

**PIETER-DIRK UYS**

**APPASSIONATA**

*A play for a pianist*

## CAST

MARIA ROUSSEAU    the concert pianist

DAVID                      her husband

*The setting is a concert hall.*

*The time is 1982.*

For Tessa Uys

*Appassionata* was first performed in the Arena Studio at the State Theatre, Pretoria, on 2 July 1982, with Tessa Uys (Maria) and Chris Galloway (David), directed by Marie Schiess. The same production opened at the Main Theatre of the Market on 30 July 1982.

# ACT ONE

*The audience can see from their programme which lists a full piano recital.*

*The first act of this play comprises the selection of music played after 'the interval', (approximately sixty minutes), which concludes with the Beethoven Sonata no. 23 in F minor, opus 57 - the 'Appassionata.'*

*The stage is set for a professional classical piano recital - grand piano, lighting, etc.*

*The pianist-actress enters and performs the second half of her recital programme.*

*When the concert ends with an encore and applause, the house lights come up and it is interval.*

## ACT TWO

*The green-room backstage.*

*The recital is over. The rehearsal piano in the green-room is covered with a protective cloth. The piano is closed.*

*The room looks cold and impersonal. A few bouquets of flowers in cellophane. A pack of telegrams and good-luck cards are on the piano.*

*The pianist's husband is smoking, looking through the telegram envelopes which are all still closed. We hear her outside saying goodbye to the last of her visitors.*

SHE: (*laughs*)                      What!? I don't believe a word! Not a damn word! Okay,  
goodbye my darling. . .thank you. Love to the boys. Phone me.  
Bye.

*She backs into the room, waving off. She still wears her evening dress.*

HE:                   Lovely flowers.

SHE: She hated the 'Appassionata'.

HE: She sent beautiful flowers.

SHE: Gerda? Oh shit. . . (*She runs out*) Gerda, thanks for the flowers!  
The flowers! I love you. . .bye. . .bye. . .(*She enters again. Wipes her forehead and shoulders gently with a towel*)  
I'm hot. . . I haven't seen her so tense for months. It must be her new job. I told her it would kill her before it paid her a pension  
Oh God it's stuffy in here. . .(*Blows down front of dress*)

HE: Well? They liked it.

SHE: Gerda hated the 'Appassionata.'

HE: What did she say?

SHE: She said it was wonderful, an inspiration, a *tour de force*.  
She hated it. She always hates my Beethoven.

HE: But always loves your Mozart.

SHE: So the Beethoven was bad.

HE: I didn't say so.

SHE: Nor did she, but I know Gerda when she gushes. She hated it. I thought the 'Appassionata' went rather well. In fact, better than last time. And I should know; I play the damn thing.

HE: Gerda was tense.

SHE: Don't make excuses. She hated the recital. Fine, I don't care.  
If I listened to all my jealous bosom-vipers, I'd be a dead duck  
having a tenth anniversary. Read the telegrams. (*He does. She  
watches him closely. Waves away his cigarette smoke*) Your  
cigarette. . .

HE: Sorry. From your agent.

SHE: How sweet. Is there one from the record company?

HE: From Joan and Phil.

SHE: Sweet.

HE: 'Break a leg.'

SHE: Cheerful.

HE: Better than 'break a finger.' You could still always play with  
a broken leg.

SHE: Maybe I should. Gerda would love my pedalling. (*She takes  
some telegrams from him and glances at them*) Sonja.

HE: I thought she was in America.

SHE: She is. God, it's from Los Angeles! How sweet of her. . .  
fancy that.

HE: What does it say?

SHE: 'Good luck and phone me urgently. . .' Ah. . . yes, so that I pay for the call. Typical fair exchange. One telegram for a twenty minute trunk-call.

HE: Urgent?

SHE: She probably wants to know about her animals. I said I'd keep an eye on them while she was away. Hideous little dogs. . . (*She shudders. Puts the telegrams down on the piano. Sighs*) Sweet thoughts. They don't exactly get one through a memory lapse or a migraine, but all the same it's nice to be remembered. (*She sits at the piano and plays a few bars of the Beethoven 'Appassionata'*) I always seem to strike velvet here. What did it sound like?

HE: Fine.

SHE: Fine?

HE: Pack up, let's go.

SHE: Just fine?

HE: We're already late.

SHE: Oh no, I really haven't the energy for Joan and Phil now. Please, I'm tired.

HE: Not Phil and Joan; the Hutchinsons.

SHE: I thought we could go and have dinner.

HE: We are having dinner.

SHE: I meant: the two of us. With that crowd it'll be like a gilt-edged post-mortem. You know how I hate smalltalk about big things like my career and.. .

HE: Calm down.

SHE: I can't 'calm down!' I'm flying around like a bubble in a hailstorm. Damn that Gerda! Couldn't wait to prick me with a pin and see me pop. Can't they allow one a moment of peace, just a little bit of security? But no, if she were on roller-skates, she couldn't have got here quicker - to gloat.

