

(The editor marks the take in her script and turns the page, obviously continuing the conversation interrupted by the take.)

SHE: I tell you Wenders is overrated. His stuff is all superficial.  
By the way, have you seen our new Chekhov production?

(Benjamin enters the studio from the back, looking disheveled. His clothing is filthy, his face even paler than before. He sits down on a chair, unnoticed, listens to the conversation. When the porno loops run, he slowly rises to his feet, almost solemnly removes his hat, walks almost all the way to the actors at the rostrum and is totally shocked by what he sees on the screen.)

HE: Just a minute. I don't think I agree with you...

(The light moves. Three beeps. The loop goes on. We hear the next sentence from the

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porno in Japanese. The actors move their lips to the take. The actress takes another sip of coffee. The actor lights a cigarette.) (The moving light briefly disappears.)

SHE:                    You need that?

HE:                    Yeah.

(Once again moving light. The three reference beeps.)

HE:                    (a routine groan) Give it to me, honey! I'm as horny as a Brahms symphony!

(Light briefly goes out, then starts moving again. Three beeps.)

HE:                    (now really into it) Give it to me, honey. I'm as horny as a Brahms symphony!

(The actress garnishes the take with a couple of ecstatic moans. The moving light goes out.)

EDITOR:                Thank you.

DIRECTOR:             Thank you.

SHE:                    Getting back to Wenders. He's basically just sixties Fassbinder warmed over. Post-modern pseudo-doodoo... Even back then, it was all...

HE:                    (annoyed) Easy does it. I know your aversion to Rainer-Werner. But I was a part of that! Back then! (sentimentally reflecting) In one-reel short subjects - as a raw beginner.

(The new loop goes up, moving light, Japanese dialogue. The two actors at the rostrum continue their conversation.)

SHE:                    (bugged) Yeah, I know, and you've got the raw ass to prove it. How often did he...?

DIRECTOR:             Would you guys mind...?

SHE:                    I hear you talkin'!

HE:                    I know you can't stand...

SHE:                    You got it! I can't stand him either. But...

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(Moving light. The actress goes right into the dubbing script as if continuing her conversation toward the screen.)

SHE:                    You may be an old scum bag, but you fuck like a young samurai!

EDITOR:                Stretch the "scum bag", and take a little more time with "fuck".

SHE:                    You got it!

(While continuing the conversation, he leafs demonstratively through a yellow press paper.)

SHE:                    So what if Fassbinder gave you your big break back then. Where are you now? On the wrong side of the silver screen earning ten cents a moan! Way to go!

(Benjamin is now downstage, directly behind the two actors.)

BENJAMIN:            (looks straight ahead with tears in his eyes) Oy, Gottenyu!

(The actress has just discovered the interloper, but she can't say anything, because the loop has come up again. Moving light. Three reference beeps.)

SHE:                    (passionately) You may be an old scum bag, but you fuck like a young samurai!

EDITOR:                Thank you.

DIRECTOR:            Thank you.

SHE:                    Who are you?

EDITOR:                What do you want?

DIRECTOR:            (embarrassed) What the hell are *you* doing here?

(The actor hasn't really been listening from behind his paper.)

HE:                     Are you ready for this? Maria Schell is doing a Beck's Beer commercial!

(Still looking at the intruder, she answers the actor, however speaking slowly while listening to the Japanese loop with one ear.)

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SHE: They wanted me for a detergent campaign, but... (She stops dead.)

(The son now walks into the studio, planting himself aggressively in front of Benjamin.)

NURSE: Stop the loop! (The editor picks up the phone.) Now what's the point of walking in on us here?

EDITOR: Please hold the next loop.

BENJAMIN: (with an effort to keep cool) Well, brotherlebben, I said to myself: either he's in the old folk's home or he's in the studio. (looking provocatively over at the actress) It's all the same anyway.

SHE: How do you mean that?

BENJAMIN: That dreck up there on the screen, as we say in... plain language...is just for old...

SON: (finishes the sentence, looking daggers over at his brother) Old jerk-offs.

BENJAMIN: Right! Movies for old jerk-offs. Mazel tov!

SHE: (flustered) We'll wait outside.

BENJAMIN: Since when have you been involved in this filth?

SON: Since you stopped sending checks to Mama.

(The actor rolls up the newspaper like a club and says as he exits.)

HE: There's nothing like a family.

(The actors exit.)

BENJAMIN: Life is hard in Tel Aviv, you know. Besides, that money was meant for Mama and not for mother and son.

SON: (to the editor) Take a break. I'll call you back just as soon as I've beaten him to death.

EDITOR: (flippantly) Whatever you want, Mr. Abel.

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SON: That was Cain! She may not know her Bible, our dear little porno editor, but she does have quite a sense of humor.

(The editor walks out, insulted.)

SON: Well now, what brings the voice of God to my humble little grime studio.

BENJAMIN: You're asking me?! Who sent that telegram: "Come at once, mother is ill!"? Just incidentally: if she dies tomorrow, you can bury her yourself. I'm not coming back.

SON: What?

BENJAMIN: As far as I'm concerned, she's already dead!

SON: Since when?

BENJAMIN: Since today.

SON: Them's fightin' words from our man in Tel Aviv, our Chief Cantor who didn't make it in musicals.

BENJAMIN: I'll never sing again.

SON: I think I've heard that somewhere before.

BENJAMIN: I know what you're alluding to: when I lost my voice.

SON: Yeah, Mama told the story often enough. 1948.

BENJAMIN: Cut that out!

SON: (sings provocatively) "In dreams I kiss your hand, Madame..." (stops singing) Did you notice our editor's boots - straight from the SS!?

BENJAMIN: Cut it out!

