FEAR AND RAPTURE,

or

SOLDIERS OF CHRIST

A play by

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CHARACTERS

JOHN BROWN Former judge
TINA His wife
WINNIE A gas station man
DEBBIE A milliner
STRUDEL A retired officer
KAYA A student
SEBASTIAN A piano tuner

SETTING

A small town.

TIME

Easter week.

> And they asked him, saying, Master, we know that thou sayest and teachest rightly. Is it lawful for us to give tribute unto Caesar, or no?
>
> Luke: 19, 20-21

TIME AND PLACE

Small towns like Beaverdam (population 1,234) can be found all across America, but we shall put **our** Beaverdam on the map, nostalgically, in New England, amid the green hills of Vermont. May not the fewness of its denizen mislead you, for it will satisfy both your soul and body: a modest theater, passionately loyal to Charles Dickens, and a Karate Club; First National Bank, feeling perfectly safe under the iron protection of a cannon circa 1861-1865, and a white shingle post office with black jambs and lintels; fancy picture windows showcasing flirty bonnets and straw effigies; the sheriff's house, a.k.a. police department; gas station; a local bar Hem noted for its literary soirées; a sawmill; a restaurant where you will be offered "the world's best maple syrup" in the spring and "the world's best apple cider" in the fall; and, last but not least, the beaver dam which you can enjoy from a stone bridge or, say, from a hill, sitting among the chirping kids and their drowsy parents while putting away a barbecued chicken and chasing it down with cider. There's Eden for you. And time, as befitting paradise, flows from season to season here, not according to fashion's whims or the zigzags of big politics. Here the fifties and the nineties graze side by side, as well as the various confessions, having but one house of worship -- a white wooden affair with a high steeple whereby our characters sing every Sunday. Their singing attracts people from the nearby towns, and during the great religious celebrations those who were not lucky enough to get in make do with the folding chairs out on the lawn, while some listen from their cars with a window rolled down. And it so happens that this story runs through the last three days of Easter week.

ACT ONE: FRIDAY

THE BROWNS' sitting room, which has an austere look in spite of many porcelain knickknacks here and there. Although it is a bright day a dozen candles are burning. In the recess area, on two makeshift choir risers, stand TINA and DEBBIE (front row), WINNIE and STRUDEL (back row), singing a cappella "Soldiers of Christ, Arise" with SEBASTIAN as a choir master. JUDGE BROWN is listening with a somber expression from his wheelchair in the corner. After a few bars, SEBASTIAN gives a sign to stop.

SEBASTIAN

It's going to be Easter, the day after tomorrow. They will be listening to you, two hundred people in the church, and another eight hundred outside. The entire village, not to mention people from all over. What would they come for, do you think? Our songs? (*He makes a pause, expecting no answer.*) They will come for **revelation**. And what is revelation about? Fear and rapture. The very same things that Mary Magdalene felt having come to the sepulcher to find that the Lord had risen. Rapture and fear of a mortal before the greater power. Am I right, Judge? (*A slight nod from JUDGE for an answer*.) Pick it up from the second number.

(*The singing resumes accompanied by SEBASTIAN'S notes*.)

CHORUS

Soldiers of Christ, arise,
And put your armor on,
Strong in the strength which God supplies
Through his eternal Son, etc.

(*The inspired singing muffles the sound of a car pulling up. Light reveals a girl in a threadbare sweater and jeans, KAYA. She pauses captivated by the uplifting tune, then begins to speak while the rest continue to sing as eagerly, if not as loud, as though she does not exist.*)

KAYA

Hi. I'm Kaya. An odd name -- my father's off-center. Was. Died from leukemia when I was ten. My mom remarried to make me feel bad. Guess what her new hubby did first thing in our little Jewish home? Baptized my late dad, ex post factum, into *his* Church. He's a Mormon, yep. Said a girl my age shouldn't have a car of her own. Must be one of the Ten Commandments: "Thou shalt not have a car." Fancy me and Holden walking to Key West . . . across the water! They finally gave me -- *lent* me -- their old Chevy, but not until I had convinced my stepfather it was our honeymoon. Of course I lied--

(*The singing stops abruptly. She explains*.)

KAYA

I had to . . . and we *will* get married as soon as Holden gets his degree. Look, it's an ugly old car . . . It's bad, I know. A lie is a lie. Which is why I'm here. Debbie said you would help me come to terms with my sense of guilt. You would? I mean, won't you? Cause I feel real bad about--

(*DEBBIE motions to her to join the choir. KAYA makes a step forward and stops in confusion.*)

KAYA

I left all my things in the . . .

SEBASTIAN

All you need is your sheet music.

JUDGE

You sight read, don't you?

KAYA

Well, yes . . . .

(*JUDGE BROWN points to a spare music-stand next to DEBBIE, as if set up for a new choir member. KAYA makes an awkward move and trips. She clutches at her ankle, moaning through her teeth. They look on, concerned, curious.*)

STRUDEL

Is she all right?

DEBBIE

I guess.

TINA

I like her.

WINNIE

She's a natural.

DEBBIE

What did I tell you.

WINNIE

Just what we need.

SEBASTIAN

(*Sings childishly.*)

"I'm -- a -- hap -- py -- girl." Well? (*KAYA smiles faintly and makes an effort to sing along.*) "We -- shall -- have -- some -- fun." (*She repeats after him, gratefully. They give her a big hand. She walks with a limp to the music-stand.*) There you go. That's my girl. I bet you can show them a thing or two. Everybody ready? And--!

(*The singing resumes. SEBASTIAN indicates it is now KAYA'S solo. She has a fresh, clear voice. The rest listen to her with a smile of recognition, then join in with renewed force.*)

CHORUS

Stand, then, in his great might,
With all his strength endured;
But take, to arm you for the fight,
The panoply of God, etc.

(*SEBASTIAN turns to the audience. He, and then the others, speak over the ongoing quiet singing.*)

SEBASTIAN

When Debbie said she'd found "the seventh," suddenly I felt a sting here. (*He points at his heart.*)

TINA

They met on campus -- it is a thirty minutes drive from here -- at the supermarket where we shop twice a week -- it's a whole lot cheaper.

JUDGE

Kaya was a cashier there.

DEBBIE

Worked two shifts, poor thing.

WINNIE

All by herself, in a strange place. No support. She tried to save up by skipping her lunches.

STRUDEL

Two-fifty monthly rent, take it or leave it.

SEBASTIAN

Our vote was unanimous: we must come to her rescue. (*Without looking back.*) Strudel, I can't hear you!

(*The old man puts in an extra effort. They sing in sync.*)

(*Later. KAYA is unpacking in her room. DEBBIE, who helped her to move in, is playing with her fluffy cat that looks almost like a real one while showing some interest in her wardrobe.*)

DEBBIE
(*About a fancy jumpsuit*.)
What a beauty!

KAYA
Some dork got it for me.

DEBBIE
Oh yeah?

KAYA
I tried it on and I'm giving it back -- can't afford it, right? -- and the lady says, "Your husband has already paid for it."

DEBBIE
Your husband?

KAYA
I was, like, what!

DEBBIE
Some have it all don't they, kitty? (*She is squeezing the cat lovingly*.)

KAYA
That's my Alice.

DEBBIE
So? What have you been up to, you naughty pussycat? You know you're *bad* don't ya. Oh yeah, oh yeah. You gonna tell Debbie what you're up to? No? You and your dirty little *secrets!*

KAYA
No rent?

DEBBIE
Crazy, huh? Time you got used to the thought: not everything is about money.

KAYA
There's a good one. Why then, when I need to talk to my Mother, I hang up after the first ring and wait for the return call?

DEBBIE

Did you pay for your room when you lived with your mom and stepfather?

KAYA

It may have occurred to them to charge me but something interfered . . . We are family, you know.

DEBBIE

So are we, a *family*.

KAYA

You mean . . . ?

DEBBIE

We do pot luck, we go to movies, we sing, we *confabulate*.

KAYA

You what?

DEBBIE

Confabulation, a free-flowing exchange of thoughts. The Judge's word.

KAYA

The Judge! (*She makes a frightened face.*)

DEBBIE

He is the kindest person you ever saw.

KAYA

The guy who put people away for years?

DEBBIE

When they *deserved* it.

KAYA

Hallelujah!

DEBBIE

The man wouldn't touch food when the inmates went on a hunger strike. For eight *days*.

KAYA

And meanwhile how many pounds did his wife gain?

DEBBIE

Now what are you getting at! Tina is a loyal wife. Her middle name is misery -- an invalid for a husband, her daughter, a loose cannon, gave birth to a retard . . . and look at her: at fifty, she'll give you a run for your money! If not for Tina, you'd be sucking on your toe in your college den with bare walls. A rooming house, it was her idea after the Judge's stroke had forced him to retire, and a great idea as far as *I*'m concerned. You better watch your tongue kiddo.

KAYA

Hey, it was a joke, all right?

DEBBIE

We're talking nice people here, in case you haven't noticed.

KAYA

A joke, Debbie.

DEBBIE

Sebastian gets seven years for armed robbery . . .

KAYA

Your *choir* master?!

DEBBIE

. . . out of which he serves *five*. He gets out, no money, no home, and a gang-ho thing on his record . . .

KAYA

Is it going to have a happy ending?

DEBBIE

Figure this: the Judge brings him in, gives him room and board *for free*, and makes a few phone calls. (*She casually picks up KAYA'S frayed paperback and begins to leaf through it*.) Like, the man is *clean*, why don't we let him move on with his life. And now look at Sebastian, they want him everywhere! Churches, private homes, *funeral* parlors. (*About the book*.) Black magic? I *adore* that stuff.

KAYA

Funeral parlors?

DEBBIE

He is a tuner. Pianos, organs. It's something we *all* need.

KAYA

You mean . . . ?

DEBBIE

A tune-up.

KAYA

Oh.

DEBBIE

So how did you like our beaver dam?

KAYA

Haven't seen it yet.

DEBBIE

You haven't! You didn't stop on the bridge to look at our beaver dam. (*KAYA makes a helpless gesture*.) And the bridge! Venice is a pile of shit.

KAYA

Is that right?

DEBBIE

(*Letting her in on a big one*.)

You're standing on the bridge, facing the dam. You drop a sliver or, say, a twig. As it hits the water you make a wish and you **rush** to the opposite railing while it sails under! A jiffy is all you've got, but if you can make it, that's it!

KAYA

That's it what?

DEBBIE

You've got your wish! Do you have an idea how many miles people are willing to make just to . . .

(*A rough knock as if someone is kicking the door. Light on WINNIE carrying a big TV set*.)

WINNIE

Where do you want it?

KAYA

Oh. On the floor.

(*He puts it down.*)

WINNIE

Shall I plug it in?

KAYA

You've *fixed* it?

WINNIE

Oh yes ma'am.

DEBBIE

That's Winnie the Miracle Man, he'll change your water into wine. I'm serious. It's Tina's birthday and Strudel the old geezer forgets to buy *wine*. A grip of panic. In our village, after hours, it's easier to rob a bank than to buy a drink. So Winnie takes Diet Pepsi and Sprite -- okay? -- and he mixes them in our glasses. *Three* drinks later, the Judge is telling *jokes*, Tina is waltzing with *Strudel*, if you can imagine *that*, and *I* wake up the next morning with a *hangover!*

(*WINNIE, who is working on the picture, looks a little embarrassed but undoubtedly pleased. On the screen, there is some daytime talk show*.)

DEBBIE

Gotta go. (*Pointing at the paperback*.) Must be one hell of a book?

KAYA

All you need to know about hell. (*They giggle, two school girls*.)

DEBBIE

See you guys at dinner. Where's my Alice full of malice? Kitty-kitty. (*She tickles the toy cat and leaves*.)

KAYA

A whiz, huh?