HE: She loved it.

SHE: The 'Appassionata' stank.

HE: She didn't say that.

SHE: I say that. It was in her eyes. She should talk. I remember her attempt at Rach Two before her nerve went.

HE: That's not something she'd forget. Maybe that's why she's teaching small children.

SHE: Listen, darling, she dare not show her face to anyone over the age of three, not after that assassination of poor Rachmaninov. *Please*, not long, okay?

HE: Not long what. . .

SHE: The dreary Hutchinsons, the dinner-table din, the hello-

darling-kissie-kissie-crap. One kiss, one darling, and then home please.

HE: All right.

SHE: I have the recording tomorrow, in case you forgot.

HE: No, I didn't forget. At eleven.

SHE: The Schumann's no joke.

HE: Really? You educate me all the time. Thank you dear. (*He kisses her. She puts her arms about him affectionately.*)

SHE: Oh, I should be kept in a cage and given a tranquillizer every time I growl.

HE: Yes.

SHE: I'm a monster.

HE: Yes.

SHE: Really?

HE: A delicious monster.

SHE: Lovely, like that plant with thick fat green leaves. So I'm fat.

HE: You could advertise pantyhose.

SHE: What an awful thought. How would one advertise pantyhose? Naked on horseback with thin golden mesh glittering between the thighs? Ugh. Why pantyhose anyway? Rather perfume or make-up, please. Gerda says I don't wear enough make-up. Look.

HE: It looks good.

SHE: For the stage!

HE: You've been doing this for seven years. You know your face; what you want to look like.

SHE: But maybe I've been wrong all this time. I didn't look too pale maybe?

HE: You look beautiful.

SHE: But too pale.

HE: You looked fine.

SHE: Why do you always use that word: fine? Every time you talk to your friends or about your secretary or anyone else anonymous, you wax lyrically with *magnificent* and *incredible* and *beautiful* and so on. With me it's just fine.

HE: And beautiful and incredible and so on.

SHE: You weren't in your seat.

*PAUSE*

HE: How could you see?

SHE: I always get you the seat so I know where to look. I bow to you, in case you never noticed. You weren't in your seat.

HE: At the beginning.

SHE: I don't look at the beginning, it's bad luck. At the end. I got up and put on that stupid smile and bowed and looked at you and you were not there as usual.

HE: No.

SHE: So where were you?

HE: I was at the back.

SHE: What was wrong with the seat I got you? It was on the aisle on the left side. ..

HE: Nothing. I just preferred standing at the back.

SHE: You promised you wouldn't do that any more. You know people watch you like a cripple. If you go pacing up and down the foyer and smoke those damn cigarettes and look like you're up on a murder charge, of course all the people are going to know the recital will be a disaster!

HE: I don't pace anymore.

SHE: No, you just stand glumly at the back, that's worse. It's as if you're ready to make a quick get-away when it all collapses in

chaos. *(She opens a card from the flowers)* Ah . . . sweet.

HE: Who's it from?

SHE: 'Your greatest admirer.'

HE: Oh, I'm glad they arrived. I didn't know which they were.

SHE: What?

HE: My flowers.

*She gasps and looks at the card.*

SHE: Your flowers! Oh my darling, thank you! Sorry. . .sorry . . .  
*(They embrace)* They're beautiful. You know how I love carnations.

HE: Which they didn't have..

SHE: What are they? I love them also, whatever they are. Thank you. *(They kiss)* Now, how do we get all these things to the car? Damn it, I must say for all its pomp and grandeur, this is the most depressing hole to end the evening in. Where's the man with the limp? *(She calls out of the door)* Hello? *(Shrugs)* We could carry off the whole auditorium and no one would know till Brendel plays in two days. All those six hundred chairs and matching runners and fire buckets. *(Pause)* Mmmmm, not many people came backstage, you know.

HE: What are you talking about! It's exactly ninety minutes since the end of the recital. It's never stopped; like a railway station at

rush-hour.

SHE: Did you see the critics?

HE: Yes of course, we nodded as usual.

SHE: 'Of course?' They don't usually all come 'of course.'

HE: Well, I saw most of them.

SHE: Who didn't come?

HE: I really don't know.

SHE: Any second strings?

HE: The main ones were there.

SHE: Till the end? (*She smirks*) There wasn't a sudden change of programme in the second half so we'll never know who left at interval. That little Dalling boy came back and kissed me. They wanted a photograph but thank God the photographer had gone off to the pub by then. He's playing here on Wednesday.

HE: We should put in an appearance.

SHE: Why?

HE: It's his first big recital. If you are seen to be here, it would give him quite a boost.

SHE: Really? He won't think I'm after him or something, would he?

HE: He's a bit young for you.

SHE: Rubbish. He's gay. I know a No-Entry sign when I see one.  
Anyway he's not as young as he pretends to be. It's all an act, the big eyes and the stutter. He was shaking.