SON: (singing again) "'Cause I can't *sta-a-a-a-and* your breath!" (stops singing) Do you still lose your voice every time you see boots like that? Or why else has his Master's voice lost the song in its heart?

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BENJAMIN: (screams) Cut it out!

(A beat. He takes a deep breath and continues in a monotone voice.)

BENJAMIN: It was a gorgeous morning in Tel Aviv. My wife bought new candles for the Chanukah lights - challeh and wine, too. As usual. For shabbes. Then your fucking telegram arrived: "Come at once. Mother is ill." Is she terminal, or isn't she?

SON: No, but we're working on it.

BENJAMIN: And to get that information, you dimwit, I fly to a de-Jewed country, land in a city where the Jewish section was build by Reb Potemkin, for tourists to wander through like a kind of kosher Disneyland, so an old Nazi in a hospital can tell me he's my father.

SON: (stupefied) Your father? I thought he was *my*...

BENJAMIN: I don't ever want to see her again, that Nazi whore!

(The son slaps Benjamin in the face.)

BENJAMIN: (smiles, after a long pause) Admit it, that slap was meant for darling Mama. Take comfort. Mother's Jewish, your father's a Commie, a perfect family tree. Now, look at me...

(The editor comes indignantly back into the room. By the way, she is wearing black boots.)

EDITOR: What's wrong with him?

SON: Oh, nothing special. He just thought he was Moses, and it now it turns out he's really a Himmler clone.

(Benjamin slowly rises to his feet and now smacks the son resoundingly across the face.)

SON: (crushed... then, after a long pause, smiles) You know something, little half brother - that's the first human emotion I've ever seen from you.

(Benjamin smiles, looks over the editor's boots, then kneels down and asks the editor:)

BENJAMIN: Are those heirlooms?

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EDITOR: (outraged) Gimme a break! Can we get back to work now?

BENJAMIN: (goes right into his song, eyeing her) "In dreams I kiss your hand, Madame..."

SON: (singing along) "'Cause I can't *sta-a-a-a-a-and* your breath!"

(The actor and actress return to the studio, totally pissed off, and see the two men on the floor.)

HE: Could we please get this show back on the road?

SHE: Yeah, I got a performance tonight.

EDITOR: (on the phone) Could we have the next loop please?

SON: What for? Who told you the break was over? I've been waiting forty years to have it out with my brother, and you just stick another mass copulation loop into the projector!

(The loop comes up, i.e. the stage is again filled with moving light. No sound.)

BENJAMIN: Let 'er roll. Better mass copulation than mass deportation!

SON: That's funny. I said exactly the same thing. Yesterday.

BENJAMIN: To whom?

SON: (hesitantly) To your father. First I thought he was mine.

BENJAMIN: Makes no difference, bro'. Half bro'. Only this morning in Tel Aviv, I still thought I was a Jew.

SHE: Pardon me for butting in, but you're always whatever your mother is. I mean, according to Jewish law.

HE: She's right.

SON: Mama's right. Germany is a Jewish state. Without Jews. They want to be as smart as we are. As witty as we are. As successful as we are - nothing less than Nobel Prize Winners and concert pianists need apply.

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BENJAMIN: Right. (To the editor) He's something. An idiot. But...

EDITOR: I don't know what you're talking about.

BENJAMIN: He means: average, common garden variety people are just not acceptable. Who ever says: "the little Jewish, beaten-to-death seamstress around the corner"... There has to be Nobel Prize blood in there somewhere.

SON: Exactly. One transfusion transplants the next.

BENJAMIN: Include me out, you kosher chazeirim!

(He pushes the original sound button on the rostrum, whereupon we hear a cascade of Nipponese erotic groaning.)

SHE: Disgraceful!

HE: And you call yourself a religious Jew!

BENJAMIN: (he turns off the sound for a moment and says:) Heil show business!

(Benjamin turns the sound back on and exits to the sound of the groans. The actors take up their positions again. The son disappears into the control room. The actors keep looking off into the wings.)

EDITOR: I don't get it. I mean, what was that all about?

SON: (from off-stage) It's all quite simple, but please turn off the sound first.

(The actress turns off the sound. The loop falls silent. The moving light, however, continues.)

SHE: (almost demandingly) If you don't mind.

HE: (gripping) I agree - you owe us an explanation! (a beat)

(The film light stops flickering. There is a long, embarrassing pause.)

SON: (from off-stage) The whole business is quite simple: he thought his producer had perished in Auschwitz.

EDITOR: And?

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SON: (Pause) That was a lie. Mother's lie.

EDITOR: (laughing and scribbling on the book in front of her) The so-called Auschwitz lie!

(A long pause. The actor and actress look at one another in horror. Footsteps. The son comes back into the studio. He walks over to the editor, takes away her ball point. Then he punches her out. Blackout.)

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**Scene 15:**

(Pellmann's library. Pellmann is sitting on the floor in front of his armchair, leaning on the back of the chair. The son is seated on the floor beside him. He repeats the stage direction from the previous scene.)

PELLMANN: "...takes away her ball point, then he punches her out."  
(turns to the son.) Listen, I've appeared in this overgrown skit of yours often enough - angel or no angel - involuntarily, as you know. But when I really want to get involved in a scene, you don't bring me on. It is downright imbecilic to deal with that editor as... which leads me to the point of the libel laws. Have you cleared the name: Pellmann dreams? (turning back to the son) In this regard, please allow me to give my lawyer a quick call. I don't think you're allowed to use my name just like that in an...

(The son playfully holds the pistol to his head.)

PELLMANN: Oh, very well. It's a legal problem. Turning back to dramatic matters: now, pay attention, my dear friend.

