

Mantra

Act I

V: (*shouting*) She's waking up, Phil, where's that paperwork?

P: (*from across the room*) You tell me, Victor. I handed it to you ten minutes ago.

V: nnnnnNo, you didn't Phil.

P: eeeeyYes I did, Victor. (*pause*) Maybe you stuck it in that stack of work orders...by the door. Did you look through those?

V: Umm, gee...now, why would I have filed a new client's paperwork with the completed work orders? Do I look like an idiot to you?

P: Oh ho ho, don't tempt me Victor, I'm feeling feisty today.

V: (*to himself*) Ooh! Jesus! (*to Phil, still shouting*) She's almost conscious, Phil, I just saw her eyebrows twitch.

P: Eeeeeew! I wanna see! (*sound of Phil running over to where Victor is*) Ooh, she was a cute one, wasn't she? (*gasps*) Christ, she's all legs, huh?

V: (*sighs*) Phil, for the last time, *please* go and get her paperwork...

P: Ummmm, how 'bout it's not over there, Victor.... I believe we've already established that fact.

V: Then write up a new form, there should be a few blank ones under my in-box.

P: Not until you check that stack of work orders....

K: (*as if waking from a deep sleep*) Oooooooh!

V: (*half yelling, half whispering*) Now, Phil. NOW!

P: Christ, take it easy.

(*sound of Phil traversing the room*)

K. (*coming to*) oh, oh my god...doctor, am I... okay?

V. You're fine. I'm not a doctor though. There's uh, a bit of.....

K. I feeeeel.....

V.... There's some paperwork here I'll need you to read and...uh (*sound of papers rustling*)

K: Perfect?! Mmmm. (*suddenly*) Oh no, the other driver! (*panicking*) Oh my God!

V: He's fine, too, ma'am, just fine.

K.(sighs) Oh, thank God! (pause) I swear I felt my neck snap just as things went...

V: There's some paperwork....

K:...black.

V: somewhere...(yelling) Phil?

K: Hm. You must be an amazing doctor, I mean there's not a scratch...

V: I'm not a doctor, I'm....

K:...on me?!

V:...uhh....Phil? Phil!! where's the goddamned paperwork?

K: Was I in a.... coma or something? I mean...

P: (*yelling from across the room*) I can't find it.

K: This is the strangest looking hospital....

P: We musta ran outta copies....uhhh....

K: I mean, aren't there any beds, or nurses, or...

V:(under breath) Fucking hell...(yelling) Print one out from the website!

K:What is this place?

P: What's the address?

K: Doctor? What is this place?

V: (*to Katherine*) I'm not a doctor... (*yelling*) Double-U, Double-U....

P: What?

V: (*shouting*) forget it! I'll do it!

K: Doctor?

V: Excuse me, miss.

K: Doctor, where is this place?

V: (*shouting*) Get over here and attend to this woman! (under breath) christ-all-fucking- mighty...

P: (*walking over*) All right, Jesus! Like I'm supposed to know all this shit on my third day....

V: It'll be your *last* fucking day with that attitude!

P: (*to himself*) Ooh I'm fuckin shaking.....

V: (*now across the room*) What, Phil?

P: Nothing, nothing. (*to Katherine, over-sweetly*) Hi, I'm Phil, what's your name?

K: Katherine, Katherine Duncan.

P: Ahhh, an Irish lass! I'm Phil, Katherine. Nice to meet you.

K: Dr. Phil? How is this place....

P: So was there, like, a tunnel of lights 'n shit, or like...

V: PHIL!

P: My bad, my bad. O...kaaay... here comes Victor with the paperwork. (Under his Breath.) thank gaaawd....

V: Okay, Ms. Duncan, I want you to read this thoroughly, and...

K: You're *angels*, heavenly angels...

P: Well, aren't you sweetest damned thing! Y'know what? We're.....

V: Phil! (sighs) We're not doctors, miss, and we're certainly not angels. Just read the paperwork, Miss Duncan.

K: There are no windows here, are we...underground?

P: Just read it sweetie.

K: Not a single window...

V: Katherine, read the paperwork!

K: OK, so maybe I wasn't a *great* person in life, but.....

V: Katherine! Read the paperwork.

P: (*intimately*) Read the paperwork, sweetie....., its okay.

K: The paperwork?

P: Yes, dear. You're holding it now. Just read it.

K: I can't, (*sobbing*) I can't!

V: We need you to be a big girl, now, Katherine, okay? There's no use crying!

P: Yeah, seriously. Like, your tear ducts don't even function on this plane, so...

V: Phil!

P: Whoopsies!

K: Okay....okay, I understand..... (*composes herself*) okay, here goes:
Shiraz. Goose Patte. Brie, Wheat Thins...

V: No, no, no, Ms. Duncan, ah he he. Turn it over, please. My apologies.

P: Viiiiiiic? Are we planning a wine and cheese party to which *I'm* not invited?

V: Not now, Phil, okay?

P: Cuz if you aaare, I'm sooo the King of planning the WCPs.

V: Ha! More like the queen!

P: What?! I'm married, you prick!

K: Brie is pretty predictable, actually. A nice smoked Gouda...

M: Ms. Duncan, Phil, this is neither the time nor the.....