(*We may as well mention now that WINNIE, to use the language of political correctness, is a man of non-traditional sexual orientation, and both his looks and manners bespeak it clearly*.)

WINNIE

At least Debbie got one thing right -- you're certainly not the first to fall into her trap.

KAYA

So you didn't . . . ?

WINNIE

It was nothing. Two solutions with low carbohydrates, when you mix them together . . . it's just a chemical reaction.

KAYA

Well fixing this monster in five minutes was a true miracle.

WINNIE

An expensive monster.

KAYA

(*As a matter of course*.)

Some dork's present. So, this is what you do for a living?

WINNIE

No, for a living I mix high octane and low grade gasoline. (*She chortles*.) Welcome to Prodigy Gas Station.

KAYA

Is it the one with a neon sign . . .

TOGETHER

. . . YOUR CAR WILL LOVE IT!

KAYA

I must check it out, Mr. Magician.

WINNIE

We'll be happy to serve someone with such a beautiful voice.

KAYA

Thanks.

WINNIE

I bet you sang in a choir.

KAYA

Yeah. Yeah, as a matter of fact I did.

WINNIE

A colony for juvenile delinquents?

KAYA

Juvenile delinquents! What gave you the idea?

WINNIE

I'm sorry.

KAYA

It's okay.

WINNIE

(*A sexton from ambo*.)

And the Lord created man, and he could not fathom his creation. (*He makes KAYA laugh*.) Well, take our Strudel . . . a proud eagle! General Washington! . . . and the army gave him the boot . . . planted it right in his scrawny butt. Why? You tell me!

KAYA

You're not saying that I'll be the next one, huh?

WINNIE

Ah, we'll take good care of you, Grasshopper. Shall I tell you a tale?

KAYA

I love tales.

WINNIE

Once upon a time there lived Pip and his good friends -- a Locust, a Horse-Fly, a Bark Beetle, and a Ladybird. They used to come to a sunny glade to talk about themselves. They poured their hearts out, for there could be no secrets among friends. He who had something to hide, Pip said, would do time in a matchbox. Well they'd heard things about that matchbox and they sure didn't like what they'd heard. As for their glade, they just loved it, and -- strange, isn't it? -- their stories would get better and better.

KAYA

Who's Pip?

WINNIE

(*Shrugging it off*.)

Like I said, it's just a tale. (*Intimately*.) So, who are you?

KAYA

(*Mysteriously*.)

You really want to know?

WINNIE

Professionally.

KAYA

Ah. Here's the shock: You're talking to the would-be horticulturist.

WINNIE

The would-be what?

KAYA

My thing is Japanese gardens. Dwarf trees. Gazebo. Stones. A place for contemplation. (*Now it is her turn to enjoy his confusion. She makes it hazier still*.) It's reality round the corner sort of thing. The eleven stones lay there peacefully while the last one is playing hide-and-seek with you. Or, I step aside, and I am gone! Nowhere to be seen. What do you think? I tell you something: If you guys behave well I will design it in the backyard for you. You'll sit on the stone and twist your neck looking out for me: Hello, Kaya? The Invisible Girl, where are you?

WINNIE

I don't have to just sit there, do I? What if I get up and go . . .

KAYA

. . . to your room so the Invisible Girl could take a shower maybe?

WINNIE

Now I've been shown the door.

KAYA

Winnie, we don't know each other that well yet.

WINNIE

(*Playfully*.)

You gave me the fright of my life, doll!

(*JUDGE BROWN at his desk. TINA is leaning on his shoulder*.)

TINA

How do you know the super is lying?

JUDGE

Because there were no bruises *prior* to their little chit-chat.

TINA

Says who?

JUDGE

Two inmates who saw the man--

TINA

Inmates!

JUDGE

From *isolated* blocks. Tina, the jail has a bad reputation and it's our job to look into a possible--

TINA

Yes yes yes, you'll stay up all night and tomorrow you'll be on your last legs.

JUDGE

Tina . . .

TINA

I'm getting old and grumpy. We were playing bridge the other day, it's Strudel's turn and, well, he is slow. I mean *slow*. So I say, Why don't you lay down your Queen, which incidentally is the only *Spade* on your hand, and let your *partner* worry about the consequences.

JUDGE

You were peeking in his cards.

TINA

Is it my fault he is far-sighted? He is all but sticking his hand in my nose!

JUDGE

You must bring it up tonight.

TINA

Of course. Tina Tell-It-All confesses yet another of her many sins! Oh John, we don't need to know Strudel's *cards* to beat the boys at their game. (*Under his gaze of disapproval*.) Very well your honor. "Overruled." (*Humbly*.) Anything else?

JUDGE

Why this girl?

TINA

Kaya?

JUDGE

Her one "big crime" is lack of substance, at best. We'll be wasting our time on her. Curbing the lofty goals we set ourselves.

TINA

What if she is that cleansing spirit you were talking about? This "one link in the chain of humanity" that was missing? Debbie says--

JUDGE

Hold it there. This is a no-nonsense . . .

TINA

Boarding house.

JUDGE

. . . *place* where former criminals are given a second chance.

TINA

It's peaceful backwater, and you make it sound like we are running a rehab center.

JUDGE

I don't care what you call it but in three years we've turned one crook into a law-abiding citizen, and the other . . .

TINA

You shouldn't be calling Sebastian a crook.

JUDGE

A gang of hoods -- masks, guns and all -- cleaning department stores . . . you call it Mardi Gras? God is performing miracles in this "peaceful backwater" and we're arguing over semantics. Look at Strudel. Look at Debbie who didn't know right from wrong. A complete makeover! They'll open their hearts to you like a bunch of three-year-olds. *You* remember what they were like when you heard their cases on the parole board. "This Winnie-boy," you said, "will cheat himself out of his pants." And I said . . .

TINA

"We have a spare room."

JUDGE

And when Sebastian's ulcer acted up! You treated him like royalty. I don't recall getting a pineapple soufflé when *I* was bed-ridden. You probably spent more time in his room than in your own bedroom. I'm not grumbling, dear. It's all right as long--

(*Light on WINNIE singing a Welsh tune, "O Spirit of the Living God," as he is working with his soldering iron. He has a beautiful tenor which soars through the rooms making people look up in wonder*.)

WINNIE

O Spirit of the Living God,
Thou light and fire divine,
Descend upon thy Church once more
And make it truly thine, etc.

(*The rest is toned down*.)

JUDGE

I was sitting on a case, my very first one as a district judge. I left home three hours ahead of time and it was a fifteen minute drive. The accused claimed his wife had been cheating on him. It's what he *felt*. Not a single shred of evidence. Well, they'd got physical, she slipped, fractured her skull.

TINA

. . . involuntary manslaughter . . .

(*JUDGE BROWN reaches for his Gideon Bible. He reads*.)

JUDGE

"When the spirit of jealousy cometh upon the man, he shall set the woman before the Lord. Then shall the man be guiltless, and this woman shall bear her iniquity." (*He puts the book down*.) Faith, man's finest protection. Like those "Loving Hands" Latex Gloves of yours that insulate you from dirt and burns.

I settled for a first-degree murder . . . to give him more time to sleep on it. You know my philosophy: criminal law is the best reference to your conscience. Apparently he didn't take my good advice to heart.

TINA

He didn't?

JUDGE

Back in his cell, he cut his veins, you see. But for me, it was as though he had choked on his own bile. Excuse me, darling.

(*He wheels toward the exit when WINNIE resumes singing. JUDGE BROWN pauses to listen, a dreamy smile on his face*.)

WINNIE

Teach us to utter living words
Of truth which all may hear--

JUDGE

That is the ultimate reward.

WINNIE

The language all men understand
When love speaks loud and clear.

(*Light off JUDGE BROWN. TINA opens the Bible to the bookmark and reads out loud*.)

TINA

"And the man shall set the woman before the Lord, and shall give her the bitter water, and say unto the woman, If thou hast gone aside to another then this water that causeth the

curse shall go into thy bowels to make thy belly to swell and thy thigh to rot." (*She looks up listening to WINNIE'S enthralling voice*.)

WINNIE

Burn, wingéd fire! Inspire our lips
With flaming love and zeal
To preach to all thy great good news
God's glorious commonweal!

(*Light reveals KAYA*.)

KAYA

I stopped by to thank you for everything. It's like a dream . . . Thirty minutes from campus, with its crowds and screaming graffiti, and suddenly . . . gospel songs, this sharing and caring, a room at no charge. I feel like I'm Cinderella in a palace.

TINA

Not a princess in a prison? I'm sure you have seen the billboard as you came in. "Beaverdam. Population 1,234."

KAYA

A remarkable accuracy!

TINA

(*Refusing to share her enthusiasm*.)

How amusing, to keep rewriting those numbers!

KAYA

A lovely small town you have!

TINA

Why don't you sit down. There. Will you have iced tea? And I drink it all day long. Small town, you say. Well, we had Nancy Sinatra a while ago.

KAYA

(*Quite surprised*.)

You did?

TINA

She had a car problem on the highway, spent a night at our motel. She checks in, next Mike gives her a ring.

KAYA

Who's Mike?

TINA

Mike Maccormick, the owner of Hem. A Hemingway buff and a true zealot. Readings, "Largely Literary" T-shirts. He wants Nancy to make a public appearance. Apparently she is not inclined, but, Hemingway and all, she says yes. The bar is bursting at the seams, as you can well imagine. Nancy is dressed like your next girl: tight pants, a sweater, and boots . . . the very same! Ah, who am I telling this, you weren't even born, and we were absolutely crazy about those boots. And then Mike suddenly realizes he doesn't have an LP of Sinatra! He has recordings galore but not one envelope to autograph! He could kill himself. And what do you think? Our Winnie makes a run to his gas station, where they have a whole rack of magazines, and he brings a recent Playboy, fifteen copies, with Nancy on the cover! Now, show me a decent person who will buy Playboy. This filth used to gather dust there, unopened, for months 'til they took it away somewhere. Well what do you know! Back at Mike's, it is gone before you can blink! Our pastor rips off the plastic cover and he is shoving it to her over the people's heads. And the former chairman of the chamber of commerce, a well-respected man, who has just become a grandfather for the **third** time, spreads out before her . . . (*she looks around impulsively and lowers her voice*) . . . spreads out before her the centerfold where she is posing . . . (*a suggestive gesture*) . . . in those boots!!! You see what I'm saying?

KAYA

. . . yeah.

(*There is an awkward pause. TINA is ogling her young guest who casts her eyes down. The land lady takes her by the hand and smiles encouragingly*.) Well, tell me.

KAYA

Tell you what?

TINA

The story. Your parents, yourself. Friends. Flings. Spare me no detail.

KAYA

My parents . . . I think I'll have some iced tea myself, if I may.

TINA

Of course. (*Pours from a pitcher*.) Go on.

KAYA

My parents . . . why are you asking?

TINA

Good question. Kaya, we must know all about you.

KAYA

"We" meaning--?

TINA

You belong with us now and being close means . . . very close. So you're ready when a person needs you. Kindred spirits? When it's missing, the end is often sad. You don't have to reach far for an example. Strudel and his daughter . . . alienation, bitterness . . . and he finds himself out on the street.

KAYA

Oh?

TINA

One day they look like your regular family, and the next day it's "What are you teaching your grandchildren, you scum?!" (*Gently*.) Come on. Speak up.

KAYA

Can I tell you *your* story first?

TINA

Now that should be interesting.

(*They sit down, KAYA takes her left hand and begins to study the palm.*)

KAYA

You have a daughter . . . see this little side line? . . . she often makes you unhappy . . . yes . . . but not quite as much as your little granddaughter who was born with . . . some deficiency. (*TINA cringes, forces a smile*.)

TINA

Go on.