SON: I'm not your friend, I'm your kidnapper.

PELLMANN: Kidnapping, if you don't mind, takes place somewhere else, but I am here, if it's all right with you, in my own home.

SON: Make yourself comfortable. I only abducted you in my play. And tonight, my dear Pellmann, no lawyer will get you out of this.

PELLMANN: All right. Now then, you let things get so far that an old Nazi scum bag with obvious philo-Semitic characteristics slaps an aging child star in the face. Fine. Shortly after that, one brother slaps another. Step! Between brothers. After his exit, the one left behind slugs a sound editor because of the Auschwitz lie. That just won't work.

SON: It's the only way it *will* work. Take the Holocaust...

PELLMANN: (shocked) The *what!?!?!?*

(The son instantly slaps Pellmann across the cheek. Pellmann freezes. Horrified, he moves his hand slow motion up to his cheek. A beat. Then he winds up for a cascade of invective.)

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PELLMANN: Listen to me, you half-pint with your dainty little revolver, I very seldom use the word - I mean, ethics, but I am extremely... Ask my literary advisors, but this time, quite apart from the grievous bodily harm that has just been visited on me, it is totally irresponsible to trivialize the word "Holocaust" after all that has happened. I should think, you, of all people, a Jew...

(The son slaps Pellmann again. This time he gets furious, starts to defend himself, then the son cravenly holds the gun to his head.)

SON: I'll determine who's Jewish and who isn't!

PELLMANN: Jawohl, Herr Göring!

(Conny enters from one of the library walls, that is to say Conny remains standing in one of the squares. Conny's background is sky blue.)

CONNY: So you're dis guy Göring?

(Pellmann leafs through the script, then looks around and looks back in the script.)

PELLMANN: She already said that in Scene two. In the first act. Dining room. Remember?

SON: (smirking) I'm glad you're contributing to the thought process, Mr. Pellmann. If you had read my play sooner, we wouldn't be sitting here now. On the other hand, I find this whole atmosphere very personal and direct, I mean the way we're...

PELLMANN: (rubbing his cheek) Oh yes, very personal. I complain about having three slaps, one after the other in this play, and you slug me. That's totally uneconomical, dramaturgically irrelevant, and... and...

SON: And tasteless.

PELLMANN: Thank you. In this context, the word "Holocaust" alone. I mean a slap in the face doesn't lead to the death of...

SON: How do you know? Who knows all the things that might occur to you later? I mean, now or in ten years, you, with your elephant's memory.

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CONNYP: Look, guys, I may be standing around here like some kinda dummy. I mean, you got all the lines, and I ain't got nothin' to say.

PELLMANN: Do you think that's fair - having my wife, of all people, playing this Conny? I don't generally mix my profession and my private life.

SON: Conny, please take Mr. Pellmann to the roof now.

PELLMANN: Me? To the roof of the theatre? With my wife? I'm not suicidal! After I fucked up Venice for her.

CONNYP: (looks over at some imaginary horrid thing) You gotta go up there! Benjamin wants to kill himself - jump off the roof. Understand?

PELLMANN: He won't do it. Not in my play. That sort of thing needs preparation. I mean, a dramatic build-up, a clever one, so it comes at just the right moment...

SON: Too late! I wanted to give you a chance, Pellmann!

PELLMANN: Mr. Pellmann! (to Conny) Totally devoid of style, too.

CONNYP: Oh, I like him. He was the most touching stage hand I ever saw in our theatre. He's certainly the first stage hand that ever offered the other guys money to strike the set for him.

SON: That's true. The guys were very fond of me.

(While he is saying this, he looks for a station on the radio. A beautiful waltz melody starts to play.)

CONNYP: (putting her arms around him) So was I.

PELLMANN: And the likes of that wants me to take her to Venice!

CONNYP: Not any more.

PELLMANN: But Conny just said I should come help a poor suicidal creature. Just like an angel. Well, you know what I mean. (As if looking for his coat.) Now, where are those fucking

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wings.

SON: Too late. Benjamin is dead. You waited too long. From a dramaturgical point of view.

(Now a newscast comes over the radio.)

RADIO: Berlin. The roof of the Senior Citizens' Castle old people's home was again the scene of a spectacular suicide. While police continue to look for the first suicide candidate, without a clue in sight, the second suicide is the forty-five year old Israeli citizen, Benjamin P. The man succumbed to internal injuries on the spot. And now back to Dawn Rose giving you the finger in concert - oh, sorry, The Rosy Fingers of Dawn Concert.

(Mantovani's recording of *Fascination* starts to play. The son turns the radio off.)

PELLMANN: I would have prevented that.

SON: Characters have their own will.

CONNY: I have to look after my husband.

SON: Oh, all of a sudden! (He looks down at his gun.) I may kill him after all.

(Blackout)

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**Scene 16:**

(Roof of the Senior Citizens' Castle. Benjamin is right on the edge. Angel Pellmann is standing by the chimney with his transistor radio. We can hear the melody of Mantovani's *Fascination* on the radio, overlaid with static. The only letters of the SENIOR CITIZENS' CASTLE neon sign still lighted are the ones spelling: OR CIT. We see the angel in silhouette. He holds the transistor radio to his ear. Now the letters OR CIT also go out.)

BENJAMIN: Is somebody there?

(Pellmann reads, also amazed at seeing the familiar line.)

PELLMANN: "There's always somebody there, just not the one you thought it was." Here it is! Page twenty-five.

BENJAMIN: My mother is a piece of shit.

PELLMANN: No, the sister says that. In your brother's play. Your younger brother's. You know. In his maternal exorcism. Unpublished.

BENJAMIN: I'm a piece of Nazi shit.

(Pellmann checks the script for this line.)

