

# Happy Deathday

*A Play by*

PETER HOWARD

WESTMINSTER PRODUCTIONS

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**HAPPY DEATHDAY** is the play that Peter Howard was working on when he died unexpectedly in Peru, in February 1965. It was completed by his daughter Anne (Mrs Patrick Wolrige Gordon) according to the outline that he himself wrote. It was first performed at the Westminster Theatre, London, in February 1967.

HAPPY DEATHDAY was first produced at the Westminster Theatre, opening on 9 February, 1967, with the following cast:

JOSIAH SWINYARD

Godfrey Kenton

BIGGS

Robert Hartley

DR OLIVER TARQUIN

Bryan Coleman

JETTA ZOLTAN

Barbara Ewing

REBECCA ZOLTAN

June Sylvaine

PROFESSOR ESTEBAN ZOLTAN

Clement McCallin

DR JOHN SYLVESTER

Clifton Jones

Directed by Henry Cass

Settings by W. Cameron Johnson

Lighting by Louis Fleming

*Characters*

JOSIAH SWINYARD

BIGGS

DR OLIVER TARQUIN

JETTA ZOLTAN

REBECCA ZOLTAN

PROFESSOR ESTEBAN ZOLTAN

DR JOHN SYLVESTER

*The action takes place in the house of Josiah Swinyard  
and the study of Esteban Zoltan, at the present time.*

## ACT ONE

*Josiah ('Josh') Swinyard lies in bed. Beside him is a table with a clock, a Bible and a bottle of pills. He is propped with pillows. At first he is so still that some may think him a great, bearded corpse awaiting burial. But soon he speaks.*

SWINYARD I'm an old man, a very old man. I lie here so you do not know whether I dream or wake – and at times I hardly know myself. The hours go crawling with slow, night feet. Heavy feet, with their claws of memory. Claws that tear with 'if only', and 'too late now', and 'almost it was – but not quite'. Hopes, fears, hurts, disappointments, loves that staled to hate. Till the pain and mumbles of memory drug me to drowsiness and I sleep and snore a little (*He does so*) and dream once more of pain. Sometimes I wish those heavy feet would hurry, race, gallop to journey's end where pain marched me into – what? Long sleep and everlasting darkness? Who can be sure of an end – or a beginning? Dreams may go on beyond this journey – and pain too. None can tell for sure. Sometimes I wish those feet would slow and stop, to give me time, a year or two perhaps, to bear the known rather than face the unknown. For a moment I forget the years, as some lust or struggle, or hating or kissing dull with time is scratched alive by memory. Like an old tree that mistakes the bite of winter frost at the root for the spur of sap in the spring branches. Then I feel I could rise and strive and run, and snatch one last prize from life. And then I know I'm dreaming – as now I dream. (*He snores gently*) Then comes the morning, and that fool with his tea and his talk. If I were half my age I'd have him out of the house and gone. But I dare not. It's hard to get people nowadays to lift and wipe and clean the very old. Families won't do it any more. I depend on him. (*He looks at a clock by his bed*) He's coming now. (*Picks up a huge Bible, opens it and starts to read*) I must be reading my Bible. I can't see

without my spectacles and I can never find my spectacles. *(He is searching for them frantically)* And he knows I can't read without my spectacles. But it's good for him to find me with my Bible. He thinks I know it by heart, and indeed I do. *(He repeats aloud looking out over the audience)*

Our transgressions are multiplied before Thee, and our sins testify against us; for our transgressions are with us, and as for our iniquities, we know them.

*(He turns to the New Testament without looking down)*

He said unto me, 'My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness'. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

*(While he is saying this, Biggs enters. He carries a tray with tea. He goes to the bed, puts down the tray, puts his hand under the pillows and produces spectacles)*

BIGGS Your spectacles, Mr Swinyard.

SWINYARD *(Taking the spectacles)* Thank you, Biggs. I was looking everywhere for them. *(His voice and manner when he talks to Biggs are different from the way he spoke before. You can see the clip and bite that made a fortune out of pills, potions, scents, soaps and other bottles, boxes and packets of medicine and decoration)* Where were they?

BIGGS Under the pillow. As usual.

SWINYARD *(Puts them on)* I looked there. *(He didn't)* They weren't there.

BIGGS Well, whoever moved them must have put them back again. They were there just now. Just on the half-hour – and a lovely morning.

SWINYARD Nonsense. I've heard the rain on the roof most of the night. Why do you say it's a lovely day?

BIGGS Rain's good for the crops, they say. Besides it's always a lovely day for you, sir. The doctor says we must keep you cheerful. Nothing gloomy. Tea, sir. *(He has poured out a cup.*

*He carefully takes one pill from the bottle*) And morning pill, sir.

SWINYARD Only one, mind. The doctor says they're dangerous.

BIGGS One at morning, one at night. Fatal dose six taken together. You can rely on me only to give what I'm told to give.

*(Josiah Swinyard takes the pill and swallows it with the tea)*

BIGGS And happy birthday, sir.

SWINYARD Heavens, it's my birthday. I forgot.

BIGGS I didn't.

SWINYARD When you come to my age, birthdays are better forgotten. You start thinking of death.

BIGGS Mustn't talk like that, sir. The doctor will blame me if you're in that sort of mood.

SWINYARD Is he here?

BIGGS Bright and early, bag and all, just waiting to see you. He doesn't like any talk of death. Funny, because it's his trade in a way. Perhaps he's a superstitious gentleman.

SWINYARD I'm not superstitious.

BIGGS Nor am I. Not a bit. But I was brought up in a village. My mother taught me to take precautions.

SWINYARD Precautions?

BIGGS Well, it's like this. If I walk under a ladder, I keep my fingers crossed until I see a dog. Doesn't do me or the dog any harm – and it might do us some good. When I spill salt, I always throw some over the left shoulder. Good for the salt merchants anyway. And then there was last night.

SWINYARD What happened last night?

BIGGS I saw an old owl go floating across the moon before the rain came. So I put my pillow at the foot of the bed and slept the wrong way round in it.

SWINYARD Whatever for, Biggs?



BIGGS A ring around the moon – and rain  
With owls a-flying  
Means crops to grow, but brings the bane  
Of someone dying.

Mother always said if you slept with your head at the foot of the bed on nights like that, it was safer. It's a lot of nonsense. But I sleep better for the doing of it.

SWINYARD I thought you said you weren't superstitious?

BIGGS I'm not. Not like that doctor.

SWINYARD You say he's waiting?

BIGGS Yes.

SWINYARD Well, get me up then. I'll see him at once. (*As they talk Josh is helped out of bed, a dressing-gown is put upon him and he is sat downstage facing the audience on a chair Biggs brings. He sets another chair beside him*) Haven't you got a present for me, Biggs?

BIGGS Not my place to do it. I leave that to the family. They'll all be here with presents in the next half-hour.

SWINYARD All hoping I'll leave them something when I go.

BIGGS You said it, Mr Swinyard. You shouldn't have said it. But you did.

SWINYARD Don't you hope I'll leave you something, Biggs?

BIGGS I know you haven't. I witnessed your will. Cook and me did it. I know enough to know that if I witness the will, there's nothing in it for me. Besides, I wouldn't want anyone to say that I helped you on your way, sir, after you were gone, if you see what I mean. People always say nasty things if people like me are left money.

SWINYARD I might have made another will, Biggs.

BIGGS Maybe. I don't worry about such things. I leave all that to the family. They do plenty of it, from what I hear. And I hear plenty.

SWINYARD You don't seem to worry about anything much,

Biggs. Don't you mind talking to me about my dying?

BIGGS Why ever should I, sir. It's natural to all of us, isn't it? Like football pools and racing. Everybody does it sometime or another, though there's some that don't much like talking about it. But you're not like that. You're not afraid of facing the facts of life or death. You're a great Christian gentleman.

SWINYARD (*Very pleased. As Biggs wraps a rug around his knees*)  
What makes you think so, Biggs?

BIGGS You've often told me so, Mr Swinyard. Shall I send in the doctor? (*He goes*)

SWINYARD I've often told him so? Too often? Who knows? Someone has got to stand for something, to keep your own heart high – or the courage of your neighbours. (*In a louder voice*) I will not be afraid.