P: Fuckin A right it's not, Victor!

K: And a dessert wine like a Beaujoulais...

V: Enough!

(pause of 2 seconds)

(V): *(sighs)* My apologies, Miss Duncan. Should you wish to complain about the inappropriate language of either Phil or myself, you'll find an evaluation form on page 29....I just want to say how sorry we both are about all of this silliness, right Phil?

P: Hm!

V: Now please, just read the paperwork.

K: Yes, *(blowing her nose)* yes. Okay, here goes: "Welcome. If you are reading this, you have just passed from the earthly plane." Oh my God, it's true, it's true!.... *(sobbing again)* it's true....

P: *(consoling)* Seriously, Kat? It happens to everyone.

V: Phil's right, Miss Duncan. You are approximately the eight-billion, nine-hundred-and eighty-nine million, eight-hundred and twenty-six thousand, four hundred and-twentieth person (well, homo sapien person, I suppose) to die. It's really not that big of a deal, now is it?

K: *(still sobbing)* I suppose not.

V: Keep reading, Miss Duncan.

P: Yeah, Kat, keep reading. It gets a lot better.

K: *(Composing herself again)* Okay, okay. "You are in neither heaven nor hell. These are mythic places devised to ensure a more challenging earthly existence. Should a more thorough explanation be necessary, we advise Catholics to read page seven, paragraph four"...but, I haven't been to church in decades!.... "Jews may find page 8, paragraph nine useful, and we encourage all Muslims to read page nine, paragraphs 1 through 16, page 10 in its entirety, appendix B pages 1 through 24, addendum 2....."

V:...um, I believe you can skip those parts, Miss Duncan.

P: Yeah, Kat. Just keep reading, sweetie.

K: You know, you're the first person ever to call me Kat. I quite like it.

(Victor sighs)

P: Well, aren't you the sweetest thing.....

V: Phil, please! The reality is, Miss Duncan, that you have died and must therefore be properly registered with our department. The Commissioner will be here shortly to make sure that everything is in order. In the mean time, I suggest that you relax; should you have any further questions, please let me know.

K: You're both very nice young men. You have my condolences on your untimely departures from the...."earthly" plane as you call it.

P: Pssh! We're not *dead*, sweetie, we just work here!

V: PHIL!

K: But.....I don't understand. How can you...

V....All of your questions will be answered in due time, Miss Duncan. Our job is to make sure that you understand your immediate circumstances, and that you are comfortable. Now please, have a seat. We offer recent issues of *Newsweek*, *The Nation* and *Jugs* for your perusal.

K: *Jugs*?

V: Yes, well... I suppose you may want to skip that one.....

P: uh...ha ha, that's something we normally reserve for our Lutheran clients, Kat. I'll just get it out of your way....*(whispering)* Jesus, Victor! *(sound of papers rustling)*

(A minute or two passes, during which the sound of magazine pages turning is heard...in the meantime, Victor and Phil whisper the following conversation. Eventually, the Commissioner walks into the room)

P: Y'know, I don't fucking appreciate the shit that you're constantly, *constantly* shoveling on me. I'm here to do my job, not to listen to you bitch, *Victor*.

V: Well, had you read the employee manual, *Phil*, assuming of course that you *can* read.....

P: *You* are an asshole.

V: It states that no one, the Commissioner included, may inquire about the journey between earthly and post-mortal planes. Likewise, we are to make no reference to any biological consequences of passing, or to our personal status as employees...

(*sighs*) and your ridiculous use of the nickname “Kat” is in cleeeear violation of article 47, which states.....

P: Y’know what, Victor, I don’t care. Only the Commissioner can hire and fire, and the Commissioner *lllooooooves* me.

V: Oh, I’m sure the Commissioner will agree....

P: That’s what this is all about, isn’t it, Victor? The Commissioner thinks I’m hot shit and you can’t fuckin’ stand it...

V: (*huffy-puffy*) You just wait, Phil. You just fucking wait! When the Commissioner...

P: Commissioner!

V: Commissioner!

K:(*enthralled by the Commissioner’s youthful handsomeness*) Commiss ioner!

C: (*greeting Phil first*) Hey, Phil! How’s my new guy today?

P:(*feigning a more masculine voice*) Oh, just fine, Commissioner. Couldn’t be better!

C: Alright, buddy! (*sound of the Commissioner slapping Phil on the back*)

V: ummm, Commissioner?

C: Hey, Phil, you look like a guy who needs two tickets to tonight’s Cavaliers game...huh?! Am I right?

P: Oh...uh... yes, I looove baseball!

(*Victor sighs*)

C: Alright, buddy! Why don’t you call your wife and make plans, then. How’s that sound, buddy? Huh?!

P: (mock-soldier-like) Yes, Sir!

C: Ah-ha-h’All-right, buddy!

V: Ummm, Commissioner?

C: Yes. (*sighs*) Victor.... I trust that Phil’s level of competency has far exceeded

your expectations?

V: Well that's just it, Commissioner, you see.....

C: Tell me: Did he call her by a previously-unused nickname?

V: Well, yes....but...

C: That was my idea. You see, Vic, sometimes our clients need a bit of extra... TLC.....knowwuddamean, big guy?

V: ummm...But , you see, the employee manual....