HE: Maybe he was nervous.

SHE: Oh? Did he play tonight? *(Pause)* Nervous? Of me, you think?

HE: I was nervous of you, I know! I remember shaking as well. My hand was damp and seemed to stick to the handkerchief in your palm when we shook hands for the first time. In spite of my experience in the world of finance and commerce, I too stuttered. Your perfume clung to me for days afterwards. It was like a drug.

SHE: Perfume? I don't remember.

HE: It was my dream. Why should you remember?

SHE: Because I married you. I should be able to trace all the reasons why, even down to that first perfume-soaked lightning bolt. I remember - when I went backstage to kneel in front of Arthur Rubinstein, I didn't only shake - I cried - I lost all sense of myself, my poise, my nothingness. I just held his hand and shook my head and bit my bottom lip and smiled. He must've thought I was mad. And I was.

HE: One of millions.

SHE: No. I knew he'd play for me and me alone and it was up to me to go to him and conquer my paralysis and say thank you.  
'Thank you God, I want to become part of your magic' And he just smiled and knew what I was there for. Do I give magic? Do I?

HE: Yes.

SHE: I don't feel the magic. I feel like a lumberjack working the late-night suicide-shift. I suppose the magic must be somewhere else, somewhere out there among the anonymous millions. When you see me, do I evoke magic?

HE: Not first thing in the morning.

*She laughs and throws something at him.*

SHE: I love you when you lie. Here, take the wreaths to the car. We can lay them across the tomb of the unknown oboe-player tomorrow morning. *(He takes the flowers. She helps him)* Where are we going? Restaurant?

HE: Their home.

SHE: Shit. Wet spaniel-noses poking up the privates! I feel ill. Can't we phone and say I'm in a coma?

HE: You phone and say you're in a coma. They'll understand.

SHE: I might just do that. It's not fair! I've run the three-minute mile sixteen times tonight and now they want me to dance on the table with a feather up my. . .nose.

HE: Might be fun.

SHE: Might be a future! Careful with the water in the little vase. *(He exits carefully. She sighs and sits at the piano. Plays some phrases from another piece in the recital. Stops)* Bloody old Titanic. Maybe I should settle for the feather-up-the-orifice-thing. *(She sits down and plays a jazz number.)*

*HE ENTERS*

HE: Fantastic. Incredible!

SHE: Yes. Fine!

HE: Let's go. I found the man with the limp. He's now also got a bottle and a sandwich and is ready to talk. Let's flee.

SHE: I can't go to dinner in my platform-frock.

HE: Why not? It's fine. Good protection against the wet noses of interested spaniels. I love that costume. You look perfect.

SHE: For the stage, yes, I know, but not for going out in. Can't we go home first?

HE: No, they're waiting.

SHE: I don't want to go.

HE: Oh for God's sake, don't start with that again!

SHE: I'm not starting with anything again! Why should I go? Who

are these people anyway? Some stuffed shirt and his equally stuffy wife. Boring. I'm not going.

HE: I can vouch for the them. He's a colleague.

SHE: That's even worse - an office party!

HE: They want to meet you, entertain you.

SHE: Then send them a copy of my latest record with a signed singing photograph. I am not going! I'm tired. I'm exhilarated. I'm fed-up! I should be giving my own damn party for all the ghouls that kiss my hand. Where are my friends? Why am I never with my friends?

HE: They're very nice people.

SHE: I'm sure they are, my darling, for a nice tea on a nice Sunday afternoon. But not after a big night like now. This is a world stage! It's a night for the world, not a trio of wife-swappers in the suburbs. Tell them I have a headache. *(She collects her things determinedly).*

HE: Just let's go and get it over with. Please, I don't feel like a tug-of-war. Or a headache.

SHE: Nor do I. So let's just phone them sweetly, and then drop in at Eloise for a bite - they serve delicious soup and snacks till 4.00 am.

HE: You have a headache.

SHE: Why do you always do this to me? Every time I have a moment like tonight you spoil it for me! It happened in Munich after that nightmare battle on a Steinway with rigor-mortis, even after that you spoilt my moment!

HE: I supported you all the time.

SHE: I can never go anywhere! You wouldn't let me go with those sweet people. They invited me, went to all the trouble and then you wrecked it.

HE: You had a fever.

SHE: Feel my head. Now, go on, feel it.

HE: It's hot.

SHE: Fever.

HE: Excitement.

SHE: Fever!

HE: Not like Zurich.

SHE: Like Zurich. Worse than Munich.

HE: Please let's go.

SHE: Not at all like Munich on second thoughts. Munich had some energy and life lurking in those well-meaning zombies who clicked heels and kissed hands. I don't want to have to make a

list of differences. Let's just say, I'm right.

HE: I have never forced you to do anything against your wishes.

SHE: Cut your finger and write that in blood across the ceiling.  
You're like a bloody anchor round me, mooring me to  
mediocrity!