KAYA

Knowing true passion, you're stifled in this backwoods. No one suspects what tempests rage in your heart. Do you keep a diary?

TINA

No.

KAYA

See? You can't even confide in the paper.

(*TINA quietly withdraws her hand*.)

TINA

Thank you, dear. *Quite* amusing. So you can read people's hearts?

KAYA

Hands. Only their hands.

(*Kitchen area. DEBBIE is making a salad. SEBASTIAN is standing behind her, helping himself absent-mindedly to a cabbage stalk.*)

SEBASTIAN

Huhn.

DEBBIE

. . . *and*, Kaya will have me in the express lane where, you know, it's under ten items only.

(*SEBASTIAN picks up a snake of a grocery check-out receipt and studies it with mild interest.*)

SEBASTIAN

. . . not exactly our case . . . (*DEBBIE laughs wholeheartedly.*) Kaya, a nice girl.

DEBBIE

Yeah. One bone too many, for my taste, but *some* like it fat-free.

SEBASTIAN

Hmmm.

DEBBIE

Will you take her out tonight?

SEBASTIAN

Maybe.

DEBBIE

Remember how you took *me* out? Candles and all. You wore your London Fog cardigan with white trim and navy blue slacks. The maitre d' sent us Champagne, on the *house*. I was like, *wow*. No *rent*, and now *this?* Is that how they treat each newly arrived tenant? Little did I know.

(*SEBASTIAN puts the check aside.*)

SEBASTIAN

She has a boyfriend, you said?

DEBBIE

There's a whole bunch, but one, Holden, is "it."

SEBASTIAN

Holden?

DEBBIE

A dork, as she calls them, from her home town. Guess where they made love? In the K-Mart parking lot in broad *day*light. (*Checking his reaction*.)

SEBASTIAN

Well well.

DEBBIE

Do you want her to wear *red?* I don't recall seeing anything quite the right color in her closet, but she could borrow my skirt and pantyhose. And Tina's got herself a scarlet blouse, a *see-through*, reeeal snazzy.

SEBASTIAN

Hmn.

DEBBIE

Even the Judge would have given his stamp of approval, huh?

SEBASTIAN

Gotta go. Must see about this baby-grand.

DEBBIE

On Main Street?

SEBASTIAN

Behind the bank.

DEBBIE

I thought you'd fixed it.

SEBASTIAN

They want their nephew to come over to practice while they're gone.

DEBBIE

Not a good idea, eh?

SEBASTIAN

No.

DEBBIE

What's the rush anyway?

SEBASTIAN

They're leaving. I won't be late for dinner, if that's what you were thinking.

DEBBIE

I was thinking of the baby-grand watching over the empty place. How did you put it? "A silent caretaker." I like that.

SEBASTIAN

I'm glad you do.

DEBBIE

Well. I'm *almost* done here . . . Maybe I could make some phone calls.

SEBASTIAN

Mary Magdalene Agency open on Good Friday? (*Hearing disapproval in his voice, DEBBIE suddenly cowers*.)

DEBBIE

You got me wrong there . . . it's about my bonnets. They sell well, I'm told . . . (*In her agitation she helps herself to a handful of Hershey Kisses*.)

SEBASTIAN

Shall I remind you that we fast? All this chocolate!

(*Now DEBBIE is close to panic. She is looking for an excuse and cannot find one. SEBASTIAN gives her a cabbage stalk, which she receives as if it were a royal gift, as he leaves. Blackout. Then a knock on the door*.)

KAYA'S VOICE

Anytime!

(*Light on KAYA, in a doggie position, reading a book for class and not seeing STRUDEL in the doorway. The TV, which is always on, is humming on the floor. It's a no-chairs, "carpet life": here KAYA eats, studies, entertains her guests.*)

STRUDEL

I'd rather follow service regulations!

KAYA

(*Assuming a less provocative posture*.)

I thought it was Debbie.

STRUDEL

I decided to introduce myself properly. Strudel, army counterintelligence, got my discharge at the rank of captain! (*All of a sudden, as if scared by something, meekly*.) I am only a gardener these days. Try my pickles. And my strawberries, mmm! (*He squats beside her and speaks intimately*.) What they do: they take bad strawberries, and they make essence, and then they put it in the oatmeal. Now, the price is the same . . . what are you going to buy? Regular oatmeal or one with strawberry flavor? (*Triumphantly*.) Aha! (*A casual glance at her book*.) Study for school?

KAYA

I try.

STRUDEL

Good. (*He paces the room*.) You find yourself a long ways from home.

KAYA

Slackfest is over! (*Quoting parental cliches*.) "What are your values? Goals? There is nothing you really care for!" So we are the freaks of nature. We don't need nobody, we don't care a damn. And why is that? "No spine whatsoever!" Pfft, none. Some are born without hair, and here, as ill luck would have it, each and every one without a spine! Just "an empty soul." It is that small reservoir, right here (*she points at her solar plexus*), 6 by 3 by 3 . . . when you feel real bad it hurts, ouch, but otherwise it doesn't really bother you. So it's empty, big deal!

STRUDEL

When beavers make their dam they each work on their own project. One is building something, another is sorting out the materials, a third one is mixing mortar. No one's messing with his peer, or giving a piece of advice, and work is in full swing, like you've never seen. I'll take you there some day. I know a secret place, in a hazel-grove, where you can see it in full view.

KAYA

There's this guy, a professor, who sparked me . . . with a wife, naturally . . . he takes me out to a remote park where they have this pond with wild geese. Fat, cheeky bastards. They come waddling to our bench, bad boys, you know, and start screaming, "Snack! Snack! Snack!" Well we have no food to give so one of them bits my bare thigh, can you imagine!

STRUDEL

You don't want to mess with a gang. Yeah. (*Daydreaming*.) Do you use credit cards?

KAYA

Visa. Why?

STRUDEL

Give me the number.

KAYA

Why should I?

STRUDEL

Go ahead.

(*With a shrug, KAYA reaches for her purse, gets her billfold, finds her Visa. She reads it to him*.)

KAYA

3962178411072544.

STRUDEL

Hold it! Now my turn. Are you following? (*He must be seeing the card in his mind's eye for he makes slight pauses, as a reader might, after each cluster of numbers*.) 3962 1784 1107 2544.

KAYA

Wow. How do you do that?

STRUDEL

(*With dignity rather than braggadocio*.)

Professional memory.

KAYA

Neat. (*After a thought*.) I can do things too.

STRUDEL

Like what?

KAYA

Reading minds.

STRUDEL

We had a guy like that. Interrogation under torture -- boy, was he good at it.

KAYA

I don't do torture. I can also learn one's past by studying his scalp.

STRUDEL

Scalp?

KAYA

Not *that* scalp. Aaahhh! (*Showing a scary skull with sunken eye sockets*.) A regular

head. There's a science -- phrenology? Haven't you heard?

STRUDEL

You bet. Scalp, hunh? (*He bends his head*.)

KAYA

You want me to . . . ?

STRUDEL

Go on, read my scalp.

(*There is a devilish spark in her eye. But she immediately assumes a solemn expression and, laying her hands on the old man's bald head, she begins to fumble for his bumps and bulges*.)

KAYA

You have a will of stone. No compromises. Drive it home like a nail. Well you stretched it too far . . . got your discharge before your time. (*STRUDEL raises his head.*) I'm not done yet. These nodes (*she runs her fingers gingerly behind the old man's ears*) -- can you feel them? -- are your links with your ancestors. You want young people to respect traditions and their elders. Hippies, punks, you'd like to see this filth scorched by hot iron, and not many young people share your sentiment. You have . . . a daughter . . . and two grandchildren?

STRUDEL

Yes. (*He draws his head in as if expecting a blow.*)

KAYA

Your daughter didn't want you to live with them? Spoke of your bad influence?

(*STRUDEL straightens up slowly. He looks like a cornered wolf too scared to snap at the hunter. KAYA tries to smooth it out*.)

KAYA

I'm sorry -- shouldn't've brought it up -- this must be something you don't want to--

(*Before she has time to finish, STRUDEL opens his mouth and belts out a plaintive and passionate aria from* Pagliacci, Act 1.)

(*Evening. A quiet family dinner is over. In the sitting room, the JUDGE lights a big candle in the center of the table while TINA is setting personal ones in graceful silver candleholders. DEBBIE is putting away clean plates from the dishwasher. WINNIE and STRUDEL are talking in low voices at the table. Enter KAYA and SEBASTIAN who are having an argument, which looks more like flirting*.)

KAYA

Everyone has his little mysteries.

SEBASTIAN

Mysteries? There's a meaningless word.

KAYA

Oh yeah?

SEBASTIAN

Suppose I didn't tell you my real occupation. (*She slaps him gently on the hand, he lowers his head guiltily and goes on.*) You stifle a cry: "Mystery!" Not exactly. All you need to know is to tighten the right string. (*Approaching the table.*) See this chair? It's been waiting for you . . . (*to others*) for how long?

DEBBIE

Three years!

KAYA

Three years! There's a true gentleman!

(*KAYA and SEBASTIAN sit down at the table.*)

TINA

Aren't you going to ask why?

KAYA

Yes. Why?

TINA

(*Sitting down.*)

Because . . .

(*An eager chorus responding to the cue.*)

CHORUS

WE NEED A SEVENTH!!!

TINA

Right, John? (*JUDGE BROWN nods.*)

KAYA

A seventh?

TINA

A faucet in the shower came off the thread -- just like that. At least it was cold water, no burns.

WINNIE

And blood!

KAYA

Blood . . .

TINA

See that vent in the kitchen? I'm cooking dinner, then it comes from above -- *plop plop*. Right on my blouse. The blood! I call the police. This boy, Perkins, fresh from the army, takes off the grid, and there it is -- a piece of raw meat!

DEBBIE

Yuk.

TINA

And it wouldn't wash off.

WINNIE

You know why.

KAYA

(*Playing up*.)

Oh my!

DEBBIE

And how about the car moving all by itself?

KAYA

All by itself?

DEBBIE

I always park it outside the *house*. Same place. Next morning, it's across the street!

JUDGE

Tell her about the chalk.

DEBBIE

I park it as usual, okay? And I circle the spot with *chalk* . . .

KAYA

(*"Guessing."*)

. . . later, the circle is there and the car isn't.

DEBBIE

Right! But where *is* it?

KAYA

Yes? Where?

WINNIE

Near the bus stop! With a ticket on the wind shield!

TINA

And our front door! The rule is: who comes in last, locks up for the night. Now what happens in the morning? The door is wide open! Be our guests! I come down in the middle of the night to check, and it's locked. Then it's morning, and it's happened again!

STRUDEL

I said, What we must do is sprinkle the house with holy water--

DEBBIE

As if I didn't!

STRUDEL

You, it's one thing; the priest, that's different. Father Steiner--

DEBBIE

Father Steiner wouldn't cross himself unless you show him a bottle.

TINA

So. John is talking to me and he says, Six is a devil's number. With six of us here we'll never get rid of this pollution. We need a seventh. Now, we spoke on -- when was it, John? -- last Wednesday, and Friday you move in.

DEBBIE

Good Friday.

(*Pause. Definitely an epiphany*.)

SEBASTIAN

All right then. Our new sister is here. We've shared bread and shelter with her, we may as well share now . . . something we bear in our hearts.

JUDGE

Would you like to start?

KAYA

No thank you . . . I . . . maybe later?

JUDGE

As you wish.

SEBASTIAN

Let's hold hands . . . so we can feel the energy of each other flow right into us. (*They hold hands.*) "Lead me, O Lord, in thy righteousness because of my enemies. For there is no faithfulness in their mouth; their inward part is wickedness; their throat is an open sepulcher; they flatter with their tongues. Destroy them, o God; let them fall by their own conceits, for they have rebelled against thee."