PELLMANN: (babbling) It isn't in here, but I have no objection if that's what you want to say. You just mustn't jump. That's what I'm doing here, as a matter of fact.

SON: (on the edge of the stage) Yes, he has to jump!

BENJAMIN: Is somebody there?

PELLMANN: (indignant) A celestial fuck-up, I tell you. Invariably invisible when we don't need it. (Looks up to the sky.) Franz Schubert, hasten to our aid!

(We now hear a wine house combo playing the Schubert Sonata. Benjamin jumps. Pellmann is terrified. He looks down into the abyss. Then he shakes his head.)

PELLMANN: What times we live in. Now the news gets on the air before the victim even hits the ground.

(Pellmann looks down - the complet director - to see where things go from here.)

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PELLMANN:           And now?

(He leafs through the script, finds the right page.)

PELLMANN:           Aha... the angel jumps after Benjamin. (He looks to heaven.)

PELLMANN:           Without Schubert please. (He gets ready to jump.)

PELLMANN:           Lilienthal - here I come!

(The wine house band plays - without Schubert. Pellmann jumps.)

(Blackout)

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**Scene 17:**

(Show curtain: the Caspar David Friedrich painting of chalk cliffs on the Island of Rügen with two men standing in front of it. One of them is a little shorter than the other. Both are at the edge, looking down into the abyss. Above this scene the voices of the inspector and his assistant.)

INSPECTOR: Schulz...?

POLICEMAN: Yeah, chief?

INSPECTOR: What do you see?

POLICEMAN: Professor Ullrich's net ain't there no more.

INSPECTOR: (drily) He's slowly removing it. And what else do you see?

POLICEMAN: A Jew hanging from the flag.

(Blackout.)

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**Scene 18:**

(When the Caspar David Friedrich curtain returns to the flies, we again see Pellmann's desk. This time, however, the son is sitting on the armchair. The bookshelves fly up. Benjamin and Pellmann are hanging from the two flagpoles, Pellmann from the German flag and Benjamin from the Berlin flag. From the left and right sides of the stage, the two ladies from the old folk's home appear. They look up, together with the author, at the two men hanging from the flagpoles.)

SON: (rising in fury) I never wrote it like that! In my play the Jew is dead!

BENJAMIN: (hanging there) So, I survived.

PELLMANN: (hanging there) Nobody will ever forgive you for this!

BENJAMIN: Is somebody there?

SON: (checking the script) There's always somebody. But not like this.

(The son has now completely taken over Pellmann's role. He paces up and down, smoking cigarettes and looking over the scene, unable to influence it. The ladies run from the desk into the scene, taking up positions in front of the wall with their backs to the audience, discussing the action. They cannot see Pellmann.)

PELLMANN: Fucking invisibility. I shouldn't have turned in my German passport. Now I'm nothing but empty air - dressed as an Austrian.

LADY 1: Weird people.

PELLMANN: The Austrians?

LADY 1: Those Jews really know how to suffer!

PELLMANN: I see...

LADY 2: But...

PELLMANN: Please don't tell me again that they all survived anyway in the Café Luitpold.

LADY 2: Lordy, no! But them pogroms cain't have been all that bad.

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(The inspector enters.)

INSPECTOR: How do you know?

LADY 2: Take that fiddle player on the roof - when them pore souls get to the end of their rope, what do they do? They sing a song.

INSPECTOR: Schulz!

(The policeman enters.)

POLICEMAN: Yes, chief?

INSPECTOR: Take down this woman's testimony.

LADY 2: How come?

INSPECTOR: Because of anti-Semitic tendencies.

LADY 1: There must be some misunderstanding. Look up there - there's a guy hangin' there.

INSPECTOR: I know. He's allowed to hang - but nobody's allowed to trash him.

(Blackout.)

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**Scene 19:**

(Roof of the Senior Citizens' Castle. Benjamin is sitting on his mother's beach chair. He has fallen asleep. Now he wakes up. Nurse Conny joins him.)

CONNY: How da ya like *them* apples!? What're you doin' here? Yer gonna fall right off my roof!

BENJAMIN: I already did that. Or did I just dream it...?

CONNY: Guy's got a loose shingle.

BENJAMIN: Allow me.

CONNY: I'm allowing. But ya know, ya can't get no peace and quiet around this jernt. Up till now, this wuz the only place you could catch a puff, but now they went an' tightened the rules. NS!

BENJAMIN: National Socialism?

CONNY: No smoking! Ya want a weed?

BENJAMIN: Do you know what I am?

CONNY: With all them black duds, I'd say yer an x-ray of my lungs! Or else a preacher. (confidentially) Can we talk?

BENJAMIN: (amused) Go ahead.

CONNY: I'd take the lungs over the preacher.

BENJAMIN: So would I. Let's have one.

(A beat. He smokes, she smokes. After a while, we can hear the sound of cars in the distance. Traffic noises. Change of light. Benjamin and Conny are now lying on the roof as if it were a greensward.)

CONNY: Ya got real funny spit curls.

BENJAMIN: Those are payess.

CONNY: Pay-offs?

BENJAMIN: No, payess - prayer curls.

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CONNYP: And preachers got them things? That's new to me.

BENJAMIN: No, only Jews have them, and it's very old.

CONNYP: Is yer old man a Jew?

BENJAMIN: No, a Nazi.

CONNYP: An' yer Mama?

BENJAMIN: Oh, she's Jewish.

CONNYP: I'll be a doity boid. Well, what the hell, be happy you can't inherit it - I mean from yer old man. The Jew folks is always what their moms is.

BENJAMIN: (to himself) Mama's right. A Jewish state. Without Jews. (now back to Conny) Did you know that was a fundamental facet of Judaism?