HE: I'm your husband.

SHE: Don't change the subject.

HE: Thank you for saying that. For one awful moment, I thought I  
was guilty of marriage.

*She puts her arms round him, shaking her head.*

SHE: You see, what happens? I say things like that, terrible things that  
hurt you and I don't mean to, God knows, I don't mean to hurt  
you.

HE: I know.

SHE: I'm a monster.

HE: When you want to be.

SHE: It's lonely, just us.

*There is an uncomfortable pause.*

HE: We could start our family.

SHE: Where are all my lovely friends? Carl in America. Stephen in New Zealand, for God's sake. Bev married and gone forever, lost to the hungry loins of her love. Gerda bitchy, Joan busy...all alone.

HE: Gerda was here, Joan sent a cable.

SHE: But there were days when they were with me, laughing, drinking, talking, playing, making music. Music music music. There was a time that I made music with my friends because we loved. We loved each other, we loved the sounds, the challenges, the dreams, the languages of Mozart and Corelli and Scriabin and the Beatles and bloody Bach with all his Preludes. We were all in the same boat in the never-ending sea of hope and futures and things that mattered - we mattered, our holding on to each other mattered and gave us courage and daring and cheek. Those were important things then.

HE: Even you had to grow up, it can't be helped.

SHE: This is not what we planned. Cold rooms, empty praise, dull days. Machine-like technique, a nun's life without the promise of a date with Jesus. The magic is gone into the drugged eye of the beholder and I am alone and fed-up. Damn damn damn.

HE: That's what they pay for.

SHE: Pop goes the bubble. Thanks. I needed your prompt into the real world. Pay. Okay, what else has changed since those good old days, other than my face, which now has, what my friends call, interesting bones. What can I list that's new? You're new.

HE: Four years new?

SHE: The gloss still shines. You'll last long, that's at least one thing I don't have to worry about. You'll grow into the face I always imagined you to have - sleek and elegant and wise and waiting.

HE: How long do I still have to go?

SHE: You're quite sleekish and elegantish and wiseish already.

HE: And waiting.

SHE: I'm not going, so don't wait. I'll take a cab, you go and be nice to your friends.

HE: I've never stood in your way. I've never tried to compete with your music.

SHE: You'd lose.

HE: We'd both lose. *(He puts his arms round her)* You need to kick out and scream every now and then. I don't mind. I know how frustrating it must be to know that you're getting older. I also swear at the mirror.

*She draws away from him.*

SHE: You simple man. Mirror? Age has got nothing to do with it! How many times must I say that to you - to all the people who said to me when we got married: good for you, darling, you've now reached the pinnacle of your career. As if twenty years of success suddenly ceased to exist and the most important words of my life became: 'I do - till Bach us do part.' *(They hold hands; she*

*strokes his hand in hers*) I married you because I loved you - because I love you now. I want to kick you when you become so bloody normal and talk about our life together as if it came in factory-sealed packets at a discount on Fridays. I'm not frustrated because of my 'interesting bones' or because of what the mirror gloats back at me. Artists are not normal. We're magicians who can bend steel with our smiles and then die quicker than daylight. You can't expect us to fit into the mould of a television serial.

HE: No, I don't expect that.

SHE: Then don't blame me for not making your dreams complete. I'm sorry, David, if our dreams have become incompatible.

HE: Dreams aren't really important. They're necessary little therapies that keep us from going mad. But I suppose that's the essence of what we pretend to be. Civilised people.

SHE: Drugged on dreams.

HE: Crazyed by dreams. And how's your dream, after tonight?

SHE: Fine I suppose. Fed by the right sounds, the right applause. Okay . . .

HE: I'm glad you're okay. Mine, on the other hand, if you're interested ...

SHE: Yes.

HE: Good. Mine's not so fine. The right sounds maybe, but no applause.

*Pause.*

SHE: We can adopt.

HE: Yes, I can also buy an LP; I don't have to listen to you play live. It's not quite the same. I also want my own.

SHE: There's time.

HE: Interesting bones get in the way of having babies.

SHE: My darling, if I stop playing now, it'll surge ahead without me. I look over my shoulder and see the new ones rearing to go, shaking off their college shackles and getting ready to run me in to the strains of Opus 111. Stamina, sex-appeal and experience are only three out of the twenty to win this race. A bun in the oven will be the farewell banquet. I can't afford the luxury.

HE: You'll look beautiful playing a Mozart concerto with a tummy.

SHE: Can you imagine! *(She sits at the piano and demonstrates)* I don't think this is the time or the place to dig up those old hurts. Oh, I'll go with you to the dreary fans.

HE: Meaning: that ordeal is infinitely better than talking about us and our relationship.