ALL

Amen!

SEBASTIAN

Tina?

TINA

I have this dream: how we sit down and tell our stories . . . good and bad . . . and then, relieved, each lights his candle. Dear Lord, I tell myself, please see to it that we are all together forever! Who else can I talk to about my poor little girl? The aquarium Winnie gave to her! She spends hours sitting in front of it. I've put a net in her hand, she pokes the glass wall with it, babbling something. The other day Janet screamed again: "She'll drive me nuts with her mooing! Someday I'll strangle her with my own hands!" I too used to have . . . thoughts. What a shame. It's not her fault . . . she was born that way. (*Wants to light her candle.*)

JUDGE

Go on.

TINA

Do I really have to . . . ? (*She wilts under his cold stare.*) Well, we were playing cards and I . . . sneaked a peek at your hand, Strudel. The way you held it . . . and other times, too. Can you imagine doing that to *me*?

STRUDEL

Even if I'm smart enough not to flash my cards you girls are still going to beat us. Right, Winnie?

WINNIE

To a pulp.

TINA

I'm so ashamed of myself . . . .

JUDGE

Sins out peace in.

ALL

Sins out peace in.

(*TINA lights her candle*.)

DEBBIE

And I almost screwed up. The cashier totals my bill, and oops, I see these bonbons in my *cart!* And she's looking away . . . like she's waiting to see if I'm gonna tell her or not. You can't play tricks on *me*. Who wants to get smeared . . . for *nothing.*

WINNIE

Exactly.

DEBBIE

Shoved that box right under her nose. The bitch.

JUDGE

The pitfall of temptation.

DEBBIE

She can choke on it!

STRUDEL

Next time she'll know better than to play the fool with our Debbie.

(*DEBBIE is ready to light a candle when SEBASTIAN says matter-of-factly:*)

SEBASTIAN

Hershey Kisses?

(*DEBBIE'S face turns red. Long pause.*)

DEBBIE

I . . . I thought the cart was empty. I didn't see them! I swear by my mother's name!

KAYA

How would *you* know?

SEBASTIAN

She never declared them. (*He waves the check.*) So much for "mysteries." A sin sticks out its ugly head like a bad mushroom. Am I right, Judge?

JUDGE

God be praised, hallelujah!

DEBBIE

It boggles my mind how this whole thing -- it's the devil's work--

KAYA

Take it easy. You didn't notice the stupid box.

TINA

And when you did, it just made no sense to take it back. Right?

DEBBIE

Right.

WINNIE

Can happen to the best of us, not to mention the rest of us.

KAYA

It happened to me. Same old story.

DEBBIE

I felt so ashamed of myself.

TINA

Light your candle.

(*DEBBIE does. All faces turn to KAYA.*)

KAYA

Well -- I don't know if I have any secret sins to confess. Nothing comes to mind, really.

SEBASTIAN

Why don't you tell us about your engagement?

(*She considers it for a moment, then nods her head in agreement.*)

KAYA

Holden and I, we're not getting married.

(*She gets some raised eyebrows.*)

KAYA

There's this pier in my hometown where they dive into the water. Boys. They bring their

girl friends there to see the sunset and maybe have a beer or two and, well, do things. And then they dive. It's that man thing. The sea is lapping down below but you can't see it it's so dark.

(*Pause*.)

They jump off, feet first, and you hear a splash and then *yahoo!* they're back dripping water and grinning from ear to ear. Strutting in front of the girls. Well, some of these dorks make goo-goo eyes at *me* and Holden decides to show them class. Being new there and all.

(*Pause*.)

He takes a run up . . . you could tell right away he'd never done it before . . . and, to really impress the crowd, he goes head first before anyone has time to open his mouth. Well, down there and farther off, it is reinforcement steel and concrete blocks. So there. He injures his spinal cord.

(*Pause*.)

Shall I light a candle for him?

(*Lights fade out as the new candle comes alive in the dark.*)

ACT TWO: SATURDAY

Late morning. KAYA, wrapped in a bed sheet, sits in bed, facing the wall. Her clothes are scattered around. A moment ago she let in DEBBIE, who is now trying on the snazzy red blouse in front of the full-length mirror. We hear TINA sing a love tune from Aida.

DEBBIE

What about *his* order? Let me guess. Shrimp cocktail, Caesar salad with *French* dressing, uhm, Cajun steak -- Sebastian likes it blackened -- with baked potatoes, and ice-cream for dessert. Did you try their Chocolate Suicide? I'll do it with a stranger for a helping of that sweet poison. (*She laughs*.) Now *drinks*. Blush Chardonnais. Why does the young wine go right to your head? Beats me. And then the best part: a shot of Lady Godiva, for the road, as a stamp of maturity, and grabbing the gentleman's elbow, like a boat railing, you let your feet figure out the force of the storm.

(*Still fooling around, she has put on her hat, coquettishly*.)

DEBBIE

How do you like my last creation? Twenty-five. Okay, twenty, for you. (*No reaction*.) Are you sure you're all right?

KAYA

Yep.

DEBBIE

Tada! (*She makes a spectacular twirl, but her theatrical pose is lost on KAYA. DEBBIE throws a glance over her shoulder and examines the blouse's crumpled back*.) Well, my child! Did you make love to a bear or something?

KAYA

I slept in my clothes -- until I took them off, that is -- that's Lady Godiva for you.

DEBBIE

You also tore your panties in your sleep. (*With her toe she fishes out KAYA'S underwear*.) Want me to guess again? He invited you into his room, you had *more* drinks, he told you to undress, you tried the door, it was *locked*, although *he* never used the key, the rest is history.

(*KAYA turns abruptly, staring at DEBBIE*.)

KAYA

He never used the key.

DEBBIE

That's what I said.

KAYA

So how come the door was locked?

DEBBIE

Someone *else* locked it from the *outside*, you silly.

KAYA

"Someone else"?

DEBBIE

Take your pick.

KAYA

But why???

DEBBIE

You're one of our family, remember?

KAYA

Family.

DEBBIE

. . . and as his *wife*, my little friend, you have certain obligations.

KAYA

His wife?

DEBBIE

. . . *and* child. We are all his children.

KAYA

Look, Debbie. I've been *raped* and I'm really in no mood to--

DEBBIE

Raped?!? He was doing you a *favor*. Who do you think you are? The Virgin *Mary?* You open your legs and you say thank you. Thank you Sebastian for straightening my ways with your sword. Thank you for baptizing me in your come. *Me*. The scum of the earth. You gave me a chance so I can try to make the most of it. (*KAYA is staring at her beginning to make sense of what happened*.) Don't. Don't scorch me with your look.

KAYA

You knew didn't you? When you and Tina were fixing me up for the evening, like a bride for the church, you knew what he was up to all along?

DEBBIE

Aren't we dramatic.

KAYA

. . . transparent red clothes . . . a bride and a whore. (*A sudden thought*.) Are you his wives also? (*DEBBIE arrogantly meets her gaze*.) Well well. This is getting interesting. Are we on flextime?

DEBBIE

Poor Sherry, Queen of Cherry.

KAYA

Does the Judge know?

(*DEBBIE sits on the bed and takes KAYA'S hand*.)

DEBBIE

Judge Brown is in poor health, you don't want to upset him -- am I making myself clear? (*KAYA utters a cry, her fingers having been squeezed*.) I'm sorry, I'm sorry. (*Kissing each finger*.) I didn't mean to hurt you, trust me. Kaya, this is an amazing home where we love each other.

KAYA

"Love!"

DEBBIE

(*Coldly*.)

Spare me your vulgarities please.

KAYA

What do you want exactly?

DEBBIE

What do I want? (*She presses Alice the cat against her body and buries her face in its smoky hair. Her voice gets childishly plaintive. She acts as if KAYA is not there*.) Alice, what is it that I want? To have somebody warm and fluffy near me. Somebody to squeeze me and talk silly. To blow into my neck like this. And never ask questions. Never ever. So I can tell him tales.

KAYA

How sweet. I'm good at telling tales myself. Right, Alice? (*She takes the cat away from her*.) We are quite happy just the two of us.

DEBBIE

Are you saying . . . ?

KAYA

I'm getting out of here.

DEBBIE

Leaving behind people who wished you nothing but good? Can't you figure how much it will hurt their feelings?

KAYA

Let me spare their feelings, if I must. I'll sneak out without "good-byes."

DEBBIE

Sneak out? Are you sure?

KAYA

What do you mean, am I sure?

DEBBIE

Nothing. Just asking. (*She gives KAYA a strange look and suddenly throws herself into her arms*.) Don't go don't go don't go!

(*Later. STRUDEL and KAYA. She is packing, or rather tossing in her things in a sort of frenzy*.)

STRUDEL

(*Stubbornly*.)

I didn't lock the door.

KAYA

And you don't mess with credit cards either.

STRUDEL

Who told you that?

KAYA

You didn't answer *my* question.

STRUDEL

(*Through his teeth*.)

Motherfucker.

KAYA

Enough is enough! I'm off! Where's the nearest gas station?

STRUDEL

There is only one.

KAYA

Prodigy Gas. How could I forget!

STRUDEL

And "prodigy" it is. Their super octane is 89, and their 87's too weak even as a drink.

KAYA

Oh yeah?

STRUDEL

Buy Winnie lunch, he might sell you the know-how.

KAYA

Are you saying it was Winnie who pulled this trick on me just because he is a cheat?

STRUDEL

I'm not saying anything.

KAYA

Oh but you are. Why?

STRUDEL

Maybe I need a favor.

KAYA

My credit card?

STRUDEL

(*Taking offense*.)

A ride.

KAYA

You need a ride?

STRUDEL

To town.

KAYA

It's your grandchildren, right? Right. Ready for another term for kidnapping?

STRUDEL

I'll just catch a glimpse of them.

KAYA

What do I care.

STRUDEL

He turned five today -- Jack. Got him a set of Power Rangers. I've thought it through. The kids are with the baby-sitter. I'll deliver it myself. There! (*He dons a wig and a fake mustache*.) I have this UPS thing. No one will know.

KAYA

And in the worst scenario they shoot you on sight. I can see the headlines: "STRUDEL KILLED BY FRIENDLY FIRE: A DAUGHTER AND FATHER STORY."

STRUDEL

Will you take me to the bus station?

KAYA

Well, what about your "family"? Tina? Debbie? (*He looks away*.) Sebastian. You don't want Sebastian to know. (*He shows signs of exasperation*.) What? Big Brother is watching? (*Addressing the bare wall much too loudly*.) Oh Big Brother, the All-Searching One! You won't pull my legs if I take your "son" Strudel to the bus station?

STRUDEL

(*Badly scared*.)

Please, don't . . .

KAYA

Then tell me.

STRUDEL

Tell you what?

KAYA

I'll take you to the bus station. (*Expressly, she shoves the suitcase back into her closet*.) When are you coming back?

STRUDEL

Five. In time for dinner.

KAYA

. . . and your "confession night". Well make sure to come up with a plausible story . . . how you've been abducted by the aliens dressed as local militia. You guys are good at telling stories. I'll pick you up, I promise. Eh bien? Sebastian is . . . ?

STRUDEL

A piano tuner.

KAYA

I know that much. He pulls the strings, what are they? Money? The threat of turning you in?

STRUDEL

(*Under his breath*.)

Please: you're asking for trouble.

KAYA

Don't flinch, Intelligence. I will take him down a peg or two.

STRUDEL

Why do you hate him?

KAYA

Why do you love him?

STRUDEL

I . . .

KAYA

Go on.

STRUDEL

It's none of your business.

KAYA

I see.

