

United Incandescent



a play

by elizabeth kuti

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for reading at the Old Red Lion

CHARACTERS

Henrik Gichner, Hungarian, aged 66 in 1986. (b.1920)

Matthew, son of Henrik and Claire, 22 in 1986. (b. May 1964)

Jessica, Henrik and Claire's daughter, 17 in 1986. (b.1969)

Anna, b. 1943; Hungarian; aged 53 in 1996.

Claire, aged 53 in 1986. (b.1931) Married to Henrik.



Scene One: **23rd October, 1996.**

Scene Two: **23rd October, 1986.**

Scene Three: **13th June, 1987**

Scene Four: **August, 1990**

Scene Five: **23rd October, 1996.**

The only thing that's new is the history we do not know.

Harry S Truman

The past is never where you thought you left it.

Katherine Porter

An old joke about the Communist Party's revision of history goes like this: a Communist official, on being questioned about the Party line, scratches his chin and ponders. "Well," he says, "we're pretty certain about what's going to happen in the future. It's what happened in the past that we're finding a little more difficult to predict."

Scene One

23rd October, 1996.

Late morning, 23rd October, 1996.

A 'front' living-room in a modest 1930s semi-detached house. Sofa and the usual; but a rather dingy feeling, of comfortlessness. A goldfish bowl with one goldfish in it. Perhaps a bay window with net curtains obscuring the view onto the street. A record player. A desk with papers and a filing cabinet.

On the mantelpiece there is a black-and-white framed photograph of CLAIRE in younger days. A large white invitation card propped up, and a bit of brick rubble.

There is an ironing board messily leaning against a wall and a white shirt on a hanger.

A door that leads out to the hallway and the stairs/front door and kitchen.

It is dirty and untidy on quite a deep level, but subtly so.

Lights up.

Enter MATTHEW. He is 32, shaven-headed, unshaven of chin, in a ragged dressing-gown. Carrying a brown envelope.

MATTHEW puts on a record.

Wagner's Siegfried plays.

He sits on the sofa, opens the brown envelope and reads a letter. The content pains him. He hears Henrik coming, and scrunches the letter up into a ball. He shoves it surreptitiously down the back of the sofa.

Enter HENRIK.

HENRIK: When will your sister be here?

MATTHEW: No idea.

HENRIK: What time did she say?

MATTHEW: Why is she coming over?

HENRIK: You know why.

MATTHEW: I don't.

(Music plays)

HENRIK: Isn't it so strange - ?

MATTHEW: What?

HENRIK: About the Germans.

MATTHEW: What about the Germans?

HENRIK: That such a cruel people should produce so much beautiful music.

MATTHEW: You can't say that.

HENRIK: Why not?

MATTHEW: You can't say Germans are cruel.

HENRIK: I can't? You think I can't.

MATTHEW switches off the music.

MATTHEW: I'd no idea she was coming over.

HENRIK: Did we get any post today?

Matthew.

Was there any post?

MATTHEW: No. Nothing today.

HENRIK: Why do I never see the post? I thought I heard a –

Some kind of thump near the doormat.

MATTHEW: 'Fraid not. Perhaps it was the blue-tits.

HENRIK: Blue-tits?

MATTHEW: They're always blundering around the door-step trying to get at the gold top.

HENRIK: We shouldn't get that gold-top, it's bad for the heart.

MATTHEW: I'd say my heart's a goner anyway Dad.

HENRIK: Cancel that bloody gold-top and get yourself some All-bran. Clear you out.

MATTHEW: OK.

HENRI: Sort out your bloody bowels.

MATTHEW: Right, thanks, OK.

HENRIK: You can laugh but I'm bloody serious.

MATTHEW: I'm not laughing. It's a very good idea.

HENRIK: Have you heard from that supermarket yet?

MATTHEW: No.

HENRIK: They take their bloody time, no?

Where is your sister?

MATTHEW: I don't know.

HENRIK: I thought she was coming over today.

MATTHEW: I don't know. I hope to Christ not.

HENRIK: Wasn't there a plan?

MATTHEW: What plan?

HENRIK: That Agency she went to, they were going to send somebody today, no? And Jessica was going to come over to meet them – to, you know –

MATTHEW: Vet them?

HENRIK: Talk with them. Whatever her bloody idea was.

MATTHEW: I honestly don't know. I didn't even know you went to an Agency.

HENRIK: I didn't. She did.

MATTHEW: What for?

HENRIK: For some kind of person. . . I don't know. . . to clean up. House-keep, Home – help. Some such.

MATTHEW: I hardly think we need it.

HENRIK: It could be cleaner.

MATTHEW: Barely. She should keep her bloody nose out.

HENRIK: It could be less dusty.

MATTHEW: I like the dust.

HENRIK: That's bullshit.

MATTHEW: I love the way it spins suspended in the light.

HENRIK: Don't talk rubbish.

MATTHEW: Tiny orbiting planets each one a flake of dead human skin. And then we inhale! In the midst of life we are in et cetera. What could be prettier?

HENRIK: Get dressed.

MATTHEW: How are the Memoirs today?

HENRIK: Fine!

MATTHEW: That's good then.

HENRIK: In a manner of speaking

MATTHEW: What? Not fine?

HENRIK: I don't know. Things keep getting out of hand. You have the material rigidly organized, you think you know what happened, you believe it's an accurate representation and then – ka-boom! It falls apart.

MATTHEW: Ah, yes. Isn't that always the problem with history. Ka- boom.

HENRIK: So, for instance - I was returning to my chapter on post-war reconstruction for some revisions but when I read it again I find my conclusions –

I begin to doubt whether – I doubt my judgement -

MATTHEW: Not like you, dad.

HENRIK: One is continually so subjective – the tricks of memory –

It would be better with more evidence but then the statistics are notoriously difficult to interpret even if one could trust them on a factual level.

Aghh. Enough, enough.

We're here, right now and that's what we need to deal with. So!

Matthew.

Retail management. Let's talk about it.

MATTHEW: Really let's not.

HENRIK: It could be a great opportunity. This possible opening, no?

MATTHEW: Well, maybe, dunno really, just, please, dad, just don't get your hopes up –

HENRIK: Come on, you're a clever boy.

MATTHEW: I'm so clever, that's right.

HENRIK: There was that guy, remember, who was the guy, the guy that predicted –

MATTHEW: Please Dad.

HENRIK: You could have got a First. He said so. Goldberg?

MATTHEW: Goldstein, yes, about twelve hundred years ago, please let's not -

HANERIK: He predicted you a First class degree, didn't he? And he had a bloody Nobel!

MATTHEW: Yes that's right.

HENRIK: A First predicted! Doesn't that count for anything? Did you tell them that? Did you tell them that at the interview? These supermarket bosses?

MATTHEW: No I didn't.

HENRIK: Why not?

MATTHEW: It's a night-time cleaning post, dad, with expansion into shelf-filling if they take a shine to you. I just tried to look pretty and not talk too much.

HENRIK: I think you must improve your interview technique.

MATTHEW: I'm not sure that's the problem.

HENRIK: OK then what is the problem?

MATTHEW: You tell me, Dad, you tell me.

HENRIK: You could get off those bloody pills.

MATTHEW: They don't advise it.

HENRIK: Who doesn't advise it?

MATTHEW: My consultant. My GP. My inner policeman.

Anyway. Fingers crossed, eh? Maybe this time I'll be lucky.

HENRIK: I hope so. Look at this place. The dust and the smell.

Why is it like this? (*Prods window-sill*)

It's got a sticky – What the hell is this sticky?

MATTHEW: Beer? Glue? Lemon curd?

HENRIK: Look!

MATTHEW: Could be anything really.

HENRIK: And there are lots of little flies in the kitchen.

MATTHEW: They're hunting sugar. They love it if you leave the lid off the jam.

HENRIK: Do you leave the lid off the jam?

MATTHEW: Sometimes.

HENRIK: Well don't! Otherwise we are going to have some kind of cleaning supervisor imposed upon us by your sister and her –

Social conscience.

MATTHEW: Jessica can fuck off.

HENRIK: Watch your mouth.

MATTHEW: She doesn't live here. It's none of her business.

HENRIK: If we clean up then we can –

MATTHEW: She can clean up her own bloody house.

HENRIK: She does, in fairness.

MATTHEW: Well then. Isn't that enough for her? She could let us rot quietly in our own filth, couldn't she, secure in the knowledge that her own little patch is neat and tidy. She doesn't need to invade ours.

HENRIK: This could be wiped. It could be wiped with some kind of –

Damp cloth. That's what your mother did – she 'went round' with a damp cloth.

MATTHEW: Fine.

HENRIK: You do it.

MATTHEW: What?

HENRIK: Go round with a cloth.

MATTHEW: What cloth?

HENRIK: Get rid of this sticky – It's disgusting. And the flies. Just clean up, before she gets here and perhaps then we could dissuade her – get her to cancel the – just get a cloth, go on -

MATTHEW: Oh bollocks

HENRIK: And when is this person coming, this so-called housekeeper, for vetting or whatever?

MATTHEW: I have no idea -

HENRIK: Get a bloody cloth and get on with it – And watch your mouth –

Exit MATTHEW.

HENRIK: A damp cloth! And some kind of spray – to freshen – to neutralise - the odour as they say . . . we have a spray, no? Under the stairs, I'm sure –

Your mother used to–

We had the materials -

Matthew –

We have to rationalize –

He puts the record on again and Wagner plays.

The front door opens and slams distantly.

HENRIK: She would dampen it. And the windows were more open. More frequently.

He goes to try to open the windows. Fails.

As he struggles, JESSICA, 28, enters. Very smartly dressed in unflashy suit.

JESSICA: That door's getting really stiff.

HENRIK: Hello.

JESSICA: Took me ages to turn the key. You should get some WD 40, Dad, do you not have some?

Do you need a hand?

HENRIK: No – no – all fine.

JESSICA: A bit of air would definitely be a good idea.

HENRIK: No – I was just checking the – window locks –

JESSICA: They've been painted shut. When did you do that?

HENRIK: Painted?

JESSICA: Did Matthew ever paint the woodwork?

HENRIK: I doubt it.

No! We had that fellow round – remember – you got that man to do the woodwork – when we found the rotten patch – he must have – daubed it all over -

JESSICA: I can't believe he painted it shut. What an idiot.

HENRIK: A mistake.

JESSICA: Why did you let him? Now we'll have to sand everything and start again.

HENRIK: No, no –

JESSICA: What a bloody idiot. I can't believe you didn't notice. Why did you pay him if he did such a rubbish job? It's all got to be done again now.

HENRIK: No, no –

JESSICA: Dad, you can't –

HENRIK: Is really not necessary –

JESSICA: You can't live like this – it's really not -

Exit HENRIK.

JESSICA: What's this? Is it Wagner? I didn't think you liked Wagner.

She switches off the music.

She stops in front of the black-and-white photograph of the woman. Touches the brick rubble.

Oh God. Is Matthew even dressed?

Dad!

If he's not dressed I'm going to -

Is Matthew –?

Matthew!

Enter HENRIK with an iron. He sets up the ironing board, plugs in the iron and starts ironing the white shirt during the following.

JESSICA: You know, dad, it's not healthy to live like this.

I'm sorry, I know you're not keen, but let's at least meet a few of these people from the Agency and maybe, who knows, one of them you might like. Might even be nice to have someone popping in a few times a week. Keeping things a bit more – hygienic.

HENRIK: Popping in to do hygiene?

JESSICA: Just regular – cooking and cleaning. And I even put on the 'desirable' list, a Hungarian speaker. . . just in case there's anyone out there . . . You'd like a chat in Hungarian, now and again, wouldn't you Dad? Some nice lady?

HENRIK: Is unnecessary. I told you.

JESSICA: Anyway, the first one's coming at 12.30, so let's at least meet her and chat for twenty minutes or something, it doesn't have to be more than that. Katie's at the childminder's, but Denise has a dentist appointment so I have to be out of here by one-thirty latest to get her to nursery because they get very shirty if you bring them in after two o'clock. You mustn't miss The Register! Honestly, they get a bit above themselves, I said she's three, this is a nursery, she's not actually at school yet, surely I can pop her in when suits me and they looked so disapproving it was as though I'd said I was giving her a tattoo for her birthday or something -

HENRIK: Fine.

JESSICA: Anyhow - I just thought if we get a Hungarian speaker, they might know a few traditional recipes. . . Hungarian recipes - things you like. . . that would be quite nice, don't you think? They could whip you up a little paprika thingy or a goulash or a . . . one of those things mum used to make. Tried to make.

HENRIK: She could not cook.

JESSICA: She did all right.

Anyway. I thought it might cheer you up, the occasional ethnic recipe -

HENRIK: Ethnic recipe? I don't want an ethnic recipe.

JESSICA: You can't just live off toast and kippers. It's gross, Dad, the pair of you –

HENRIK: Not true. Last night we had spaghetti.

JESSICA: With what?

HENRIK: Cocoa powder.

JESSICA: Dad –

HENRIK: Is very good. You should try it.

JESSICA: I have. You used to make it for us. It wasn't good in 1988 and it's not good now. You'll get ill, it's not a balanced meal.

HENRIK: Balanced?

JESSICA: All I'm saying is this place could do with a bit more TLC and a whiz round with a Hoover now and then and clearly you two are not up to it, and I don't see why I should cook and clean and – I mean even if I could – which I can't because of Katie, and the campaign kicking off fairly soon, given that the election is likely to be May – or possibly June - or whenever it's going to be – and then if I win –

And even if I don't - *I just can't* –

It's just really hard to predict when it's such a marginal seat. Dad?

HENRIK: What?

JESSICA: Craymouth. It's marginal. I was saying I can't predict how busy I'll be come the run up to May - or June -

And even if I had the time, I don't see why I should, to be brutally frank. I don't see why we can't find an adult solution to this whole issue because it's not taking care of itself and that's perfectly clear. My argument is that we can- or I can-throw some money at the problem and–

HENRIK: And exploit someone to clean up after us, no thank you.

JESSICA: No, not exploit - someone who'd be grateful for the job! I don't mind paying. I've said I don't mind. It's wealth-sharing. I have neither time nor inclination to scrub the bloody – to clean up after you and Matthew and I don't see why I should. I am prepared, however, to use some of my hard-earned money to solve the problem because that would make me sleep easier if -

HENRIK: Ah yes, the *problem* –

JESSICA: Yes, exactly, I would sleep easier knowing –

HENRIK: The problem is, I'm not sure I perceive the problem as a problem *per se* –

JESSICA: Look we've gone through this, and we've tried to do it your way, and you both said you would try harder to keep things better and it simply hasn't happened, it's getting worse in fact –

HENRIK: How does this look?

Holding up the shirt he's been ironing.

JESSICA: Fine. I've never seen you iron.

HENRIK: There's much you haven't seen.

JESSICA: True.

Pause.

So – is there a special reason for this – or . . . ?

HENRIK: I am attending a social event.

JESSICA: Really?

HENRIK: Tonight.

JESSICA: Great. Brilliant. That's great, Dad. What kind of . . . ?

HENRIK: Dinner. At my club. Tonight.

JESSICA: Your what? What club? What's tonight?

HENRIK: *(Indicates the white card on the mantelpiece.)*

I have been invited to a dinner.

JESSICA: October 23rd. Please don't tell me, it's not the –

HENRIK: Check it out.

JESSICA: *(she reads the card)* 'The Hungarian Society of Surrey invites you to the' – Hungarian Society – are you still doing that? -

HENRIK: I have a life membership. You may recall.

JESSICA: So you do. *(Reading invitation card)* ' - invites you to the 1956 Uprising Commemoration Dinner, with special Lecture' – oh God, dad – "special Lecture presentation: 1956 forty years on: Is post-Communist Hungary living up to the ideals of its martyrs?"

Please tell me you're not going? To this?

HENRIK: Why should I not go?

JESSICA: Wow.

Of course – I just mean –fine, but - 1956, *ideals of its martyrs* – are you sure?

HENRIK: Why would I not be sure?

JESSICA: It just doesn't sound quite like your –
The lesson of history makes me wonder if it's a totally good idea –

HENRIK: Why not?

JESSICA: Just with what happened last time.