SHE: I don't like talking about us and our relationship. There are some things that should be allowed to remain a mystery - like what attracts a monster like me to a missionary like you. Like what makes a Mozart sonata so magical? No cheap analysis, no

mundane assassination. Digging up the alphabet to find out what letters we use to live by. They nearly destroyed the beauties of the piano for me at college with their constant nit-picking. . .or should I say note-picking. . .ripping the heart out of the gentlest and most delicate love songs and sad songs. *(Pause)* I'm just scared that if we call our spade a spade, we'll realise how silly and redundant spades have become. *(She takes his hand)* It's not that I don't care. I do care, very deeply, very often. I worry because I know I'm a one-man band who expects to have a chauffeur and a bell-boy and a bodyguard and a lover all rolled into one. It helps me make the impossible into a successful career, because I know I'm not alone. I'd be so frightened now, to be alone after four years of you.. .

HE: You're as strong as an ox.

SHE: Your choice of words is dazzling. 'In her interpretation of Beethoven's "Appassionata", Madame Rousseau showed the strength of an ox, unquote.'

HE: You'll never be alone. Not with that creature to keep in trim.  
*(He refers to the piano).*

*She strokes it gently.*

SHE: I remember what Prof said about the piano on our first day at college, all of us ready and waiting to kick the great legends into Madame Tussaud's. He said: 'Look at that baby puppy, so small and helpless and sweet. Get to train it, but train yourselves as well, because overnight the puppy becomes a Great Dane and if you don't keep up with him on his runs, he'll drag you across the stages of the world on your face.' Poor Prof. I wonder what he

would've said about tonight's performance. 'Come now,' he'd say, 'a little less acting and a little more care. . .' He was never impressed by the obvious. Gerda says men leer at me when I perform and wonder what I look like without my clothes, what do you say to that?

HE: Well, there are no invisible wires, that I can assure them. Just what they least expect, I suppose.

SHE: A tan?

HE: A real person. Use it as a means to an end. While they're straining to see if you're wearing a bra, at least the music is filtering through their subconscious. *(Pause)* I often wonder where you would be today, if I hadn't married you.

SHE: Do you? I'd be here, like now.

HE: With a husband?

SHE: You're not the only one who wanted to marry me. There were queues, let me tell you, queues round the block for miles. We had to open soup kitchens or they would have starved!

HE: No, seriously, have I helped you or hindered you? Who knows, you might have met a conductor who could've immediately blessed you with superstardom.

SHE: And knowing my luck he would've been on the buses. I don't know. Look at Gerda. She married a colleague. They've never stopped dining out on each other ever since, both sliding back to square one in matrimonial chaos. Plus children and a mortgage.

Minus their music and their dreams. And on top of it, the cow hated my 'Appassionata.' You just can't win! *(She collects her things. He stands and watches her)* Darling, bring that basket. Oh hell, I had a lovely bottle of champagne and two glasses ready on ice. Let me see. . .*(She checks)*. . .still cold. What a waste.

HE: We can have it there.

SHE: We can have what where? One bottle of champagne among seventeen fans? I'm not good at miracles, David. Bread and fish is a pushover, but I draw the line at turning soda water into champagne. *(She giggles)* I can be so stupid sometimes. *(She takes out the bottle and sets out the glasses on her scarf on the floor. Excited)* Let's have a picnic.

HE: What are you doing?

SHE: A picnic! Just the two of us. Champagne. . .no, don't say anything. . .flowers. . .*(She sets them)* You sit there, I'll sit here . . . music . . . no, let's keep work out of it. Food . . . I've a Lunch Bar in my bag. . . where's my bag . . . where's my bag ... oh God I've been robbed . . . someone stole my bag. Oh no, here it is. Oh I've eaten it. . .no . . .it's a bit full of powder. . .powder? Oh shit, my compact's broken. . .never mind, pretend it's snow. *(Blows off powder. He coughs)* Sorry darling, did I blow it at you? Come and sit. . .come on. . .a candle! Where the hell did I see a candle ... oh yes! The men's toilet backstage, probably in case of a power failure, can't imagine what the men do with a candle . . .

HE: And what were you doing in the men's loo?

SHE: Loo-ing, what else? It was either that or the old rolled up

carpet right here in the green-room. Is that why they call it *green*? Fit for moss and ferns! (*Pushes him gently to the door*)  
Go and get it, please, it'll be so romantic. David? Please . . .

HE: What's wrong with you?

SHE: Everything's right for a change, don't you feel it? All the loose ends are coming together and making magic. Magic. We need a candle. Hurry, I'll keep the dinner warm ... go.

*She pushes him off. He exits. She looks around the room - places two cushions on the floor. Takes out her perfume and sprays around the room. Poses herself against the piano sexily and gets the giggles.*

SHE: Silly bitch ...

*He enters with a candle. She laughs at him.*

HE: What are you laughing at?

SHE: You. In your sombre suit creeping down the hallowed passages with a candle in your hand. Instant thought: help, a vampire critic! Get the steak and garlic and a small French salad on the side. I'm sorry, I'm feeling a bit silly. Open the bottle?  
(*Pause*) Where's your dress suit?