(*Dr Tarquin comes in with a bag*)

TARQUIN (*Sitting down*) Good morning, Josh. How are you feeling this morning?

SWINYARD I don't know. Nobody's told me yet.

(*The doctor catches hold of his patient's pulse and feels it, looking down at his watch. Then he puts it down. There is a moment of silence*)

SWINYARD Well?

TARQUIN (*Hurriedly*) Oh, very well. Very well indeed. Steady as a clock and strong as a hammer this morning.

SWINYARD I don't pay you to tell me lies.

TARQUIN Nor do I tell them, Josh.

SWINYARD Then tell me the truth now. You know my heart flutters like a bird with a broken wing. I can feel it even as you hold that artery of mine in your fingers.

TARQUIN For a man of your age, it's a good pulse.

SWINYARD Forget that. Just tell me how long I have to live. You took photographs. You made tests. You left me two

days ago trembling like a twig yourself, looking worse than I've looked in years, and saying you would have to get a specialist's report on my condition. What is the verdict?

*(Dr Tarquin rises and walks once up and down the stage. Then he faces Josiah Swinyard)*

TARQUIN Look here. It's always hard to know how much to tell a patient. Some of them can't bear truth. They die happy if you keep telling them they'll live for ever. Some try to force the truth out of you – then curse you and change their doctor when you give it them. It's harder when a man's a friend, as you are, Josh.

SWINYARD *(Gets up, goes over and with a fit of vigour seizes the doctor's shoulders)* I'll shake it out of you, Tarquin. Tell me at once.

TARQUIN For heaven's sake, sit down. You must not do this sort of thing, man. *(He tries to push the old gentleman back to his chair. Swinyard will not budge)*

SWINYARD Tell me.

TARQUIN It's bad, Josh.

*(The old man lets go. Slowly he sits facing the audience)*

SWINYARD How bad?

TARQUIN Well, there's always hope on these occasions. And specialists are not infallible.

SWINYARD *(Half rising again and shouting)* How bad?

TARQUIN They give you three months at the most.

SWINYARD The least?

TARQUIN Any moment.

SWINYARD And the least is more likely?

TARQUIN *(Sits down in the chair again)* Look here, Josh. If it were anyone else but you, I'd wrap it up in a prettier package and tie it with ribbons and coloured strings. But you're a man of faith. We've talked about it often enough. You have a certainty of God and eternity that few possess and certainly I envy. *(As he says this, Josh Swinyard glances at*

him, stiffens himself, and puts on the look of a Christian unafraid) The truth is it's a miracle you're alive today. You ought to have died years ago. The specialist didn't believe it. He looked at the X-rays and the analysis of the tests and said to me, 'Hurry back, doctor. Or you'll find your man has left you.'

SWINYARD So you did – and I haven't?

TARQUIN (*Happy that his patient is taking it so well*) Exactly. I told the specialist I was thinking of giving you the facts. He advised me not to do it. He said the shock might kill you.

SWINYARD Well, it hasn't. Not yet, anyway. I'm tougher than you think. I've got something to do before I go. Time's short. It *would* be strange if I died on my birthday.

TARQUIN Good heavens, Josh. Is it your birthday? Many happy . . . (*He has risen and is shaking Josh's hand. Then he suddenly realises what he is saying. He drops the hand*) Oh, Lord.

SWINYARD Many happy returns of the day was what you meant to wish me, I imagine, Tarquin. (*As the doctor still hovers and hesitates*) For heaven's sake, man, sit down. You'll give yourself a heart attack if you jump up and down like that, and I'll be telephoning that specialist of yours to ask him why he didn't do something for you instead of giving you my death sentence. (*Tarquin sits*) I want you to help me.

TARQUIN Of course. Anything.

SWINYARD My family will be here soon. They always come on my birthday. What do you think of them?

TARQUIN Think of them? Charming. Delightful people.

SWINYARD You've just told me I may die any minute. Can't you in these circumstances tell me the truth? What do you think of Zoltan?

TARQUIN (*With real enthusiasm*) Your son-in-law is one of the most brilliant brains alive. He's further ahead of most scientists than a jet plane is of a wheelbarrow. His mind has

broken the space barrier. It's exploring worlds whose existence man has never known and perhaps will never know.

SWINYARD What about this world, Tarquin? How does he live on this one?

TARQUIN He's always treated me as an equal. It makes me humble because I know I am not.

SWINYARD He's never treated me as an equal. He reserves the right to dwell in his unknown worlds but looks down on me for believing in a next world. What about my daughter?

TARQUIN You can't expect me to discuss your family with you in this way. After all I'm an old friend. You shouldn't expect it. *(He tries to rise and go. Josh seizes him and pulls him down in the chair again)*

SWINYARD Sit down. *(He lets go and recovers his breath)* Do you want to kill me? Tell me the truth about my daughter.

TARQUIN She's a fine wife to Zoltan. It's not easy, I suppose, to be married to a scientist. She loves him as much as he loves his work. She's shared her husband with that work and the world is richer for it.

SWINYARD She was brought up with faith. She married a man who argued her out of it. Now she's as hard as nails with everyone, including her father. She's turned against me. You know it's true.

TARQUIN You're unjust.

SWINYARD Perhaps I am. Today you're going to help me find out. What about the girl?

TARQUIN You mean Jetta?

SWINYARD Who else would I mean? *(Tarquin says nothing)* Don't tell me you are going to be unpleasant about my grand-daughter. She's the only one I'm sure about.

TARQUIN I'm not sure about her.

SWINYARD *(Laughing)* Tarquin, you're more old-fashioned than I am. If you allow those pants and that awful music she

wobbles and shakes at and her sloppy ways to worry you, you're crazy. It's a sign of the times. It means nothing.

TARQUIN It's not that. It's only that Jetta troubles me sometimes – especially lately. She's not the girl she was.

SWINYARD Exactly. I'm glad you have noticed it – and it's nothing to make you weep but something to make you sing. She's not the girl she was. In spite of her father's influence and her mother's indifference she's turning my way. She asked me more than once to talk to her about the things that mean most to me. She's becoming all that I hoped my daughter would be, that I thought once she was, and found she never was. (*He looks at Tarquin for a moment or two*) Tarquin, have you ever wondered how much money I have?

TARQUIN It's not my business.

SWINYARD Have you never wondered if I'll leave you anything when I go?

TARQUIN Josh, this really is most offensive. Certainly I haven't. I try hard to keep you alive. You've paid me well to do it.

SWINYARD (*Chuckling*) So far you've been pretty successful at it. But the job's getting a bit shaky now, it seems. Only a few more fees before the fade-out.

TARQUIN Look here. I don't want to talk any more like this. Indeed I don't want your money except what I can honestly earn. When rich patients leave something to poor doctors, people always gossip.

SWINYARD You're the second person today who says he hopes I'll leave him nothing. And strangely I think both of you meant it. (*As Tarquin is about to ask who the other one is*) Never mind about that. And I'll save you any more worry. I do not intend to leave you one shilling – not a picture, not a book, not a suit of clothes, not a memento of any kind. You've looked after me well for twenty years, and I'm grateful for it. That's all. I'm now going to tell you some-

thing nobody else knows except my lawyer. I've made a will leaving everything I have to Jetta.

TARQUIN It's no business of mine – but I think that's terribly unjust. The Zoltans need money so much. He could do so much more in research if he didn't have to scrape for every penny. He'll be angry. Your daughter will be hurt.

SWINYARD It's not your business, as you say. And I do not want you to say one word about this to anybody.

TARQUIN What do you want me to do?

SWINYARD Go out there. (*Pointing at the door*) They'll all be coming soon with their birthday gifts and their good wishes and their hopes of getting something out of me. Tell them all the truth about my health. Tell them I'm bound to die soon and may die any moment. Give it them straighter than you had the guts to give it me. Then I'll see whether I'm unjust or not. By the end of today I'll know whether I'm right about my daughter and my son-in-law – and Jetta.

TARQUIN I don't like this at all.

SWINYARD It's your duty to tell my family the truth.