STRUDEL

You don't see nothing! Tina nearly lost her granddaughter, and who was there for her? Ahhh! And Winnie! Three years ago, a passing car would scare him shitless, he was completely off his base . . . and who put him back on track? Not to mention myself -- out of a dump and right into a paradise. Well, the paradise is costly and who is paying? Snug dinners with burning candles? An MPV for outings? Where would we be if not for Sebastian! He had put us back together, piece by piece, he had breezed life into us . . . .

KAYA

(*Mutters*.)

Saint Sebastian.

STRUDEL

Huh?

KAYA

Nothing.

STRUDEL

Exactly: You know nothing and you want to judge him!

KAYA

(*Lost in her thoughts*.)

Yeah, I would pay dearly to know more about him.

STRUDEL

(*Suddenly, almost a whisper*.)

Go.

KAYA

What did you say?

STRUDEL

Go. Leave. Now.

KAYA

And who will take you to the . . .

STRUDEL

Are you deaf? You might still be able to make it.

KAYA

(*An actress of the early sound films*.)

Kaya . . . the latest victim of Bluebeard!

STRUDEL

I'll be waiting for you outside. The best stories are in the morning paper. (*He bends for a copy that has been tucked under her door and tosses it on the bed*.) Tell them I'm off to see my war buddy. (*At the door*.) Are *you* good at telling stories?

KAYA

What do you think?

STRUDEL

I think you'll keep me good company.

(*After he is gone KAYA is standing for a few moments lost in thought, then picks up the newspaper. She scans the headlines until she hits the crime section.*)

KAYA

"A break-in on Main Street leaves police clueless." (*She sits on the rug and begins to read*.)

(*SEBASTIAN is in bed, TINA is at the window in a see-through nightgown*.)

TINA

(*Peering out from behind the curtain*.)

There she is.

SEBASTIAN

And Strudel?

TINA

With his duffel bag. Beside her car.

SEBASTIAN

The bitch is giving him a ride.

TINA

Looks like it.

SEBASTIAN

I said she'd fall for it. Honesty -- who can resist it? And from Strudel, to boot. Is it what they teach them in the army? "Your fly is undone . . . sir!"

TINA

In the army, they teach them tricks to fool the enemy.

SEBASTIAN

The bitch is a friend.

TINA

If you say so.

SEBASTIAN

She belongs here.

TINA

She's trouble.

(*The sound of a leaving car. TINA pulls the curtain, letting in disparaging sunlight*.)

SEBASTIAN

Untamed. (*He grimaces touching fresh scars on his upper arms left by KAYA*.) Could've been worse. Give her time.

TINA

It didn't have to be *her*. When we talked about "the seventh"--

SEBASTIAN

. . . not again . . .

TINA

Yes. It could be someone like Winnie.

SEBASTIAN

Boredom, the aftertaste of pleasure. I don't sleep with Winnie, not anymore, and you know that full well, my dear.

TINA

What I'm saying is it could have been another *man*, not a foxy little . . .

SEBASTIAN

Drop it.

TINA

(*A sigh of defeat*.)

And this trial . . .

SEBASTIAN

I may need your help there.

TINA

. . . it's madness!

SEBASTIAN

Oh yeah?

TINA

It will lead you nowhere. She may have that look . . . a slacker . . . but she sure is a wild thing.

SEBASTIAN

Young deer have brittle antlers.

TINA

No blood, please.

SEBASTIAN

I want you two to hang out together. Take her out shopping. Fill her in. She's a smart girl.

TINA

You can't keep her against her will, Sebastian. Tomorrow, she'll leave.

SEBASTIAN

Maybe not.

TINA

Oh? (*Intrigued, she is ready to cross to him, but he stops her right there*.)

SEBASTIAN

Stay put. Isn't that why you came to the window in your nightie?

TINA

You're not going to leave me for her?

SEBASTIAN

Fear not. For thy Maker is thine husband.

TINA

I messed up.

SEBASTIAN

. . . the key . . .

TINA

You said I should leave it in the key hole and Strudel would get it later.

SEBASTIAN

. . . but you couldn't help it. (*She nods*.) I'm sure you liked what you saw.

TINA

You're not angry with me?

SEBASTIAN

Now we can tell the Judge.

TINA

Tell the . . .

SEBASTIAN

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.

TINA

It could kill him.

SEBASTIAN

Mm-hmn.

TINA

Perhaps not. He is a strong man.

SEBASTIAN

The mighty Judge.

TINA

The day we were expecting you, after your release, he asked for his gown. It was to be his grand entrance. Same old judge you saw last in the courtroom. Except now he was in the wheelchair. He rolled out on the front porch -- formal tie, black gown. His gavel too. Mid-July, sweltering heat. You weren't on the 4 o'clock bus. Nor on the next one. I suggested that we wait in the house, but he flatly refused. Wouldn't allow me to get him a glass of iced tea. I was not quite sure what it was all about. And then I figured out. He wanted you to say "thank you." For the harsh sentence. For the five years spent behind bars. For seeing it his way, finally. A spineless man.

(*Pause*.)

You showed up . . . a white linen suit complete with a cavalier hat and a buttonhole. Your new shoes squeaked as you walked up the steps. You did have a little suitcase but when you opened it we saw bottles of Champagne! Nothing but. You shook hands. You didn't seem to notice the old fool's attire . . . until the cork popped and the wine gushed out making a mess of his immaculately-ironed gown.

(*Pause*.)

And I remember thinking: Some changes are under way.

(*DEBBIE steps out into a small hall separating her room from WINNIE'S and is about to knock on a half-open door when she hears irregular panting from the bathroom. She comes over and listens with a puzzled expression*.)

DEBBIE

Winnie? (*Panting stops for a second, then resumes*.) What are you *doing*, Winnie?

(*Light on WINNIE in the bathroom, in front of the mirror, exercising his diaphragm*.)

WINNIE

What do you think?

DEBBIE

Do you have a moment?

(*He does the scale, then:*)

WINNIE

Is it your caaaaaaarrr? (*He sticks out his tongue to check his tonsils*.)

DEBBIE

Win*nie*!

WINNIE

Deb*bie*! I know how we can give the Judge a *real* treat. Set a car theft alarm that would go off by itself every half hour.

DEBBIE

You done? (*She won't leave and he knows it but he is in no hurry to get out*.)

WINNIE

I can't believe it. This gray hair, where does it come from? I mean . . . where does it come from? I'm going to pluck it out and I don't care if it grows back. (*Fumbles with his pincers*.) Do you think it can grow back? Ah well. Ouch! (*He plucks the hair out*.) That hurts!

DEBBIE

Winnie, are you going to keep me waiting at the door?

(*The door opens as if by magic to reveal WINNIE equipped with mascara and brush*.)

WINNIE

If you don't mind. (*Having raised her arm to hold the box so he can see himself in the small mirror, he proceeds with the ritual*.) I am all yours.

DEBBIE

Listen . . . (*She goes to stage whisper*.) Do you think of . . . going places?

WINNIE

Can you do me a favor and stop fussing until I'm done?

DEBBIE

You know what I'm saying?

WINNIE

You mean like moving out? (*Her entire body language expresses her dismay, as he rolls his eyes in frustration*.) Debbie, if you can't stop fussing altogether do you think you could maybe involve in the process only **some** body parts? Anyway, why move out? There aren't many idiots out there who will give you room and board just to get a smack of your dirty laundry. What do you think? (*He shows her his makeup lines*.)

DEBBIE

(*A perfunctory glance*.)

It may end soon.

WINNIE

Quite possible.

DEBBIE

I don't like this whole idea.

WINNIE

(*Back to work*.)

Oh it's gotta be fun.

DEBBIE

I'm not so sure. Things can get out of hand.

WINNIE

Sebastian knows what he is doing.

DEBBIE

Jester's vest?

WINNIE

Will you get it done in time?

DEBBIE

The *blindfold?*

(*There is no way she could stand still. Shaking his head, WINNIE takes his mascara box back from her. He drops his playful tone*.)

WINNIE

Hey, what's wrong with you today, sis?

DEBBIE

Let's get away! We could make it!

WINNIE

Go where? You can't get away . . . as long as he is alive. (*There is a silent question in her eyes*.) I have a plan, yes. (*She wants more*.) Later, Debbie, later.

DEBBIE

Winnie, I'm scared.

WINNIE

Hush, baby. (*He is stroking her head like a little girl's*.) Tomorrow he will let her go and it will be back to the good old days, honey pie. Hey! I have a lovely something for you. (*Catching a suspicious look.*) I never wore it, I swear to God!

DEBBIE

(*She is not in a laughing mood today*.)

Maybe I worry too much. Things haven't gone well for me lately.

WINNIE

I know someone who will smooth it out for you.

DEBBIE

And who might that be?

WINNIE

Well. There's this girl with a strange name around here.

DEBBIE

Kaya? Are you out of your mind?

WINNIE

I don't recall hearing her scream for help last night. So why wouldn't she do it with others . . . for a stipend? It's more fun than dog-watching a cash-register.

DEBBIE

Well . . .

WINNIE

And you know what?

DEBBIE

What?

WINNIE

You cut down on your phone bills.

DEBBIE

How can I possibly love such monster? (*She offers her cheek, and he plants a smooch. DEBBIE makes for the door*.) Have to work on this stupid vest.

WINNIE

Hey!

(*He indicates there is a trace of lipstick left on her cheek. She wipes it off, makes a "naughty naughty" gesture, and leaves. WINNIE enters his room. He is shocked to see KAYA there*.)

KAYA

I knocked. The door was open.

WINNIE

Did you . . . ? (*She nods: I heard it all, yes*.) What brought you here? (*She produces today's newspaper by way of explanation*.) And?

KAYA

That I hope to learn from you. The article is marked.

WINNIE

(*Wide-eyed*.)

Criminal section! A real mystery? In our hinterland? Finally!

KAYA

A third burglary in Beaverdam . . . a tenth including the neighboring towns. One style: people leave for vacation, their homes are cleaned out. At the drop of the hat.

WINNIE

(*He studies it thoughtfully*.)

Sounds bad . . . and they don't seem to have a clue.

KAYA

(*A qualifier*.)

The police.

WINNIE

Well yes.

KAYA

What about you?

WINNIE

Me?

KAYA

You want to play hide-and-seek, Winnie? I have a feeling Sebastian would like to hear more about your plan to get rid of him. I don't think he'd have much trouble squeezing the details out of you. (*WINNIE is a wreck. He is short for breath*.) Can I give you some water? (*Shaking his head no, he slumps in a chair and swallows some pill. He closes his eyes and tries to take a deep breath*.) Better?

(*WINNIE starts as though he got an electric shock. He stares at KAYA, opening and closing his mouth like an automaton, and then he begins to shake all over. We have a glimpse of a former WINNIE, wretched, fear-stricken, a man recently described by STRUDEL. Small wonder KAYA treats him like a very sick person*.)

KAYA

Winnie, he won't find out, I promise. But you must do something for me as well. Will you help me? Good. Fear not, everything is going to be just fine. Here, drink it all. (*She has poured him a glass of water which he drinks as told*.) I'll ask you a couple questions, and you will answer them, very briefly, okay? (*He nods, a bob-head doll*.) Does Sebastian have something to do with it?

WINNIE

Yes.

KAYA

But wasn't he home yesterday when it happened? I don't get it. He doesn't burglarize himself, does he?

WINNIE

No.

KAYA

So what is he? A mastermind? A tipper-off? (*WINNIE nods dully*.) A tipper-off, I see. No I don't. I don't see how he does it. Winnie the Pooh, could you tip *me* off? It's going to be between you and me, I swear. What's the story?

WINNIE

Piano . . .

KAYA

Piano?

(*He nods. She could jump to the ceiling*.)

KAYA

He tunes their pianos. "Surveying the terrain." It's how he learns when they're leaving. Winnie! You are a genius! (*Overjoyed, she is pulling him about*.) Oh I'm sorry. Why don't you take it easy? Let me give you a hand.