HE: Why?

SHE: You had it on when we left home, didn't you?

HE: I went and changed.

SHE: Oh. Why?

HE: Close your ears, it's going to bang.

*She closes her ears and he eases off the cork of the champagne bottle. It does not pop at all, but her eyes and ears are tightly closed.*

SHE: Tell me when it's over, oh God, I hate violence . . . is it over?  
Don't spray the piano, whatever you do . . . or me . . . is it over?

*He taps her on the shoulder. She screams.*

HE: You can come out now.

*She peeps.*

SHE: Is it over? Was there a terrible noise, like a bomb?

HE: Like a bomb.

SHE: Oh God, I hate loud noise. Why do they make those corks so tight, or fat or whatever makes the noise?

HE: Hot air.

*She drops her pose. Glares at him.*

SHE: Hot air. Now that was definitely aimed at me, wasn't it? Well I'm sorry if I'm babbling on, but it is my night, my time, my moment. You have yours every day after work: your stocks, your shares, your secretaries: scalding air, my dear! Well cheers. Here's to the three Bs: Beethoven, Bach and bankruptcy! (*He doesn't drink*) What's wrong now? Oh God, of course, the candle. Give me matches . . . no, don't smoke, not now. Just one magic

moment without pollution, please. *(She lights the candle)* And then there was a little light. . . *(Switches off the main lights. The area is lit only by candle)* Oh God, it's so dark . . . *(She feels her way to the area and sits. Looks around)* You don't think we'll arouse some sleeping demons with our incantations, do you? They say if you circle your flame thrice with a full glass, you get a wish. Do you want to do it? Go on ...

HE: It's not very comfortable on the floor, you know. There are good chairs around, comfortable places to get sentimental in.

SHE: I know. Places like our living-room with its wall-to-wall status symbols and immaculate taste, or in restaurants with plastic food and Muzak. I know about those places. Let's ignore them and be squatters for a moment, forget about what we should be doing and where. Be sentimental, David. It's only me to see, so don't feel too embarrassed. If you want to do it in the dark, I'll blow out the candle. *(He picks up his glass)* Are you ready? *(She thinks and raises her glass)* A toast. Here's to you, because I like you - and because I like you, I want to love you, but I can't because I promised to be true. But I'll tell you what: I'll lie perfectly still and let you . . . *(Pause. She smiles at him, leans across and kisses him. He doesn't respond in the same way. She draws back)* In other words: cheers dears. Here's to the fluff in your keyhole! *(She swallows her drink and immediately pours another angrily. He drinks slowly. Then gets up and stands)* You see what I mean? Look at now. You ruined the magic. You're so bloody concerned in case someone saw you sitting on the carpet, dear God, that you throw all my affection back at me! Can't you just relax, not even for a moment? Oh, switch on the light. *(He does)* They were right. One does rouse demons with a display of unprotected happiness.

*She sits at the piano and starts playing softly.*

HE: Can we please go?

SHE: Yes, for God's sake, let's grow up and go. *(She gets up and closes the piano)* See you soon, Great Dane. *(Touches it lightly)* It's always much easier after the concert to be nice to the old green-room Yamaha - during the ordeal on stage it's always the fault of the Steinway, as the fingers slide back and forth across the keys, drowning in their own terror . . .

HE: I'll bring the car round to the door. What else must I take?

SHE: The basket, the picnic ... no, leave the bottle. I might as well bring something useful. *(She drinks as he packs up and exits. Then she looks around. Picks up the candle and places it carefully on the piano. With her full glass, she circles the flame three times for her wish)* Are you there? *(Whispers)* Ludwig? Are you there? Can you hear me? *(She looks up and uses sign language for his deafness)* Are you cross with me, Mr B? I'm sorry, I know it went better last week - a lot went better last week. Too many people out there I knew too well tonight. It's so much easier playing for the anonymous gods than it is for your family and friends who care so much it nearly kills you. Don't be cross with me. I know it's a pain in A major to be criticised by the likes of Gerda Greenblatt, but I did sort of wool up one of the passages and it wasn't your fault. It was mine. *(She sits and plays the phrase from the 'Appassionata')* Yes, it sounds so easy, doesn't it, but damn you it's a killer. *(She plays softly as she talks)* I remember the first time I played here, I was still at the college and the prizewinners gave a combined recital and there were six

of us in here waiting to go on. The smell was one of pure terror. I didn't play anything of yours that night, but that poor little Chinese violinist did and mucked it up, remember? I wonder what ever happened to her . . . how many invisible dream-prints are etched out on these walls without names, ranks or numbers? *(She stops)* Is it worth it? Having to become an athlete in order to compete successfully with the new technology? Hey Johann Sebastian? Always being compared to the latest DGG recording. It was different in your day, I'm sure; you still had time to have all those children for a start. Nowadays besides having to learn the notes, you've to be a part-time lawyer, agent, whore, nun, actress, nurse, nut and Nazi as well. There's got to be a simpler way of enjoying your music . . . any music. What happened to the love . . . *(She plays a gentle Schumann)*

*He enters.*

HE: The man with the limp wants to lock up. What have you done with my matches? *(She indicates where they are. He retrieves them. Looks at her)* I liked the way you played that tonight.