TARQUIN I know. I was going to tell your daughter anyway. But this game, this trick, this cruel, horrid playing with them. . . .

SWINYARD Don't you understand, man. I've got no time to waste. I can't afford more waiting. It's absurd, but when you find death staring at you eyeball to eyeball, what happens to your property becomes important. It's the one link you have with what lies ahead, the one card left in life for you to play.

TARQUIN I thought you believed in life after death?

SWINYARD I do. With all my heart I do – and with most of my head most of the time. That's why I don't want any of my money used by those who destroy men's faith. That's why I want to be sure, I must be sure. That's why I want

you to tell them, Tarquin. But do not let them know you've told me. I want to see how they react, how they treat me when they know I'm going.

TARQUIN All right. If you want me to do it, I'll do it. What about Dr Sylvester? He's bound to be with them. He always comes on your birthday.

SWINYARD Tell him, too. I don't care a bit. Let them all know. Surely he doesn't expect anything from me?

TARQUIN I don't imagine so.

SWINYARD Why Zoltan had to hire a coloured man as his assistant God alone knows.

TARQUIN I imagine because he thought Sylvester was the best one for the job.

SWINYARD Come, Tarquin, don't talk nonsense. I think my son-in-law only did it to annoy me. You surely don't suggest that we have to go into the jungles and forests of Asia or Africa to find the best scientific brains?

TARQUIN Sylvester is a great scientist in the making. I know enough of what they are doing to know that. I think your son-in-law also wanted to train someone from a country where professional men are still scarce. I cannot believe there's anything in that black Bible of yours which tells you white men are superior to black men, Josh.

SWINYARD And nothing which says black men are superior to white. It's something people forget nowadays. God made us different because He wanted us different. If He'd wanted all men the same colour He'd have made them so.

*(During this last speech, Jetta comes in. She carries a small package in her hand. She is dressed in slacks, with untidy hair. She looks charming)*

JETTA Are you talking about Dr Sylvester?

SWINYARD Jetta, I never heard you come in. Don't they tell you to knock on people's doors nowadays?

JETTA I knocked. I knocked like mad. But all I heard was the



rumble of voices. You might have been saying, 'Come in' for all I know, so in I came. Were you talking about Sylvester?

TARQUIN I was telling your grandfather, Jetta, that black and white people are very much alike.

JETTA I don't agree at all. They look different, laugh different, live different, probably love different.

SWINYARD Jetta, you simply must not talk like that.

TARQUIN I don't know. It's pretty much what you were saying, Josh.

SWINYARD Nothing of the sort. I can't imagine why young people nowadays think of things like that, let alone say them.

JETTA What foul minds older people seem to have. It's obvious to everybody that black people are different.

TARQUIN (*Who got up from the chair when Jetta arrived and has been standing since*) Well, I think I'll be going. Are the family outside, Jetta?

JETTA They'll be there in a few minutes.

TARQUIN (*Catches hold of Jetta's shoulders and looking at her*) You look a bit tired, Jetta. When did you get to bed last night?

JETTA I haven't been to bed yet. We stayed up talking and smoking and singing and drinking till about four. It didn't seem worth it after that. Don't worry, I'll get to bed presently. I don't need much sleep.

SWINYARD Young people are mad nowadays. I must have a word with your mother.

JETTA Don't bother to do that, Grandpa. It won't have any more effect than the words she has with me.

TARQUIN Drop round and see me sometime, Jetta. After all, I helped to bring you into the world and I'd like to help keep you fit while you're around. You need a tonic or something.

JETTA I'd like to see you, Tarquin. I'll come. But don't give me any of that tonic stuff. I'll only put it down the drain.

TARQUIN Goodbye for now.

SWINYARD Look in again later, will you? I'd like to know how you get on with the mission I gave you.

TARQUIN I'll look in. *(He goes)*

JETTA Mission? It all sounds exciting and mysterious.

SWINYARD No mystery. I just asked him to pass on a message to somebody.

JETTA *(She is a different, less brittle personality when alone with her grandfather. She puts her arm round him and kisses him)* Happy birthday, Grandpa. I wanted to be the first of the family to see you and to give you a present. *(She hands him the package)*

SWINYARD It's sweet of you, Jetta. Can I open it now?

JETTA I hope you will. It's chocolate. I'm hungry. I thought you might share my present with me for breakfast.

SWINYARD *(Opening the package)* Chocolate for breakfast? Tarquin would never let me do it. Anyway, supposing I won't give you any?

JETTA It doesn't feel like breakfast when you haven't been to bed all night. It's just food. It's something to chew for comfort's sake. And I know you'll give me some, because you don't like chocolate.

SWINYARD *(Hands her the chocolate. She takes a bite)* I like it. It's just that I can't eat it nowadays. But I will today to celebrate my birthday.

JETTA *(Sitting at his feet, munching)* Oh Grandpa, it's not much of a present I know. I hated getting something I guessed you didn't really want. But it's awfully hard to know what to give you when I've got so little money and you've got so much of everything.

SWINYARD So much of everything? You have so much more.

What wouldn't I give for your youth, (*Strokes her hair*) and your laughter – and your beauty.

JETTA Life's awfully unfair, isn't it? When you're young, you don't know it. Or at least you don't think anything about it. All you want madly is money to do all the things you'd like to do. When you get old, you have the money. At least, a lot of old people seem to have it. But you don't have the strength or even the wish to do much with it except hoard it. You just seem to spend time remembering what you think it was like to be young. But old people forget what youth is really like.

SWINYARD And youth can never know what age is like. You'll have money one day, Jetta.

JETTA I don't think so. Mother won't give me any. And Father spends every penny he has on science and research and test-tubes and computers and stuff. I don't understand anything about it all. He's always asking societies and foundations and things for money. He never seems to have enough. Poor Father.

SWINYARD Do you feel sorry for your father?

JETTA Sorry for him? He's marvellous. He's got the most amazing brain on earth. He's cleverer than I used to think God was. He's the last person on earth to be sorry for.

SWINYARD I feel sorry for any man who thinks he's cleverer than God.

JETTA Oh, I know all the things you believe, Grandpa. I wish I could believe them. You ought to talk to father.

SWINYARD Yes. I will.

JETTA Life hurts doesn't it? I love father. But he's always so busy he never seems to have much time to talk to me. I know I should love mother, Grandpa – but I don't. It's like the things you believe in – should but can't.

SWINYARD More likely could but won't.

JETTA Anyway, I love you, Grandpa. That's for sure. You

don't want anything from me. So many people want things.

SWINYARD I'm satisfied with your love, Jetta.

JETTA Everybody talks about love. Nobody seems to understand it. At least I don't. All the older people talk about it but then seem to hate you nowadays just because you're young and want to be happy and do the things you like and not do all the things you don't like and they want to make you do.

SWINYARD Nobody hates you for being young, Jetta.

JETTA Mother does. I know she does. And I hate her too. That's the truth if you want to know it.

SWINYARD You shouldn't say things like that, Jetta. You don't really mean it.

JETTA I do mean it. At least, quite often I do. I hate her for not understanding, for expecting me to understand why she is always right and I am always wrong, for being old, I guess. (*Suddenly realises what she has said, turns and clasps her grandfather's knees*) Oh, I didn't mean that, Grandpa. You're old and I don't hate you. I love you. It's just that the young and the old seem so far apart nowadays. Was it always like that Grandpa? What's it feel like to be old?

SWINYARD (*As he speaks, he looks out into the audience. Jetta, at his feet, looks with him*) The tragedy is that much of the time you feel no different at all, Jetta. You only know from the way people look at you and treat you, that you are different. You feel a surge of longing to grip life by the throat to shake men to their senses. You long to give advice but know the young will never take it. It would save so much hurt if they did. Your mind, your will, your heart all leap as they did in all the yesterdays. You feel your brain like a greyhound, your body ready to eat and drink, no matter what the doctor says, to laugh, yes, and to make love.

JETTA I wish I'd had you dancing with me last night, Grandpa.

Modern men don't seem much like men. Many just wobble and waggle and look bored with women.

SWINYARD Dance? 'Then shall the virgins rejoice in the dance, both young men and old men together.'