HENRIK: That was ten years ago.

JESSICA: Yes. When they actually threw things at you. Mum dry-cleaned your suit as I recall.

HENRIK: Is unforgivable, you don't invite somebody to give a talk and then throw things.

JESSICA: You just didn't give them quite what they expected.

HENRIK: A lot has changed since ten years ago.

JESSICA: Yes. It has.

HENRIK: It's a new age. Ok. So I can learn. I can adapt.

JESSICA: Well it's great you're going out. Can I safely assume that at least you're not giving the lecture this time?

HENRIK: I'm going to listen carefully and not cause trouble.

JESSICA: Lovely.

HENRIK: (*brandishing a sheaf of papers*) However, I have prepared a brief document summarizing my position – which I can circulate if -

JESSICA: “Achievements and triumphs of the Communist era considered.” Dad –

HENRIK: You don't think it sounds too frivolous?

JESSICA: This is exactly what I mean! They won't want to hear about the triumphs of the Communist era –

HENRIK: It's a balanced and objective paper. Supported by empirical evidence.

JESSICA: Dad - Can I suggest – please -

HENRIK: And if I find my sensibilities insupportably assaulted by any flagrant twisting of the truth then I shall take appropriate and swift action. By delivering my point of view. To any interested parties.

JESSICA: Just please don't – just try not to upset people –

HENRIK: There can be no upset. It is a scientific and purely objective analysis.

Jessica!

Relax.

We are not necessarily bound by what happened last time.

JESSICA: Really?

HENRIK: Such a pessimist for one so young.

JESSICA: In my darker moments, obviously –

HENRIK: What right have you to ‘darker moments’?

JESSICA: Sorry, Dad, I forgot my life has been one long sunny picnic.

HENRIK: It has. By comparison.

JESSICA: Yes. All right. (*Picking up green hard-backed notebook*) And when are you going to let me read the Grand Official History?

HENRIK: (*taking it from her*) When it’s finished.

JESSICA: I thought it was finished.

HENRIK: I’m still revising. And working on the closing pages.

JESSICA: The summing up?

HENRIK: Exactly. And when you read it you will see that I do not preclude the possibility of progress. Of forward movement.

Difficult though it is to discern.

JESSICA: Well, hooray. It’ll be an uplifting read then.

HENRIK: I do not set out to ‘uplift.’ I set out to present some form of objective analysis.

JESSICA: Yes, I know that, Dad. I get you.

HENRIK: I think I need a tie.

Exit HENRIK.

JESSICA: And where’s Matthew? He needs to be here -

Please tell me he’s not still in his pants.

Enter MATTHEW in dressing gown with bowl of water and washing-up brush.

MATTHEW: This place will not know itself. I guarantee.

JESSICA: Christ, Matthew, could you not put some clothes on? And what's that for?

MATTHEW: It's for the window sill. *(dabs at it)*

JESSICA: Matthew, really, please co-operate – Dad is going to get ill if he lives like this much longer – eating bizarre crap and breathing in this air –

MATTHEW: I'm on it! I'm rectifying the situation - *(dabs at window sill)* And it's coming up lovely!

JESSICA: Please stop sabotaging my attempts to help you . . .

MATTHEW: We don't want your help.

JESSICA: Fine. I'm past caring, to be honest, when it comes to you, it's your life, Matthew, and frankly it's just been going on too bloody long and it's your business – but *Dad* . . . I'm not going to watch him slide into chaos and filth and Christ knows an early grave because you think it's hilarious that a man of his age is eating cocoa powder and spaghetti for his evening meal. It's not hilarious. It's sad and pathetic and shaming and wrong.

MATTHEW: It's delicious actually.

JESSICA: Have you even registered, Matt, that the state of this house is probably at a level now where it is having a significant negative impact on the value of the property?

MATTHEW: Aha! Now I get you! Value of the property -

JESSICA: I'm not going to start debating, I have to go and -

MATTHEW: Funny I thought for one crazed moment there was some actual philanthropy or something going on but now I see –

JESSICA: I'm being practical!

MATTHEW: So am I. *I'm cleaning!*

JESSICA: It's a bit late now, Matthew, perhaps five years ago I might have been a little more impressed.

MATTHEW: Anyway - *(little dab)* You're looking very dapper. Going somewhere nice?

JESSICA: Yes, super glamorous morning – here to find you guys a cleaning-lady, and then Denise's to pick up Katie, and then the nursery, so I can be at the office for half-two and

get everything done that has to be done in three hours rather than in eight. So that I can get to the Deli before seven to purchase borlotti beans and pancetta for the very snazzy thing that Seb wants to cook on Friday.

MATTHEW: What's Friday?

JESSICA: Our special dinner. You know. I told you.

MATTHEW: What? Anniversary?

JESSICA: Matthew!

MATTHEW: Christmas? Passover? What?

JESSICA: Tony is coming round. I told you.

MATTJEW: Tony who?

JESSICA: Matthew. Tony!

MATTHEW: Ah. Wow. Borlotti beans, eh.

JESSICA: So all in all it's shaping up to be what I call a Ginger Rogers sort of a day.

MATTHEW: Which is - ?

JESSICA: Where Seb does his Fred Astaire routine in the kitchen awaiting The Arrival of the Ingredients. While I do everything that he has to do, but backwards and in high heels.

MATTHEW: Nice that he cooks though.

JESSICA: Oh he's very feminist. Just not in the bathroom. You should join the Party again, Matt.

MATTHEW: Yeah. Well.

JESSICA: You should. Everything's different now.

MATTHEW: Yup.

JESSICA: We have a real chance. There's everything to play for. I mean Craymouth is marginal but if we can get the Greens on the run, and make the Bs and the Cs really get what we have to offer them in real terms of their actual pocket. I was saying to Seb, we've done the hard bit, we've transformed. We've got rid of all that dead weight, all the outdated stuff that turned people off -

MATTHEW: The socialism, you mean?

JESSICA: Whatever you want to call it – it's gone, we're free. At last, we're shot of Big Daddy's stranglehold. And we can win. If people like you could just accept that what's gone is gone.

MATTHEW: Yes but it's sort of the socialism I miss, though.

JESSICA: If you got in the bloody Party and did your bit we could be in power next May!

MATTHEW: Power. No, I get it. Wish I could help out. I guess I'm just not feeling it.

JESSICA: Why not? You were so committed.

MATTHEW: I tried. I did try. A couple of years ago I gave myself a stern talking to and I got as far as picking up the phone to renew my subs and then I just –

JESSICA: What?

MATTHEW: All I could see looming in front of me was that ghastly school-assembly hatchet-job that Tony and your lot did on Clause four –

JESSICA: Clause four – for fuck's sake! Oh come on, Matthew. Stop quibbling over words – it's just the words you're attached to – you just love the words 'common ownership' –

MATTHEW: Yes I do love those words -

JESSICA: - 'means of production in the hands of the workers' – it's just some phrases – old school Marxist frighteners giving voters the heebie-jeebies - who cares if one or few phrases got changed -?

MATTHEW: It's the one or two phrases that somehow make all the difference. And yes, it's the words! I'm attached to the words. Words make all the difference. Like when you say, "Hoc est corpus." - "The truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth." "I do." Little magic words that change everything –

JESSICA: It was those little magic words that were stopping us get elected!

MATTHEW: But what do we have in their place? That woeful meaningless *non-speak* that Tony bashed out. Each one of us having the means to realize our true *potential* – our common *endeavour*, and living together freely blah blah – what does it *mean*? It's not an argument, is it - who could possibly disagree? It's not even language, it's just gutless, spineless, puerile, empty political blancmange-

JESSICA: Oh yes, well, I'm so sorry we're not quite left enough for you, not like the old days and all the "Lefter than thou" stuff. That was your big thing, wasn't it -

MATTHEW: That was a great T-shirt.

JESSICA: It was a great T-shirt.

And an even greater morning, as I recall - June 13th 1987 – That was a pretty good day – Still seared on my memory.

Still got the T-shirt have you?

MATTHEW: Yes I have as a matter of fact.

JESSICA: I bet you have. I bet you still wear it. Lefter than thou. June '87. And how did that work out for you? And the country?

And for dad, and me?

And for mum?

MATTHEW: I'm sorry. I just don't want to re-join the party.

JESSICA: Fine.

MATTHEW: I've sort of had it with parties.

JESSICA: Fine. I know.

Look, Matthew, I'm sorry, I didn't -

Doorbell rings.

Oh my God. (*Peeks through net curtains*) That must be her.

I thought we said 12.30, why is she here already?

HENRIK: Must be who?

JESSICA: The first woman for the housekeeping - for the interview -

But she's ridiculously early -

Doorbell rings again.

MATTHEW: Rather sexist of you.

JESSICA: What? Oh. I know it's a she, I can see, and anyway they told me, it's a Mrs - (*consults Filofax*) - who was it? - Mrs Somebody - I was sure I had it written - . Must be my other diary, that was stupid - yes, look, 12.30. She's incredibly early - lucky I got here - unless there's been some -

Matthew - do you have any teabags? Or milk?

MATTHEW: If there are teabags they'll be in the breadbin

JESSICA: For God's sake – I'll go and put some coffee on, just please be civil and don't let Dad say anything too offensive –

Exit JESSICA

MATTHEW: And the milk may be a bit dodgy because the fridge door doesn't shut properly so just give it a good sniff –

Enter HENRIK, with ANNA, 53.

HENRIK: . . . do come this way and meet my son and daughter . . . through here. . . So, this is Mrs Tamagyi – Mrs Tamagyi, shall I take your coat – ?

ANNA: Thank you, Mr Gichner.

HENRIK: Henrik, please – and this is my son, Matthew - you'll have to excuse him, he's just – doing some cleaning! Matthew, this is Mrs Tamagyi.

ANNA: How do you do?

MATTHEW: Hello Mrs Tamagyi.

ANNA: So. You were expecting me, yes? I was not sure if my letter has come to you-

MATTHEW: Ah – a letter? Did we - ? Dad, did we – the post's a bit -

ANNA: I was hoping – I did not know if you would be at home today but because I thought, I have the address, I will just – take a chance because it's October 23rd – of all days! - and I will try the doorbell, and if no one is there – is not so problem, so very fast here from Waterloo -

MATTHEW: Yes, it's pretty convenient, isn't it Dad?

HENRIK: Yes. Is convenient.

MATTHEW: So, are you based in central London, Anna?

ANNA: Yes, it's very nice place. Not too expensive. Quite clean and quite fine. Close to the Underground. Angel.

MATTHEW: Ah, Angel and Islington – right –

ANNA: Very easy to travel around – I have been to the museum, the British Museum – and we also took a coach trip to –

Hever Castle! In Kent.

I love the castles – your English castles – fantastic –

MATTHEW: (*slightly non-plussed*) Great. Yes – Hever’s lovely.

(*They are all a bit confused but plough on*)

Dad, do you want to tell Mrs Tamagyi about –

HENRIK: So. What we are looking for. This was all really my daughter’s idea, so she can explain. Jessica – you know - that one -

ANNA: I know, of course, Jessica.

HENRIK: She’s a high flier. As they say. She’s a journalist.

ANNA: Journalist, wonderful. A . . . newspaper. . . reporter?

HENRIK: Yes – well, more, broadcast, radio. . . the BBC at first, but now. . . So. Anyway. She wants us to clean up our act.

MATTHEW: She’s a professional sorter-outer. Kicking us all up the arse. Soon it’ll be the entire country. Just wait till she gets elected!

ANNA: Elected?

HENRIK: She’s the Labour candidate for Craymouth. She is going to stand in the general election, next year -. . .

ANNA: She’s a political – a –

MATTHEW: Politician.

ANNA: I see.

And what is your job?

MATTHEW: I’m a –

HENRIK: He’s a layabout.

MATTHEW: I’m a writer. I write. I mean. I’m intending to. Big huge opus magnus – burgeoning. . . any day now. And in the meantime –

HENRIK: He had an interview with Tesco last week. The supermarket.

MATTHEW: So I did.

HENRIK: We haven't heard anything yet. But it's a retail – environment. Good prospects. Management possibilities and so on.

ANNA: Retail, very good, yes -

MATTHEW: A shelf-filling position – the late shift. I'm more owl than lark really. They had an early-morning cleaning job as well, but they seemed to think you could be there at five-thirty in the morning. Bless!

HENRIK: And – what – what's your – employment history?

ANNA: You know, I have been working as a secretary . . . for a law firm. Many years.

HENRIK: Oh really?

ANNA: I was studying law at the University. . . but when I graduated. . . I had no success in finding a position – it was difficult for me with - no Party connections. No family who could help me. So – I got nothing, at the level I trained for. I took what job I can. As secretary. I am working with same firm twelve years now.

HENRIK: Ah. So how will you - ? You need more hours, or would this be -?

ANNA: But I am so glad that you received my letter as I was not – I did not want to just knock on your door without an introduction – But Jessica, she was so kind when we met - so insistent that I should come to see you –

MATTHEW: When you met? When did you meet Jessica? I thought -

ANNA: Long time, no? must be six years now since Jessica was with us, but it seems like nothing-

Re-enter JESSICA with coffee-pot

JESSICA: Hello – sorry to keep you waiting - the teabags looked a bit the worse for wear so I've made some–

ANNA: Ah, Jessica! At last! I was saying, is it six years now, since we met, no?

JESSICA: I'm sorry?

ANNA: You have changed so much! Last time – you was just a girl with a backpack on, so young – and now – Was. . . I think, 1990. . . no?

JESSICA: 1990?

ANNA: Henrik, you must be very, very proud, such a fine daughter. . . and such a wonderful career. . . in politics – she takes after you, Henrik, no?

JESSICA: Ah. Oh. Oh my goodness -.

ANNA: We were so happy – when Jessica knocked on our door in Budapest - my parents, I mean, my God, they were so astonished! So very surprised to hear news of you, Henrik - So long since you disappeared! Such a mystery, they thought you was dead. But to be here now. So they both send you their best regards, Henrik, my mother and father.

HENRIK: Your mother. . . ?

ANNA: Lili. Lili Panyai.

HENRIK: You are Lili's daughter?

ANNA: Yes.

HENRIK: Little Anna?

ANNA: Yes! Anna!

JESSICA: Anna Panyai -

ANNA: Yes, was my name before I got married. You remember me now, no? Lili's daughter? We had some lemonade at my mother's house, in the garden -

JESSICA: Yes, 1990 - of course –

Oh my goodness. Oh God. . . I'm so sorry. This is completely weird but I think there's been a mahor crossed wire –we're actually expecting to meet somebody else today – a Hungarian lady – about a housekeeping job - a bit later -

But yes of course I remember your, 1990, it was the summer I went inter-railing –with Josh and Lorna - we went all over, we did Vienna to Budapest. And Berlin, of course, was the hot destination, needless to say – a bit voyeuristic, I guess but –

But Budapest, yes, you were there, and your mother made some very good lemonade – and we sat in your garden – and I talked with your parents, Lili and Ferenc -

ANNA: Yes - Lili. And Ferenc – So my father, he was the foreman at United Incandescent. The lightbulb factory.

They was all together on the lamp assembly line, my mother and father and Henrik. My mother started there, just before the War when she came out of school – she was fourteen, and Henrik, you must have been the same, no? when you started – Was so kind of you, Jessica, to invite us to visit in England – to get in touch with Henrik again –people she had only just met -

JESSICA: Well –

ANNA: Because I can tell you was such a surprise for us, when she – when Jessica – arrives! My mother – she was ringing me on the phone, and saying, this girl is here – this Gichner Jessica – can you believe it but she is the daughter of Henrik - Comrade Gichner, our that we used to know at the factory, the manager, when you was a very little girl?

And I was saying, yes, mother, of course I do remember Comrade Gichner! – he was very well-known in our neighbourhood, your father, when I was a young girl, he was always driving around in this big car – I always think of you in that car, Mr Henrik – with – you had – how do you say – a man in the front who was driving you,–

MATTHEW: A chauffeur?

ANNA: Chauffeur, yes - driving you in this fancy car -

HENRIK: Was not really so fancy.