(*He brushes her aside and makes for the bed on his own*.)

WINNIE

A little rest . . .

KAYA

Very good.

WINNIE

Tonight, a special dinner, then the trial . . .

KAYA

(*Assuming that he is delirious*.)

Yeah, yeah. You snooze a sec. (*She covers him with a spread*.) Feel better? There you go. Get some sleep, Winnie. (*She tiptoes out*.)

(*JUDGE BROWN in his study. He thinks aloud as he writes.*)

JUDGE

The reason our penal system is not working is it ignores man's nature. You can't beat reflexes. (*He begins to write*.) Our small community, within three years, has proved to all Doubting Thomases that things can work out fine once you have instilled fear in the criminal mind. They dread each other and they dread Sebastian and Sebastian dreads me. A solid foundation for a happy family.

(*Evening. KAYA is frozen in mild shock. Other tenants, forming a line, are ready to greet her. TINA hits the button on the tape recorder. Flourish. STRUDEL unfolds a scroll and reads his verse*.)

STRUDEL

When night is dark and thunder dreary,

Open your door to a stranger weary,
He will remember you till his death--

CHORUS
Warmed beside your hearth.

STRUDEL
Never judge a man by his clothes,
The food you cook you can share both,
Then show him a place where he may rest in peace--

CHORUS
Beside your mantelpiece!

(*KAYA stands at a loss. The pause is getting awkward. DEBBIE gives WINNIE a shove. Though he looks a bit sluggish he says his words cheerfully and clearly*.)

WINNIE
Dear Grasshopper, we are saddened to see you leave our sunny glade for some dark rainforest. You will always be remembered by--

DEBBIE
. . . Locust . . .

STRUDEL
. . . Horse-fly . . .

WINNIE
. . . Bark Beetle . . .

TINA
. . . and Ladybird . . .

WINNIE
--not to mention some *rare* species of our tight family-- (*SEBASTIAN bows graciously*.) Wherever you are, remember you have a home in Beaverdam.

TINA
. . . but . . .

DEBBIE
. . . but . . .

STRUDEL
. . . but . . .

SEBASTIAN

. . . BUT! . . .

WINNIE

At least we hope you will stay after meal for our crickety and buzzy . . .

JUDGE

. . . “no hard liquor please”. . .

SEBASTIAN

. . . small chatter.

STRUDEL

Amen. To the table! To the table!

DEBBIE

What about the *presents?!*

KAYA

Presents? But I--

TINA

Shhh. You don’t want to insult us. (*TINA gently takes her by the hand and walks her to the coffee table which displays souvenirs wrapped in tinsel paper*.) You must certainly enjoy getting presents?

KAYA

At least let me guess who they come from. (*Opens a jewel box*.) Golden key?

SEBASTIAN

To every door.

(*They all, except for SEBASTIAN, close in for a better view*.)

KAYA

Tina? (*Their eyes meet*.)

TINA

Well . . .

KAYA

You guys. (*She is unwrapping presents, hardly hesitating to name a sender*.) Red lantern.

TINA

Isn't that pretty!

KAYA

Debbie? And *this* . . . from the Judge. (*She is spinning a charm with a gilded letter* L *round her finger*.) L for "love"?

TINA

There are many L-words, honey.

KAYA

What else? (*Reads the title on cassette.*) "Your favorite arias." Strudel!

STRUDEL

You like it?

KAYA

I'm stunned. (*Slips it in her pocket.*) And this is . . . (*It is Victoria's Secret underwear.*) Winnie, do you mind if I try them on later?

DEBBIE

Yeah, you better spare Winnie the shock.

KAYA

That leaves . . . Pip. (*She discovers a clay pipe in the shape of a duck, blows into it.*) A tooter?

SEBASTIAN

A duck-call. (*He aims at an imaginary bird on the fly.*) Bang!

KAYA

Well, what can I say . . .

DEBBIE

How about, "To the table?"

CHORUS

To the table! To the table!

KAYA

I'm speechless.

(*They all sit round the table and with thoughtful affection serve each other tidbits. DEBBIE makes a show of herself by eating heartily.*)

STRUDEL

Debbie, I keep forgetting. Are you already *off* your diet or about to get *on* it?

DEBBIE

Strudel, if I had nothing but your garden to live on I would've kicked the bucket.

SEBASTIAN

What's *that*?

TINA

Ah, that is stewed carrot with raisins. Tsimes, in Yiddish. Is that how you pronounce it, Kaya? It's lenten dinner, folks.

SEBASTIAN

Mmmmm. A piece or two for the bystanders. Some luck, huh Winnie?

TINA

Strudel, your pickles!

STRUDEL

(*Putting one on KAYA'S plate*.)

My specialty. A pity you can't stay.

KAYA

Actually--

SEBASTIAN

We understand. Big city, interesting propositions . . . and here, backwoods, tedium . . .

DEBBIE

Here too one can find . . . interesting propositions.

TINA

. . . a burglary, at best. Remember that mansion behind the bank? White columns? It was robbed. The owners left for vacation, and that same night, boom: jewelry, antiques. John, you tell me: Who told them there was no one home?

JUDGE

Neighbors?

TINA

Neighbors! They were not at home themselves. And a month ago, on Elm Street, same thing! I'm getting new locks tomorrow.

(*Her exaggerated fear suggests it is some kind of a put-on at the JUDGE'S expense. But to proceed with it they need a royal sanction*.)

SEBASTIAN

We don't have a piano.

(*There it is! Now they all, save WINNIE who looks antsy, can go for it. It is a shorthand among people who share many secrets*.)

STRUDEL

Well that's true.

DEBBIE

We've robbed ourselves!

TINA

Really.

JUDGE

What does a piano have to do with it?

DEBBIE

They break in where there is a piano. It's what they said at the hair salon.

STRUDEL

Right. They play it and then, inspired, they make off with the loot.

DEBBIE

An *uplifting* tune. And the police clueless for two years!

JUDGE

So it *is* a joke.

KAYA

Maybe there is something to it, Judge.

TINA

What are you talking about?

KAYA

They don't take pianos, do they? Which means . . .

DEBBIE

Yes?

KAYA

A piano is nothing but an instrument.

TINA

How true!

KAYA

. . . an instrument for surveying the terrain.

STRUDEL

Surveying the terrain?

TINA

She doesn't know what she is talking about.

SEBASTIAN

Go on. We're all ears.

KAYA

It's an old story: takes one man to point to the right house and a couple more to clean it out.

SEBASTIAN

Any idea who could possibly be pointing?

KAYA

How about . . . a tuner?

JUDGE

What--!

SEBASTIAN

I see.

(*Pause. She has spoiled their game.*)

WINNIE

You're not a good eater, Grasshopper.

KAYA

I don't feel well.

STRUDEL

Intimate details.

DEBBIE

Uh oh.

SEBASTIAN

What Strudel is saying is her body aches because she's leaving us behind.

KAYA

My body's distress is no one's business.

SEBASTIAN

Got to the core of it. Hit the nail on the head. Naked truth.

JUDGE

What's going on, I don't--

TINA

They're playing the fool, dear.

JUDGE

I'll be damned. I can never tell with you folks.

SEBASTIAN

Some more horseplay, then the princess mounts her horse and clip clop clip clop off she goes.

KAYA

I'm not leaving.

(*Beat*.)

TINA

I see.

KAYA

Do you mind?

TINA

No . . . I . . .

JUDGE

We are happy to have you, Kaya. Aren't we all?

(*Hostile silence*.)

KAYA

It's great to be part of a loving family.

DEBBIE

But what about the presents?

WINNIE

And the poem? Strudel wrote this beautiful poem.

KAYA

I was trying to tell you all along. Yeah well, it's kind of funny.

SEBASTIAN

And it'll get funnier, I'm sure.

STRUDEL

Well then. (*Crosses to KAYA.*) My present.

KAYA

What--?

STRUDEL

I want my present back.

(*She gets the cassette out of her pocket. He grabs it and leaves without as much as a word.*)

DEBBIE

Oo la la!

(*KAYA begins to hum a tune.*)

JUDGE

Excuse me.

(*He wheels off to catch up with STRUDEL. Leaving table, DEBBIE and WINNIE put their heads on each other's shoulder and for some time they stand still as two horses would. KAYA smirks already knowing the ritual.*)

DEBBIE

I'm not reclaiming *my* present. How about you, Winnie?

WINNIE

She can wear them, as far as I'm concerned.

TINA

No one even tried my tsimes.

(*DEBBIE gives WINNIE a friendly tap on the back and gently moves away only to find herself in TINA'S embrace. Then WINNIE finds comfort on TINA'S breast as DEBBIE leaves.*)

WINNIE

I bought you new fish.

TINA

You did?

WINNIE

Guess what color their fins are.

TINA

Red? . . . Black? . . . I give up.

WINNIE

They. Don't. Have. Fins. (*On their way out.*)

TINA

They don't?

(*KAYA and SEBASTIAN alone at the table.*)

SEBASTIAN

"This my daughter was dead, and is alive again . . ."

KAYA

". . . she was lost, and is found . . ."

SEBASTIAN

Hmn. (*He fills the glasses and gives one to KAYA.*)

KAYA

". . . And they began to be merry."

(*They drink. Pause.*)

SEBASTIAN

So what made you change your mind, if I may ask?

KAYA

Curiosity?

SEBASTIAN

"And they learn to be idle, idle and curious, speaking things which they ought not."

KAYA

I thought you encouraged everyone to speak up.

SEBASTIAN

Maybe I did.

KAYA

I ran into sheriff today. He looked worried. Mr. Quilty, whose house had been robbed the other night, appears to have a brother in Washington, D.C. A big wig.

SEBASTIAN

Go on.

KAYA

"His eyes showed a spark of interest." No, I didn't ask sheriff if Mr. Quilty's piano had been tuned recently if you're wondering.

SEBASTIAN

I'm wondering . . . what I could do for you.

KAYA

How about a nice story? Something from the heart? Enough of "fish" and "bonbons."

SEBASTIAN

You want a confession?

KAYA

Yeah! "A confession from Sebastian."

SEBASTIAN

All right. (*He is thinking. KAYA props her chin, a trustful child listening to the Arabian Nights*.) In the coop, there was this guy. A trigger man. Held them by the balls. Tells me: "Time to clean the wind mill." - "Beg your pardon?" - "Your wind mill, pal." So we meet in the laundry room. Tête-à-tête. His do-alls stand watch. I get my pants down, and so does he. Well. The tile floor is wet, he takes a bad fall. The guards come running: What the hell?! An accident, I say. And the do-alls won't sing. So I walk.

KAYA

I've heard better stories.

SEBASTIAN

You're too good. The surprise you gave me the very first night . . . .

KAYA

Did I?

SEBASTIAN

I was on cloud nine.

KAYA

You are drunk.

SEBASTIAN

Did you shave it for me?

KAYA

Dirty pig!

SEBASTIAN

So smooth, like a little girl's. It must tickle an awful lot. I did it to myself, believe it or not, when I was a boy. It was a mess. The cuts I didn't mind, but the itch! Drove me nuts for weeks. It heightens the pleasure for women, they say. Is that true?

(*All words have been said. They stare at each other as if to see who will blink first*.)

(*Evening. Sitting room. Candles and incense. Wine and Butterfingers. KAYA brought in Coca-Cola but hasn't opened it yet.*)

JUDGE

You're putting me on.

SEBASTIAN

We're putting on a trial. Will you play Justice for us?

VOICES

Yes! Yes! Please! Please!

JUDGE

Play . . . ?

SEBASTIAN

You know the part, Judge.

TINA

John, really. We counted on you.

JUDGE

Well, if you insist . . .

VOICES

We do! Yessir!

SEBASTIAN

Winnie?