CONNYP: Judy who? Nah, ya know we got an old Jewish lady in the home, wid an old son. That's what she always sez. I tell you, the two o' dem weirdos is like a bad marriage.

BENJAMIN: He is my brother.

CONNYP: Then the old bat wid de bun is your mom?

BENJAMIN: (putting on her dialect) She used to wuz.

CONNYP: Ya mom's always ya mom. And yer always what yer mom...

BENJAMIN: (gruffly) I know!

CONNYP: How duz a Jew kiss?

BENJAMIN: Give it a try.

CONNYP: And what if I don't like de way you kiss?

BENJAMIN: (drily) Then you're obviously anti-Semitic.

CONNYP: Wozzat?

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BENJAMIN: Come on, pucker up for a married Jew on Shabbes. I've committed so many sins, one or two more won't make any difference. Maybe I'm already dead, and this whole place is just... Besides you're very pretty.

CONNIE: I know. And them curls really toin me on.

BENJAMIN: (tenderly, in dialect) I dunno...

CONNIE: (in proper English) Ah, but I know...

(Conny kisses Benjamin. Her beeper goes off. The two continue kissing. During the kiss, Conny takes the beeper off her uniform and turns it off.)

CONNIE: Heavy!

BENJAMIN: (amused) Heavy!

CONNIE: Gotta go. The SS is calling. (She professionally straightens out her uniform.)

BENJAMIN: (horrified) The *what?!*

CONNIE: (naïvely) The SS - the soup slurpers. Care ta join me?

(Blackout)

(In the dark. We hear a tape of soup spoons mightily clattering in the bowls, combined with the slurping and smacking noises of elderly people. This sound collage fills the whole theatre, getting louder and more menacing. During the collage, the set is changed.)

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**Scene 20:**

(Dining room. Light comes from the wings to the left and right. We can't see the people slurping, eating, drinking, jabbering. We can only see a table for three in the middle of the room. In the background on a kitschy tapestry: a department store copy of a painting of Frederick the Great playing the flute in Sanssouci Castle. The son enters. The sound collage stops abruptly. The three ladies also stop spooning out their soup.)

LADY 2:                   So, how's yer li'l ole Mama?

SON:                       (reserved) She is sleeping.

LADY 1:                   Dat's good.

LADY 2:                   (jolly) Ya cain't commit no sins in your sleep!

LADY 1:                   She's sleepin' herself back ta health. That's real good.

SON:                       She can sleep all she wants when she's dead. (He sits down.)

LADY 2:                   Izzat enny way to talk 'bout yer Mama?

LADY 1:                   Ah, let 'im shoot off his mouth.

SON:                       (calling into the wings) Conny, a pig's knuckle.

BENJAMIN:               (appalled) You eat pork?

SON:                       Did I ask you the fish's name?

(Benjamin sits down demonstratively at the table for three, joining the ladies as they spoon out their broth.)

BENJAMIN:               (drily, somehow absent) Leo Rosten - *The Joys of Yinglish* - page twenty-two, right column, top of page.

SON:                       (cynically applauding) Way to go, Jokerissimo. If Mother weren't clutched in the arms of Morpheus right now, you could play the joke book game with her. I played it, you know that. And if I hadn't come here, today *you* might be the king of the talent shows.

LADY 2:                   Land o' Goshen, wuz you as funny as yer brother on the T and V?

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SON: (dead serious) Funny as hell! Right up to 1948.

(Benjamin gets up, walks over to a corner and begins davvening, facing the wall.)

SON: You know something, girls, *Gone With the Wind* was his destiny.

LADY 1: What - in Atlanta?

SON: Hell, no. Around the corner from here - in the Titania Palace Cinema. He used to announce the housewife's matinée between movie screenings. To make a long story short, my brother got the Puss in Boots ballet mixed up with the Führer's own SS regiment, and he started yelling "Heil Hitler!" Over and over again: "Heil Hitler!"

(Kneels down and shouts in a child's voice.)

SON: Heil Hitler!

(He raises his arm for the Hitler salute, then gets back up and returns to normal conversation.)

SON: '48 was not his year. The tenor made a fist, then stroked the little tyke's head: "Out of the mouths of babes". (laughs hysterically) (a beat) Silence - exit! (to the davvening Benjamin) That's how it was! Wasn't it? Then they carried you out - while the orchestra kept sawing away.

(A beat. He sits back down.)

SON: Look, I wasn't there. I had to be born first to get rid of his baby shit.

LADY 1: Hey, easy duz it!

(Conny enters with the pig's knuckle. She puts it down on the table.)

CONNIE: Your pig's knuckle.

(Benjamin interrupts his prayer, walks over to the son, calmly pulls the tablecloth with the pig's knuckle off the table. Conny exits, shocked. The ladies exit, speechless. Benjamin goes back to the corner and continues davvening. The son takes a long pause, then speaks to the pig's knuckle on the floor.)

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SON:                   For a long time I believed Jews all over the world set the table just for my brother - open the doors and windows - once a year - for the Passover seder, to let him in, my Godlike brother, who left me behind with Mother on a trunk full of jokes in Berlin. My substitute Messiah.

(The lights fade slowly. The sound collage fills the theatre: slurping and clattering spoons, then fade-out and lights on.)

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**Scene 21:**

(The son is still sitting at the table, which again has its white tablecloth. Benjamin enters, dressed as a slovenly waiter, and sets a plate of soup down in front of his nose. The son prefers to read the newspaper. It is the "*Völkische Beobachter*", the Nazi party newspaper. A beat. After a short while, a voice from an echo chamber, Pellmann's voice, as if God were speaking to him.)