JETTA What's that mean? I suppose it comes out of that old black book of yours. It's the only place where people talk about virgins these days.

SWINYARD It's not something to talk about.

JETTA Why not? Grandpa, do you think making love and all that sort of thing matters as much as old people say it does? After all, it doesn't harm anybody.

SWINYARD You're too young to know about these things.

JETTA (*Quickly*) Yes, of course I am. That's why I'm asking you.

SWINYARD People do what they call fall in love, and they can't wait for marriage, or perhaps they don't mean to marry anyway, or one of them doesn't. And then one of them wants to break it off. Or they have a child they don't want. There's a wound that hurts for ever and a scar that marks one or two – or three of them – all life long. Not all old ways are bad ways, Jetta. They were born out of hundreds of years of experience and there's something of wisdom in them.

JETTA (*Stands up and walks up and down*) Wisdom is something I don't want. It's so cold and calculating and often it seems cruel to me. I wouldn't mind having a baby if it came from somebody I love. Honestly I wouldn't. Why should I? It would be an adventure. It'd be fun. And think how furious mother would be. Besides, I'd give any child of mine fun too. I wouldn't bully and bribe and kiss it one minute when the visitors came to the house, and kick it or smack it or shake it as soon as they'd left for not doing credit to me. Oh, Grandpa, a child of mine would be happy and wonderful and beautiful – never would there be a child like mine – and my child would never, never, never grow older than

two or three, and every time I looked at it, I'd laugh and cry and think of the man I'd loved even if he'd left me. (*She has been waltzing and acting her joy. Now she sinks back at her grandfather's feet*) Oh, Grandpa, I do talk nonsense, don't I? But I want to live, live, live, live, live. It's like dying at home, half the time. If I had a child, I'd keep it young and happy and glorious for ever.

SWINYARD Where would you get the money?

JETTA I'd borrow, lie, blackmail, steal. I'd get it.

SWINYARD You'll have children one day, Jetta. I won't be there to see it. But you'll have them.

JETTA I doubt it. And of course you'll be there, Grandpa.

SWINYARD I won't. At least my old body won't be. But I may know what's going on, be watching over you.

JETTA Do you really believe we go on somewhere after we die?

SWINYARD (*Sits up straight and speaks with certainty*) I know it.

JETTA How can anybody know?

SWINYARD By faith.

JETTA That's not the same as knowing.

SWINYARD It takes as much faith to disbelieve in God and an after-life as it does to believe in them. Your father with his knowledge of science and space is guilty of the thing he most despises when he dares to say, 'I am cleverer than God. There is no God.' Anyone who looks at the mysteries of life, the order of the world, the way humanity has crawled and struggled out of slime and primaeval mud, and is able to ride the stars and plunge beneath the Arctic ice-cap, talk to his friends and see them across the continents and oceans - anyone who studies these things and declares, 'I believe there is no God,' a statement which can no more be proved than the statement, 'I believe', is a man of faith. It takes far more faith to disbelieve than to believe.

JETTA I don't quite understand, Grandpa. It frightens me a

little – more than father's figures and bangs and electronics. Why do you believe?

SWINYARD Because I know the power that gave me my flesh can rule it; the hand that built me, holds me fast; the God that made me can guide me.

JETTA Aren't you afraid of dying?

SWINYARD (*Loudly*) I am not afraid.

JETTA (*Getting up*) Don't get excited, Grandpa. The family will soon be here. They're probably here now. Would you like a little rest before they come in?

SWINYARD Come in? I'm coming out to see them all. This is my birthday.

JETTA I'm sure you shouldn't.

SWINYARD I thought you said it was the old who told the young all the things they shouldn't do?

JETTA (*Laughing, patting his head*) Rest first, then. I'll tell them you're coming in half an hour.

SWINYARD Do you remember the song you used to sing when you were little? Sing it me again.

JETTA (*Sings softly the 'Rocking Carol'*)

Little Jesus sweetly sleep  
Do not stir  
We will lend a coat of fur,

....

*(As the old man's eyes close, while still singing, Jetta watches him. She takes his bottle of pills, opens them, pours a handful out, puts them in the pocket of her slacks. Still singing softly, and more softly, she goes. The lights are out except on the old man. He opens his eyes)*

SWINYARD I'm an old man. A very old man. You do not know whether I dream or wake. At times I hardly know myself. Was it a lie I told her? Fear is a liar. And it can lie when it says, 'There is no fear'. Or can it? Once that was the truth. And truth, unlike man, dies not. Once there was

no fear. Once there was certainty. Once I felt God as close as any man, stronger than any longing, unsleeping, all-knowing. Am I wrong to proclaim what once was truth within me – and what I believe will be true again before I go where I must go and where none can follow till their time comes? No. For the sake of them all I must tell the truth. It would be a lie to pretend that faith was a fraud when I remember the certainty of it. ‘I know that my Redeemer liveth . . . I know that my Redeemer liveth . . . I know . . . I know . . .’

*(He is nodding as the lights fade away)*

*(The lights go up as Professor Esteban Zoltan, the scientist, Rebecca Zoltan (“Becky”), daughter of Josh Swinyard, Dr Sylvester, the coloured assistant, are all talking excitedly together around Dr Tarquin who is sitting on a chair facing the audience, his bag at his side. Becky Zoltan’s voice rises above the others and she dominates the scene, a habit she has long cultivated)*

BECKY I know, I know, I know. I know all about specialists’ reports and medical uncertainties. But can’t you tell me in clear terms how long my father will live?

TARQUIN *(Exasperated)* Becky, I’m not God.

ZOLTAN *(Laughing)* You’re as good a version of God as any of us are ever likely to see, Tarquin.

BECKY Do be quiet, Esteban. Well, Tarquin?

TARQUIN At most, three months. More likely this week.

SYLVESTER Cases like that do recover.

TARQUIN I’ve seen men who should have died twenty years ago still drinking brandy, eating beef, producing babies. I’ve seen others who seemed sure to puff on another thirty years suddenly stop puffing.

SYLVESTER And you can’t tell why. *(Dr Tarquin shrugs)*



ZOLTAN But you sign the death certificate giving your own speculative reasons – and they're as good as anybody else's.

TARQUIN I can only deal in probabilities. The probability is that within a few days we shall be at the funeral of your father, Becky.

ZOLTAN No flowers by request. At least, that's my request. I'll miss the old boy, to tell you the truth. His unreasonable dogmas plus his dogged disapproval of me as a son-in-law have been my best recreation for years. I love arguing with him. He gets so mad and pretends to be so saintly. Feeds the cruelty in my nature, I suppose. It's like teasing a kitten. But I don't want to waste a penny on flowers, even for an old favourite like him. God, how much more could I do, how quickly could I advance, if I had the money to do it.

SYLVESTER But surely, Professor Zoltan, you'll have enough money now? Your father-in-law is rich, isn't he?

ZOLTAN Rich as Solomon. Swinyard's Pink Pills for Piles and Depression, Swinyard's Soap for Skin Cancer, Eczema and Warts, Swinyard's Tonic for Troubled Tubes, Swinyard's Perfumed Powders for Perspiration and Pimples – heaven knows what all the stuff is called. But it's been pouring gold rain into the bucket of Josh Swinyard for fifty years. And there aren't many holes in that bucket. Probably caused many of those deaths that you found so odd, Tarquin. You can't tell me that men and women can swallow that muck or rub it into their skin without harm. But he won't leave me a penny.

TARQUIN How do you know?

ZOLTAN It would be out of character. I don't blame him at all. He thinks I'd use the cash to discover truths that make his fairy tales more and more incredible. And so I should.

SYLVESTER Doesn't he understand the importance of what you are doing?

BECKY He never has understood Esteban, Dr Sylvester. He has never tried to understand him.

SYLVESTER But surely, Mrs Zoltan, your father will leave you his money? You're his only child.

BECKY He'll leave me nothing. He's never forgiven me for marrying Esteban. He'll leave it all to some fool charity – or to Jetta. I'm sure of it.

SYLVESTER Then that's all right. Jetta's a sensible person. She'll surely let you have what you need.