C: You mean you actually read that old war-horse? (laughs) Oh-ho-ho, Victor, you *are* a classic!

V: I thought.....

C: Now listen, Victor....I trust that you'll be in attendance at tomorrow night's Supervisors Meeting.

V: But,... tomorrow's... Saturday.

C: Very intuitive of you, Victor. We'll meet at the Olive Garden on route 9 at 7:30 sharp.

V: But, my house-warming party...

C: So, you have plans, eh?

V: Well, yes..... only I had no idea...

C: Well, you'll just have to cancel them, Vic....Oh, and be sure to bring Phil along, won't you? Between you and me, he's *definetely* supervisor material, and it's high time he got involved in such things. Cabeesh?

V: Yes...of course.

C: Alright, buddy! (sound of slapping Victor on the back)
(*The Commissioner whistling as he crosses the room to where Katherine is seated*)
Ahh, Miss Duncan. So nice to have you with us...you have my condolences, of course.

K: Please, call me Kat.

C: Okay, Katherine, then you shall call me Gordon.

K: Well, Commissioner Gordon, I must say I never expected that such an important position would be filled by such a(flirting) *handsome, young man.*

P: Oh! What a sweetheart! (*jokingly*) Watch out for this one, Commissioner, she's a real charmer!

C: (*laughs*) Oh-ho-ho, Phil, you're the best, m' man, the *best!* Now, If you're ready, Katherine, we'll have a private chat in the next room, eh?

K: I can't wait, Commissioner.

C: I'm sure Phil and uh....um....

V: (*utterly defeated*) Victor.

C:.....Victor have piles of paperwork to file. Right, Buddies?

V,P: (*song-like*) Yes, Commissioner!

C: Ha- h'allright!

(Upon entering the next room, the Commissioner becomes much more business-like. He takes on the role of an indifferent psychoanalyst-cum-detective. Meanwhile, Katherine's voice becomes more and more child-like.)

(Sound of door opening and shutting)

K: My god, this room is incredible...

C: Yes.....

K: Just look at that mirror, it must be centuries old!

C: Very intuitive of you, Katherine.

K: Kat, please. Oh! And this grand piano with the rococo finishing! It looks like something Liberace used to...

C: Do *you* play?

K: And this incredible canopy bed! (*sound of bed-springs*) I guess Phil was right, things have gotten a lot better!

C: Do you play the *pianoforte?* (*mock-italian accent*)

K: And just look at this antique type-writer! My god, it's a prototype in perfect condition! (*truly astonished*) The keys are still in alphabetical order.... it must be worth millions!

C: It's just been tuned, if you care to...

K: And I suppose this bottle of Dom Perignon will lighten the mood considerably...oh, (laughs) oh Gordon!

C: Yes, it does seem...

(*sound of loud knocking*)

K: What was that, Gordon?

C: Nothing, Katherine. And please, call me Commissioner Gordon. Well. Before we go any further, Katherine, I'll need to ask you a few questions. Why don't you take a seat here at the piano bench.

K: Well... wouldn't you rather I sit on the bed, for convenience sake?

C: I'd much rather you sit here on this bench, Katherine.

(*Sound of the Commissioner patting the bench with the palm of his hand*)

K: (*with as sexy a voice as she can muster*) Well, OK, Gordon.

C: *Commissioner* Gordon, if you don't mind, Katherine.

K: Please, call me Kat.

(*sound of the commissioner flipping papers on his clip-board, then clearing his voice*)

C: Well now, Katherine, why don't you tell me a bit about your childhood...

K: Well, if I must, Gordon...

C: *Commissioner* Gordon...

K: Commissioner Gordon.....Well, there's not much to tell, really. I was, in every respect, a normal, average, everyday little American girl...

C: Did you have any hobbies as a girl?.....like, say, the playing of a certain musical instrument?

K: Well, yes. I played the piano....I also collected Barbie Dolls, pet rocks, and...

C: Can you focus a bit more on your piano playing, Katherine?

K: Kat, please. Yes, well I suppose I was a decent prospect. When I was eleven, I won a concerto competition held by the New England Conservatory. I really wasn't any better than the college students – I suppose the judges were impressed mostly by my young age.

C: Yes, yes, go on, go on.

K: Well, that's it really. My teacher, professor Einmal, told me that I had the fingers of a prodigy, but wrists like wet noodles... He called them, um....uh...

C: Mamby-pamby wrists?

K: Very intuitive of you, Gordon.

C: *Commissioner* Gordon, if you don't mind. But please go on, go on.

K: Well, I guess that considering his constant criticism, and the fact that I longed to lead the life of a normal twelve-year-old...

C: And so you didn't find this criticism constructive in *any* way?

K: Certainly not. He treated me like some sort of special case, like a freak. I mean, he had, like... thirty students, at least...but he made an example of me whenever he possibly could...he could be really cruel sometimes...the son-of-a-bitch, he smoked like a chimney, but naturally he never considered himself anything less than perfect...

C: And so this...(sound of flipping pages)...uh...Gunther Einmal is partially responsible for your desire to quit playing, yes?

K: More than partially. He just didn't know how to deal with an emotional young woman. He wasn't a bit like you, Gordy.

C: Gordon, please. Go on, Katherine.