VOICE: Taste good?

SON: (he looks around and then says to the sky) Thanks, I'm not hungry.

VOICE: Not hungry, eh? He doesn't realize the sun won't come up in the morning if he doesn't eat his food.

SON: I couldn't care less - fuck the sun!

VOICE: (filling the room) That does it! I want this man to eat!

(Blackout.)

(In the blackout, we hear a resounding slap in the face. Lights on: the son is holding his cheek. He looks anxiously around. Zarathustra music begins to play. As if under some kind of compulsion, the son, still looking anxiously around, begins spooning up his soup; faster and faster. At the end, in time with the music as it crescendoes, he licks his plate clean and takes up a position like an Olympic athlete receiving his prize, his arm outstretched for the "Heil Hitler!" salute. Benjamin now enters with a silver tray with a red velvet pillow on it. There is an arm band on the pillow. Benjamin puts the arm band around his brother's arm. On the arm band we see a white circle on a red background: a crossed knife and fork, the kind we see at rest stops on highways. The whole scene continues under the Zarathustra music in a spotlight. The son, clearly a soup slurping champion, proudly extends his arm to give the "Heil Hitler!" salute while he proudly holds the soup spoon in his other hand over his chest. Benjamin, his tray now empty, dignifiedly exits. As he makes his exit, we can see that he has to vomit, which quickens his step. Light out. Light on.)

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**Scene 22:**

(The scene is back to what it was before the dream, i.e. tablecloth on the floor, food scraps, the three ladies' table empty. The son wakes up. The lady with the jitters appears from the wings, with her wheelchair wheels squeaking. He looks at her, as if she knew about the dream, and says.)

SON: Old husband's tale.

JITTERS: (speaks very slowly, as if in a trance, her eyes fixed on a distant point.) Better than an old husband's joke. You know this one? (without looking at the son) "A Viennese count is naked in the bathtub, lying on top of a naked countess, and he says..."

SON: (matter-of-factly) He doesn't say anything. He tells his friend the baron about this number in the bath and asks him... (double take) Since when can you talk?

JITTERS: Wrong! He doesn't say: "Since when you talk?" He asks the Baron: "Dear lad, there I was starkers on top of the countess. Don't you think there's something I should have done?"

SON: (flabbergasted) Where do you know that one from?

JITTERS: (picking up her speech tempo) From your joke trunk. That means, actually it's mine. More specifically, it belongs to Arthur.

SON: Who's Arthur?

JITTERS: Better you should ask: "Who *was* Arthur?" Arthur Cohn.

(Angel Pellmann, now dressed in a concentration camp prisoner's uniform with the wings on the back, crosses the stage carrying an old suitcase. He sings:)

PELLMANN: Mister Cohn, Mister Cohn,  
Calls up girlies on the phone.  
And they meet him on the sly...

JITTERS: (waves to the concentration camp angel and finishes the verse)  
'Cause he's such a generous guy!

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(Smiles, waves, then speaks to herself.)

JITTERS: My brother! My darling brother!

SON: I wish I could say that.

(Now she speaks quite normally, without bobbing her head.)

JITTERS: You don't have a brother.

SON: But...

JITTERS: You never did. He was a wonderful vaudeville singer. And: a comic! He was a big star before they took him away. With songs, jokes.

(She makes a weary hand motion)

JITTERS: Right around the corner from here. You know, in the Jewish Theatre, the only house Jews were allowed to perform. He was almost as good an MC as Robitscheck. I said: almost. I can still hear the people laughing. They... laughed... and laughed... even on the day they took him away. I wonder if Arthur was still doing one-liners on his way to the ovens... I can't imagine that, but I wouldn't put it past him. (indifferently) Know this one? "Two Jews are standing in front of poster in 1941. The poster says: 'A German never lies.' So, the one Jew says to the other: 'One Jew - that's some percentage.'"

SON: (after a long pause) You're just like Mama. Today. How come you said nothing for so long, and now all of a sudden you're doing comedy routines - just like Mama. Telling Jewish whisper jokes - from Göring's secret file. The Gauleiters used to tell them.

JITTERS: Of course. The Nazis loved Jewish jokes. Sonny, you know how you can tell a real Nazi? From the bent arm he uses to tell Jewish jokes.

SON: You keep talking and talking. How come? All of a sudden? So unexpectedly.

JITTERS: I'm not so fond of the mishpoche.

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SON: Mishpoche?

JITTERS: And when my attacks kept getting worse... and the reparations office kept me dangling...

SON: Who are you?

JITTERS: I'm the niece of Judas.

SON: Judas?

JITTERS: You know: when they give you something, take it. When they take it away from you, yell! So I yell. And she took me in.

SON: Who?

JITTERS: Your mother. And since then we've been living under the same roof, and haven't spoken a word to each other...

SON: How come?

JITTERS: Oh, you know how it is, sonny, you're allowed to have mishpoche, but you've got to be mad at them.

(The jittery lady exits into the wings on her wheelchair, singing.)

(Ladies one and two enter from the other side, cross the stage and follow the lady with the jitters off stage without so much as a glance at the son. The son runs after them excitedly.)

SON: She can talk. My God, she can talk. She can talk. She can talk again. Listen, the jittery lady can talk!

LADY 2: (exiting) That knocks me right speechless!

LADY 1: Over you.

LADY 2: You worthless brother!

LADY 1: Call yaself a son?

LADY 2: I'll answer that question - you ain't no son!

LADY 1: You ain't nobody's son-shine!

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LADY 2: (struggling to speak correctly) You make no-one happy when skies are grey! (back in dialect) Catch mah drift?

(Blackout.)