ZOLTAN Jetta? Not her. You don't know Jetta, Sylvester my boy. She's got the Swinyard strain right down the middle of her backbone. What she has she holds. She loves me as much as most children love parents nowadays. But not enough to share her grandfather's wealth with me. Not that I'd be too proud to take it. I'd take it all and spend it too, in tracking truth to its final lair, if she offered it me. But she'd think it disloyal to her grandfather's wishes to let me get my hands on it. At least that's what she'd tell herself. She'll keep it – if she gets it.

BECKY Esteban.

ZOLTAN (*Laughing*) Whenever you talk in that tone, I know something serious – and unpleasant is coming.

BECKY This is serious. If what Tarquin says is true, you must speak to father. Speak to him today.

ZOLTAN What about?

BECKY About money.

ZOLTAN You mean that when he's face to face with his Creator he'll be more ready to hand over his cash?

SYLVESTER She's right, you know. You owe it to science.

ZOLTAN He hates science. And I hate cadging for science. Ask him yourself, Becky. After all, he's your father.

BECKY Very well, I will.

TARQUIN I absolutely forbid it. You can't hound and badger my patient even if he is your father. Besides any strong excitement could finish him.

BECKY Money certainly excites him.

TARQUIN At present, the subject seems to be exciting you. It's no business of mine, but surely on your father's birthday, Becky, you might think of giving him something instead of trying to pick his pocket.

ZOLTAN As he kicks the bucket.

SYLVESTER It's not your business or mine, Dr Tarquin. But if you understood how near we are, how near Professor Zoltan is to success in experiments that may affect the whole life of the planet. . . .

ZOLTAN Sylvester, be careful. Don't say too much.

SYLVESTER I'm sorry. But a few thousand pounds could affect millions of lives – and deaths.

BECKY Esteban, you *must* ask him.

*(Jetta comes rushing in as Becky is speaking. She is still munching chocolate)*

JETTA Ask who, what?

BECKY Jetta, don't come rushing in like a child of six with those awful clothes – and chocolate or something all over your face. *(Licks her handkerchief and advances to wipe Jetta's face)*

JETTA If you treat me like a child of six, I'll go on rushing like a child of six. I'm old enough to wipe my own face, Mother – or at least to use my own spit. *(Does so with the back of her hand and goes on munching)*

BECKY Anyway, what are you rushing for?

JETTA To tell you grandpa's just coming.

BECKY Have you seen him? How is he?

JETTA Marvellous. I gave him my birthday present and he gave it me back again and he talked to me ever so long – more than for years – and he told me I'm going to be rich, rich, rich one day and made me ever so happy.

TARQUIN Jetta, do calm down. You get far too excited.

JETTA Ah, Doctor, but I've got plenty to be excited about.

I'm coming to see you. You suggested it you know. I'll tell you all about it. You'll need a tonic yourself when I'm through. *(She goes past Sylvester, saying a casual 'Hello, you' as she passes. He watches her but says nothing)*

BECKY *(To her husband)* You see?

ZOLTAN I see very well. Now you're going to see something you never expected. If Jetta can surprise Tarquin, I can surprise you.

BECKY Are you going to speak to father?

ZOLTAN Yes. I know what to say to him now. I'll try it, Becky. I don't think it'll work, but I'll try. It's worth risking. And it'll be fun to see his reactions even if he doesn't do it.

*(Josh Swinyard, pushed by Biggs, in a wheel-chair, comes in. He has a rug over his knees. Dr Tarquin goes at once to his side)*

SWINYARD Ah, there you are, Doctor. Disappointed no doubt to find your prognosis inaccurate. I'm still here, you see. *(Dr Tarquin holds his patient's pulse as Biggs pushes him to centre stage)* Did you do what I asked? *(Dr Tarquin nods)*

SWINYARD Thank you, Tarquin. That will do, Biggs. I'll send for you when I want you.

BIGGS Very well, sir. And I do trust you have a very happy birthday with all your loved ones near.

*(They look at him to discover irony. He surveys them all and goes without a flicker of expression)*

BECKY *(Going forward and kissing him)* Happy birthday, Father. And many happy returns of the day. I've not seen you look so well for years.

SWINYARD Haven't you, Becky. It's amazing how long I last. And it's all thanks to Tarquin.

SYLVESTER Happy birthday, Mr Swinyard.

SWINYARD Thank you, Dr Sylvester. I'm astonished you remembered it, and came.

ZOLTAN Why the astonishment? The bottom has a longer memory than the boot.

SWINYARD What exactly is the meaning of that remark?

ZOLTAN Only that you have so often been so unpleasant to Sylvester that though you may forget many things about him, he forgets nothing about you – and that includes your birthday.

JETTA (*Seeing that her grandfather is about to make some rough remark, rushes forward and covers it with a kiss*) Happy, happy birthday again, Grandpa. Don't let father make you mad. He loves doing it to everybody.

SWINYARD I've no time to be mad today. I've something important to decide. Jetta made me so happy. She brought me a present.

BECKY What was it?

JETTA A secret.

SWINYARD Tarquin wouldn't approve of it.

BECKY We'd all have brought you something if we'd known what you wanted.

ZOLTAN I have brought you something.

SWINYARD What is it? Can I have it now?

BECKY You never told me you'd brought father anything, Esteban.

TARQUIN Nothing to eat – or drink, I hope?

ZOLTAN It's nothing to eat. It's nothing to drink. It's nothing I've bought. In fact, you have to pay a price for it, Josh. But it's priceless.

SWINYARD Pay a price? I guessed you'd want money from me.

*(As this scene continues, the lights concentrate vividly on Esteban Zoltan and Josh Swinyard)*

ZOLTAN You guessed right. Is it not better to give than to receive? Isn't that what your God tells you and what you keep telling me and all of us until we are numbed and

drugged and drowsy with your piosity? Now's your chance to do some giving.

SWINYARD Be careful, Esteban. You can mock me. You always have. But do not mock your Maker.

ZOLTAN He's not my Maker. He's yours and you made him. He belongs to you, but He never made me. I made myself after the lust of my father sowed the seed. I made myself out of liquids, chemicals, solids that I swallowed and turned to blood, and nail and bone and hair inside me. And one day they'll scatter again in the dust of the earth and the waters of the seas to become part of other animals like us, wearing shirts and skirts, walking the world for a short season before they dissolve in kindly corruption - unless there's one of your miracles.

SWINYARD And the soul, Esteban, the soul?

ZOLTAN Ah, yes - the soul. You are interested in souls just now, Josh. Tarquin told me the news of your health. I imagine as a man of faith you are not afraid.

SWINYARD I am not afraid.

ZOLTAN Splendid. Nor am I. So we can talk without sentimentality. Fear is unscientific. At least you are scientific to that extent. Now you're close to death. It's as normal as sleep and I imagine equally as pleasant - unless, of course, you have a soul to reckon with. Perhaps you won't mind my asking how much your soul - or mine - weighs? I'll believe in anything I can see, touch, weigh, measure or deduce by theory, then prove by experiment.

SWINYARD My soul will be there when I am gone.

ZOLTAN Are you sure of that, Josh? Quite sure? Don't answer in a hurry, because if you are *quite* sure, you'll not be interested in the gift I'm going to offer you.

SWINYARD What is it?

ZOLTAN Something you spend your life hoping for but never quite believe in. Something that God of yours promises but

will never perform. Something that science can now offer you – in return for your money.

SWINYARD What is it?

ZOLTAN A miracle – you believe in miracles, don't you?

SWINYARD What miracle?

ZOLTAN The gift of eternal life.

SWINYARD Blasphemy!

ZOLTAN Don't be silly. Don't be childish. Be your age. At a time like this I wouldn't propose something I couldn't perform. I offer you your life for your money. It's a practical scientific suggestion – provided, of course, you don't expect me to give you a soul as well.

SWINYARD I'll not give you a penny.

ZOLTAN Very well then. Go ahead and die. And the Lord have mercy on your soul. Not mine, of course. I haven't got one. *(He laughs with enjoyment)*

SWINYARD You're mad. You can't be serious.