K: I prefer Kat, if you don't mind. Anyway, I wasn't about to be treated like some sickly, greenhouse plant that must stay indoors practicing while her friends have all the fun....you can understand that, can't you Gordy?

C: Of course, Katherine.

K: Kat please, Gordy.

C: Gordon, if you don't mind, Katherine. So...tell me about your life after the piano.

K: Well, I earned a degree in English at Yale, and decided to become a novelist.

C: And...?

K: Well, after finishing my first novel, I sent the manuscript to a local publisher, but...

C: But what?

K: Well, they rejected it out of hand.

C: I see. So you gave up?

K: Well, I had failed at writing fiction, just like I'd failed at the piano,... so I stopped. I became a freelance fashion writer for Women's magazines, but the calls for work were very...uh.....

C: Intermittant?

K: Very intuitive of you, Gordo.

C: *Gordy*, if you don't mind.

K: Yes, well ultimately I found full-time work in the field of data-entry. (*laughs*) I guess you could say I've been pushing buttons of one kind or another since I was a little girl.

C: (*laughs*) Yes.

K: (*in her sexiest voice*) Do *you* have any buttons that need pushing, Gordo?

C: (*nervously*) Oh, well...actually...

K: (*laughs*) Look at you, you're as red as a tomato, you silly thing!
(*pause as Katherine laughs and enjoys her victorious moment*)
Anyway, I started taking dancing classes a few years ago....I simply loooove salsa dancing, Gordo.

C: (*nervously*) Yes, well, I can see that you certainly had the legs of a dancer, Kat...

(*Loud sound of knocking*)

K: My God, is there someone watching us from behind that mirror? How kinky!

C: Oh! Oh my... uhhhh, you'll have to excuse me for a moment, Kat... Kather...uh Miss Duncan.

K: Hurry back!

*(sound of the Commissioner walking towards the mirror, and of it swinging open.)
We hear the voice of Herr Direktor as he admonishes the Commissioner. His voice is an intelligible growl.*

C: *(extremely nervously)* Tut mir leid, Herr direktor!.....Ja, alles klar, alles klar!Na klar, du hast recht.....er, uh....Sie! ...Sie uh *haben* recht!.....Ja alles klar! Danke, danke Herr Direktor! Auf wiedersehen.

(sound of the Commissioner closing the swinging "door" of the mirror. The Commissioner returns to his seat next to the piano bench. His breathing is heavy, as he tries to recompose himself).

K: Is everything alright?

C: Yes....yes of course.

K: I didn't get you into any trouble, did I?

C: No...no, of course not.

K: Maybe a glass of champagne would...

C: No! Uh, no, that is, I'm fine, now. Just fine.

K: Gordon?

C: Katherine, I'm afraid I've allowed our conversation to become a bit more...*familiar* than what is normally our custom here. *(clears his throat)* Should you wish to file a complaint, you'll find an evaluation form on page twenty-....

K: Gordon?

C: ...nine. (sighs) Yes, Miss Duncan?

K: Do you or do you not intend to make love to me on that canopy bed over there for the rest of eternity....

C: I'm afraid that...

K: ...taking breaks only to sip from that bottomless bottle of champagne, or to sing raucous, ribald Victorian parlor duets together at this piano...

C: I'm not sure you under...

K:...after which I'll compose a short letter on that priceless typewriter...a letter assuring my mother of my happy (albeit tragic) death...

C: It's just that...

K:...which you will instruct Phil to deliver during his lunch break... Well, Gordy?

(pause of 3 seconds)

C: I'm afraid that's not a possibility, Kat.

K: Katherine, please Gordy.

C: Gordon, if you don't mind, Katherine.

K: Miss Duncan, please, Commissioner.

(pause of 8 seconds)

C: *(overly chipper)* Well, Miss Duncan, I propose that we take a short break....

K: *(suddenly overcome with anger)* It's this *fucking piano*, isn't it?

C: Mmm?

K: I'm to play this *fucking piano* for all of eternity...that's why I'm here, isn't it, Commissioner?

(pause of 3 seconds)

C: Very intuitive of you Miss Duncan.

END OF ACT I

ACT II

C:.....So, you see, you'll be doing a tremendous service to our other clients.

K: But why not just buy the CDs, maybe you can get a corporate rate. Yes! You can purchase every CD ever made! You're sure to get them at cost. That would be a much better solution than having me play and record them all. Besides, my skills have greatly diminished over the years, and...

C: You don't understand, Miss Duncan. The dead cannot hear sound waves. That's one of the biological consequences of passing. In fact, here, within the walls of our department, sound is automatically transposed so that our clients can process it. Likewise, the notes you will play on the piano will be converted into feelings and emotions that the dead can feel.

K: But there must be some way you can perform the same transposition with existing recordings...

C: I'm afraid not. Your lifeless fingers alone speak the *language* of the dead. That's something a recording simply can't do. Besides, less than one-thousandth of one percent of the music in question is available on recordings. On the bright side, I can assure you that there are, by definition, a finite number of musical pieces, so eventually you'll be able to... retire.

K: But why me? There must be thousands of dead pianists who play better than I do.

C: Not according to our files.

K: Gosh, you mean I could have been *that* great?