**Scene 23:**

(Lights on. The roof of the Senior Citizens' Castle. The edge of the roof is lined with barbed wire. Crackly music comes out of the loudspeaker, an old 1940's number. "Chattanooga Choo-Choo". There are ten old ladies in bathing suits sunning themselves on deck chairs on the roof. Sitting in the middle, sunbathing, yet clad from head to foot in black, are the mother and son.)

CONNRY: (to the directress) Honest, Miss Directress, sometimes I think you toined this roof into a sun deck to keep me from gettin' a cig.

DIRECTRESS: You've been getting more than that up here.

LADY 1: (to the mother) There's something I always wanted to ask you: how did you ever survive that awful time?

MOTHER: (bored, looking into the sun) With a counterfeit ID - for bombed-out native Germans.

LADY 1: Oh year, I can still remember.

LADY 2: Ah kin, too. I even remember whut it sed: "Valid for the duration."

MOTHER: Correct.

LADY 1: Yeah, but you wusn't no native Joimin. I mean, strictly speakin'...

LADY 2: Right you is.

MOTHER: I got that ID from a government official, who knew exactly that...

LADY 2: Gummint official?

LADY 1: Like a brass monkey.

LADY 2: Lordy, but counterfeitin'... Why Mizziz, uh, heavenly days, we been living in the same place since Pluto was knee-high to a pup, and I don't even know yer name, Mizziz...

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MOTHER: Oh, feel free to call me Room thirteen.

LADY 1: I'll tell ya what you are - ye're bitter. It figures, after all you went through, the only survivor.

LADY 2: Ain't that the truth - why, your pore Mama wuz in Auschwitz, so I'm tole...

MOTHER: Yes, Auschwitz. (she rises to her feet.) There were no tables available at the Café Luitpold.

(The mother begins swaying, weeping. Conny comes run over to comfort her.)

CONNYP: Look, at least ya survived, and so did yer Benjamin...

SON: (coldly) It isn't her Benjamin. (a beat) He's not your son.

(The ladies all look over at mother and son.)

MOTHER: What did you say? (a beat)

DIRECTRESS: (to herself) So it's true!

MOTHER: He told you?

DIRECTRESS: (softly) Hermann the creep. (loud) Now then, ladies, enough is enough - don't want to get a burn. Besides, supper has been moved up to six-fifteen this evening because of choir practice.

(The music is turned off. The ladies go off, chattering.)

DIRECTRESS: We have to vacuum the lawn, too. So, I'm very sorry. But Conny needs a little breather, too.

CONNYP: I'll take a breather when I feel like it. (She turns on the vacuum cleaner.)

(The mother and son are now alone on their beach chairs, yelling at each other over the roar of the vacuum cleaner.)

MOTHER: Who says Benjamin isn't my son?

SON: (yelling as he sunbathes) The old man. Your attorney at

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letch, Hermann.

MOTHER: He isn't my attorney.

SON: Right. And he was only a letch with your sister.

(The mother turns off the vacuum cleaner. Conny exits, shrugging her shoulders.)

MOTHER: (softly) Well, now you know. Okay. Old Wive's Tale.

SON: What? That's your sister? Why didn't you ever...

(The mother kneels down and starts praying in Hebrew [very softly]. Parallel to this, her son lets loose with a tirade.)

SON: You speak Hebrew? You speak Hebrew! You pray!  
Fucking assholes! (to heaven) Listen to me, God in Heaven!  
This is one weird customer. I just found out in passing  
that you've been living here under the same roof with your  
sister.

(He turns the vacuum cleaner back on.)

SON: You kept the whole Jewish thing away from me. I'm  
neither circumcised nor a Christian nor an atheist. What  
the hell am I?

(The son spreads his arms wide and calls to heaven.)

SON: Which porker would you rather have? From Mozart  
without a piano to early retirement: another form of  
stardom. (yells in her ear) Or would you rather have a deaf  
fiddler on the roof? Hard-of-hearing only when required.  
At the moment she's deep in prayer: as Hebrew as she can  
get! With her Jewish God, of course. What kind of a  
prayer is this, Mamaleben? A cry for mercy for your sister  
who fucks Nazis, or for her child? What can I give my little  
Nazi cousin Benjamin for Chanukah? An arm band - from  
brother to brother?

MOTHER: Stop it! Stop it!

SON: (in a child's voice praying to heaven) My mommy's been  
brain fucking me so long I don't know whether I'm a boy  
or a girl. Funny, isn't it?

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(The mother kicks her son in the balls and walks off.)

MOTHER:           Choir rehearsal at six-fifteen!

SON:               (doubled over) What was that prayer all about? Why? For whom?

MOTHER:           (with her back to her son) For you.

SON:               I hate you!

MOTHER:           I hate you too. (they embrace.)

(Blackout)

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**Scene 24:**

(The rear wall of the old people's home. The wheelchair crosses the stage, empty.)

PELLMANN: Please tell me how the story ends? Have you got an effective finale?

SON: Sure. What do you think of a finale among mothers?

PELLMANN: Been done. And I have no time. My wife. You know. Venice. To make a long story short, I can't read this to the end. How does the story turn out?

(Mother enters.)

MOTHER: (looks at the dead man) Funny, I always thought my sister would marry the old bastard in her third springtime.

(She brushes the dandruff off the dead man's shoulders, straightens his tie and sings to herself.)

MOTHER: Happy ending. Just pretending. But let me add, A magician's got to be a cad.

(The son leans over the corpse and sings with his mother.)

BOTH: Dad-dad-dad, dad-dad-dad, daddy-ad-dad.

PELLMANN: You can say what you want. The Jews have wonderful rituals.

SON: Exit mother. Exit Pellmann.

PELLMANN: I was eager to get to Venice anyway.