ANNA: But all the kids loved that car! The one Mr Henrik was driven in! The boys in particular. We was running after it down the street! We was always, whispering, you know – Gichner is coming, Comrade Gichner is coming - in his big car! And we would run down the road after the car!

HENRIK: Was falling apart, really.

ANNA: You did very well for yourself, Henrik.

But I did not know you and my parents had one time been such friends, when you was all together, making lightbulbs - for the big factory - United Incandescent – before the war

My mother said oh yes, we were friends with Comrade Gichner when he was just little Henrik! Rowing together on the Danube, skating in the winter – I had no idea.

HENRIK: Lili and Ferenc.

We were indeed – good friends. Before the war -

There was a little disagreement later but – nothing personal.

ANNA: So - my mother even found - (*brings out a photograph*) Here you are, Henrik – and this is my mother, and my father – in their swimming trunks!

HENRIK studies the photograph.

All so young.

HENRIK: She could dive, your mother. From the top board. She could have competed. And that red hair – up on the top board. Like a sort of - flying angel.

JESSICA: I suppose things must be very different these days, in Hungary – I mean even since 1990 - everything must have changed?

ANNA: Oh yes, it has all changed. Now the Government is in love with America – and so we are all in love with America. Our new masters! Macdonalds! Starbucks! Hollywood!

And of course America is in love with Israel, so now the government is in love with Israel.

So nothing changes. You know what I mean?

(Pause.)

But – I am very happy you received my letter. I don't want to take up your whole day so – perhaps we can talk about it.

JESSICA: Your letter?

ANNA: Should we talk about it, no? My proposal in the letter.

HENRIK: What letter?

ANNA: The letter I sent in June.

I am wondering – what you thought about it?

HENRIK: Matthew – did you - ? Was there a letter?

ANNA: So you didn't – you didn't see my letter?

MATTHEW: There is that pile of post behind the breadbin, Dad. But if you don't open it after about six months I tend to chuck it. Sorry.

JESSICA: Oh dear.

ANNA: You didn't see my letter?

HENRIK: I saw no letter from you. There was no letter. I would have remembered.

ANNA: No? Oh my God. I am sorry to hear that because I hoped you had – This is perhaps awkward then.

I had hoped you had already read what I – what I have come to ask you.

The reason for my visit.

JESSICA: Perhaps you could just tell us now what it is you – how we can help you?

ANNA: So. In my letter, I explained that there is a new movement in Hungary today – a pressure group who are pursuing compensation. With regards to the Communist era. It was a proposal coming from some lawyers in Budapest, a year or two ago – some academic lawyers, they published a – what you say? – in a – publication –

JESSICA: A paper? An article?

ANNA: Yes – an article - arguing that there should be some way – for people to claim compensation for - damages incurred under Communism. Not so much for injury to the person – though that would be very good idea– but – to start with, at least, for property lost –

For goods and property removed – stolen - during the time of Communism.

This was in fact the case for my parents. Because my father was in textiles, he trained as a tailor, and he started a small business, they had five sewing machines, and some equipment, material, small things – and the Communist Party, after the war - they was nationalizing, of course, so the regime, they take the sewing machines – they take everything. My parents lose everything. Was not uncommon. Was normal. You know? For small businesses, private enterprise, small farms and so on.

So now the law firm I work for is very interested, has become involved, in this idea. For compensation, for property stolen under Communist regime. And we are putting together several cases of this kind. We think with a good possibility of success.

And if there is success for one – there will be success for many.

So my boss, I have told him of our family, and he says, Anna, we will make this one of our test cases - the situation of your father and the sewing machines. We will pursue this matter of compensation for him.

But to win, we must have witnesses – witness testimony in support of the claim.

Somebody who knew about what happened - the stolen property - somebody who was there, watching.

Or, even better, somebody involved in the actual removal of the property, a Party member or an official –

Somebody who can say, yes, I was there, I did this, and yes these things happened.

Such as yourself, Henrik.

Because you know. What you know.

HENRIK: What I know - ?

ANNA: So - That is why - I come to you, in person, and explain to you, in person, why this is important, to me, to my family –

That if you comply –

Is very important for us.

HENRIK: And how would I – comply? What do you ask me to do?

ANNA: Just that you would confirm, with your signature – a simple statement – drafted by -.

HENRIK: What kind of statement?

ANNA: Here. (*She hands HENRIK a paper document.*) It was drafted, and of course translated, by my boss.

If you can sign –

Then we can proceed. We can, perhaps, win.

HENRIK: But I have not lived in Hungary for forty years, I am a British citizen - how can I comment on this - what was happening –

These alleged events are – from decades ago - I can make no comment –

ANNA: If you look – it is not so very controversial – a simple statement – that my father’s property was wrongly – “unlawfully” - confiscated by the state or rather stolen in an act that constituted –

HENRIK reads the document.

HENRIK: - “. . . economic persecution of certain groups and individuals during the early years of the . . . such confiscation of their property and their businesses, constituted ideological tyranny”. . . “may be seen as provocation for later anti-Communist actions”. . .

Pause.

Is a lot of money? This compensation.

ANNA: Yes. Perhaps. Enough - Now they are not young and they are not so good in their health, yes, it will make a very big difference.

HENRIK: Of course.

ANNA: Though the money is not.

It is not really the point.

The money is nothing in comparison to what they endured. No amount of money – no money in the world – could put that right.

My father - he was in prison for fourteen years, wrongfully -

HENRIK: Is that so?

ANNA: After 1956. He was arrested. After the Uprising. As one of the insurgents. They released him in 1970. But he could not work after he was released. Because of his hands. He lost some of his fingers.

MATTHEW: How did he lose his fingers?

HENRIK: Well I’m very sorry to hear about his accident but I don’t see how I can–

ANNA: He was tortured.

JESSICA: Dad. Can I see?

(JESSICA takes the paper and reads)

ANNA: We welcome the money – of course. The money will be very useful. You can imagine. But is not the most important –

It is taking away a huge burden from my fathers' shoulders. And from mine. From all of us.

HENRIK: The burden of - ?

ANNA: We had nothing. All the years my father was in prison - My mother worked so many hours at the factory – just to feed us, just to keep going. It destroyed her. She used to be full of joy – full of music – but she could never sing again.

And when he was released – it was 1970 – I was a grown woman by then – he did not know me. He was a stranger. He had shrunk into a ghost. He didn't sleep, he was tormented by what he remembered – all the men he had known in prison who never came out – who had died, who had been tortured, executed, it was all in his head, constantly, twenty-four hours a day –

HENRIK: I'm sorry, I don't accept -

ANNA: And I have spent so many years full of rage. So many years wishing I could kill the people who hurt my parents so badly. Wishing I could do away with them. Find them, and take a gun and do to them what they have done to us. It is the rage that has been such a burden. I want to put it down. I want it to end.

So this – mark on a paper - is such a small step.

Just a small mark of your name. And you release us from so much.

Pause.

HENRIK: Just my name?

ANNA: Just sign your name, to some words. It costs you nothing. There will be no repercussions.

HENRIK: Oh you think so? You think it costs me nothing?

ANNA: You were there, Mr Gichner, you were there -

HENRIK: I am to sign – “that the economic persecution of certain groups and individuals during the early years of the regime, in the confiscation of their property and their businesses,

constituted ideological tyranny, and created intolerable poverty and hardship; that this tyranny might be seen as provocation in the face of which the uprising of 1956 can be seen as a plea for social justice and democracy-. . .

ANNA: No more than the truth –

HENRIK: I don't think so – I don't think these wild accusations are the–

'Ideological tyranny' – tyranny! Can I tell you something about tyranny – please – let me talk to you about tyranny -

JESSICA: Dad –let's talk about this calmly. Let's just calm down, and take it easy, and we can work out what to do.

Is that reasonable?

ANNA: I am sorry for the confusions, this morning. I had hoped you had read my letter and knew what I -. Perhaps you need time to think it over.

JESSICA: Yes. That would be a really good idea. Would you like another cup of tea?

ANNA: No I'm fine, but - if I can use your bathroom please?

(ANNA rummages in a plastic bag for a large brown-paper wrapped parcel.

JESSICA: Of course. Just turn right, and then past the kitchen, by the back door.

ANNA: - thank you – and while I remember - My parents - they tell me to give you this, Henrik.

They ask me to deliver it. My father says he wants to return it to you. *(ANNA leaves the parcel for HENRIK)* Just past the kitchen - ?

JESSICA: And then the door on the right -

HENRIK: What is this?

ANNA: Thank you.

Exit ANNA.

HENRIK doesn't open the parcel.

Pause.

JESSICA: Christ. This could be a disaster.

You'll have to sign it. Dad!

He'll have to sign it. There's no other option.

God, if this somehow got out to the Press I'd be –

MATTHEW: Yes. That is a worry.

JESSICA: Because if you don't sign it, Dad, and she makes a fuss, then – there may be repercussion. And if it became linked to me – in the event that I was elected – if the media got hold of any of this -

MATTHEW: Ay there's the rub.

JESSICA: It wouldn't be a good thing to have these – charges – or allegations – or whatever they are exactly – against Dad – Communist atrocities –

MATTHEW: It doesn't say atrocities.

JESSICA: Whatever - this kind of political extremism linked to me, to my family –

HENRIK: You must see this is impossible for me – it is – impossible –

JESSICA: But it could jeopardise my – it could jeopardise everything -

If you didn't sign it would look as though you were unrepentant!

HENRIK: Why should I repent for following my principles? I will not be browbeaten into shame by those people, who, much as they have always hated Communists, have always hated Jews a hell of a lot worse.

JESSICA: But I'm saying if the Press – if I was associated somehow – The fact is, we need to think carefully. About the potential implications.

HENRIK: So. That's all this is. An embarrassment. You think there will be no more police corruption? You think there will be no more social injustice? You think economic hardship is over? You think tyranny is a thing of the past?

JESSICA: Dad, if you could just stay calm -

HENRIK: In love with Israel! Did you hear her?

MATTHEW: We heard, Dad.

JESSICA: Look. She has a point. She was talking about America -

HENRIK: Did I not tell you, did I not tell you what these people were like -? In love with Israel -

JESSICA: Dad -

HENRIK: Is there no end to the anti-Semitism? – No end to such hatred? – does nothing change – has nothing changed at all?

JESSICA: I'll get on to the office – see what central office advises - I honestly don't think this is going to – we should just deal with this quickly, sign it and have done -

Enter ANNA

HENRIK: I'm to put my name to this, am I? To this lie?

ANNA: It's not a lie, Mr Gichner – the Party took everything! You know what they did, Henrik. You know -

HENRIK: I'm not putting my name to it! It is morally impossible for me to do that – do you understand?

ANNA: - and then of course he joined the rebels in '56 – how could he not? And because of that they took fourteen years of his life, they took his hands, they took my father from me -

HENRIK: I'm very sorry to hear it– but I was not involved in - those events you are talking about, if indeed they ever happened – and who is to say that they did – or did not!

ANNA: You know what you know

HENRIK: It is of course all intensely regrettable but it is not within my power to -

ANNA: And all we need is some form of testimony or witness statement from a representative of the old regime.

HENRIK: I don't like to be hijacked and threatened in my own home!

ANNA: I don't hi-jack – I don't threaten – I was invited - your daughter invited me here! She invited me. She strongly urged me to come! To call you to account!

Did you not? You sat in our garden, and you drank lemonade, and you said, you must come and visit Henrik now, you must speak plainly, you must make him put things right, you deserve the truth!

HENRIK: Jessica. Is this true?

HENRIK starts to open the parcel.

JESSICA: Look, I may have issued a friendly invitation to – drop by – I know I gave them our address – I was travelling around - it's what you do, inter-railing, you meet people and swap addresses and – yes, I invited you here but -

HENRIK: And by the way, I am not looking for gifts or bribes -

HENRIK unwraps the parcel and a long dark fur coat tumbles out.

He looks at it dumbfounded.

ANNA: My father says it is yours. He wanted to return it.

HENRIK: No –

I don't – I mean, yes, it was mine –

It was mine.

But I don't want it back – I – I -

ANNA: He said you gave it to him

HENRIK: Yes – yes – but I

ANNA: Is yours. Take it back.

HENRIK: I don't –

I really don't –

HENRIK holds the fur coat helplessly.

JESSICA: Look. Mrs Tamagyi - I may have invited you – in a casual moment – But it didn't mean anything- it was just a normal courtesy –

ANNA: Oh it didn't mean anything? That is very strange because, I remember it differently. From what you say. It didn't mean anything? That is not how I remember our meeting. Not as 'a casual moment.'

MATTHEW: Isn't that always the problem with history, the remembering?

JESSICA: You are misrepresenting what happened, Mrs Tamagyi.

MATTHEW: You think you know what happened –you think you have judged correctly, and then – ka boom! It all falls apart.

Blackout.

Scene Two

Ten years earlier: October 23rd, 1986.

We are in the same living-room. But it is cosier, cleaner, brighter, better-decorated, more comfortable.

In the room there is a fish tank with a goldfish in it and an instruction manual next to it.

HENRIK, 66, in vest and with shirt unbuttoned, is fiddling with a slide-projector, and some sheaves of paper. Wagner is playing.

He presses a button and a slide appears on the wall: a slide of HENRIK wearing the long dark fur coat from end of scene one, and a matching fur hat.

Next, a municipal building, in black and white, perhaps 1940s or 50s.

Enter CLAIRE, 53, with two ties.

CLAIRE: I can't remember which one you said. The red goes with that thread in your jacket. But the green's quite nice too. Which do you prefer?

HENRIK: What?

CLAIRE: The red or the green?

HENRIK: Neither.

CLAIRE: You have to wear a tie.

HENRIK: Why?

CLAIRE: It'll look wrong with no tie. Trust me.

HENRIK: I'm a no-tie kind of guy.

CLAIRE: You look nice in a tie.

HENRIK: No-tie no way no how!

CLAIRE: Henrik -

HENRIK: *(sings)* Don't tie me down!

CLAIRE: We haven't got time for this. That shirt needs a tie.

HENRIK: I wear a polo neck then.

CLAIRE: What polo neck? What do you mean?

HENRIK: The black one.

CLAIRE: It's in the wash.

HENRIK: Get it out of the wash then.

CLAIRE: No, seriously -

HENRIK: I am serious. I do it myself. Where is the dirty washing?

CLAIRE: I'm not getting it for you.

HENRIK: I didn't ask you to, I merely ask where do we keep the washing?

CLAIRE: In the dirty-washing basket.

HENRIK: *(vaguely looking round room)* Which is . . .?

CLAIRE: In our bedroom. Next to the wardrobe.

HENRIK: *(with dignity)* Thank you.

Exit HENRIK.

CLAIRE: *(shouting)* How is your talk coming along? Is it ready?

She picks up some papers.

CLAIRE: ‘The nationalization policies of the post-war government created genuine economic benefits – Kuchmann’s Shirt Factory, for example – see slide 16 - became one branch of the Hungarian National Textiles Company created by the State. Once in the hands of the workers, this factory became a shining example of Communist economic policy consistently delivering well above targets in successive five-year–

Enter HENRIK wearing a stained polo neck jumper.

CLAIRE: You don't think it's a little dry, dear?

HENRIK: What?

CLAIRE: I thought it was supposed to be personal recollections.

HENRIK: I don't have any personal recollections.

CLAIRE glances at him and bursts out laughing.

HENRIK: What?

CLAIRE: Oh God. Let's not go, then, let's just stay at home like we always do.

HENRIK: Claire, no, come on, we're going – we're going to go.

CLAIRE: Put the bloody telly on and do the washing up!

HENRIK: Claire!

CLAIRE: Let's just sit at home until we bloody die!

HENRIK: As you wish.

CLAIRE: Fine. We won't go. I don't want to go like this, I look ridiculous. You look ridiculous. We look ridiculous.

HENRIK: I disagree. Look at this (*her dress*) – this is very nice. Isn't it? It's great.

CLAIRE: Not if you're wearing that. I'll look overdressed and efforty. Please.

HENRIK: All right. The green. I wear the green one. You think?

CLAIRE: Hallelujah.

Exit CLAIRE, taking away the other tie.

HENRIK takes off the jumper and puts on shirt and the green tie.

HENRIK consults his sheaves of paper.