(*WINNIE ties a blindfold over JUDGE BROWN'S eyes, DEBBIE slips a jester's vest over his shoulders, TINA puts a squeaking toy hammer in his hand. They turn to KAYA.*)

KAYA

Oh! Am I asked to speak before this high court? (*Putting her hand on the can.*) I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth! (*She opens it with a popping sound and takes a lusty drink while others watch silently.*)

JUDGE

Counselor, you may cross-examine the witnesses.

SEBASTIAN

Thank you, your honor. Strudel, is it true that this young lady read your scalp like a map?

STRUDEL

Sure did.

SEBASTIAN

Is that how she learned that you got your discharge from the army?

STRUDEL

She must have . . . yes.

SEBASTIAN

And that your daughter had driven you out of your house and home?

STRUDEL

. . . yes.

SEBASTIAN

Had anyone mentioned it to her?

DEBBIE

Mention or not, she knows it all. Remember the presents?

(*We hear voices: "Yeah! She knew it all!" Calling for order, the Judge brings down his*

toy hammer with a funny squeak.)

SEBASTIAN

Your honor, the defendant claims she can read the past.

KAYA

Maybe yours is not so difficult to read?

JUDGE

The defendant, you don't have my permission to speak. Proceed, counselor.

SEBASTIAN

Tina, did she read your palm?

TINA

The details she told me! It was uncanny!

SEBASTIAN

She must be a clairvoyant, your honor.

KAYA

. . . and I can see trouble coming.

JUDGE

(*Pounding his toy gavel*.)

The defendant, this is my last admonition! (*To SEBASTIAN*.) Anything else?

SEBASTIAN

Winnie, will you tell the court what happened last night?

WINNIE

(*He is avoiding KAYA'S eyes*.)

First I thought I was dreaming it. Like you think you've woken up, you know, when in fact . . .

SEBASTIAN

(*Impatiently*.)

You heard footsteps, didn't you?

WINNIE

(*Very nervous*.)

In the kitchen. I went to look, and there she was, making herself a cheeseburger -- and swearing.

SEBASTIAN

Go on.

WINNIE

I ask her, “What’s up?” And she goes, “I lost my key to the blankety blank front door. Why do you blankety blank lock it anyway!” I say, “How did you get in?” And she says . . .

SEBASTIAN

Yes?

WINNIE

She says, “I flew through the chimney.”

JUDGE

Through the chimney?

KAYA

Anything wrong with that?

SEBASTIAN

How original. Did it take you long to learn? You have manuals, don’t you. (*Turns to DEBBIE*.) Debbie, when you paid her a visit there was a book lying on her bed?

DEBBIE

A ragged paperback.

SEBASTIAN

And the title was . . . ?

DEBBIE

Witch Hammer.

SEBASTIAN

Witch Hammer. And . . . ?

DEBBIE

I opened it. There was something about *demons*.

SEBASTIAN

Demons, you said?

DEBBIE

I could pee my pants. Excuse me, your honor.

SEBASTIAN

Demons, hunh. (*To STRUDEL*.) And how’s your hand, old man?

STRUDEL

Same.

SEBASTIAN

Numb?

(*STRUDEL is moving his fingers awkwardly.*)

STRUDEL

I'm seeing a doctor tomorrow.

SEBASTIAN

Did she hold your palm in hers?

STRUDEL

Old ass!

SEBASTIAN

Why would she do that?

STRUDEL

(*Under his breath.*)

She charged . . .

JUDGE

The court can't hear you.

STRUDEL

She charged me with her energy.

SEBASTIAN

Her energy. (*Nodding his head agreeably.*) You must be aware that a hand can wither after it's been held by . . . you know?

(*STRUDEL is staring at his spread fingers. KAYA chortles.*)

SEBASTIAN

Well *I* took precautions. One day you have a visitor in a woman's shape, and the next he is off with your soul. Aren't we lucky to see through the. . . (*He makes a theatrical pause allowing the reality to sink in.*)

DEBBIE

(*Nearly breathless.*)

The devil!

(*They move away from KAYA.*)

KAYA

Oooouuhhhh. (*She makes an imitation of "horns" while protruding her lower lip fiercely.*) Don't I look like the Wicked One?

SEBASTIAN

Your honor, the defendant has acknowledged the fact that she is a witch.

KAYA

A warning. If you cross me I'll disappear leaving such stink and stench you won't even touch your Butterfingers.

SEBASTIAN

We could run a different test.

KAYA

Such as?

SEBASTIAN

You're not going to kick, are you?

KAYA

Why don't you tie me up?

SEBASTIAN

Well. (*To STRUDEL.*) Do we have a rope?

STRUDEL

Yessir. (*He produces a rope from his pocket.*) Strudel has all you need.

KAYA

There's a kind soul. (*She stands upright.*) Tie me up, good people!

JUDGE

(*Out of character.*)

You are a handful.

(*He wants to remove the blindfold but TINA restrains him gently, while STRUDEL and WINNIE are tying KAYA'S wrists and ankles with a rope.*)

SEBASTIAN

I checked that paperback of yours myself, you know. Couldn't help it. What *I* laid my eyes on was how you could identify an evil spirit. A good practical advice: you throw a

suspect into deep water . . . he swims out, he's a true werewolf.

DEBBIE

But there's no deep *water* for miles around!

TINA

We could bury her? I mean, if she *is* a werewolf she'd still be able to get out?

DEBBIE

Bury her?

SEBASTIAN

Strudel, do you have a shovel?

STRUDEL

Sure do. The shovel, the flashlight.

(*MEN carry KAYA away, followed by DEBBIE and TINA*.)

DEBBIE

How come she's not even kicking?

TINA

She'll break loose, the witch. (*They leave*.)

(*Changing guards, SEBASTIAN has wrapped his arms around JUDGE BROWN in a tender vise*.)

SEBASTIAN

My closing argument, your honor, *then* the verdict. I can see you are pumped up, like in the good old days. What would you have me start with? "Fear." Something this quiet, serene life has erased from our minds. Or, maybe, "Truth." Confessions. Candles. Absolution. Not to mention the choral part. We were working our asses off to make you happy, Judge. You know how much we love you. Hmm. Looks like we've slipped into our special category--

(*Pause*.)

"Love." When we were laying ground rules for this small community, three years ago, you entreated me to love them as myself. And I did. I truly loved them. But Tina . . . ah Tina above them all. How many times? Let me see. I spent three hundred and twenty-seven weeks behind bars . . . I must be pretty close to the targeted number.

(*Pause*.)

It was a joke, your honor. (*He eases his grip, but the JUDGE seems to take no notice*.) Thanks anyway.

(*Left alone, JUDGE BROWN is immobile. Then he comes to his senses, rips the blindfold from his eyes and sets his wheelchair in motion. He gets to the phone and dials 911. He opens his mouth only to produce unintelligible, mooing sounds.*)

ACT THREE: SUNDAY

A chilly, windy morning. THE BROWNS' backyard displays an array of boulders in arbitrary configuration, a half-built gazebo, and what appears to be a marker, or a pile of smaller stones. On the boulders -- there are twelve of them altogether -- five people are resting. They look like someone who has sobered up after a crazy party. Long pause.

TINA

The old fool.

DEBBIE

Can you *believe* it?

TINA

He'd turn himself in to see justice served.

DEBBIE

Not if he was babbling like the sheriff said he did over the phone. (*Mimics the JUDGE*.) Ahhwuundehhhrepaaaahhhhtehcrrrraaaaahhhmmmmm.

WINNIE

"I want to report a crime." The sheriff wouldn't have guessed in a million years.

DEBBIE

He came over regardless.

STRUDEL

You owe me one. If I hadn't been quick enough to untie her . . .

DEBBIE

Your medal's on its way: a serial number on your prison garb.

STRUDEL

Shut up.

DEBBIE

The sheriff! He all but sniffed that open grave! Like we've uncovered a *treasure* box or something!

SEBASTIAN

A baby-grand.

TINA

There you are.

(*They cheer up a bit, unable to resist doing an encore of what happened earlier tonight*.)

WINNIE

"Sheriff, will you give us a hand with our Japanese garden?"

STRUDEL

"We have the stones ready, sir."

TINA

"But first we build a gazebo. Don't we, Kaya? She knows it all. The gazebo, you see, is a cap of darkness. You retreat to the gazebo, you're invisible."

DEBBIE

(*As SHERIFF, suspiciously*.)

"What's that rope for?"

TINA

"It's a measuring rope. The stones -- there are twelve of them -- must be arranged in a certain pattern. Right, Kaya? But here is a trick. Now if you give me a hand, sir, I'll show you . . ."

DEBBIE

(*As SHERIFF*.)

"Some other time perhaps."

SEBASTIAN

"You're not leaving yet?"

DEBBIE

(*As SHERIFF*.)

"It's been a long day."

STRUDEL

"You have a pleasant evening, sir."

DEBBIE

(*As SHERIFF*.)

"Well, again, keep the Judge away from that phone. You don't want a sick man to mess with the police."

TINA

"I'll keep my eye on him. Sorry for the trouble."

WINNIE

(*The spontaneity of a seven-year-old*.)

Where's sheriff? (*Searching about him*.) He is gone!

DEBBIE

(*Dark and gloomy*.)

I wonder if he is not lying snug in that damn gazebo over there putting on tape all we have to say.

(*Downcast, they lapse back into silence*.)

SEBASTIAN

I talked to her mother.

DEBBIE

You *didn't!*

SEBASTIAN

Called her up.

DEBBIE

Well?

SEBASTIAN

She was never married to a Mormon. Kaya's father is very much alive. They have *two* other siblings and *no* Jewish background to speak of, unless of course you count the Temple in their back yard. (*Pause*.) Oh, and the Chevy. They gave it to her on her eighteenth birthday. Spoiled her rotten.

DEBBIE

Well well.

TINA

The bitch.

SEBASTIAN
The engagement trip to Key West drew a big guffaw.

STRUDEL
The girl's never been to Florida?

DEBBIE
She was never engaged to Holden?

TINA
I'd be surprised if there was Holden to begin with.

SEBASTIAN
It's a name out of a J. D. Salinger book. Her source of inspiration.

STRUDEL
I'll be damned.

WINNIE
(*The only one who hasn't taken it as a personal insult*.)
Smart girl!

TINA
And John thought she was too good for us. A model student.

DEBBIE
A fucking *liar!*

TINA
Who would have thought.

WINNIE
Here's someone who would give the Judge a run for his money.

SEBASTIAN
Too late.

(*Ponderous silence*.)

TINA
At least we did everything according to her will. Stones, gazebo . . . the marker.

DEBBIE
Working our asses off on Easter Sunday. No kidding!

STRUDEL

Eleven.

DEBBIE

What?

STRUDEL

The stones. Can't see the twelfth one.

TINA

Are you sure?

STRUDEL

Check it out.

(*They all count the stones in sight and come up with the same result. We hear "whoa's" and "gee's."*)

DEBBIE

But that's im*pos*sible!

STRUDEL

See?

DEBBIE

How on earth did she conjure it?

SEBASTIAN

(*Pointing to the ground plan*.)

Give credit to the devil.

WINNIE

The Japanese devil!

(*He grabs a stick, holding it in both hands like a sword. He slashes and jabs and swirls in a ritualistic samurai dance to the cheers of the company. WINNIE is happy: for the first time since he fell in a trap he feels free. In the middle of his routine, a spotlight discovers KAYA on the back porch, pushing the wheelchair with JUDGE BROWN down the ramp*.)

KAYA

He was telling me about his granddaughter. "Aaaahhoooohhaaaahhhhh." I got it. (*She is talking to herself. WINNIE has frozen. They turn to listen*.) The poor thing is a fish. Pokes her nose against the glass. No fish food for her. (*She tucks in the plaid covering*

the JUDGE.) Then, he falls asleep. What a baby: he won't part with his gavel! Needs some fresh air. Shhhhh, we don't want to wake him up.