SON: I give the stage directions here! The jittery lady says: "Old Wive's Tale".

PELLMANN: She exited long ago. What does "Old Wive's Tale" mean anyway?

MOTHER: "Old Wive's Tale" was a code word for a Gestapo raid.

SON: Exit mother. Exit Pellmann.

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MOTHER: (apathetically) Exit Jews. Exit all the Jews. Right through my sister. Exeunt omnes.

PELLMANN: (confused) Your sister?

MOTHER: An informer!

PELLMANN: What - a Jewish informer?

PELLMANN: Under torture you'd change the repertoire, too!

(The empty wheelchair rolls out onto the stage. The mother sits down on it. In contrast to the spoken stage directions, however, Peymann does not exit, but rather picks up the dead man carries him away.)

SON: "Exit Pellmann." "With the dead man." That isn't in here!  
Where are you taking him, Pellmann? Where are you taking him?

PELLMANN: Nothing will be lost - Heaven knows!

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**Scene 25:**

(Pellmann's library. Pellmann's desk. Pellmann's chair. But no Pellmann. A pair of lovely female legs and the booted legs of the old man are sticking out from the sides of the chair. Pellmann enters from the left, now with wings. The son enters from the right.)

PELLMANN: Not on my chair! (looks down at the love scene in horror.)

SON: That's not your chair, my angel. Not yet! It's still in the propaganda ministry: Schlüterstrasse, corner of the Kurfürstendamm. 1939. His name is Hermann.

(He whistles the tune of "His name is Hermann", looking down at the love scene.)

SON: Hermann is just taking delivery on his new acquisition. Banging Jewish ladies has certainly gone out of fashion. These days. But you can see...

PELLMANN: (disgusted) I can see, all right. Not on my chair!

SON: He can't hear you, Pellmann. Not until later, much later, will you discover that antique in Vienna - on Mariahilferstrasse. In an antique store. Well, more like a junk shop. It'd make a lovely essay: the story of an armchair. From the propaganda ministry in Berlin to the Burgtheater in Vienna. The story of asses large and small through the passing years.

PELLMANN: (roars at the son) You can't do this to me! I thought you were hanging outside by the door!

SON: I have things to do everywhere.

PELLMANN: So do I! Schlüter, corner of Kurfürstendamm. 1939! (He counts.) I was still a child!

SON: Read, then we'll see where we go from here...

(The son holds his thumb and index finger at his brow as a gun, then hands him the script.)

SON: Read on, Macduff!

PELLMANN: I'm reading. I'm sure your finger is poisoned.

SON: My play: your dream!

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PELLMANN: "Breath of a Salesman"! "Fifty years later. Same place. Now Hotel Bogotá." I understand. Hotel Goebbels. But why "lady with a lady's pistol"? Why "Visit to an Old Man"? Why!??

(Shot. The old man falls to the floor. The jittery lady rises from the armchair holding the lady's pistol. Exhaustedly, she takes off her wig. It is Benjamin. [He exits.]

SON: Just because.

(Pellmann carries the dead man off stage. The sun now leaps through his script in panic.)

SON: Pellmann! Stay here. That isn't in the script! Damn it! Give him your little finger, and he grabs the whole scene... (calling) Pellmann! Wait!

(Exit son. Enter the directress.)

DIRECTRESS: (searching) Hermann? Hermann? Where are you?

(Exit the directress. The library wall descends. Mrs. Pellmann enters downstage.)

MRS. PELLMANN: Claus!? Claus? What are you doing here?

SON: I wanted to talk to your husband about my play.

MRS. PELLMANN: Well, what about it? We're on our summer break! Say: where have I seen you before?

SON: (He leaps through the script.) I think on page 98. We were cut off...

MRS. PELLMANN: You're a nut!

(Mrs. Pellmann exits.)

SON: (nodding) That's what really bugs you about this decaying dumpling we call the earth, the thing that makes it look so bland out there in the universe.

(Bells ring. The library wall rises into the flies. We can now see the Caspar David Friedrich painting without the man in front. While saying the next line, the son walks over to the painting.)

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SON:

Verily I say unto you, were Jesus to appear personally on the ramparts tomorrow, you would only say: Why shouldn't a man dance the tango over the rooftops of the city if he feels the urge to? The nut!

(He jumps into the abyss.)

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**Scene 26:**

(Light mood as at the beginning of the play. The library wall comes back down. Pellmann's chair is back. The script drops from Pellmann's hand. Pellmann gets up. He had been sleeping. He stretches himself and goes back to packing the books into his suitcase. The telephone rings. He counts off a couple of authors' names, then picks up the receiver.)

PELLMANN: Goethe, Schiller, Handke... Pellmann. Yes. Yes. I read it. Your work. Dramaturgically completely illogical. If only for the ending: angel arm in arm with the Nazi. Won't work. Not subscriber-friendly. Besides those suspenders are dead wrong. No angel would wear them. Not in my theatre. What do you mean, you knew that? What, that I wouldn't produce it? What? (startles) What Black Forest cuckoo clock idea? There's nothing about that in there! In your script. What? Listen, I've got to get to Venice. I have to. I mean, my wife. Vacation. Underneath my desk? A Black Forest... (He takes a carton out from under the desk. The carton is ticking.) (He puts the receiver back to his ear and says:) Thanks a lot. (Explosion.)

(Blackout.)

(Someone turns on the radio in the blackout. It lights up.)

RADIO: And now for the news: Vienna. This morning a bomb went off in the home of Burgtheater director Claus Pellmann, slightly injuring Mr. Pellmann. The police have arrested fifteen members of the theatre company who have recently made hostile remarks about... (We hear a "click", and the radio goes off.)