He presses the button of the slide projector and several more municipal buildings of exceptional dullness come up.

Then a slide comes up of HENRIK, arm in arm with three other people, two women and a man – a river, a boat in the background.

Another slide comes up – a black and white photograph of one of the young women from the previous slide, aged about 20, 1940s.

HENRIK looks at the photograph for a long time.

Presses the switch and another photo comes up – the same young woman, this time with HENRIK; he is gazing at her, his arms around her; she is smiling at the camera.

MATTHEW enters, aged 22. Wearing boots, long coat, dread-locks and with a bag.

MATTHEW: Wotcha.

HENRIK quickly switches off the slide projector.

HENRIK: My God. Is it Christmas?

HENRIK removes the last two slides from the slide projector.

MATTHEW: No. Just checking up on you. Making sure you're not going to do anything stupid.

HENRIK: Like what?

MATTHEW: Have a heart attack or something.

HENRIK: Why would I have a heart attack?

MATTHEW: People often do at this type of juncture.

HENRIK: Thank you for your concern. I seem to be fine.

MATTHEW: I see you have a fish.

HENRIK: Yes. Yesterday there were two. Already one has died. I watched it die.

MATTHEW: Is this a new hobby?

HENRIK: No. It's an unwanted gift.

MATTHEW: I thought they usually gave one a carriage clock.

HENRIK: That certainly would have been more functional. And less depressing. Marginally.

MATTHEW: Who was she?

HENRIK: Who?

MATTHEW: The girl on the wall.

HENRIK: Oh. Nobody. A distant relative. Just going through some – illustrations -

So how are the dreaming spires?

MATTHEW: Tall and thin and pointy same as usual.

HENRIK: And your studies?

MATTHEW: Pretty good, thanks.

HENRIK: You are doing well?

MATTHEW: Of course.

HENRIK: Working hard?

MATTHEW: Of course.

HENRIK: I hope you will not let yourself down. You can't leave it all until the last minute. It's not like school you know. You will come a cropper.

MATTHEW: I never come a cropper. When have I ever *come a cropper*? Whatever that means. I'm getting a First. The Master told me. Relax.

HENRIK: Who told you?

MATTHEW: The Master, the Nobel prize guy, you know –

HENRIK: Professor Goldstein?

MATTHEW: That's the one.

HENRIK: He said you are going to get a First?

MATTHEW: Yup. Said it's in the bag.

HENRIK: I don't believe you.

MATTHEW: He did.

HENRIK: When did he say this?

MATTHEW: Reports. They had a mid-term, whatever, pep-talk. For the third-years. We all got hauled up to sit under the chandelier and be told what they thought of us. And he said, Ah, Gichner, History, isn't it? Good on yer son, we're expecting a First.

And he's got a Nobel so I presume he knows the score.

HENRIK: A Nobel for what, clairvoyance?

MATTHEW: Something like that.

HENRIK: I don't believe you.

MATTHEW: It's true.

HENRIK: Really?

MATTHEW: I swear.

HENRIK: Well. My God.

That's brilliant!

(They embrace)

HENRIK: They really have a chandelier?

MATTHEW: Of course.

HENRIK: My God it's wonderful.

MATTHEW: Can't have a bastion of privilege without a chandelier. Just to really make sure everyone knows who is winning the fuck out of the class war. For now!

HENRIK: I hate this language when there is no need.

MATTHEW: Sorry.

HENRIK: You should be grateful for your education.

MATTHEW: Yes I know. I am. I am really, really, humbly grateful.

HENRIK: And what the hell is this with your hair?

MATTHEW: Dreads.

HENRIK: I ask myself why you must do this to yourself. A handsome boy, why must you do it?

MATTHEW: What's all this in aid of?

HENRIK: I'm giving a talk.

MATTHEW: Actually - *(He fishes in his bag and brings out a wrapped object.)*

I have something for you.

HENRIK: What?

MATTHEW: It's for you. Congratulations.

HENRIK: On what?

MATTHEW: Freedom. Completion.

HENRIK: No one is free. And nothing is completed. But thank you -

(He has unwrapped a very large and thick, hard-backed, handsome, green leather notebook.)

HENRIK: There's nothing in it.

MATTHEW: The idea is for you to write in it.

HENRIK: Me? What would I say?

MATTHEW: Whatever you like. Thoughts. Reflections. Your memoirs. Whatever.

HENRIK: Thank you.

MATTHEW: You like it?

HENRIK: But I really have nothing to say.

MATTHEW: Oh really?

(MATTHEW takes off his coat.

Underneath he is wearing a T-shirt with the Labour rose and the slogan 'Lefter than thou')

So what's the plan for tonight?

HENRIK: What is this?

MATTHEW: Campaign T-shirt. What do you think?

HENRIK: *'Lefter than thou'!*

MATTHEW: My design. Like it?

HENRIK: What does it mean?

MATTHEW: It's . . . light-hearted. But with serious intent. Holier than thou, lefter than thou. Seizing the socialist moral high ground. But with irony.

HENRIK: You are already campaigning?

MATTHEW: Groundwork. Preparing the path to victory next year.

HENRIK: Oh you think so?

MATTHEW: Oh yes. 1987 is going to be the start of a new era, when the organised working class will finally prevail.

HENRIK: Oh yes and who will organise them?

MATTHEW: Me, of course!

HENRIK: Good luck.

MATTHEW: I don't need luck. Historical forces will not be denied; victory is inevitable.

HENRIK: Victory. You think so?

MATTHEW: Undoubtedly. Who knows? Look, it's always possible.

See this? (*Points to scrawl on T-shirt*)

HENRIK: Nell? Who is this Nell? An actress?

MATTHEW: Neil.

HENRIK: Ah. Neil.

MATTHEW: He was on a visit to Oxford. Rallying troops. So we showed him our T-shirt.

HENRIK: I'm not sure about the rose idea.

MATTHEW: It's a bit girly. But we have to work with it.

HENRIK: And what did Neil think of this?

MATTHEW: Thought it was hilarious. Laughed his pants off. A robust endorsement, that was the Committee's interpretation.

HENRIK: Let's hope he's laughing come the election.

MATTHEW: Of course he will. All the way to number 10.

HENRIK: I'm glad you are so optimistic.

MATTHEW: Not optimistic. Just bowing to the inevitable.

HENRIK: So how long are you staying?

MATTHEW: Just tonight, I thought, I only came really to give you the -

HENRIK: We are in fact going out, if you'd have called we could have -

MATTHEW: It's fine, it's good. Go. Go and have fun. This is your moment. Released!

HENRIK: I'm not sure about that but.

MATTHEW: Where are you going?

HENRIK: To some kind of – I don't know. A dinner. Club thing.

MATTHEW: What club?

HENRIK: I'm in a club. A present from your mother. She wants me to take up an interest.

MATTHEW: So you *have* got a hobby?

HENRIK: Your mother signed us up to the, I don't know – something. . . (*Waves at mantelpiece, sits, puts on spectacles and starts looking at his papers*) We have a Life Membership.

MATTHEW: Life membership?

HENRIK: A present from your mother.

MATTHEW: For this? Hungarian Society?

HENRIK: We went before. It was all right. Lots of people in a hot room. Hungarians.

MATTHEW: Sounds really good.

HENRIK: So now I have to give a talk. They asked me to give a talk. Or rather I should say your mother volunteered me.

MATTHEW: What kind of talk?

HENRIK: The history of Hungary.

MATTHEW: All of it?

HENRIK: I don't know, I - it's some kind of a – I don't know – they are calling it a Commemoration. I don't know.

MATTHEW: 'Thirty Years On: Heroes of 1956 Remembered'.

HENRIK: Yes. That is it. A matter of opinion of course.

MATTHEW: What is?

HENRIK: Who were the heroes. And who were not.

MATTHEW: But are you sure you're the right person, Dad?

HENRIK: No. I am, of course, precisely not the right person. (*HENRIK has switched on the slide projector again. He flicks forward and a slide comes up – a photograph of himself, aged about 30, among a group of men all wearing fur coats and hats.*)

MATTHEW: My God, is that you?

HENRIK: It is.

MATTHEW: When was that?

HENRIK: 1951, I believe.

MATTHEW: I like the gear. You look simply marvellous in mink, Father!

HENRIK: A study-trip to Moscow. The Party sent us, I graduated with honours. My first experience of air travel. And we were all given a fur coat and hat as a gift. Rather necessary in a Moscow winter I have to say, not so much a luxury. It was thirty below zero.

But this I think is not strictly relevant. *(Takes slides out)*

MATTHEW: Very stylish. Have you still got them?

HENRIK: Somewhere, perhaps. I don't know.

MATTHEW: Where's Mum?

Exit MATTHEW.

HENRIK puts on glasses and reads from his lecture notes.

HENRIK: So – to summarize - ‘The facilities that United Incandescent provided for their factory workers in the 1950s were indeed superlative, comprising a sports complex that included an Olympic-sized swimming-pool for those who’ –

A slide here – number eight -

CLAIRE has entered and overheard some of this. HENRIK finds the slide which shows the exterior of a very dull municipal building.

CLAIRE: I just wondered about your talk.

HENRIK: I'm going to stick to the facts.

CLAIRE: It's very informative.

But did they not want something more – about your memories? Everyday life type of thing?

HENRIK: They don't want to hear that stuff. It's inconsequential.

CLAIRE: But you were there at the time. You can talk about your personal experiences. That's unique. That's fascinating.

HENRIK: I disagree. There's nothing fascinating or indeed unique about one person's personal experiences. Everybody's are the same. Love, work, death, bam. What's interesting?

CLAIRE: It's just that nationalization policies aren't everyone's cup of tea for a light, amusing, after-dinner talk.

HENRIK: They ask me for a talk. I have made them a talk. My aim is objectivity. I make no promise to be light or amusing. Anyway I get on to other stuff later.

CLAIRE: All right dear, I'm just saying –

HENRIK: I don't know why we have to have these miserable commemorations anyway with everybody whingeing. Heroes of 1956. What do they care, they're dead?

CLAIRE: Perhaps not all of them.

HENRIK: Well they should be. If they're not dead, they're not heroes.

CLAIRE: Right you are. I'm sure it's very good.

HENRIK: And I have slides.

CLAIRE: What's that one? *(of the slide projected on living-room wall)*

HENRIK: The United Incandescent Factory sports facility building at Ujpest. Circa 1951. Exterior view.

CLAIRE: Very interesting. Are you nervous?

HENRIK: No! Certainly not. What did the doctor have to say? It was today wasn't it?

CLAIRE: Yes, you know, same as usual, drink more water and peppermint tea. *(She presses the button on the projector to make the slide change)*

Where's this?

HENRIK: Hosok Ter. Heroes Square. Again, a matter of opinion.

(new slide) The Elizabeth Bridge.

CLAIRE: Oh these are very nice, they'll like these. *(She keeps pressing the button to change the slides through the following dialogue)*

HENRIK: You don't like peppermint tea though, do you?

CLAIRE: No I know. But that's not his problem is it? Peppermint tea it is. Other than that go away and don't bother me. He kept doing that thing with his spectacles.

HENRIK: I hate that.

CLAIRE: I know. I nearly slapped him.

(Slide of HENRIK and some other men in the early 1950s with spades and concrete mixers etc, standing alongside some children's swings and slides etc in playground, with a couple of small children presenting flowers)

CLAIRE: Oh look it's you. This is a nice one. What are you doing?

HENRIK: Putting up swings. In the primary school yard. There was a new initiative around '49, I think, to provide more educational play equipment for the youngsters. And we built three new nurseries. About the same time.

CLAIRE: I didn't know you were handy with a cement mixer darling.

HENRIK: I wasn't. There was other people did the actual construction. This was just the official opening I suppose. Photograph opportunity. Attractive children and so on.

CLAIRE: Aren't you all so serious?

HENRIK: Oh yes. The Party took its playgrounds very seriously.

(Slide of HENRIK, with a man and a woman, all in late teens/early 20s, all wearing bathing suits, linked arms, laughing)

CLAIRE: It's you! In trunks!

HENRIK: Oh – these ones keep creeping in - that's in the wrong pack –

CLAIRE: No, but that's a really good one – Who are they?

HENRIK: Lili and Ferenc. Old friends. Before the war. We all started on the same day on the lamp assembly line at United Incandescent. Then Ferenc got promoted to foreman so then Lili married him.

She was a great diver, Lili. Flaming red hair.

CLAIRE: Oh really?

HENRIK: Like an angel on fire.

CLAIRE: Crikey.

HENRIK: What?

CLAIRE: You sounded ever so slightly – I don't know –

HENRIK: Please. This is forty years ago. Can we stick to the facts?

CLAIRE: Fine, ok, so where are we? Where's that? The Danube, is it -?

HENRIK: I can't remember. Yes, perhaps – 1941 or '42.

CLAIRE: Show that one, it's interesting.

HENRIK: Just people in their swimming trunks why is that interesting? Why would anyone be interested?

CLAIRE: It's life, it's – personal -

HENRIK: No – I don't want to get personal - I don't want to parade things.

CLAIRE: It's not parading.

HENRIK: Means nothing to anybody. People went swimming. Just as they do now.

(HENRIK takes the slide and puts it carefully away) So when does he want you to go back? This irritating doctor?

CLAIRE: In six weeks. But he really doesn't seem to think it's anything. Middle age. Stress. All very vague.

(Another slide of people, holding drinks, at a dance, early 1950s, with an old-fashioned gramophone player prominently in the foreground).

Oh look! This is lovely. You have to use this. Look at the gramophone player! And is that you?

HENRIK: That was mine, the gramophone player.

CLAIRE: Where did you get that from?

HENRIK: My father. But I donated it to the Party, for the purpose of cultural improvement. . . music appreciation sessions we had.

And the occasional bash, as they say. A hop. This type of thing - a dance, once a month. Which as far as I recall, didn't hurt Party membership. . .

CLAIRE: I'm sure it didn't. Well who ever said Communists aren't much fun?

HENRIK: There's no need to mock.

HENRIK removes the slide from the projector.

CLAIRE: I'm not mocking, I'm not – I think it's great that you're giving this talk. . . putting another side across. . . it's interesting, darling. Why should the anti-Red brigade have it all their own way?

HENRIK crossly removes slides from the projector.

HENRIK: This stuff is all far too – trivial and insignificant. Perhaps I do it without slides–

CLAIRE: Oh no, the slides are good -

HENRIK: I really don't know why I give myself these headaches, what is the point? Hungarian club. They'll all have their – views and their arguments, and -

CLAIRE: It's just a place to go out and meet some people who have a common area of interest. Something to talk about.

HENRIK: I have nothing in common with these people.

CLAIRE: I thought you quite liked them.

HENRIK: Yes, yes – of course. They're just rather –

CLAIRE: What?

HENRIK: Hungarian.

CLAIRE: Well they would be, it's a Hungarian club. You need to give things a chance, Henrik. You can't just do nothing all day. You need to take things up, go to classes.

HENRIK: What am I, a delinquent?

CLAIRE: No –

HENRIK: I have to go back to school? Be kept off the streets?

CLAIRE: No, just develop some interests, do things. Have hobbies.

HENRIK: I don't like hobbies!

CLAIRE: I know.

HENRIK: I don't want hobbies!

CLAIRE: I know.

HENRIK: I am not a hobbyist!

CLAIRE: Look. Everyone always says retirement always takes – a bit of adjusting to.

HENRIK: It's not retirement, retirement I like. Not seeing those boring bastards at work every bastard day, that's no problem.

CLAIRE: Right, so, now we can meet some new people.

HENRIK: I don't like new people.

CLAIRE: I know darling.

HENRIK: Who wants to meet new people? There's too many of the old ones still hanging around. Be done with some of them, then I might have time for new people.

CLAIRE: Well, we have to go tonight, don't we, you're giving your talk— you promised to do it, you can't just not turn up.

HENRIK: Yes. Yes, all right.

We're a fish down by the way.

CLAIRE: What? Who?

HENRIK: Pinky. Not looking so perky. You know he stopped swimming? And now he's drifted down to the bottom.

CLAIRE: Oh no.

HENRIK: What kind of a gift is that anyway, a goldfish?

CLAIRE: It is a bit unconventional.