C: You *will* be that great, Katherine. It's your birthright. Now you'll have the chance to become what you were always meant to be. You'll be a legend among your lifeless peers. One of the most important human beings in history.

K: That doesn't exactly make me feel better...

C: You'll come around...

K: Sounds like I'll have to.

C: That's the spirit. Now, why don't you step back into the waiting room and take a short break. I expect the new issues of *Newsweek*, *The Nation* and *Jugs* will be available for your perusal.

K: Yes, I know.

C: When you return, Miss Duncan, please be ready to begin your duties as Artist in Residence.

K: Yes, Commissioner. Won't you be joining me?

C: I'm afraid that Herr Direktor and I have some paperwork to finalize, but I'll see you again shortly.

(Sound of the door opening and closing). In the waiting room, Victor and Phil have just begun their lunch break, and a game of Go Fish).

V: So, anyway, I decided to come in a bit early today and...uh...do you have any nines?

P: Go Fish.

V: Are you sure?

P: Yeeees, go fish Victor.

V: No nines at all.

P: No, go fish, and continue the story. Office gossip is my life!

V: So, I decided to come in a bit early, and...

P:...oh, Hi Kat!

K: Hello Phil. Hello Victor.

P: Hey Victor, I hear someone in this room just signed a *lucrative* recording contract!

V: Phil, please.

P: Congrats, Sweetie.

K: Thanks, I guess.

V: (sighs) Phil and I are taking our lunch break, Miss Duncan. But don't let that keep you from asking us any questions, or letting us know how we can make your stay more enjoyable.

K: Thanks, Victor. *(sound of Katherine crossing the room, taking a seat, and flipping through magazines.)*

P: Anyway, do you have any Kings?

V: Yes.

P: Heh heh heh. Do you have any fours?

V: No, go fish.

P: Dammit....anyway, you were saying?

V: Yes, of course. I decided to come in an hour early to make sure last week's work orders had all been filed. Well... let's just say that I caught a certain night-shift employee playing a certain off-limits computer game. Of course Mike pretended like it was no big deal, but he was soooo busted! Uh...do you have any nines?

P: Go fish...But didn't you delete Mine-Sweeper yesterday afternoon?

V: Yes, he must have downloaded another version. No nines, you're kidding me?

P: God, you're a poor loser. No, Victor, go fish!....But, there are worse things than mine-sweeper for him to be downloading...

V: Yes, and believe me, I've caught Mike doing that, too. Not a pretty sight, I'm afraid.

P: Ewwwww!

V: Yeah, big "Ewww." Anyway, the Commissioner and I don't expect Mike to last here much longer. I suppose that's why you were hired on Wednesday.

P: Hm. The night shift, huh? Oh well, at least I won't have you to deal with anymore. Do you have any fours?

V: Very funny. Uh, yes I do... Dammit!

P: HAA! Oooh, I wonder if I'll be made the night-shift supervisor?

V: Yes, I suppose so. By the way, the Commissioner has invited you to the Supervisor's Meeting tomorrow night at the Olive Garden...for some strange reason, he seems to think you're management material.

P: Oooh, Olive Garden. Fancy digs, fancy digs. Do you have any sixes?

V: No. go fish..... Do you have any nines?

P: Uhhh, no. Gee, do you think I'll get a raise?

V: Yes, I suppose.

P: Oooh! Goody Goody! How much, Victor, how much?

V: I don't know, what do you make now?

P: ummm, like, 35 I think...

V: No nines, eh...WHAT? Thirty fucking five? I started at twenty-four!

P: Well, cost of living...

V: Cost of living my ass! Christ, I make thirty-five and a half, now! Here's your cost of living, Phil! I got your fucking cost of living right here!

P: Please, Victor, there's a client...

V: And whuddaya mean you don't have any fucking nines? There's only two fucking cards left! Lemme see that!

P: Take it easy, Vic...

V: Jesus Christ, Phil! What kind of asshole cheats at Go Fish!?! *(sound of the table squeaking, as Victor violently removes himself from the game.)*

P: I thought it was a six...

V: Oh, you're definitely supervisor material, Phil! Management track all the fucking way!! Commissioner, Commissioner!

(sound of Victor opening and slamming the door to the Commissioner's "office".)

P: Wow, this is the craziest job I've ever had.

K: That's great, Phil. I guess congratulations are in order. You certainly deserve it.

P: Really, Kat? You're just the sweetest thing, aren't you?

K: Phil?

P: Can I ask you a question, Kat?

K: Of course.

P: How can someone named "Victor" be such a loser?

K: (laughs) You're funny, Phil. It's nice to be able to laugh.

P: I mean he takes this job sooo seriously...

K: Phil?

P:like it's a matter of life and death or something!

K: Phil?

P: Yes, dear. What is it?

K: I'd like you to do me a favor.

P: Oh! Of course, darling! Anything!

K: Well, I suppose you'll be returning to the earthly plane this evening and, well...

P: Kat, you need to forget about that place!

K: I know, but you see my mother...

P: No Kat! I'm a supervisor now, and I have to warn you that...

K: (sobbing) but we were so close, and she must be so distraught....

P: No, Kat! I can't do it! I won't!!

K: I've written a short note on the back of this work-order...

P: No. I'm not listening.... I am not listening!

K: I've included her phone number....