ZOLTAN Deadly serious. Scientists always are when they talk about science. You see, we've been experimenting with the human genes. What do you think I and Sylvester and all our friends have been doing these last years? It's possible now, with parents' consent, to decide before a child is born whether it will be male or female, twins, triplets, or quads. It's possible to decide within reasonable limits the mental capacity of a child. Rather important you know. Not only birth control, but control of the types and species born. In the age that lies ahead somebody will still have to do the dirty work. Of course, we'll have to kill off the old and the infirm as the planet gets more crowded. Painlessly but ruthlessly. We may have to create a race of Zombies happy to wash dishes, clean sewers, scrub floors, do all the jobs that tomorrow's man will refuse increasingly to do. We may need brain men to run the earth and muscle men to serve them. Then we've had to think of space travel. Space is

opening. Have no doubt of that. It will take between twenty and fifty years to reach some planets. You can't put fifty years' food and drink inside a space capsule. Besides, men in that time might fall ill, or die of boredom. And if they took off at the age of twenty they'd be seventy before they landed. Haldane suggested creating men without legs so they'd take up less room and need less food. Perfectly practicable – but not fully satisfactory. Then I had the idea of frozen animation.

SWINYARD You devil. You have a devil's brain.

ZOLTAN I don't believe in devil or in God. I have a man's brain. I use it. A Russian scientist ate mammoth's meat – meat that had been wrapped in the ice-cap for thousands of years. The meat was stringy but good. Probably it had been an elderly mammoth. Then another scientist grew corn from seeds that had been frozen in the ice a million years – but still could germinate.

SWINYARD You're not suggesting you could freeze a living man?

ZOLTAN Not suggesting. I've done it. I've kept a man unconscious, frozen so his whole life stands still for more than a year, and brought him back to vigorous, active participation in affairs again. He remembered nothing.

SWINYARD It's criminal.

ZOLTAN Not at all. He was a man sentenced to death by a doctor. Someone cleverer than old Tarquin, but quite as respectable. He gave me written permission and, incidentally, a lot of money. He financed my experiments for a year while he was in frozen animation. He died soon afterwards. But his doctor said he was due to die months earlier.

SWINYARD You offered eternal life.

ZOLTAN Yes. Cancer and leukemia will certainly be cured by the end of the century. We are finding out how to give people new kidneys. Soon we can put a new heart into an old person – perhaps even a new brain. One day, perhaps,



the accumulated knowledge and experience of many people all packed into one head. It's possible now for someone like yourself to sleep in peace, frozen peace, for 20, 50, 100 years until medical science can equip you with new health and new life, new knowledge when they awaken you.

SWINYARD You're mad.

ZOLTAN Not mad at all. Not half so mad as those who say that they'll be walking around like gossamer or ectoplasm when their bodies are a million scattered particles, already in use elsewhere. The point is that we have found in these cases of frozen animation that the muscles, eyes, ears, tissues, of a man grow no older. They stay the same. I and Dr Sylvester have been experimenting on how not only to arrest but to turn back the processes of age. We have dipped our fingers, black and white, deep in the mysteries of life and death. We have found no mystery at all. Just the scientific fact that man who made man can preserve man in youth and strength indefinitely. I tell you, Josh, within a few years it will be possible to preserve human life, yes, human youth indefinitely. We shall see a static and permanent population. Almost no births, almost no deaths. No growing old or ill or feeble. That's heaven on earth and Thy Kingdom come and all that stuff for you. I offer you the chance to share it.

SWINYARD (*Not taking his eyes off Esteban Zoltan*) Can they do it, Tarquin?

TARQUIN They say they can. They believe they can, though men like myself may not believe it. They said they could do things which seemed just as impossible twenty-five years ago – and they have done them.

ZOLTAN I offer you, Josh, in return for your money, your life. I offer to give you the taste of the fruit of the tree that was once in Eden – the tree that your God forbade Adam to taste – the tree of life itself.

SWINYARD Don't forget, Esteban, that other tree in Eden.

ZOLTAN What tree?

SWINYARD The tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

*(Jetta comes forward. As she does so, the strength of the lights bring her up and fade slightly on Zoltan. Jetta sits at her grandfather's feet, looking up at him)*

JETTA I don't know anything about trees. But do it, Grandpa.

SWINYARD Why?

JETTA Because I love you. Because you've always been decent to me. Because I'd never forgive myself if I took your money and you died and I always remembered it could have kept you living.

SWINYARD Do you believe this stuff your father's been telling me?

JETTA I don't know what I believe. But he believes it. He tells the truth when he talks about science. Honestly, Grandpa, give him a chance to try.

SWINYARD I'm not afraid to die.

JETTA Nor am I. Sometimes it's more frightening to live, isn't it? But this is the offer of a great adventure. You must say yes.

SWINYARD Death is to me the greatest adventure of all.

JETTA That's the way to look at it. If you believe in nothing, death's nothing. What else can it be? If you believe in God, it's far more fun than life. But I want you to stay alive, Grandpa.

*(He bends and kisses her on top of the head)*

SWINYARD Thank you, dear Jetta. Yours is the best birthday gift I ever had. Most people are glad to say farewell to old people. And especially when they hope to get money from them afterwards. Now I must answer your father.

*(He stands straight up. The lights bring him and Zoltan once more into prominence)*

SWINYARD You offer me what it is not in your hands to offer.

ZOLTAN It is within touching distance, almost within our grasp.

SWINYARD You will never grasp it. Life and death remain in the hands of God and Him alone. I offer my soul to Him. I offer you my prayers and pity – nothing else.

ZOLTAN You can keep both. What about the money?

SWINYARD (*Sitting down in his wheel-chair and smiling*) That you will find out any moment now, if you believe Tarquin. You'd better make friends with your daughter, Esteban. She may have more to give you soon than I can. (*Exit wheeling himself in his chair*)

BECKY (*To Jetta*) You did that well. Cunning little bitch.

ZOLTAN Leave her alone. She did her best for me.

BECKY For herself you mean. You fool. She put on an act. She knew Josh would never agree to it. She twists men round her finger.

SYLVESTER That's unfair, Mrs Zoltan.

BECKY You keep out of this.

JETTA Don't start bullying him, Mother.

BECKY (*Slaps her hard across the face*) Don't talk to me like that.

SYLVESTER She's not a child.

BECKY What do you know about her? She's my child.

ZOLTAN Mine too.

JETTA (*Who has been rubbing her slapped face with her hand and staring at her mother*) Forget that. Otherwise there'll be two of you hitting me.

SYLVESTER (*Stands between Becky and Jetta*) No more hitting. If there's to be any more of it, I'll do it. I hate wrongs.

BECKY Then hate that child getting the money.

ZOLTAN She's not got it yet.

BECKY No. But she will. And not a penny will she give you, you fool.

JETTA Why should I?

SYLVESTER Because your father needs it.

BECKY She hates her father.

JETTA I don't. I hate you.

ZOLTAN Don't say it, Jetta. It's ugly. It hurts people.

JETTA Getting slapped in the face hurts. That's ugly too.

BECKY And you'll get slapped again.

*(She tries to get at Jetta. Jetta stands ready for her. Dr Sylvester holds Becky away from her daughter)*

Take your black hands off me.

JETTA *(To her mother)* Keep your white hands off me.

TARQUIN *(Coming forward)* Ssh. Be quiet all of you.

*(Biggs enters)*

BIGGS Mr Swinyard asked me to tell you that he's expecting you all to the birthday dinner this evening.

ZOLTAN He's too ill for dinner.

BIGGS If you'll pardon me, Mr Zoltan, he's too ill not to have it. He's expecting you all. He's been talking so much about it. If he thinks the dinner's off, he'll get very angry indeed. The doctor says that's bad for him.

TARQUIN Dinner will be fine – if he's still there to eat it.

*(Exit Biggs. The Zoltans watch him go. Then they turn and look at each other. They look at their watches. Without a word both Esteban and Becky go off in different directions. Jetta and Dr Sylvester are left facing each other. They look at Dr Tarquin)*

SYLVESTER How bad is he?

TARQUIN As bad as a man can be. After this fury and tempest, how would you expect a patient to be? I'll have to stay with him.