HENRIK: I bet it was Denise. In accounts. She has this idea about herself that she is very original. But why would you do that? Why dump a fish on someone? Congratulations, now you have the time to sit and watch a fish die.

CLAIRE: It'll have to go down the loo. Jessica! Where are your shoes?

(Henrik goes to exit)

CLAIRE: We need to get going. Jessica!

(to HENRIK) Did you over-feed them?

HENRIK: No, just two pinches a day, like you said.

CLAIRE: One pinch every TWO days.

HENRIK: *(exiting)* That's insane, no wonder they were so skinny.

Enter JESSICA. She is 17.

JESSICA: Haven't you gone yet?

CLAIRE: Yes we left ten minutes ago. There's a dead fish in here, Jessica.

JESSICA: Oh Christ.

CLAIRE: Please darling could you do something about it because it's just lying there and we're going to be late?

JESSICA: Why do I have to do something about it? Why can't Dad do something about it? They're his fish, I didn't ask for them.

CLAIRE: None of us asked for them.

JESSICA: Why couldn't they give him a clock? It would have been a bit more traditional. Not to say useful.

CLAIRE: I think they wanted to get something more interactive.

JESSICA: How is Dad going to interact with a fish? He barely interacts with people.

CLAIRE: Please darling, you're good with animals, just get rid of it for me.

JESSICA: 'Good with animals'?

Exit Claire.

Jessica reads from HENRIK's lecture notes.

JESSICA: 'A major provider of employment in the Ujpest area was the lightbulb manufacturers United Incandescent, my first employer, where I worked on the factory floor from 1935.

After the war, I moved into the textile industry and the Party promoted me to Deputy Director of the Kuchmann Shirt Factory, on behalf of the State, on a modest salary but with certain benefits including the use of a car and a driver -

My friend Ferenc -'

Enter HENRIK dragging a large dusty and shabby trunk.

JESSICA: I hear you've already killed the fish.

HENRIK: It was your mother, she gave me the wrong instruction.

JESSICA: Good start.

HENRIK: To what?

JESSICA: The rest of your life. This is scintillating stuff. What's it for?

HENRIK: My talk. We're going to the Hungarian Club. There's a special event. Thirty year anniversary thing to commemorate 1956. The attempt in '56 – you know, the reactionaries, the counter-revolution –

JESSICA: What reactionaries?

HENRIK: Surely you've heard of 1956 and -

JESSICA: Yes, I've heard of the Hungarian Uprising in 1956, I've just never heard it called a reactionary counter-revolution before -.

HENRIK: OK so there's a meal thing – and talks on Hungary etcetera -. And I am a speaker.

JESSICA: You? Really? Is that a good idea?

HENRIK has opened the trunk and is pulling out yellowing tissue paper.

JESSICA: What's in there?

HENRIK: Not sure. . . just looking for something.

Enter MATTHEW.

MATTHEW: What reactionary counter-revolution?

JESSICA: Hungary, 1956.

- No one calls what happened in Hungary in 1956 a reactionary counter-revolution, Dad –

HENRIK: I beg to differ.

MATTHEW: I think it's a reasonable enough assessment. An attempt to overthrow workers' rule and substitute American-style capitalism.

JESSICA: Yes; or, for those of us not living in some weird propaganda movie, it was a heroic and doomed act of resistance to Communist tyranny - in which brave young Hungarians took on the might of the Red Army, chucking home-made Molotov cocktails at Russian tanks while the world looked away in embarrassment and let them be slaughtered.

MATTHEW: It all depends on your take, I guess.

HENRIK: Aha!

JESSICA: Yes or perhaps the strength of your connection to reality!

HENRIK has pulled out a slightly moth-eaten looking fur hat.

JESSICA: That's horrible. What is it?

HENRIK: A gift from the Party. For my trip to Stalingrad. 1951. It was thirty degrees below, I recall.

JESSICA: Jesus Christ.

MATTHEW: And did you meet him?

HENRIK: Who?

MATTHEW: The man himself? Joe Stalin?

HENRIK: He gave an after-dinner address. All the delegates were taken to this banquet, at the end, after the tours were finished, and I saw him at the end of a long room. Such a funny little man. I could hardly follow, my Russian was still pretty rudimentary. But the food! My God. I tasted caviar for the first time, and vodka, and the most wonderful desserts, I hadn't had anything like it since my childhood. We were treated like royalty. These enormous rooms, like palaces. And chandeliers – the most enormous chandeliers! I felt like a king!

JESSICA: That's a bit ironic then, isn't it?

MATTHEW: Can I have it?

HENRIK: It's a bit the worse for wear.

MATTHEW puts the hat on.

MATTHEW: Where's the coat?

HENRIK: I don't know. I have no idea.

JESSICA (To MATTHEW) So why are you here? Ivory towers of privilege get too much for your conscience?

Or has your College thrown you out for not paying the rent?

MATTHEW: We're on rent-strike. It's a perfectly legitimate piece of political action. The College are fascists, they don't need the money. Look at the capital they have in those buildings. They could sell them to benefit the working man!

JESSICA: You're living in their property: pay your bloody rent.

MATTHEW: And all property is theft. As you well know.

JESSICA: If you feel that strongly about it why don't you leave?

HENRIK: For God's sake don't put ideas in his head.

MATTHEW: I'm riding the system. I told you. So that when the time comes I'll be in a sufficiently powerful position to assist in its dismantling.

But no, as it happens, I haven't been thrown out. I'm just being friendly. Bringing dad a little celebratory item. To celebrate his release.

JESSICA: Fine. You do realise this is going to be a total disaster? Those people in the Hungarian Society are not going to see things your way. Surely you've noticed that it's called 'Heroes of '56' -

HENRIK: Heroes of '56.

Jessica, you have to ask yourself, those people chucking Molotov cocktails at the Russians in 1956 – what had they been up to during the War, eh? Ask yourself. Hobnobbing with their Nazi friends, eh? God knows. What did they do in the War?

MATTHEW: Very good point.

JESSICA: Oh Dad. Come on.

HENRIK: Fascists. Opportunists. Anti-Semites.

JESSICA: How can you make such a wild, crazy generalization -

HENRIK: I'm kidding, I'm kidding!

Obviously not all of them can have been Nazi collaborators. . . in fact some of them were friends of mine.

But, to my mind, if you take arms against a socialist people's democracy then to me that behaviour falls -

JESSICA: Socialist people's democracy! It wasn't a democracy, that was the whole point -

HENRIK: - falls into the category of counter-revolution and does not mean the same thing as a people's uprising.

JESSICA: Oh come on! Are you joking? The pair of you are insane.

MATTHEW: No. Just lefter than thou.

JESSICA: I'm left! I'm perfectly left, I'm just not completely mad! (*About the T-shirt*)
And what the hell is this?

MATTHEW: The march to victory has started.

HENRIK: Granted mistakes were made by the Party. I'm not saying things in Hungary are or were perfect, not at all, nothing human is perfect -

JESSICA: I just think that, generally speaking, that is not how the events of 1956 are regarded. The consensus is: lots of people -

HENRIK: Consensus? Consensus according to whom?

JESSICA: - lots of people, thousands of people, died fighting an inhumane and corrupt system; they were heroes; the whole thing was really bad.

HENRIK: Ah yes, well of course I forget that we have an expert in the room. What were your impressions then, Jessica, of the events of October 1956 in Hungary because I'd value that information very highly?

JESSICA: I can still think, can't I? I can read books.

HENRIK: Books, now they are good things, and we all like books.

JESSICA: Marx himself said that a country which enslaves others forges its own chains. Marx himself would have said rolling in the tanks and killing ordinary people and - children in the streets was a totally incorrect response.

HENRIK: Nobody killed children.

JESSICA: Yes they did. There's evidence!

HENRIK: I'll tell you who killed children. Children died by the barrelful of tuberculosis living in the slums of Budapest while the Regent and the aristocrats gorged on Austrian pastries, that's who killed children.

JESSICA: Well, if everything was so great under the Communists, then why did you leave? That's what makes absolutely no sense to me. Why did you turn tail and flee?

HENRIK: Lucky for you that I did or I'd never have met your mother and I would not be enjoying the benefit of this conversation.

JESSICA: No, but, really honestly, why – why did you leave in 1956? What was the reason? You’ve never told us. After all – you had it all sewn up –you just said you had a great job and you were running the Shirt Factory and everything was just hunky dory and the Russians squished the ‘56 rebels like an annoying little bug on the carpet. . . you won – your lot won! So why did you run off to England?

HENRIK: It was time to go. There was some unpleasantness. I can’t say any more than that.

JESSICA: What unpleasantness - ?

HENRIK: One day I will tell you. One day I will tell you.

JESSICA: When? When you’re able to face up to the truth?

HENRIK: When you are able to face up to it.

JESSICA: Try me now.

HENRIK: I don’t want to.

JESSICA: Why are you always hiding things?

HENRIK: Don’t push me!

Enter CLAIRE.

CLAIRE: Henrik, whatever this debate is, we really don’t have time now, we have to – Matthew! Darling, what are you - I didn’t know you were here, sweetheart. You didn’t say you were coming! I’d have left you some lasagne –

MATTHEW: I’m a vegetarian.

CLAIRE: Oh sorry.

MATTHEW: For about the last ten years.

CLAIRE: No! Really? That can’t be right.

MATTHEW: Yes.

CLAIRE: Is everything all right? Nothing’s wrong?

MATTHEW: Why should it be?

CLAIRE: Just we weren’t expecting you. Henry we have to go. It’s a commemorative meal.

MATTHEW: So I heard

HENRIK: Though why we have to commemorate these miserable anniversaries I have no idea.

CLAIRE: What about the slides - do you want these?

JESSICA: Don't for God's sake let him give a talk, Mum. He'll have the place in uproar. Listen to him!

CLAIRE: Oh shut up, please, all of you -

JESSICA: Well, there's no need to get -

HENRIK: I don't need those. Just these –

JESSICA: You're not actually going to let him offend all those people are you?

HENRIK: I'm keeping it extremely factual -

CLAIRE: I don't know what you are talking about. How's your work going?

MATTHEW: What work? I'm at university.

HENRIK: My God if I had had your chances.

MATTHEW: I know, I know, you'd be President of the universe.

HENRIK: I had to leave school at fifteen. I was working on a factory assembly line using dangerous machinery at an age when you were complaining about your homework and having to sit a few exams.

MATTHEW: Yes. I know.

HENRIK: You should try it! And your friends!

Everything I know I taught myself. Nobody gave me anything on a plate. Nothing. Whatever I got I did it myself.

MATTHEW: I'm really sorry about that Dad.

CLAIRE: Henrik –

HENRIK: Don't be sorry, don't be sorry, just remember – your education is the most important thing you have and why?

Tell me why.

CLAIRE: Henrik, it really is time we –

HENRIK: This is important.

JESSICA: We've heard it all before, Dad.

HENRIK: Then you tell me. Education is the most important thing you have because-?

JESSICA: You're crazy.

CLAIRE: Henrik, come on-

HENRIK: Why am I crazy? I want you to remember it. Why? Why is it the most important thing in your life?

MATTHEW: Because no one can ever take it from you.

HENRIK: Because no one can ever take it from you.

Anything else – everything else - your home, your money, your clothes, your children– can be taken away - gone in an instant. Like that! But your education -

That is yours

It is yours

To the day you die

No matter what they do to you, no matter what else they take away

They cannot take that

Don't forget

MATTHEW: Dad, honestly, it's not -

HENRIK: I look around and what?

My God I mean – look at this life

Paltry paltry achievements. So little to show.

You go everyday, you sit at a cardboard desk, you eat food, you come home, your life drains through your fingers like sand – your babies disappear -

And before you've even opened your eyes – you think, I'm just getting started, I'm just starting to understand - and time's up, the whistle's blown, end of play

Go home

Take your fish and get out of here

But that's how it should be.

Of course of course of course

Sons should outdo their fathers

JESSICA: What about daughters?

CLAIRE: Ssssh.

JESSICA: Silly me, I forgot they're not worth mentioning.

CLAIRE: We have to go. It's a difficult time, he's fragile

JESSICA: He's fragile? I'm fragile! We're all bloody fragile.

CLAIRE: Come on darling

HENRIK: A chandelier! My God, is it possible?

Did you hear about this boy?

A Nobel prize-winner predicts a first class degree!

CLAIRE: Really? Did he Matthew? When? Why didn't you tell us?

JESSICA: What Nobel prize-winner?

CLAIRE: See you later. Don't fight!

(HENRIK kisses Matthew on the forehead.

CLAIRE and HENRIK exit).

JESSICA: I predict a horrible disaster from this evening.

MATTHEW: Probably.

(JESSICA picks up some of the slides from the table and holds them up to the light.

She puts the slides in the projector and switches on.

There's one of HENRIK with the young woman we saw earlier – and they're holding a newborn baby wrapped in a blanket.)

JESSICA: Who's that?

MATTHEW: Dad wouldn't say. She came up before and he just said she was a distant relative.

JESSICA: It must be his first wife. The one that died.

MATTHEW: Oh yes.

JESSICA: Did he never tell you? Or mum?

MATTHEW: Now you mention it, I think Mum did tell me, when I was about ten. She said not to talk about it. Dad's never said anything to me.

So is that theirs? The baby?

JESSICA: Must be.

MATTHEW: And she died too?

JESSICA: I guess. Or else she'd be –

She must have died.

MATTHEW: How?

JESSICA: I don't think anyone knows. Or else I don't think we're supposed to know. It was the war. I think they just disappeared. People just went missing. Dad doesn't seem to know. Or else he's not telling, which is more likely.

MATTHEW: I've never in my life met such a secretive person.

JESSICA: That's one word for it.

MATTHEW: What does mum think about it all?

JESSICA: No idea. She never talks about it either.

(Another slide of HENRIK and a formal group of other comrades, in fur coats and hats, with suitcases, in a large official room, which features chandeliers.)

JESSICA: Brilliant. It's the comrades in their lovely fur coats.

Where are they?

MATTHEW: Moscow, I think, Dad said.

JESSICA: Nice chandelier. My God, have you seen the talk he's giving?

MATTHEW: It's sound.

JESSICA: It's a disaster. I predict carnage.

MATTHEW: It's a funny thing about Communists. They really love chandeliers.

Lights down. It becomes dim, night-time, MATTHEW, with the Russian fur hat on his head, is asleep on the sofa.

Enter HENRIK still in his coat, carrying papers, which he puts down on the table. He switches on a lamp. Looks at MATTHEW sleeping.

HENRIK wipes something off his face with a handkerchief. Takes off his coat – inspects his jacket and waistcoat; he attempts to wipe them with his handkerchief.

Enter CLAIRE with two mugs. Gives one to HENRIK, goes and sits on sofa beside MATTHEW.

HENRIK: I thought that went rather well.

CLAIRE: Really?

HENRIK: Generally. The first twenty minutes. You disagree?

CLAIRE: *(looking at his waistcoat and jacket)* That won't come out. I'll have to get it dry-cleaned.

Oh God I hate this stuff. All I want is a proper cup of tea, is that so much to bloody ask?

HENRIK: How are you feeling?

CLAIRE: Fine.

Look, I don't care Henrik! Really. I don't care. It's not my thing. I simply thought it might be possible to – make some friends, I suppose.

HENRIK: Not when they hate you. I should not have gone.

CLAIRE: They don't hate you.

HENRIK: Oh come on.

CLAIRE: Perhaps you shouldn't have said the thing about the Communist Party providing you with a chauffeur.

HENRIK: He wasn't a chauffeur.

CLAIRE: He drove you around in a car. To many people that is a chauffeur.

HENRIK: Now and again, for a factory inspection! Or a training course or something. So the guy would drive me because I had paperwork to do, in the back.

CLAIRE: All right, Henrik, I know, you don't have to -

HENRIK: And anyway – what was his name? Endre? - he worked in the timber-yard most of the time, he was a wood merchant. It was an occasional, very occasional bit of driving he did for me.

CLAIRE: I think it was around then that the crowd began to turn against you.

HENRIK: And it was a pile of junk anyway, that car – most of the time it was in the garage being repaired. An old Ford, it should have been melted down.