P: (*sound of a dial-tone, as Phil picks up the office phone.*) Oh my god, where's that god-damned page-all button....

K: You live here, in Cleveland I assume....

P: (*over the intercom, trying to sound calm*) Paging Commissioner Gordon. Commissioner Gordon, please come to the waiting-room right away. We've got a possible TZ-484 situation. Confidence is high. I repeat, Confidence *is* high.

(*sound of a very loud alarm*)

K: (*shouting over the alarm*) But Phil, I only wanted to let her know.....

(*sound of the door opening and slamming shut*)

C: (*shouting over the alarm*) Phil! Turn off that god-damned alarm! NOW!!

(*the alarm stops ringing*)

(sighs) Miss Duncan, I'm afraid this is partially my fault. I should have explained to you earlier that any communication with your mother, or any other living person for that matter, is simply out of the question... It could change the course of human history if they knew about... the Commission.

K: (*sobbing again*) I'm so sorry, Gordon. But she's so lonely...It must be terrible to lose a child, even if I am forty, uh thirty-eight.

C: Believe me, you are not the first of our clients to make such an attempt.

K: It's just so hard to let go... But I suppose after I finish my recordings...oh God!

C: What is it?

K: Well, I just realized that, with the population growing at such an exponential rate, it will take forever for me to record every piece ever written!

C: "Forever" is a very specific term, Miss Duncan. Besides, you can't expect the human race to exist forever, now can you?

K: God, what a morbid thought. To think that I could actually *wish* for Armageddon, it's just horrible!

P: We all have to die sometime, Kat. In fact, you're approximately the...

K: Yes, I know, Phil. There are eight-billion-and-something dead people, right?

P: Well, ten-billion, now.

K: What? Ten-billion?

C: The world is at war, Miss Duncan. Haven't you been reading *Newsweek*?

P: Or *The Nation* ?

K: Well, no.

P: My Gawd, what *have* you been reading over there?

K: Um, nothing.

P: Ooh, you naughty thing!

C: Ah, a fellow Lutheran!

K: No, I just...

C: (singing) *Nun danket alle Gott* Come on every one!

C,P: *Mit herz und hand und daa daa...*

C: That's the spirit! Now, I'm wanted in the next room. I'm negotiating a new contract with Victor. I mean sure, he's a bit old-school, but I'd hate to lose him. Hopefully, we won't have to go to.... arbitration.

P: Good luck, Commissioner.

C: Thanks, buddy! And nice work handling your first TZ-484. We'll make a supervisor of you yet!

P: Yes, Sir!

C: Don't go anywhere, Miss Duncan, I'll be ready for you shortly.

K: Yes, Commissioner.

(About 15 seconds goes by. We hear the sound of Phil typing at his computer, and possibly a "you've got mail" message. We also hear Katherine flipping pages.)

K: Phil?

P: Ohmagawd, listen to this email, Kat. They're so backed up at the Istanbul office that they're forcing everyone there to work 20 hours of *mandatory* overtime, until further notice. Ho...lee...Shit!

K: Phil?

P: And listen to this, Kat. Since it's a breach of the union contract, the workers there will be making *triple-time* for every hour over eight hours a day....my gawd!

K: Phil?

P: holy shit! ummm, yeah Kat?

K: Is the Commissioner married?

P: Pshh! Yeah, right! That'll be the day!

K: Then...he's... gay?

P: Gawd, no way! No, more like it's against the rules for any of us to have relationships. Actually, I don't think any of us have any living family members at all. That's part of the reason we were hired, I guess.

K: I thought you said you were married...

P: Actually, my wife is an ex-patriot of Germany... they're just dying to get into the United States, those krauts! What with our low taxes and everything... It's a marriage of convenience, actually. I haven't seen her since our wedding day.

K: But, you must have some close friends.

P: Well, yeah, but no one I would ever confide in about the Commission. That's the prime directive of every Commission employee... take me, for example. On Wednesday, when I was hired, oh my gawd! I had to sign a confidentiality agreement written in my own blood.

K: Oh!

P: Yeah it was gross, believe me. Then, I had to listen to a three-hour taped lecture from the Director. I couldn't understand a fucking word he was...

(Victor emerges from the next room)

V: *(finally in good spirits)* What's up, guys?

P: Victor! God, *you* look happy. What'd ya get a big raise?

V: Oooh yeah.

P: Well, let's hear it!

K: Yes, Victor, what happened?

V: Well. *(clears throat)* First, I told the Commissioner that if *you* were worth 35, then *I* was worth at least 43.

P: Yeah...and?

V: Well. Then, the Commissioner told me that that would make me the highest paid waiting-room attendant we've ever had...

K: Yes, and then what happened?

V: Well, then the Commissioner offered me 39 and a half...Obviously, I laughed in his face....

P: Ooh, you bitch! I love it! Then what happened?

K: Yeah, then what happened, you bitch?

P: ...Umm, Miss Duncan, the Commissioner asked me to send you into the next room...

K: Oh, but I've got to hear this!

P: Yeah, Vic. Kat's an employee now too, y'know!

V: (*sighs*) Okay. Anyway, the Commissioner called Herr Direktor into the room...

P: You saw him?

V: Well, I averted my eyes...

K: Then what happened?