SYLVESTER And I must go. Send word if anything happens. If not, I suppose we are all expected for dinner. Are you coming, Miss Zoltan?

JETTA Not yet, Dr Sylvester. I'll stay here and come later. I

can't face mother again, and father will be at work all day as usual.

SYLVESTER Yes. (*He is going*)

JETTA Dr Sylvester. (*Dr Sylvester pauses*)

SYLVESTER Yes, Miss Zoltan.

JETTA Thank you for what you said to my mother.

SYLVESTER Thank you for what you said to your grandfather.

It was worth much tears and pain to hear somebody speak like that. It almost makes the bottom forget the boot. (*He smiles and goes*)

JETTA Now, Tarquin, you said you wanted to see me. Here I am.

TARQUIN (*He comes downstage, holds her at arm's length and looks at her*) Jetta, Jetta, Jetta. It seems only yesterday I hauled you into the world and slapped you to make you howl.

JETTA It was only today that the mother from whom you hauled me, slapped me. But she didn't make me howl.

TARQUIN She doesn't mean it.

JETTA Of course she means it. What makes you say a thing like that?

TARQUIN It's the sort of thing one is meant to say. I'm such an old family friend. I am used to physical pain and suffering as a doctor. Sometimes I have to cause it. I still find the cruelty and acidity of people hard to bear – specially those I like.

JETTA Do you honestly like mother?

TARQUIN Yes. I think I can honestly say I do. I knew her before I knew your father. Knew all the trouble her marriage caused. Saw her hurt your grandfather without meaning to do it – first by marrying your father, then by coming to believe in his ideas and disbelieving what your grandfather believed and I suppose still believes. So inevitable, so well-intentioned, so hard on your grandfather – and on her.

JETTA On her?

TARQUIN Don't you understand how much it hurts when you feel you have to give pain to someone you once loved, as your mother loved your grandfather? She loved him once as much as you love your father, Jetta. Don't you understand how when loyalties conflict, someone has to be wounded. And the person who wounds, bleeds themselves each blow they strike. So they harden their hearts against the pain they fear to feel themselves – first an asbestos heart, then a steel heart, then a heart of stone. A hard heart soon becomes a hate-filled heart. A hating heart hurts and likes to hurt without even knowing why. You're so young, Jetta – you don't understand these things.

JETTA Why is it people imagine you can't understand things when you're young? Young people understand more than you think. Sometimes I believe I understand everything. Mother hates me. She hates grandfather. She'd hurt us both if she could. And the man who gets hurt most is father whom she says she loves. It's odd, isn't it, Tarquin? There's grandfather who says he's unafraid – but I'm not sure if it's true. And father who says he believes in nothing but science and atoms and matter – but underneath it all he believes most in the things he can't explain.

TARQUIN Such as?

JETTA Why a person who is nothing but dust and liquid can feel so much and love so much and fear so much and worry so much. In many ways he's more human than grandpa.

TARQUIN Do you worry much, Jetta?

JETTA Why should I?

TARQUIN I don't know. But there're lines under your eyes.

JETTA Mother says it's too much dancing.

TARQUIN And pale cheeks.

JETTA Mother says it's smoking and eating too many sweets.

TARQUIN Thin nose.

JETTA The one I was born with.

TARQUIN And you seem far away sometimes.

JETTA Mother thinks I'm in love.

TARQUIN Are you?

JETTA You know, Tarquin, you're a very bad doctor.

TARQUIN (*Laughing*) Luckily the rest of the family don't think so.

JETTA But I do.

TARQUIN Why?

JETTA You can't diagnose the most obvious complaint. Think about it. Pale, tired, peaky with a far-away look in her eyes - and the patient is a young woman.

TARQUIN (*Looks at her carefully*) Jetta, you're not telling me. . . . ?

JETTA I'm not telling you anything except what you told me. And the answer is that there are loaves in the oven, a cuckoo in the nest, a kernel in the nut, rabbits in the hutch. Yes, Tarquin, don't look so amazed. The fact is I'm pregnant.

TARQUIN Good God, Jetta - you're joking.

JETTA Is that what you always say to girls on these occasions?

TARQUIN But you're not married.

JETTA It happens to lots of unmarried girls, they tell me. And it's going to happen to me.

TARQUIN Do your family know?

JETTA No.

TARQUIN You'll have to tell them. When's the child due?

JETTA Seven months from now.

TARQUIN (*Sits her down in the chair which he first occupied when the act began*) You must look after yourself. Why, I never dreamed of such a thing.

JETTA That's why I say you're a bad doctor, Tarquin.

TARQUIN Who is the man?

JETTA That's my business.

TARQUIN Do I know him?

JETTA You might ask whether I know him myself. It might be one of twenty, fifty, a hundred men. (*Seeing the look of concern on Dr Tarquin's face*) Oh, don't worry, it's not like that really, I know who it is. There's only been one man. And only one time. It's bad luck really, isn't it? But when I hear father and Dr Sylvester and you too, for that matter, saying that science is what I once thought God to be, and that we can explain everything with mathematics and environment, and that everybody can do what they like in a modern world, I wonder why people fuss about lovers and babies and marriage. It all seems such an unnecessary complication.

TARQUIN You must marry this man at once.

JETTA I'm not sure that I want to marry him. Or he me. I haven't asked him.

TARQUIN But you'll have to get married.

JETTA Not necessarily.

TARQUIN You can't just produce a child as if it was as trifling as a new dress or a hat or something.

JETTA I'm going to produce one. Unless, of course, you help me.

TARQUIN I'll help you, naturally, Jetta, when the time comes.

JETTA You do make things difficult, Tarquin. I never realised before what a stupid man you were. I don't want help when the time comes. I want it now.

TARQUIN How?

JETTA Get rid of it. They say it's not too dangerous or painful. Take me to your house or a nursing home and operate on me - or whatever it is you have to do.

TARQUIN No.



JETTA Why not?

TARQUIN It's illegal.

JETTA Oh, that. Lots of doctors do it. You know they do.

TARQUIN I think it's wrong. I won't do it. I never have – and I never will – least of all for somebody I love.

JETTA What is right? What is wrong? Unless something happens like that, I'm going to cause lots of trouble to lots of people – and they're people you love and that's all wrong. Can't you think of them? If you won't do it yourself, send me to somebody who will. If it's money that worries you, grandpa says I'm going to have lots when he dies.

TARQUIN Jetta, you must not think these things, or say these things. You're upset, naturally. But it will be all right. And I certainly shall do nothing to help you get rid of the child.

JETTA (*Standing up*) I didn't think you would. But it was worth trying. It's a relief to have told somebody. You won't tell anyone else, will you, Tarquin?

TARQUIN No. But you must. You must tell your parents. And you must get this man to marry you, whoever he is.

JETTA. 'Must' and 'Mustn't' parents are  
Of kids who lie to Pa and Ma.

That's the old rhyme. And it's true in my case. Well, we'll see. Thank you for listening to my symptoms and letting me give you the diagnosis and then for refusing to do anything about it. Well, I don't know what I'm going to do. But I promise you I'm going to do something.

(*She goes, with Tarquin staring after her*)

TARQUIN Come back. Come back, Jetta.

(*He hurries after her as the lights fade*)

## ACT TWO

*As the lights come up again, we see Professor Zoltan and Dr Sylvester in white coats and working with chalk on a formula set out facing the audience on a blackboard. They work without words for a few minutes. Then Sylvester goes over to Zoltan's side of the board, rubbing out one set of figures, substitutes another and looks at Zoltan.*

ZOLTAN You're right, Sylvester. That's it. You know more about this now than I do.

SYLVESTER That's not true, Professor Zoltan.

ZOLTAN Sometimes I think it is. Certainly I'd never have got so far ahead without you. You'll be one of the great ones.

SYLVESTER It all seems so important. And then suddenly it seems nothing – at times like this morning.

ZOLTAN Don't let rows about money upset you. If you're an experimental scientist you have to reckon that you're always opening up territory which will ruin you and make a fortune for those who come after you. There's always a fight for money going on around you. You have to learn to disregard it, like bagpipes or the weather.