CLAIRE: There was that woman huffing in the corner. You know that lady in the corner with the hair?

HENRIK: All piled up high?

CLAIRE: Yes, well she told me that her brother –

HENRIK: Oh spare me the stories! The stories, the stories –

CLAIRE: She said her brother Laszlo was one of the insurgents in '56 and he was arrested in the December and taken away by the secret police. He hadn't been heavily involved in the – in the fighting – not really, he was 18 and he had picked up a gun but -. So anyway, December came, and there's a knock on the door – the AVO arrest him and he disappears completely. Nobody knew where he was, no sign or word of him anywhere. And the family gave him up for dead. And then in March the next year - back he comes. Literally stumbled back into the house, but -. Whatever the AVO had done, he couldn't speak. He had brain damage. He never spoke again. All his language had gone. And that was her brother.

HENRIK: That's her story.

CLAIRE: I don't think she was making it up.

HENRIK: I'm not saying she was. But how does she know he hadn't been – hit by a car? Or a falling branch from a tree. On his way home.

CLAIRE: I don't know. I'm just saying it how she told me.

HENRIK: It's a story. People make stories. That story has a good shape. It fits how she feels.

CLAIRE: Yes but darling! Can't you ever admit – even within these walls, even between us – that some of what happened, some of what is happening now – didn't - doesn't - live up to those ideals?

HENRIK: Of course. Humans don't live up to ideals, ever, ever. I don't need you to tell me that! But it doesn't mean the ideals are wrong!

CLAIRE: All I'm saying is maybe next time you could consider -

HENRIK: There won't be a next time, we're not going back.

CLAIRE: Fine. Whatever you say.

HENRIK: They hate us, they always hated us. They say they hate Communists but what they actually hate is the Jews.

CLAIRE: Henrik –

HENRIK: Forgive me, please, if I'm not getting over the twentieth century quite as quickly as you people in the Home Counties.

CLAIRE: Darling, let's not get it all out of proportion –

HENRIK: Out of proportion! Six million dead and you talk of proportion.

CLAIRE: This is just a new phase for you. For both of us. Let's go to bed. I've got double maths with 5D in the morning and it's quadratic equations so God knows I am going to need some strength from somewhere -.

HENRIK: Should we wake him up do you think?

CLAIRE: Always such a heavy sleeper.

Do you remember how he slept as a little boy? With his hands up near his head like that? And his mouth made these sucking movements.

HENRIK: No. I don't. All this trivia. I'm smashed against the rocks with it. I don't remember!

CLAIRE: I love you.

CLAIRE leaves. HENRIK sits.

MATTHEW stirs and wakes up.

MATTHEW: Nice meal?

HENRIK: Very nice.

MATTHEW: And how did it go? Your talk?

HENRIK: It went fine.

MATTHEW: Did you stick to the facts?

HENRIK: Yes I stuck to the facts.

MATTHEW: So you managed to avoid telling any personal stories?

HENRIK: I have none. I really can't remember any.

I tried to explain to those people tonight – my reasoning - but I think perhaps I phrased it wrongly.

MATTHEW: Never mind Dad.

I get you. But don't worry. (*taps T-shirt*) You'll be vindicated by history. 'Lefter than thou!'

And we're heading for victory next year. Victory! In '87! A new era! Working people will rise up and we will see the wrongs of this century righted. Socialist justice for all, in '87! You'll see.

HENRIK: Go to bed. Bedtime now.

Concentrate on your studies, Matthew. Hey? A clever boy like you. Get a good result. Make good use of your life. Don't risk everything for an idea.

MATTHEW: Don't worry. Just watch me.

HENRIK: Good night.

MATTHEW: 'Night. (*MATTHEW exits*)

Scene Three:

Eight months later: 13 June, 1987.

The same living-room. June, in the following summer.

There is now a table covered in typewriter, papers and evidence of writing. Also a two-drawer filing cabinet beside the table.

The radio is on, with discussion and analysis of the Conservative victory 2 days ago in the General Election.

JESSICA is sitting working with school textbooks and notebooks at the table.

Enter MATTHEW. In coat, boots, with large bag as before, he looks very unkempt and under his coat is wearing the 'Lefter than Thou' T-shirt.

MATTHEW: Wotcha.

JESSICA: Where did you spring from? I thought you weren't coming for another three weeks?

MATTHEW: Unforeseen circumstances. I found someone to sublet my room to. So I thought, you know, might as well save the money.

(Indicates filing cabinets)

What's all this?

JESSICA: Dad's Memoirs. The Grand Official History. His retirement project. You started it.

MATTHEW plucks out and glances at a sheet of paper at random.

'The benefits to the majority of nationalization were plain to see as universal employment, health care and nursery education, as well as improved working hours, were among the many rewards enjoyed by-'

JESSICA: Endless self-justification.

MATTHEW: - enjoyed by the Hungarian people.'

JESSICA: Exactly who is he trying to persuade? That's what I don't get.

MATTHEW: 'To follow later - an account of the policy of post-war Communist reconstruction 1949 to '53 as pursued in the outlying areas of Szeged and Szekesfehervar with further consideration of the positive impact of the economic reforms of the-'

JESSICA: Before the excitement kills me - what's the news from the ivory towers?

MATTHEW rummages in the back of the filing cabinet and pulls out the green hard-backed notebook that he gave his father in scene 2.

JESSICA: I haven't seen that one. Must be top secret. Does Mum know you're here?

MATTHEW: 'Julia final events, Budapest.' Julia?

JESSICA: More rambling self-pity and biased, self-serving analysis, I don't doubt.

Do you want a cup of tea?

MATTHEW: What?

JESSICA: Tea?

MATTHEW: Yeah go on.

'The programme of nationalization was unpopular of course with those whose small business were confiscated and repossessed by the State on behalf of the people. Neighbours and friends in Budapest such as Panyai Lili and Ferenc, whose bespoke tailoring business was confiscated in '48 -

JESSICA: Confiscated?

MATTHEW: No, listen ,‘ - As a member of the official State Action Group for Textiles, ordering the re-possession of the five sewing machines from their business premises – which also doubled as their marital home - at 22 Eotvos Utca, Buda – was one of my more unpleasant duties. Eotvos Utca happened to be the street I lived in too –

JESSICA: Stone the crows, ‘my unpleasant duty’ - could this even actually be an admission of something?

MATTHEW: - Eotvos utca – we lived in an apartment at number 37 – a pleasantly situated neighbourhood with peach trees to the south and -

JESSICA: He actually gives an address? I hadn’t seen that bit.

MATTHEW: - hang on – neighbourhood ... Panyai Lili and Ferenc at number 22 Eotvos Utca - and Lili and Ferenc were my oldest friends in the neighbourhood, one-time colleagues on the factory floor at United Incandescent. Naturally enough after the closure of their tailoring business they were among those who felt hard done by under Communist rule. Damage to friendship an unfortunate corollary of a – it’s crossed out – *universal principle?* -

JESSICA: Interesting. Earl Grey or regular?

MATTHEW: Regular.

(Exit JESSICA.

MATTHEW flicks to later in the green book.)

MATTHEW: ‘In March 1944 Hungary was occupied by the Nazis and the situation became increasingly dangerous. My wife Julia argued that we should find a hiding-place, for ourselves or at least for our baby, Matild.

I strongly disagreed as I felt that we could not ask friends to undertake such a dangerous task. Sheltering Jewish people was a crime punishable by death or deportation. I was also very hopeful that our papers providing safe passage to Sweden would arrive any day meaning that we could leave Hungary in a matter of weeks’ -

‘In retrospect this decision was not the right one. I last saw my wife Julia and our daughter Matild on the morning of Thursday March 25th 1944. I said goodbye and left to go to work. I never saw either of them again. The bus I took to work was stopped at the Erzesbet Bridge and all on board were marched to a field on the outskirts of Budapest; thence dispatched to a variety of destinations: work camps, internment, and so forth. I cannot give numbers, of dead? Of survivors? Impossible to estimate –

I spent two years in Nazi labour camps. I was fortunate not to be sent to a death camp.

I returned to Budapest in the spring of 46. March. I found my friends Mrs Lili Panyai and Ferenc Panyai her husband.

But of my wife and young daughter Matild - who would have been two years old by then – there was no sign whatsoever . . . Their fate remains unknown. I questioned neighbours and friends to no avail. None of our neighbours in the building reported any disturbances. Most likely they had been arrested, perhaps in the street – then transported and murdered. Or taken to the countryside and shot, and flung into one of the mass graves which were dug specially for this purpose. Or perhaps the baby was destroyed instantly and Julia only taken to Auschwitz and gassed, or perhaps she, or the baby, or both, died en route on the train, or -

Possibilities legion.

Regret have no evidence to provide a proper account.

Will abandon this thread of narrative here perhaps cut above speculation as objective evidence lacking - remember that terrible photograph what book was it? of naked women and children made to undress at side of grave before being massacred but this is not reliable and should expunge from thoughts unscientific as who can possibly know and – please God -

Excise above as lack of objective proofs render overly speculative’ . . .

Lack of objective proofs. . .

Pause.

CLAIRE enters. Wearing a headscarf.

CLAIRE: Darling! You’re home!

MATTHEW: Yup.

CLAIRE: We weren’t expecting you for a week or two. Have you eaten?

MATTHEW: I’m not actually very hungry.

CLAIRE: There’s some of our lunch left over. Chicken casserole – would you like some?

MATTHEW: I’m a vegetarian.

CLAIRE: No! Are you?

MATTHEW: Yes. Since about 1870.

CLAIRE: Right. OK. Well there’s cheese then.

MATTHEW: Think I’ll skip it.

CLAIRE: You must eat, Matt.

MATTHEW: I'm OK.

Matthew takes off his coat. He is wearing a tatty and unwashed 'Lester than Thou' T-shirt.

CLAIRE: Oh darling. Was everybody very depressed?

MATTHEW: What?

CLAIRE: The campaign –

MATTHEW: Oh, that. Yeah. Collective downer. So what's been going on?

CLAIRE: Well. Jessica's exams. She's got one tomorrow.

MATTHEW: Oh really? Poor sod.

CLAIRE: She's been very good about it all. Very mature.

MATTHEW: What does she need to get?

CLAIRE: Two As and a B. For Oriel. Or an A and two Bs for Manchester. Which she'd also be perfectly happy with, I'm just a bit nervous about, you know -

MATTHEW: The North?

CLAIRE: I love the North, I just –

MATTHEW: Prefer the Home Counties. 'Course you do, we all do.

She'll walk it. Just remember to dose her up with a cough bottle and she'll be grand.

CLAIRE: What?

MATTHEW: Don't you remember? You always gave me cough medicine on exam nights. When I did my A levels.

CLAIRE: I did not!

MATTHEW: You did!

CLAIRE: Only if you couldn't get to sleep.

MATTHEW: Every exam night. Out with the cough-bottle. I can still smell the bloody stuff. And now I'm a total junkie before any kind of test. I have to mainline Benylin or my nerves are shot to hell.

CLAIRE: There was a medicinal purpose, you had trouble sleeping. Anyway Jess doesn't seem to have that problem.

MATTHEW: Balls of steel that girl.

CLAIRE: She's been wonderful, actually.

MATTHEW: (*careful to be careless*) And how are you getting on?

CLAIRE: Fine. Nearly finished. In all senses, I suspect.

MATTHEW: Great, so how many more sessions?

CLAIRE: Two. Then we'll see.

MATTHEW: That's good.

CLAIRE: Nearly totally zapped.

MATTHEW: You've done it then, you've finished.

CLAIRE: Finished is right. Zapped to high heaven!

MATTHEW: You reckon?

CLAIRE: Unless it's the other place for me. Nothing would surprise me.

MATTHEW: You'll be out of the woods now. You've done it now.

CLAIRE: Not quite sure.

MATTHEW: How do you mean?

CLAIRE: Just - not sure.

MATTHEW: Is this them saying that or you?

CLAIRE: Both, really. Seems to be a fair bit of hedge-betting going on. Amongst the – chaps in the know. Just have to hang on in there and see what they say.

MATTHEW: Right. The scan was -?

CLAIRE: They want to do some other thing. A test thing, it's all a bit – we have to go in on Friday anyway.

How about you?

MATTHEW: Oh I'm fine. All fine.

CLAIRE: When do you get your results?

MATTHEW: What results?

CLAIRE: The results – exam – degree results.

MATTHEW: July.

CLAIRE: Right. Bit of a wait then.

MATTHEW: Yes, though actually -. There's –

CLAIRE: What?

MATTHEW: Nothing.

(Pause)

CLAIRE: Poor old Neil. And all of you. You must have worked so hard.

MATTHEW: Yes. Useless. Lost the deposit and everything this time. A total lost cause!

CLAIRE: No – no – not a lost cause – it's democracy, you make the argument. That's all you can do. Make the argument. If you don't, who will?

MATTHEW: It's all feeling a tad pointless.

CLAIRE: Come on! Come on! Now's not the time to give up. Is it? Now's the time to try even harder! Everything to play for! Hey?

MATTHEW: Yeah.

CLAIRE: Any way – come on. Have a cheese sandwich. I'll make you one.

MATTHEW: No, I'm fine Mum.

CLAIRE: I'll get it. You sit down.

MATTHEW: No. I said I'm fine!

Sorry.

CLAIRE: Henrik! Matthew's here!

Come on. You're getting a First – aren't you? The Master said! So why the long face?

MATTHEW: No –no – I –

CLAIRE: My God I am blessed with two brilliant children aren't I? Let's not be down in the dumps.

Henrik!

And that bloody fish is thriving. I don't know what your father did to the first one, but this guy – Fantastic. No bother at all.

Enter HENRIK.

HENRIK: Who's no bother?

CLAIRE: Perky.

HENRIK: Well it's a fish it doesn't need walking.
So you're moving back in?

MATTHEW: If that's ok.

HENRIK: Why? Are you in trouble?

MATTHEW: No, no, just till I – find somewhere. Work something out.

HENRIK: Work something out? What does that mean?

MATTHEW: It means – until I work something out. I presume you don't mind if I sleep in my bed?

HENRIK: We're honoured to see you. As always. Can't remember the last time.
The occasional phone call wouldn't have killed you.

MATTHEW: I did call. I called. Frequently.

CLAIRE: He did call. He was busy.

HENRIK: We're all busy!

MATTHEW: Well you're not.

HENRIK: No? You think my life's been a picnic lately?

MATTHEW: No.

CLAIRE: Please can we not pick fights?

HENRIK: I'm not picking fights!

CLAIRE: We all know Matthew's had Finals and the campaign and . . .

HENRIK: The campaign! And look what happened there.

CLAIRE: I think it's wonderful that they tried, these young people, that your son is trying. . .

HENRIK: Trying! Trying! Don't try! Do!

'Lefter than thou'! So typical of your generation, can you do nothing without irony?

MATTHEW: And can yours do nothing without making a God-awful cock-up?

CLAIRE: I DO NOT NEED THIS! ALL RIGHT? ALL RIGHT!

I do not need this.

Thank you.

(Exit CLAIRE)

HENRIK: So - shame about the – Neil and whatnot. Eh?

MATTHEW: Yes. A bit of a shame.

HENRIK: So what is the plan then?

MATTHEW: Plan?

HENRIK: For your life? Or at least for the summer? The next bit?

MATTHEW: Just finding my feet I guess.

Look, Dad -.

HENRIK: Yes?

MATTHEW: Something has come up.

HENRIK: What? A job? What's your new triumph then?

MATTHEW: No. It's – a different situation. A bit problematic, in fact.

HENRIK: Explain.

MATTHEW: It's not the end of the world. OK? It really isn't.

HENRIK: Good.

MATTHEW: But - I don't want you to tell Mum. Not just yet.

HENRIK: Oh my God is it some girl you've . . .?

MATTHEW: No! No.

HENRIK: Because if it is, there are ways – just don't panic, we can –

MATTHEW: Dad –

HENRIK: Stupid boy, why can't you be more bloody careful?

MATTHEW: Dad! For God's sake. It's not that. I wish it was.

HENRIK: What then?

MATTHEW: I don't want Mum to know. Just at the moment.

HENRIK: What?

What is it?

Spit it out.