*She stops.*

SHE: I didn't do Schumann tonight.

HE: Oh. Oh no ...

SHE: You sound like that critic who left at interval and didn't realise the pianist fell off the stage and never finished the recital.

HE: Let's go.

SHE: You weren't there, were you?

HE: Don't be silly.

SHE: You've been busking it! Christ, I should've guessed it the moment I saw you - you didn't stay, did you? You went to some pub or something better. Well, thanks a lot. At least you could've been honest enough to say so: 'Sorry but I find your music a bore.'

HE: I didn't go to a pub.

SHE: And your suit! When did you have the time to go and change costumes if you were so busy listening to me? Did you have it tucked away in the boot of the car?

HE: No, I went back home after I left you here shaking like a victim, as white as death and as unpleasant as a bad smell in an art gallery. I went home, sighed with relief to be me again, had a slow whisky, put on my taste in music, which was a vintage New Orleans jazz record and changed into civvies.

SHE: So you were late. You missed the first group of pieces.

HE: I've heard the first group of pieces - in pieces, in sections, in agony, in ecstasy - I've heard them. I know them. I'm sick of them. Yes, I missed them.

SHE: Well, damn you, you had no right to agree with Gerda about the Beethoven. If you didn't hear the 'Appassionata', why didn't you at least stick up for me!

HE: So you made a mistake, who cares?

SHE: I care. Everyone cares!

HE: And the passages are full of weeping friends mourning the mistake? No one cares. I don't even think Beethoven cares. Or Mozart. Or Bach.

SHE: Too busy with his children to care.

HE: Can't say the same about you.

SHE: You really are full of tender loving surprises tonight. Everyone must have seen that you weren't there tonight. Thank you. Now I have to defend not only my declining career, but my disintegrating marriage as well. I don't need that in my life.

HE: You are a superb artist. I've always told you so. Even the sternest critic has agreed that you're not just anyone's old piano-player. Your career's fine. As for your marriage, well, I think I get more gold stars at present than you for little things like consideration, tact, companionship, care. You take the prize for dancing on the table with the feather up your nose.

SHE: If you don't like it, you shouldn't have lumped yourself with it in the first place.

HE: Ah yes, well it's too late now. The damage is done.

*She is visibly shocked by what he says.*

SHE: What are you talking about: what damage is done? Don't say such awful things when we play these games. It's only an exercise, David, don't take it all so seriously! My God, I'm cold

all over, look at the goose-flesh! I know I'm not easy to live with, but God forbid, at least I'm not a catatonic that needs to be placed on the pot. I'm independent too, David. (*He tries to speak*) Let me finish! If you can accuse me of carelessness, allow me to show you why. Hasn't four years taught you anything about my Devil, my Lover, my Life? I can't do anything else. I've tried thinking about an alternative - a family, a home, the mummy-next-door. I'm jealous of Gerda and her spoilt brats and small victories - her gossips at the supermarket, her circle of divorcing suburban pals who are all into each other's knickers anyway, her verbose post-mortems on my art - all the everyday things that reek to me of freedom. I'm free - I'm not accusing you of trapping me, no. . I am free, but only free to be tied. Surely if I was meant to be what you say I'm not - an ordinary loving wife - I would only play chopsticks on the piano and still think that was an achievement? David, please don't whitewash me to blend in with all the other ghosts. I'm scarlet, I'm crimson, I'm electric blue, I'm golden - tell me you want me for the rainbow, not the Friday night schnitzel. I am the mother of a million sonatas and concertos and preludes - children with many fathers who've chosen me, and I can't let them down as I have let you down. I'm sorry. I am what I am.

*Pause. He takes the bottle from her.*

HE: Yes, tipsy for a start. I won't waste more time. The evening is wrecked. It's too late now anyway. The Hutchinsons had invited some important people who will now be annoyed because we didn't bother to turn up.

SHE: I'm not interested in 'important people.'

HE: They were invited for my benefit, not yours! My business

needs important people. You on my arm at the right time, elegant, amusing, famous - you are a boost to my business. So tonight was not only a social failure, but also a business bomb.

SHE: You didn't tell me ...

HE: Then to clarify my suit. I changed my suit because it is silly going to off-the-beaten-track bistros looking ostentatious in a dress suit with bow-tie, etcetera. After all, the reason for slinking off secretly is to blend, as they say. Well, I can't say I blended, but Veronica did. She wore jeans and a pony-tail and looked even younger than her twenty-four years. We had a light meal and held hands and laughed about normal things like jokes and food and fashion and fun, and not the eternal 'What-did-Gerda-say-about-the-Bach' and 'Were-the-critics-there' and 'Do-I-look-okay?' None of the monologue. While you were slaving away at the feet of your ego, I was having what they used to call 'a damn good time.'