(*The audience will get it not from KAYA'S monologue, but rather from the way she is spoken to, that the girl has lost her mind*.)

TINA

We'll be quiet.

WINNIE

How do you like our gazebo?

STRUDEL

A day's work. We've been trying to decide the color -- white or green?

KAYA

White or green.

STRUDEL

Right. I'll see about the seedlings myself. We may want to plow the vegetable garden.

DEBBIE

Who needs your garden anyways!

STRUDEL

. . . to have more room. I'm thinking apple trees and pears.

TINA

How about cherry?

STRUDEL

Yeah. K-Mart is iffy, much too expensive, and you just never know if they're going to take root. I'll buy them from Jack, Jack is a sure thing. Next spring, they will be in blossom.

DEBBIE

Next spring?

STRUDEL

You bet.

(*KAYA is stroking the marker, which creates some tension*.)

WINNIE

Anything wrong?

DEBBIE

We followed your instructions.

TINA

. . . a pyramid, five feet tall . . .

STRUDEL

If you don't like the stones, we can get something else. Right, Winnie?

WINNIE

There is a quarry out there. Sandstone.

DEBBIE

There you go!

WINNIE

We'll make a run, Strudel and I, no problem.

SEBASTIAN

After the church service. We should be getting dressed pretty soon.

TINA

(*To KAYA.*)

It's going to be babel there.

DEBBIE

But it won't take long. Two hours?

WINNIE

There's Breakfast with the Arts on PBS at ten, showcasing the Kirov Ballet. Want me to turn it on for you?

KAYA

I'm going to the sheriff's.

(*A bomb went off. Who said she was mad? Suddenly all cards got mixed up. Their faces betray fear, but also a determination to get off the hook at all costs.*)

DEBBIE

Don't look at *me* like I set you up.

STRUDEL

It's what Debbie does best.

DEBBIE

I *fixed* her up, OK? It was Winnie's idea. (*To WINNIE*.) *You* urged me to bring her in. "She is a looker, just what we need to play off Sebastian." Kaya and Tina, a carrot and a stick.

TINA

Faggot!

WINNIE

You mean I don't have flushes? I'll take it.

TINA

And what else can you take? "A looker" hasn't seen you yet in women's underwear. (*To KAYA*.) You've missed out big.

WINNIE

She's missed out on a bigger one. She didn't see someone with a master key lock her up with a man.

SEBASTIAN

You're going to regret this, Winnie-boy.

TINA

(*To SEBASTIAN*.)

I was crazy to do it for you!

SEBASTIAN

Don't work yourself into a snit, pussy willow.

TINA

I want my bonds. I want the mortgage. You've robbed us!!

SEBASTIAN

Shhh.

TINA

Robbed!!! And if I tell John . . .

(*They turn to look at JUDGE BROWN, who shows no sign of interest*.)

KAYA

I think I'll take Alice along so she can have some fun.

SEBASTIAN

Who is Alice?

DEBBIE

Her cat. A **toy**.

KAYA

Sheriff has a Persian. Same age as my Alice.

TINA

(*Under her breath*.)

She **is** not right in her head.

SEBASTIAN

Kaya, and what are you going to talk about, you and sheriff?

(*But they are no longer there, as far as she is concerned. She is standing, lost in thought, before the marker. Then she smiles, remembering something*.)

KAYA

Once I'd broken a plate from a set and laid the blame on my brother. Dad said, "What I won't tolerate in this house is a lie." But when we confessed our little crimes, we would be locked up in the dark room. Thinking of the angel who never failed to tell the truth. For he never did anything to be ashamed of. We had absolute faith in that angel. Up to the age of five. (*They are listening intently. Finally she notices that she is not alone*.) You buried her, didn't you? Said all the good words?

(*SEBASTIAN comes forward, the rest of them join him at the marker just in case*.)

SEBASTIAN

Today we are saying our "good-byes" to Kaya, a happy child. Innocent she left this hub of sin. Blameless and harmless in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, amongst whom she shined as light in the world. Miss she will the highlights of her life. Her own rape. Betrayal and humiliation. The things we of the ill fortune must enjoy daily. But the comfort: as we carry our cross, another soul is en route to the land of the ignorant.

KAYA

Bye, love.

(*They all go to her, one after another, offering their condolences*.)

SEBASTIAN

You have my profound admiration. It took a lot of courage.

TINA

You can always rely on us.

STRUDEL

I'll do anything I can, young lady.

DEBBIE

Should you decide to make easy money I'd be happy to network for you.

WINNIE

Grasshopper. (*He gives her a big hug*.)

(*They are ready to go inside when SEBASTIAN'S commanding voice gets their attention: Is this some new game?*)

SEBASTIAN

Leaving unrepented? "And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child." So that's what it has come down to? (*They shuffle their feet as they listen with puzzled expression to his impassioned speech.*) Haven't you noticed that the bottom has fallen off your life? Look at you cowering in the wind. So much for your strength. Trembling you stand, your heart a beheaded bird. What are you waiting for? God never intended to have you carry your sins around. Don't you know that your sins soil his reputation?

CHORUS

Aye!

SEBASTIAN

Not him, who is pure, but his reputation in the eyes of the world. Who are you to taint his glory? I say, scorch your ego, as David did when he said "I have sinned"!

CHORUS

I have sinned, my Lord.

SEBASTIAN

Praise the living God, as Isaiah did, and He will show you the Promised Land.

CHORUS

Hallelujah!

SEBASTIAN

Sing and may God's blazing light penetrate the darkest corner of your depraved heart.

CHORUS

Amen!

(*SEBASTIAN'S hand tips off an avalanche of "Dies Irae" from Handel's Requiem Mass. KAYA alone takes no part in singing: she sits on the boulder, her face contorted in an*

attempt to penetrate the meaning of words. The singing is over.)

SEBASTIAN

Aren't you proud of us, Judge, on this Easter Sunday? (*They briefly look at JUDGE BROWN*.) All here and never stronger in our faith.

CHORUS

Yea!

SEBASTIAN

Our will, a rock; our heart, a flame.

CHORUS

Oh yea!

SEBASTIAN

Holding up the blazing sword even as the Wicked One, mortified, crawls away on his belly.

CHORUS

Hallelujah!

SEBASTIAN

And here we are to do it again.

(*They disperse and rest themselves by sitting down on the boulders*.)

SEBASTIAN

Winnie?

WINNIE

(*Starting*.)

Yes?

SEBASTIAN

You wanted to talk about Gee Gee.

(*Here it is, the retribution! WINNIE all but shrinks. He hangs his head. He forces himself to speak, but he is struggling*.)

WINNIE

She raised me as her own child. Never slapped me or anything. She was good to me.

STRUDEL

(*Doubtfully*.)

Stepmother?

WINNIE

She gave me money for the amusement park.

TINA

You once said you were afraid to stay at home with her.

WINNIE

Yes, but that was something else.

DEBBIE

Well what was it? (*WINNIE is staring at his feet*.) You feel embarrassed to talk about it? (*He nods.*) You did something shameful? (*He shakes his head.*)

TINA

She did? (*Waits for an answer, then presses him some more.*) Did she? (*He nods almost imperceptibly.*) What did she do, Winnie?

(*WINNIE is mute, glued to his stone as if expecting a blow*.)

STRUDEL

You must tell it all, Winnie.

(*Still no response*.)

DEBBIE

Tell it and you'll feel better.

TINA

Sins out peace in.

(*Agonizing pause.*)

SEBASTIAN

(*With latent force*.)

I ask myself: How can life, that veteran whore, seduce us so easily and take away our last penny? Why are the worst cowards, hiding behind their soldiers' backs, proclaimed the greatest commanders? Scoundrels, who have learned to lie without blushing, prominent statesmen? Con men, who are only good at shuffling words, spiritual leaders?

(*Pause*.)

Here is my answer: The blame stays on us, who have locked up our vices where they are swelling like boils unable to burst. By faintheartedly hiding that pus we add to the

mundane evil, and unless the boils burst, and our sinful thoughts come out, there will be no rest for our souls, no place for the kingdom of light . . . Speak up, Winnie.

(*It is more than a request. Everybody is very quiet. Finally, WINNIE breaks the silence*.)

WINNIE

I was in my room . . . sorting out my baseball cards . . . and Gee Gee . . . that's what my father called my stepmother . . . she was in the bedroom. I thought they were both there . . . except my father had left early. I heard nothing, they allowed me to sleep late on Saturdays. And then I heard Gee Gee calling out to me . . . "Winnie," she said, "bring me that blue box from the toilet sink . . ." I fetched it . . . and there she was standing in front of the big mirror . . . naked. She turned to me, and I saw blood running down her thigh . . . I dropped the box and . . . and I ran off . . . .

(*Pause*.)

SEBASTIAN

Is that all? (*WINNIE has covered his face and is moaning or mumbling to himself.*) You're not withholding anything from us, Winnie, now are you? Maybe you decided to stay and watch what Gee Gee was going to do? Huh?

(*WINNIE'S narrow shoulders are visibly shaking. DEBBIE comes over and wraps her hand around him.*)

DEBBIE

There, there, Winnie.

SEBASTIAN

He'll feel better in a moment. How can one live with such burden!

STRUDEL

Winnie? Do you want me to light a candle for you?

(*He lights the candle, covering it from wind, and puts it in WINNIE'S limp hand. All the while KAYA is sitting with a serene smile on her face. SEBASTIAN glances at his watch*.)

SEBASTIAN

Whoa! A quick warm up for the service before we get dressed.

(*They stroll about, some do scales. KAYA remains seated. DEBBIE checks with the JUDGE*.)

DEBBIE

We don't want to wake him up.

WINNIE

No way.

STRUDEL

Don't be so sure.

WINNIE

You can fire a cannon, he'll sleep right through it.

STRUDEL

I bet you a silver dollar that he won't.

WINNIE

Let me see it. (*STRUDEL shows him the coin*.)

WINNIE

You bastard.

STRUDEL

What?

WINNIE

"What?" You stole my silver dollar!

(*We see the familiar arrangement: women in the front row, men perched on the boulders, in the back*.)

TINA

Okay, so win it back.

DEBBIE

Don't you know: it's fight for fight's sake.

SEBASTIAN

Will you stop it! Don't you hold anything sacred at all? All right. Ready? (*He gives a sign, they sing*.)

CHORUS

Soldiers of Christ, arise,
And put your armor on,
Strong in the strength which God supplies
Through his eternal Son . . .

SEBASTIAN

Stop, stop, stop! This is not a Christmas carol in kindergarten. This is an **intimate** dialogue. You and God. You have something to tell him? No? Then why bother! And if you do . . . Once again: the formula of revelation?

(*They are silent. The answer comes from where it is least expected*.)

KAYA

Fear and rapture.

SEBASTIAN

(*Surprised*.)

Yes. Fear and rapture, rapture and fear . . . Pick it up from the third number!

(*The singing resumes*.)

CHORUS

From strength to strength go on,
Wrestle and fight and pray;
Tread all the powers of darkness down,
And win the well-fought day.
Still let the Spirit cry,
In all his soldiers, "Come!"
Till Christ the Lord descends from high,
And takes the conquerors home, etc.

(*SEBASTIAN can tell by their faces that something is going on behind his back. He turns around to see the distraught KAYA conduct the chorus. For a moment he stands at a loss, then he joins the chorus. The singing grows louder and louder until it reaches thundering crescendo, yet it seems to have no effect on JUDGE BROWN who sleeps right through it. Without interrupting the routine, WINNIE extends his hand and STRUDEL, grudgingly, slips a silver dollar into his open palm*.)

CURTAIN