MATTHEW: I got this letter –

HENRIK: What letter? Who sent you?

MATTHEW: It's not life and death.

HENRIK: Then why is your face like that?

MATTHEW: It's from the Dean. And the Chancellor.

HENRIK: Of the Exchequer?

MATTHEW: Of the university.

HENRIK: Can I see it? What is it about?

MATTHEW: There is - an issue about my degree result.

HENRIK: What issue?

I thought the results aren't out yet.

MATTHEW: They're not, but they're. . . they're saying –

MATTHEW gives the letter to HENRIK, who reads it.

HENRIK: ' . . . your commission of a second act of plagiarism, after the warning you were issued in your second year, constitutes a serious academic offence in the light of which we have no option but to suspend permanently your Membership of this University –'

Academic offence?

'All your examination results will be commuted to zero and your consequent degree classification will be Unclassified. You will therefore not be entitled to graduate.'

Not be entitled to graduate?

Zero? Because of this. . . what do they say - plagiarism?

MATTHEW: The thing was that - I was really busy with the election. The campaign. And I cut a few corners. We had this massive extended essay and I just had to get it done, so I think I – there were maybe some passages – look, I should have quoted and put a reference and all of that, of course I should, but I just didn't have time to go back and get all the books out again so I-

HENRIK: Cheated?

MATTHEW: I put in some material from elsewhere and I -

HENRIK: You stole other people's work?

MATTHEW: I was just too busy.

HENRIK: With what?

MATTHEW: With the campaign. Knocking on doors. It was a marginal seat. We should have won, we were so close. It was crazy that we didn't win – no one could believe -

HENRIK laughs.

Pause.

HENRIK: OK. There must be some process?

Right?

There must be some process of appeal. Against this.

You can appeal. You have been under pressure, you have been campaigning – your mother is – your mother has been –

All of that.

You go to them, with all that information, you ask for another chance. You appeal right? You go through the process, you apologise, you explain you grovel – and you - Put all this right.

MATTHEW: I can't.

HENRIK: You can.

MATTHEW: No Dad I can't, I really can't.

HENRIK: This is not a pride thing, Matthew, this is your life – . This is your education. You want this on your record forever? You know what this says? That your University threw you out? Refused to have you as a member? Stripped you of your degree! Because you cheated!

MATTHEW: I didn't cheat I just –

HENRIK: Oh come on, Matthew –

MATTHEW: All right, I know, I know, it's not good, I know –

HENRIK: So you must appeal -

MATTHEW: No, it's not that Dad -

HENRIK: And your mother! Your mother!

MATTHEW: No, it's not that, nothing to do with–

HENRIK: What then? Appeal!

MATTHEW: I already have! I already have! I have appealed!

Two weeks ago. I went to appeal. I made every excuse under the sun.

HENRIK: What about your Professor - Goldstein? Can't he help you? Get him to write to the University authorities! He predicted a –

MATTHEW: He already has. He made a statement, wrote a letter, but – the bottom line is that I –

It happened before. They gave me a warning.

HENRIK: *What -*

MATTHEW: In the second year – just a small thing – it was just an essay and it was the same sort of thing, I ran out of time so I - ok, I lifted some material from – so they caught me, then said it was plagiarism and if it happened again, blah blah blah, and I said obviously it'll never happen again – but then – I'm an idiot, I know, I -

HENRIK: But Goldstein, the Nobel guy, he supported you – he predicted you'd get a first!

MATTHEW: He can't do any more. He won't.

HENRIK: My God, Matthew!

MATTHEW: I appealed. I have already appealed. This has been going on for weeks. And this is it now. End of story.

I'm sorry.

I am truly very sorry.

HENRIK: No. No. No, no no, no, no -

MATTHEW: It's not the end of the world. Nobody is dead. Nobody has died.

HENRIK: This now – on top of -

MATTHEW: I'll do something else – I'll – think of something. I'm going to think of a plan.

HENRIK: A plan, oh God. He's going to think of a plan!

All those years. Everything we did for you – years and years - all leading to this - to this –
You shame me! You shame yourself!

MATTHEW: I'll do something, I'll do something else! It was a stupid mistake, ok, it was a bad choice, I left it too late but it was because of the campaign – it was a matter of principle – the greater good and all that – we were all working around the clock -

HENRIK: You left it too late because of *the campaign!*

The campaign!

And look what happened there!

MATTHEW: It's just a stupid academic rule, if I'd put in a footnote I'd have been fine. I mean, they call it plagiarism -

HENRIK: And your mother! To do this to your mother! In this state.

MATTHEW: - but it's hardly – I mean, it isn't stealing – intellectual property's the same as anything else, right? And all property is theft, right? So I didn't -

HENRIK: You *fool!* You bloody fool! 'Leter than thou' -

Enter CLAIRE.

CLAIRE: What is it? What's going on?

HENRIK: It's a disaster, Claire. It's a disaster.

CLAIRE: What is? What is it? What's going on?

HENRIK: How can he - ? Of all times, Matthew, to do this to us –

MATTHEW: I have done nothing to you – to myself, perhaps -

CLAIRE: Please tell me what's going on!

HENRIK: My God this is a blow – I can't – I can't -

CLAIRE: What blow? (*He gives her the letter. She reads it.*)

CLAIRE: This can't be right, it can't be right, it can't be. Matthew - There must be something we can do – Matthew? Can you -? Can he appeal?

HENRIK: There's nothing, there's nothing, it's finished –

CLAIRE: I don't believe you –
Matthew?

Enter JESSICA.

MATTHEW: No. He's right.

I've already appealed and it was rejected.

I'm sorry.

I'm really sorry.

JESSICA: What's going on? (*CLAIRE gives her the letter.*)- “commuted to zero”. . . They're taking away your degree? But they can't – I mean – can they?

MATTHEW: Seems they can. And before you ask, yes, I have already appealed as much as I can and they have all been rejected. So I'm afraid these are the facts and we are going to have to live with them. I've been thrown out.

It's just a degree. It's not -

HENRIK: Plagiarism. Plagiarism!

You bloody fool!

What the hell do you think you are going to do now with your life? Eh? What the hell do you think -

Lefter than thou?

CLAIRE: Leave it Henrik.

HENRIK: Lefter than thou!

What did I tell you, always? What did I always tell you?

CLAIRE: Stop it, Henrik.

HENRIK: You want to break your mother's heart? You think we haven't got enough on our plates?

CLAIRE: That's enough, Henrik, I'm asking you –

HENRIK: Want to really smash things up? Want to really rub our noses in it? Smash me against the rocks? Is that what you want?

HENRIK moving with increasing threat towards MATTHEW.

CLAIRE: Henrik . . . Henrik . . . stop . . .

JESSICA: It was a mistake – he just made a mistake!

HENRIK: Don't you question me. Don't you point fingers - Don't you dare!

Either of you! Don't make me do something I'll regret!

HENRIK lurches at MATTHEW and starts viciously ripping the 'Lester Than Thou' T-shirt off him, as CLAIRE and JESSICA attempt to intervene and stop him.

HENRIK succeeds in getting the T-shirt off MATTHEW. HENRIK hurls it to the floor, spits on it, grabs a vase and is about to smash it to pieces.

Don't make me –

CLAIRE: Henrik! Look at yourself! Look at yourself! Look!

HENRIK puts down the vase and leaves the room.

Blackout (Interval).

Scene Four: August 1990

Three years later.

Darkened living-room. It's about 4.30 am.

Enter JESSICA, now 21, with a rucksack.

The two-drawer filing cabinet is now a four-drawer filing cabinet and table still laden with papers and typewriter.

The house is scruffier, barer and dirtier than before. There is a black and white framed photograph of CLAIRE as in Scene one.

JESSICA pauses in front of it and looks at it.

She pulls a guitar out of its case and very softly strums a few chords. Plucks a few notes and tunes it. Sings a song in halting German.

MATTHEW enters in boxer shorts and a hideous unwashed dressing-gown. The dread-locks have gone; his hair is shaved short as in scene one.

MATTHEW: Wotcha.

JESSICA: Wotcha. (*sings another line or two of the song*)

MATTHEW: What a lovely surprise.

JESSICA: Guten Abend. Or rather, guten Morgen. (*strums a chord*) There's bloody nothing in the fridge.

MATTHEW: I didn't know you were coming.

JESSICA: Yes you did.

MATTHEW: No I didn't.

JESSICA: Yes you did. I rang and told Dad we'd be here today.

MATTHEW: Ah, well, you see, that's not the same thing. You told Dad. But Dad, Me - Not the same person. Different. Live in same house. But not same person.

JESSICA: Obviously I assumed he would - . Can he not pass on the simplest message?

MATTHEW: Evidently. How was the hol?

JESSICA: Not a holiday. Travelling.

MATTHEW: Sorry – how was travelling? The perverse tourist trail?

JESSICA: Amazing, actually –

MATTHEW: Jolly good. And now here you are, finished college and all growed up. Wow. What's the plan?

JESSICA: I've got an interview. On Wednesday.

MATTHEW: For what?

JESSICA: A job. In London.

MATTHEW: Oh you don't want to rush into that nonsense. Take a tip from me. There's this brilliant thing that happens which is that if you don't get a job, they actually pay you money to stay at home. It's a really good deal.

JESSICA: It's at the House of Commons. Researcher. For Harriet Harman's office.

MATTHEW: Oh. Well, like I say, don't forget you have options.

JESSICA: If I get it I'm going to commute in. I've renewed the lease on the house. And Seb's going to do a Ph.D.

MATTHEW: Oh good.

JESSICA: In economics.

MATTHEW: Oh, good choice. Really good choice.

JESSICA: What are you up to these days?

MATTHEW: Trying not to kill Pater. Mostly succeeding.

JESSICA: How is he?

MATTHEW: Horrendous. But, you know, we rub along.

JESSICA: I brought you something -

(She rummages in her rucksack)

From the tourist trail.

(She brings out a chunk of concrete rubble)

MATTHEW: Gosh. Thank you. It's lovely.

JESSICA: Berlin Wall.

MATTHEW: Ah. Thank you.

JESSICA: Little keepsake.

MATTHEW: More like a - scalp.

JESSICA: What?

MATTHEW: A scalp. Communism - we beat the bastard! Raaaarrgh! The beast is dead!
Nail its scalp to the mantelpiece!

How was it all anyway – the Wall et cetera?

JESSICA: You have to go. Seriously. You have to go to Berlin before it all gets ruined and made into a theme park. It's amazing. I mean – there were people weeping – smashing it with hammers – taking the rubble apart with their bare hands. . .and even now there's all these poems and letters, and graffiti – it's like history but it's right there, it's physical-

MATTHEW yawns hugely.

JESSICA: Really sorry, am I keeping you up?

MATTHEW: No, no, it's fascinating. I see that. I kind of feel though that staring at walls is something I get quite enough of here at home. My major hobby in fact.

JESSICA: Fine.

You have to go, Matthew, it's not what you think. You think you can stay objective but it's more than that. I cried, when I picked it up, everyone was crying – and for all these people who fought for so long - it's like a rebirth. It's this unbelievable symbol. Walls coming down. Everything that separates us, being blown apart. Crumbling away. All the old hatreds and feuds – all the fear and bitterness, all the corruption - smashed away.

Like this unbelievable - catharsis.

My whole childhood I grew up thinking we were going to get nuked and we were all going to die lingeringly underground of radiation sickness with our hair falling out and our skin dropping off. I had dreams about it all the time.

And now – it's over, the war is over.

MATTHEW: You think?

JESSICA: Yes I do. Peace in our time. Peace.

MATTHEW: Yes, but then look who said that.

JESSICA: The borders have all been opened. You can go all the way from Vienna to Budapest.

MATTHEW: Oh really.

JESSICA: So we did. I looked up some of Dad's old friends. By the way.

MATTHEW: Who?

JESSICA: The Panyais. Lili and Ferenc. The ones Dad keeps talking about in his memoir.

MATTHEW: How did you find them?

JESSICA: They were still at their old address. 22 Eotvos Utca, in Buda. I just tried it on the off chance – I wanted to find Dad's old house – so I looked up their address and there they were.

MATTHEW: Nice people?

JESSICA: Very hospitable. We drank lemonade, in their garden, and they had this rather dowdy daughter – Nadia, or Anna, or something. Looked a bit depressed.

Anyway so I gave them our address and told them they'd be welcome to visit -

MATTHEW: You did what?

JESSICA: Come on. It sounds like Dad owes them something.

MATTHEW: There are always reasons why people do things.

JESSICA: Why do you always defend him?

MATTHEW: I'm just saying there are reasons. Reasons that maybe you don't know about, haven't taken the time to figure out -

JESSICA: Reasons for actions don't therefore make the actions right.

Why do you always defend him – ?

Enter HENRIK in dressing-gown.

HENRIK: What the hell is going on?

MATTHEW: Jess is back.

JESS: Hi Dad.

HENRIK: Ah. You are staying?

JESS: Not for long. I'm on my way back to Botley Road. Just thought I'd be friendly and stop by.

HENRIK: It's very early.

JESS: Sorry. We had an early crossing. Thought I'd come straight here and have a quiet kip till you got up. Sorry if I woke you. You should go back to bed. I need to sleep some more anyway.

MATTHEW: Lightweight.

JESS: I've got a job interview on Thursday.

MATTHEW: For what?

JESSICA: House of Commons, junior researcher.

MATTHEW: I told her, there's really no need in this day and age -

JESS: I made scrambled egg, Dad, do you want some?

HENRIK: No, thanks.

JESS: So what's the news with you two, anyway? Any developments?

MATTHEW: No.

JESSICA: Any jobs on the horizon?

MATTHEW: There was a night-time cleaner position going at the BT offices.

JESSICA: Any luck?

MATTHEW: Did the interview. Didn't get it.

HENRIK: Night-time cleaner. Night time cleaner! What the hell's wrong with you? You deliberately antagonised them! Is that what you did? You deliberately wound them up so they wouldn't give you the job so you wouldn't have to get off your arse and do something!

MATTHEW: Sadly not. In fact I tried really hard. I don't know if that makes you feel better or worse.

HENRIK: I don't believe you.

JESSICA: You're probably over-qualified.

MATTHEW: I am overqualified, I confuse them.

HENRIK: Overqualified? Matthew. What a load of excuses.

MATTHEW: They're incredibly prejudiced, they just don't seem to like the three years of my finding myself you know, might have been OK if it had been in India but in the living-room on benefits, you know, they think for some reason it denotes lack of effort –

HENRIK: Benefits! Don't talk about benefits – who had every benefit a boy could have? You need to get back on track. You need to get over this! It's pathetic, sitting like this, day after bloody day. You think no one has suffered but you? You think no one else feels depressed a bit sometimes? You bloody get on with it, you don't slump like a bloody bastard in your underpants going oh no oh no what will I do my life isn't quite the picnic it ought to have been! Because I screwed up! Made stupid decisions, and stupid mistakes. The efforts of my parents, the years of my education, the opportunities served up to me on a plate – I screwed them up! Out of sheer bloody laziness! And inattention!

It's a disgrace! You should be ashamed!

MATTHEW: Oh I am, Dad, I am, don't you worry about that.

HENRIK: Then do something about it! Do something! Get out of your chair -

MATTHEW: I don't choose to – I didn't choose – this is not my -

HENRIK: No. I don't believe a word of it. You chose to fail! You chose it! And you are choosing this!

MATTHEW: Oh, yes, that's right – it's all going exactly to plan. You're quite right, Dad, this is really what I want, this is what I choose! Right here is where I want to be!

HENRIK: Well where the hell do you want to be?

MATTHEW: Nowhere! Nowhere. I don't want to be anywhere. I wish I was nowhere. I wish that I could be gone.

Every fucking day. Every day.

HENRIK: You! Gutless! Spineless -

MATTHEW: Yes, yes, yes indeed.

HENRIK: Selfish! Wastrel! What would your mother say?

MATTHEW: She would say nothing because she is dead.

HENRIK: And whose fault is that?

MATTHEW: She was ill.

HENRIK: With a sixty-five percent chance of recovery. Before you –

MATTHEW: Sixty-five per cent.

Is not a -

HENRIK: Be careful what you say to me.