V: Well, Herr Direktor suggested we hire an independent arbitrator, but suddenly he got a call on his cell phone!

P: From who?

V: Ah-hmm-hmm...

P: From who Vic?

V: Brace yourselves... El Presidente!!!

P: Shut up!

K: Who?

P: You're fucking kidding me!

V: No. You're looking at the new day-shift supervisor at the Istanbul office!

P: What ? You were traded? For whom?

V: A very well-respected supervisor with *major* credentials... and prospects.

P: But, you don't speak Turkish!

V: Oh, contraire, Phil. As a Lutheran, *naturally* I've spent time in Germany. And anyone who's been to Germany picks up at least *some* Turkish on the street. Christ, you've got so much to learn Phil.

P: Gosh , I hope you'll still be making an hourly wage, because...

V: At this level of management, please! Anyway, the shitty thing is that Herr Direktor had to throw Mike in to sweeten the deal...

K: Won't you be making an hourly wage, Victor?

P: Yeah, Vic, hourly wage or salary?

V: Salary, naturally.

(Phil and Katherine try, but are unsuccessful in controlling their laughter)

V: Yes, I assumed that you would be giddy at the thought of me being traded...

P: Oh, not at all, Vic. *(pause)* In fact *(holding back tears)* I can't believe you're leaving!

V: Oh, come on, Phil.

P: *(full-on crying)* I mean, where would I be without your training? You're like... my Yoda!

V: *(getting emotional)* Oh, Phil. I've trained so many, but I'll always remember you, ya big lug!

P: Victor!

V: I'll miss you, Phil!

(10 seconds pass. We hear both Phil and Victor sniffle and clear their throats as they try to compose themselves)

P: Let me write down my email address...

V: Yes, and I'll write down mine...

P: Promise me you'll write me every day...

V: Of course, Phil. Sweet, sweet Phil...

(pause of 3 seconds)

K: This is the weirdest job I've ever had...

V: Goodbye, Miss Duncan.

K: Goodbye, Victor, and good luck!

P: So long, Kat.

K: But, ...I'll be seeing you soon, Phil.

P: Actually, Kat, after you finish your residency, I'll be long dead.

K: Yes, I suppose my residency will take a few million years...

V,P Very intuitive of you...

P: Ha! Jinx! Y'owe me a beer!

V: You got it, pal!

(pause of a few seconds)

K: Well, goodbye.

P: Goodbye, darling, and good luck. I'll see you soon, I know it!

V: Don't interfere, Phil!

P: Fuck you, Victor!

V: ...hmm... Yeah... fuck me. We'll both see you soon, Kat!

K: Thanks, Victor. Well, goodbye.

V,P: Goodbye, Kat.

(sound of the door opening and closing)

C: Ah, Miss Duncan. Well, no point in wasting any time, eh? Let's begin!

K: My god, look at all these boxes!

C: Yes. These are the pieces you're to begin with. When you've completed recording each piece, just stack it there by the door. Eventually, a new load of boxes will be carted in ... Do you have any questions?

K: Well, when I, or rather, *if* I finish, I'd like to be able to see my mother...

C: Yes. Uhhh... actually, once you've finished your recordings, there's one last bit of business you'll need to take care of...

K: Yes. I figured you'd say something like that. I'll have to complete a novel...on that typewriter, yes?

C: Very intuitive of ...

K: Stop saying that!!

C: Sorry. Force of habit. Not just a novel, Miss Duncan. The greatest novel of all time!

K: Gee. Sounds like I should have stuck with the writing, too. (*pause*) Hm. Can it be... semi-autobiographical?

C: Ummm....

(sound of one knock from behind the mirror)

(C:) uh, yes. That's fine.

(sound of knocking in the rhythm of a sports stadium motive.)

(C:) uh, but not recommended....uh.....

(sound of knocking in the rhythm of "shave and a haircut")

(C:) ummm, actually, you may want to steer clear of any themes relating to your personal life.

K: I see...

C: But don't worry, I shouldn't think it would take long for a brilliant artist like you to write. Maybe a few hundred-thousand tries at the very most.

K: Commissioner?

C: Of course, if it were up to me, I'd develop a single character over the canon of novels. That way...

K: Commissioner?

C: You won't have to worry so much about development...

K: Gordon?

C: I mean, that's the trick isn't it?

K: Gordy?

C: Yes. Please, call me...

K: Shh! (*emotional*) Gordy, will I ever see you again?

(*pause*)

C: Oh. (*pause*) Well, I don't know...

(*sound of knocking in the rhythm of Bolero*)

(C:) Uh... well. (*listens to more knocking*) Once you've finished your novels, you will be considered a free agent. (*listens to more knocking*) ummm, of course, you'll have to locate me among approximately ...sixty...no, sixteen-billion souls, but ...I think that would be lovely, Kat. (*sound of one loud knock*) er, I mean, Miss Duncan.

K: Then I have a last request.

(*sound of one loud knock*)

C: um...I'm afraid we don't grant last requests...

K: Hmmm. You know, I don't think I remember my scales! Gosh, is this middle C? Or is it this one, an octave higher?

(*sound of one loud knock*)

C: I'm sorry, Miss Duncan. You heard Herr Director. Last requests are simply out of the...