*Pause. She tries to shrug it off.*

SHE: Eh ... Veronica. Oh yes, Joan's sister.

HE: Joan's sister is called Geraldine and you know it. Veronica is a young colt who works at the office, a wild and wonderful example of unattached, unambitious femininity. Veronica is my lover.

*Pause.*

SHE: I think I'm going to be sick.

HE: Nonsense, they only say that in movies.

SHE:                   You bastard.

HE:                   No, *you* bastard! What do you think I am? An answering machine? Madame Rousseau is not available at the moment. Please leave a message and she is sure to contact you as soon as she sees fit. I... I never thought I could just say all this so easily and so calmly. I was going to wait till after your recording tomorrow, after the recital on Sunday - then I was going to talk to you. Maybe take you away for a weekend and discuss it like normal people, possibly try and salvage what was left and who knows start again, once more with feeling. But I'm sorry, it seems to have chosen to be said now. I'm leaving you. I'm packing my things. You can keep the house and the car of course. I'm moving in with Veronica and after you've divorced me for desertion or something else that would make it quick and painless, she and I will get married and have children and never ever go to another piano recital again for the rest of our lives. *(Pause)* I'll drive you home.

SHE:                   And then on to Veronica?

HE:                   Would there be any point in staying with you?

SHE:                   No, darling, we've been sleeping in separate rooms for a year. I won't notice the difference. *(She laughs to control her emotions)* Christ . . . twenty-four years old. I'm only thirty or forty ... or something. Quite a kick in the confidence. And to think of all the thousands of chances I've thrown over my shoulder because of 'us' - beautiful strong sexy young men in tight elegant trousers and Brut aftershave and full of fantasies and exciting ways of doing old routines and I said: run along

little boy, my husband is waiting. And now I'm being left high and dry for a young coat. . .what did you call her? A coat?

HE: A colt.

SHE: Sounds masculine. Maybe that's your problem. Well, I hope you're happy and have a wonderful time. Goodbye. *(She turns to him with a fixed smile and holds out a hand for him to shake)*

HE: Isn't this rather silly?

SHE Yes.

HE: In the middle of the night, in a dark concert hall, saying goodbye?

SHE: What else is left? I'll send the bills to your office. You can take all the plants - they hate the sound of my voice anyway. The cat loathes us both so it can choose its poison. The maid's mine, the car you can have. I want the house because it's good for my work. You I can easily give away because you're not good for my work.

HE: I can't live in a vacuum anymore.

SHE: *(snaps)* All right, don't rub it in. I'm aware of your burdens!

HE: I need something more than your encores, your triumphs.

SHE: You really know how to make things sound hollow and useless.

HE: Ordinary. That's all I ask for, something in small letters, not headlines. I want to experience being in charge for ... oh, even

just for one marriage.

SHE: I see.

HE: I'll always know every piano piece I hear on the radio without having to check the bulletin. Thank you for my honorary degree in music.

SHE: Get out!

*She turns away from him. Takes a swig from the bottle.*

HE: I'd like to drive you home.

SHE: You've driven me to drink, isn't that enough? *(She doesn't let him see the emotion on her face)* I don't want to be alone . . . I can't do it on my own. It's that nightmare of waking up in the middle of the night and looking round to ask: so, what's it been like - my life? Was it good? Was it worth it? Was it me? - and there's nothing other than yellowed praise from dead admirers and vintage recordings of forgotten triumphs. And with hands in charge, one is just a minor car-crash away from obscurity. David, I would stop if I could, but what could I do instead? Garden? Teach? I would be a burden. I might as well be dead . . . *(She cries. He puts his arms round her and comforts her)*

HE: I didn't mean it to be like this. On your night.

SHE: I know ... I know. *(She sniffs and looks up at him)* All right. Leave me. Go on. Leave me. I'll send her all my records and then you'll never be rid of me. I'll invite her to little lunches and dazzle her with my wit and experiences and then seduce her and take her

off to the seaside or wherever one goes and poo to you too,  
husband - watering the plants and fondly remembering the good  
old days when you were just a chauffeur and bellboy and lover all  
rolled into one - and loved it!

*He gently breaks away from her.*

HE: Come. The man with the limp needs his sleep.

SHE: Yes. I just want to ... to powder my nose. That limp lad is the  
eyes and ears of the world. He'll tell all the young pianists about  
Madame Rousseau's red nose and watering eyes and falling  
down dead drunk at the feet of her cold and unfeeling ex-  
husband. Oh go away, David, you make me feel pathetic. *(He  
exits. She wipes her eyes and blows her nose. Looks up)* You  
bastards. Can't you give a girl one break?

*She sits down at the piano and tinkers - then slowly gets involved. Plays with energy  
and passion.*

*The lights dim to blackout.*

**THE END**