MATTHEW: It is *sixty-five per cent. That is all.*

HENRIK: I understand the numbers!

It's the rest I find unfathomable.

JESSICA: Well it's great to be home. It's great to see you too, Jessica. Thanks so much, Dad. Did you have a lovely trip, Jessica? Oh yes, I did thanks, it was wonderful. We missed you so much, darling. And we must celebrate your wonderful result. Let me make you a cooked breakfast, you must be starving. Oh cheers, guys, that would be lovely. And then I can show you my photographs.

Right, well, I guess I'll have a shower if we're -

HENRIK spots the lump of concrete from the Berlin Wall on the mantelpiece.

HENRIK: And what the hell is that? Don't tell me we have to repair something else.

MATTHEW: No. No repairs necessary. It's the Berlin Wall. Lump of it anyway. Jess brought it back. A gift.

HENRIK goes over to it and handles it.

MATTHEW: They smashed it up with hammers. You remember we saw it on the telly? Bits of it flying all over the place. I think they sell them in the gift shops now.

JESS: Matt, have you got any towels? Spare ones, clean ones I mean. I was going to have a bath. I presume that's OK now we're all up?

MATTHEW: Fine, but I'm not sure about the towels. . . we have two but they're the ones we're using.

JESS: You have two towels? Between you - Two towels?

MATTHEW: Yes.

JESS: No spare ones that you keep in the airing cupboard?

MATTHEW: We used to have some but . . . not sure where they went . . .

JESS: Fine.

I'll use mine even though it's wet and horrible. How lovely.

She rummages through her rucksacks and starts pulling out towels.

MATTHEW: When did you say your interview was, Jessica?

JESSICA: Thursday. Harriet Harman's office.

MATTHEW: Jess has got an interview. For a posh job in the party.

HENRIK: Party, what party? You should concentrate on your studies.

MATTHEW: She did. She got a First dad.

HENRIK: So you did. Good girl.

MATTHEW: She means the Labour party. A job in the Labour party.

JESSICA: Researcher for Harriet Harman.

HENRIK: I didn't know you liked the Labour party.

JESSICA: I've always been in the Labour party, Dad.

HENRIK: Really?

JESSICA: Yes.

HENRIK: I don't remember that. Were you really?

JESSICA: Yes. I was. You just didn't notice.

HENRIK: I don't remember.

JESSICA: Don't worry about it.

MATTHEW: Do you remember the old days of causes, Dad?

HENRIK: No. I can't say I do.

MATTHEW: And now look. All the opinions, all the causes. The whole enormous argument. Floating on the wind in a little cloud of dust. Just bits of concrete and lumps of rubble left to remind us.

JESSICA: The causes haven't disappeared.

MATTHEW: Could have sworn they had.

JESSICA: Well they haven't. It's you who's –

MATTHEW: What? Disappeared?

JESSICA indicates the lump of rubble on the mantelpiece.

JESS: Do you like your present then, both of you?

HENRIK: What? Oh, yes. Yes. Very funny. Thank you.

JESS: It's not really meant to be funny as such.

You know Dad, I looked up your old house. In Eotvos Utca –

HENRIK: Eotvos Utca?

JESSICA: When I was in Budapest.

I saw where you lived. And your neighbours – Lili and Ferenc.

HENRIK: Lili?

JESSICA: The Panyais. Your old friend, Lili and Ferenc from the lightbulb factory.

HENRIK: How is Lili?

JESSICA: Very sweet. She made lemonade.

HENRIK: Amazing red hair. Very good at diving.

JESSICA: Well, not so much now.

But they were amazed to hear about you. They said you had just completely disappeared in 1956 after the Uprising - and they had no idea where you had gone.

Your friend Ferenc got arrested in '56, did you know? After the Rising, they caught him. He was in prison.

HENRIK: Oh dear.

JESSICA: For fourteen years. Lili thinks one of his rebel comrades turned him in for fraternizing with the enemy.

HENRIK: Fraternizing? Fraternizing how?

JESSICA: I don't really know, but someone turned him in to the authorities and then the Communists locked him up and tortured him for fourteen years. Pretty nice story.

He couldn't believe you were still alive. He thought that you must have been killed and dismembered by the rebels. Lots of people got shot, and the bodies got burnt so nobody knew who anyone was, apparently. It was total chaos. So they all assumed you were dead.

But I was able to enlighten them that you are alive and well and officially the last living Communist in Croydon.

HENRIK: So how are they? Lili and Ferenc?

JESSICA: Well, Lili just looked kind of old and sad. But the guy, Ferenc – he seemed a bit mad. Like he'd lost it a bit.

He had all these fingers missing.

He said they –

Actually I can't tell you what he said because it was too horrible to repeat.

HENRIK: Right. (*HENRIK picks up the bit of the Berlin wall and contemplates it.*)

You think that this will destroy me but you are wrong. You want to smash things up but you know what, there is nothing more to be smashed in this heart.

JESSICA: How can you say that? I've never smashed things up. I've only ever tried to put things back together -

HENRIK: Rubbing my nose in the dirt. In failure.

JESSICA: Don't say that, that's not – that's not what this is about.

HENRIK: Oh no, what is it about then?

Why else would you do this? Why would you bring back all this - poison? Why are you – gloating?

JESSICA: How dare you say that, I'm not gloating, nobody's gloating-

HENRIK: Yes, gloating, over the collapse of all that I – You can disapprove of my principles, from some great moral height but I - I raised you, I slaved night and day for you, I put clothes on your back and food in your mouth, I sacrificed over and over for you, for your happiness, for your comfort, I gave everything I had –

JESSICA: Oh yes, I know, I'm so lucky, Matt's so lucky, we're both so lucky and – I know that – and I – thank you – but also - I was here, remember? Through all of it! I saw it all! I saw everything! Everything that happened in this house - I was here!

And all the secrets and the refusal to engage – or listen – or notice -

We have a difference of opinion, dad, on a few things - let's just leave it at that.

HENRIK: You have no idea why we –we believed in a new world – we built it with our own hands – we were up against forces of evil whose magnitude you could never even imagine-

JESSICA: Forces of evil –

What was the force of evil, dad? Who was it exactly?

HENRIK: You know nothing of any of it!

JESSICA: Yes, I do. I've seen it. I've talked to them – Your friend Ferenc Panyai –

They locked him up for 14 years - They tortured him.

HENRIK: Anti-Communist propaganda.

JESSICA: I was in their house - in the same house that you ordered the confiscation of their sewing machines from. No wonder Ferenc joined the rebels in 1956, in the Uprising, and look what that led to -

I've seen him. I've seen his hands! He has fingers missing!

HENRIK: Whose story is that? Whose story will you believe? People have accidents – everybody worked with heavy machinery, including me – how do you know he is even telling you the truth?

JESSICA: You're unbelievable -

HENRIK: I never hurt anybody – I was never involved – I was not in the AVO – I ran a shirt factory for God’s sake- I was an uneducated middle manager -

JESSICA: But you were involved, dad, you were! You were involved. Lili told me - how she had gone to your office at Kuchmann’s and asked you to intervene – pleaded with you in the name of your friendship, to stop them destroying their livelihood, to do something - but you did nothing to help – you stood back and let them be ruined – in fact more than that, you actually gave the order to take away their sewing machines, you signed the order, you were a willing servant of the regime! – and they spent years in abject poverty, working on the factory line while their kid, their daughter Anna, was running round with no shoes on her feet–

While you got driven around in a big car! With a chauffeur!

I was ashamed, dad, I felt ashamed – I apologised for you -

And of course Ferenc joined the rebels in ’56, and of course they tried to end Communism.

It’s all connected, dad. We know the truth now, why can’t you just say, you were part of it! You were a part of it.

HENRIK: With regard to sewing machines - It was Party policy. We nationalized, yes! There was an end to private ownership. That means an end! It was a principle –it was THE principle - all wealth, all the means of production, to be returned to the hands of the people -

JESSICA: So you betrayed your friends.

HENRIK: A principle is not a principle unless you stick to it - even when – especially when - your own affections and interests are involved!

That is what a principle means! For the greater good!

JESSICA: You were wrong, Dad, you were wrong about everything and you know it but you just won’t admit it. All those years, defending the indefensible! Talking about principles, and liberation, and social justice – while the reality of Communism was obscene and terrible and caused unimaginable pain and suffering . . . I’m glad they smashed down the fucking wall!

HENRIK: Pain and suffering, shall we talk about that, Jessica – ok, yes, shall we talk about that? And what you might have to say from your great knowledge of those two things?

JESSICA: Oh I know nothing of those, I know that, dad, that’s your territory, no one else gets a look-in there –

HENRIK: - with your Oxbridge education and your travelling and your -

JESSICA: - in your heart you know I’m right – you know it –

HENRIK: What can you know of suffering? What can you tell me of suffering?

JESSICA: Nothing, I can tell you nothing, because you have the monopoly on suffering, dad! And I know nothing, I have experienced nothing, I have suffered nothing -

Compared to you!

(Blackout.)

Scene Five

October 23rd 1996.

We are back to 1996 and the comfortless sitting-room of Scene One, exactly as we left it at the end of scene one.

HENRIK stands holding the fur coat helplessly.

He looks at it dumbfounded.

ANNA: My father says it's yours. He wanted to return it.

HENRIK: No –

I don't – I mean, yes, it was mine –

It was mine.

But I don't want it back – I – I -

ANNA: He said you gave it to him

HENRIK: Yes – yes – but I

ANNA: It's yours. Take it back.

HENRIK: I don't –

I really don't –

HENRIK holds the fur coat helplessly.

JESSICA: Look. Mrs Tamagyi - I may have invited you – in a casual moment – But it didn't mean anything- it was just a normal courtesy –

ANNA: Oh it didn't mean anything? That is very strange because, I remember it differently. From what you say. It didn't mean anything? That is not how I remember our meeting. Not as 'a casual moment.'

MATTHEW: Isn't that always the problem with history, the remembering?

JESSICA: You are misrepresenting what happened, Mrs Tamagyi.

MATTHEW: You think you know what happened –you think you have judged correctly, and then – ka boom! It all falls apart.

HENRIK: Why does he send this to me now?

ANNA: Does this help you change your mind, Mr Henrik? Do you see, now?

Now will you sign?

JESSICA: What is the coat, anyway? What does it - Whose is it?

HENRIK: I gave it to him. To Ferenc.

JESSICA: When?

HENRIK: In 1956. On October 23rd 1956. In the basement of the Communist Party Headquarters.

I was in my furs hiding like a rat in the basement

MATTHEW: And?

HENRIK: I was behind a filing cabinet, I heard the gunfire, I heard everything, my comrades being killed. Outside in the yard the rebels shot two young policemen, one boy must have died at once; the other was screaming and screaming, then they poured on petrol and set them both alight. I listened to it all going on, I smelt it. I was too afraid to move. Then some men came in and I thought, I'm done for. They dragged me out – boots, fists, I can't remember how many, how long it went on – but I heard someone say – 'Take him outside and finish him off' – and such huge relief, thinking, please, yes, finish me. I didn't want to burn alive so I hoped they would shoot me.

There was two of them dragging me, up staircases, there was blood, or something, in my eyes and I couldn't see, I just felt then the freezing air, and the wind, and being slammed against a wall. And at last there was just one fellow with a gun.

And when he pulled off his hood, there he was - Ferenc.

Panyai Ferenc – my friend – once. Long ago, before the war, before everything. Ferenc who married Lili, red-haired Lili whom I had once thought perhaps –

And he was there, in front of me, with his gun to my chest –

And for a minute we just stared at one another

But then he – did this thing – he – took off his coat – and thrust it towards me – hissed, Put it on, Henrik, and give me yours, so I did – I ripped off my fur coat, gave it to him; I put on his coat, he put on mine -

We didn't speak again, I just ran. I didn't look back. I ran, away from it all - across fields, to the border, – to here . There was nothing there to keep me –

I didn't know they would arrest him, I didn't know about what happened later – about his hands -

ANNA: But now you do.

HENRIK: Why does nobody understand? – the ideas were bigger than we were! I was their servant – we all were! We should abandon the dream, because of – what? An affection, a friendship, - what's that? Some moments in the sun together, a swimming party, some laughs, some shared cigarettes, a bit of dancing – what was that in the face of the ideas we were serving?

Yes, it's true, yes, Lili came to see me in my office and yes, she pleaded with me to help them, to use my influence within the Party to save Ferenc's business – and they offered me every kind of bribe to do them a favour – cash they had scraped together - venison – tailored coats -

I know a lot of people in my position would have wavered.

But just because one fellow is corrupt, not everybody has to be! I upheld what I believed to be right – because the principle has to remain a principle – like an armour of truth, like a shelter from the storm –

The principle must be a principle even when – especially when – it is contrary to our interests – even our desires –

ANNA: But had you no feelings?

HENRIK: Feelings – what use are they?

The feelings would overwhelm you.

I lived. I survived. Out of all the millions, I was chosen to survive. I got back to Budapest in 1946, I was starving, my shit had turned black, I had to get some toes amputated for frostbite- but I get home – to find the worst nightmare of all –

My wife and my child – they had just disappeared. I went to our old apartment . . . it was deserted. It stank. There were rats, human waste -soldiers had slept there during the siege. . . no sign of Juli, no Matild. I went to the forests, I knew they had shot people there, so I dug

with my bare hands in the dirt – there were shallow graves - my hands touched – I saw – bone – A shoulder blade, a shin bone. So many bones, who the hell knows, could be – anyone. Anything. I could not continue. I was sick on the earth.

Lili and Ferenc had each other, they had you – a little girl – a two year old! The age my little Matild would have been if I – your sister –

This was my nightmare -

I scoured the lists of the names from the death camps, I was hoarse from begging survivors for news, for a shred – had they ever seen a young dark-haired woman carrying a baby? . . . And of course everyone had always seen her! - Always! Because there were hundreds and thousands of dark-haired women with babies. . . tens of thousands. . . lost. . . nameless. . . millions . . . raindrops in the ocean . . . each one a Holocaust – each one - every single one –

If you acted on your feelings you would have slaughtered the whole world – you would have raged and avenged and destroyed until the sky poured blood – no?

You understand?

ANNA: Yes. Yes I understand.

HENRIK: But the miracle is that - we didn't. Instead of revenge we had this idea – this dream of an idea - this astonishing idea that came with the Russians - with our liberation, and I use that word, liberation, I use that word without repentance - They had fought off the Fascist beast and they seemed –invincible – and there was this idea, this great hope that there could be another chance for humanity – not bloodshed! But to start again from the building blocks of what we are and what we need.

Not Jew, not Christian, not Polish, not Russian, not Hungarian, not anything – no flags –

An end to flags! Just human beings.

An insane optimism, is what it was! From each according to their ability; to each according to their need. A return to innocence before thine and mine. Not just a sentimental idea, not just a form of words – but an actual system. A scientific plan! To be delivered! By us. Brothers and sisters.

Comrades.

Even the word is besmirched. But it meant. What it meant once?

God, why didn't Ferenc shoot me? . . . Bloody fool! He should have stuck to his principles and finished me off when he had the chance –

HENRIK signs the paper.

ANNA: Thank you.

There is a train I think at 38 minutes past so I –

JESSICA: Yes - you should be able to make that. I'll come and get the –

ANNA: Goodbye. Thank you.

Exit ANNA and JESSICA. MATTHEW

HENRIK sits for a minute and then goes to the record player and puts on some music. Wagner plays. HENRIK goes back to sit on the sofa.

HENRIK finds the crumpled paper from behind the sofa and reads it.

HENRIK: So you didn't get the job. For a shelf-filler.

MATTHEW: No.

HENRIK: What's your excuse this time?

MATTHEW: Nothing.

HENRIK: You must try again, my son.

MATTHEW: I don't think so.

HENRIK: Come on. You are a clever boy.

MATTHEW: I'm not dad. I'm really not. I have nothing.

HENRIK: You have nothing? A Nobel prize-winner predicted you a First! Come on. Get out of your bloody dressing-gown!

Remember your mother – what she used to say?

MATTHEW: What did she used to say?

HENRIK: When you have nothing, that's when there is everything to play for!

Come on, my son. Try again.

Blackout

The End