K: You know? I can't feel my fingers! It must be another "biological consequence of passing", as you're so fond of pointing out...

(*sound of one loud, then one quiet knock*)

C: Well. It seems your request has been granted! Ask away, my dear!

K: Ok... Here goes: When my duties have been fulfilled, and I become a ... free agent, I'd like this piano to be rolled into the waiting room...

C: *(waits for a knock, but none comes)* eeeYes, that seems acceptable...

K: ...and I want this typewriter to be destroyed!

C: *(again, no knock)* eeeYes... and?

K:...so that nothing in this room remains except the canopy bed and the Dom Perignon...

(sound of knocking in a "Bo Diddley" rhythm)

C: Mmmm... oh, and uh, what about the mirror?

K: The mirror?

C: Yes, Herr Direktor has asked about the mirror...

K: Hmm... I guess that since the Director has been so accommodating...

(sound of a "drum-roll" knock)

(K:) and since his request is...*(sexy voice)* very flattering...

(the drum-roll becomes more intense)

(K:) I'd have to say....

(sound of a "heart-beat" knock)

(K:) Screw the fucking mirror!!

(sound of a decelerating knocking, and muffled growling)

(K:) You'll be here, then, at the appointed time?

C: Of course... thank you, Miss Duncan.

K: No, thank you, Commissioner.

(pause of five seconds)

Commissioner: Well, the sooner you start...

Katherine: Yes.

Commissioner: Now, let's open the first box and see... ah, yes! A modern masterpiece! (*sound of pages turning, as the Commissioner positions the piece on the piano*)

Katherine: Oh God! You're kidding me!

Commissioner: Well, you see, many of our clients are twentieth-century music enthusiasts...

Katherine: But this is scored for *two* pianos...

Commissioner: Really?

Katherine: Yes, and live electronics! I've never played anything this complex...even at the height of my talents!

Commissioner: Well, you'll just have to...

Katherine: Jesus, I suppose I'll have to record each part separately...

Commissioner: Oh no, that's not possible, Miss Duncan. Multi-track recording implies "rewinding" and other time-dependent actions. I'm afraid you'll need to record both parts simultaneously.

Katherine: What!?

(*sound of four knocks*)

Commissioner: Don't worry, Kat. Herr Direktor has generously offered to forego any performance of the electronic effects...

Katherine: You don't seem to understand, Gordon! (becoming angry) Look! See this? Here's a passage where eighteen notes need to be played simultaneously! How the fuck am I supposed to play this?

Commissioner: I don't read music...

Katherine: Okay, I'll put it in layman's terms! See how many fingers I have?

Commissioner: Uhhh, yessss.....

Katherine: There's ten right? Ten fucking fingers!!

Commissioner: Well, yes, but in time...

Katherine: In time what?

Commissioner: In time, your fingers will get used to playing...

Katherine: Oh really! So, if I understand you correctly, I'll be magically growing an extra ten fingers at some point!

Commissioner: Well, not magically....

Katherine: Oh, I see! So I'll be...uh...evolving, yes, I'll be evolving into a creature with twenty fingers, is that right?

(pause of a few seconds)

Commissioner: Yes.

Katherine: *(gasps)* Have you any idea how long that will take? Christ, it took a hundred million years, at least, for birds to evolve from lizards!

Commissioner: Well, time is something you have an abundance of.

Katherine: Oh my god...

(sound of loud knock)

Commissioner: I see that it's time for me to leave...

Katherine: No! Please stay for a few more minutes...

Commissioner: I have a telephone conference with a new employee...

Katherine: But, can't it wait just....

Commissioner: Kat....

Katherine: Just having a handsome man near me gives me so much confidence....

Commissioner: I'm sorry. Besides, I simply *despise* atonal music.....goodbye!
(sound of door opening and shutting)

(pause of five seconds during which Katherine breathes heavily.)

Katherine: *(while pounding on the piano, in the same rhythm)*

Fuck...fuck...FUCK!

Commissioner: (*muffled from behind the door*) Sounds great, Kat! Keep it up!

Katherine: (*under her breath*) Fuck you.

(*pause of 5 seconds as Katherine breathes heavily, trying to control her anger*)

(*sound of the door opening again*)

Commissioner: Oh, uh... Katherine, you have a visitor.

Katherine: What?.....My god! Professor Einmal!

Professor Einmal: Yes my dear. You look lovely, of course.

Katherine: Thanks...but... I'm so sorry, Professor! (*sobbing*) I'm so sorry!

Professor Einmal: Yes, well... no use crying now, my dear. Our tear ducts no longer function, I'm told...Besides, this is mostly my fault. I should have pushed you much harder...

Katherine: Oh no, you pushed hard enough, believe me!

Professor Einmal: I cannot agree...Well, let's get to work.

Katherine: Yes, I'm ready.

(*sound of slow piano chords*)

Professor Einmal: That's far too much pedal! This is not Rachmaninoff!

Katherine: Yes, you're right. I'm sorry!

(*same chords, again*)

Professor Einmal: And just what sort of tone do plan to produce with those mamby-pamby wrists? These are world-class recordings we're to make! Again!

Katherine: You're right, I'm sorry!

(*same chords, again and again*)

Professor Einmal: Again! Again!