SYLVESTER It's not the money. It's Mrs Zoltan hitting Jetta. People are only collections of particles – nothing more. You've taught me that, and I believe it. I hope you didn't think it wrong of me to stop your wife hitting her again?

ZOLTAN Not particularly. Not particularly right either. On the whole I think it better to let people fight who want to fight. They say they hate it. But men don't go on doing so enthusiastically what they truly hate.

SYLVESTER These were women.

ZOLTAN Even more enthusiastic when it comes to a slugging match.

SYLVESTER It's odd.

ZOLTAN What's odd?

SYLVESTER When a black man tries to stop white folk fighting. It's often been the other way round.

ZOLTAN Black? White? What's colour got to do with it? It's only an accident of genes and pigmentation. If we had the time, Sylvester, we could show humanity how to produce black babies from white parents and vice versa. No serious problem at all. As a matter of fact we shall soon have to decide how many of each colour we need on earth.

SYLVESTER Why?

ZOLTAN We're heading straight for a stabilisation of population. By the end of the century there will be no more involuntary deaths – apart from accident or violence. It's important to settle how many black, brown, white, yellow we shall need. Personally, I think it will be best to go for a new colour altogether, a sort of universal buff shade. It will save so much trouble.

SYLVESTER I don't know about that.

ZOLTAN It would end the black man's burden.

SYLVESTER Would it? I'm not sure colour is the problem. White people used to think all black men were black devils. Nowadays it's fashionable to think if a man is black, he's some sort of black angel. Black men can do no wrong. But, of course, we can – and do. No colour has a monopoly of vice or virtue. We'd better see if we can change man's character before we stabilise the population.

ZOLTAN Interesting suggestion. Probably only a matter of molecules if we get down to it. Did I tell you about the experiment we did with rats some time ago? We fed them, looked after them and studied them. The rats flourished. When the food came they ate it. When it left they slept. That was their instinct. Then we tried stimulating different areas of their brain. We gave them the same amount of food. But when we excited one part of the brain the rats shared their food, made friends, lived together in peace.

When we put pressure on the other part, they tore each other apart and fought to the death. This was controlled emotion. It would be quite possible to do the same with human beings. With the explosion of population and the selfishness in men, it is entirely necessary to do it. Human beings must be controlled and directed properly. Science will be able to provide you with instant happiness, love and understanding. Combined with our new shade of colour it should do a lot for the happiness of mankind. However, it's outside the range of our present experiment. Come on, Sylvester, let's get on with our work.

SYLVESTER Doesn't colour mean anything to you at all, Professor Zoltan?

ZOLTAN Nothing. How could it to an intelligent scientist? I wouldn't have you working with me here if it did.

SYLVESTER I rather thought you wouldn't have me working with you here if it didn't.

*(Lights fade)*

*(Lights come up on Dr Sylvester who is still working at a desk. Jetta is lying full-length on the floor, a transistor radio going ceaselessly. She is eating from a large box of chocolates in front of her, and swaying to the rhythm)*

SYLVESTER Turn it off, Jetta.

JETTA Why? I like it.

SYLVESTER It makes too much noise. Dr Zoltan will hear it, and I am supposed to be working.

JETTA *(Turning it lower)* I hate work. And I adore chocolates. Do you know, somebody brought this huge box for grandpa's birthday. Biggs found it on the hall table, with no card. Grandpa can't eat chocolates. Lucky for me. I could eat the lot.

SYLVESTER You look as if you will. They will make you sick.

JETTA Want one? (*She passes one up in her fingers*)

SYLVESTER No thank you. I must concentrate.

JETTA (*Eating the chocolate*) I always get hungry when I'm tired. (*Turns radio off*) I haven't slept for ages.

SYLVESTER Why don't you get some sleep before the party?  
It will do you good.

JETTA I can't sleep.

SYLVESTER Why not?

JETTA Too many worries. Too many rows. Too many people telling me what to do.

SYLVESTER I never thought you had any worries, Jetta.

JETTA Haven't you noticed it's the people with no real worries who proclaim them to the world. And those who are in desperate trouble who keep quiet about it?

SYLVESTER Are you in any sort of trouble, Jetta?

JETTA Some people would think it was glorious trouble. But it's going to make everyone very angry. If you think you've seen a family row, you'd better prepare yourself for this one. Because you are going to be in it.

SYLVESTER I certainly shall not. I hate the way you all go on at each other.

JETTA I hate the way everyone goes on at me. It makes me sick.

SYLVESTER There's nothing wrong with you that a good sleep won't cure.

JETTA You're the second doctor I've seen today, Sylvester. Neither of you could diagnose my problem. I don't think much of your medicine.

SYLVESTER I haven't prescribed any medicine yet. Nor have I diagnosed your condition. The fact is you are over-tired.

JETTA It will take more than a good sleep to cure me. Can't you guess? I'm pregnant. I'm going to have a baby.

SYLVESTER Jetta, don't make jokes like that. It's not funny.

JETTA I am not joking. It's the truth.

SYLVESTER Are you sure?

JETTA Of course I'm sure.

SYLVESTER I can't believe it. It must be a mistake.

JETTA There is no mistake, Sylvester, and you know it. I know most people won't believe me, but you're the only man I have ever slept with. It is your child, Sylvester.

SYLVESTER You don't expect me to believe that, Jetta. You've been around. You could be having anyone's child.

JETTA You bastard.

SYLVESTER Look at yourself, Jetta. I didn't have to seduce you, did I?

JETTA I hate you, Sylvester.

SYLVESTER Look, Jetta, stop making a tragedy out of it. You're not the first girl to become pregnant.

JETTA Don't talk to me as if I were some case history. I need help.

SYLVESTER I'll help you, if I can. Have you told anyone else?

JETTA Yes. Dr Tarquin. I asked him to get rid of the baby. He wouldn't do it.

SYLVESTER What did he say?

JETTA He said I should tell my parents and marry the man. What did you expect him to say?

SYLVESTER Have you told your parents?

JETTA Don't be stupid.

SYLVESTER You should. They would help you and understand.

JETTA How naïve you are, Sylvester. Mother hates me. As for father, I'm not a person - just so many atoms wrapped up in a pretty case.

SYLVESTER You shouldn't say things like that. Of course they care about you, Jetta. We all do.

JETTA (*Turning straight towards him*) Do you care enough to marry me, Sylvester?

SYLVESTER You know I could never do that.

JETTA No. I just wanted to ask. You're scared, scared of being stuck with me always.

SYLVESTER There's no such thing as always. Look at the people who say they will love for ever. It lasts a month, a year, and then they are landed with somebody they despise. Love passes like everything else.

JETTA Except life. You're going to make life last for ever, aren't you?

SYLVESTER Yes, I think we are. But life is nothing without happiness, without achievement and we would have neither.

JETTA We'd have as much as anyone gets in this world.

SYLVESTER The world is still the old devil world. There's more to that world than the leaping of the flesh. It has teeth and claws as well, and the nag, nag, nag of hurts that turn to hate or indifference. The heart betrays you, Jetta. It brings nothing but pain and bitterness.

JETTA I've got that already.

SYLVESTER You know nothing of bitterness. You have not lived through centuries of hatred. For years the white man has held power in his hands. He has civilised us, 'for our own good'. But we have always been less than him. He did not believe we could lead ourselves, let alone the world. He said the black man's brain was smaller than his. At last the white man's world is ending. We too can push back the barriers of knowledge, span the stars, learn the mysteries of science. We dare not lose our chance. Scientifically, we can create a heaven here on earth. It is the most exciting experiment man has ever made. It will be shared with the whole of humanity. The black man's world is coming. I've sweated for it and I know. And in that world, none of my children will be white.

JETTA I'd laugh if the baby was born black.

SYLVESTER It would not be black. It would have white blood in its veins.

JETTA Really, Sylvester, it would have red blood. Just like yours and mine. For a doctor, you don't seem to know much about life. You think you can prevent death, but you can't make life worth living. There will still be hatred and suffering – even in your new world.

SYLVESTER We can find a way to end it.

JETTA I don't think so. You haven't done it for me. You've taken my body, and left me to get on with it. Is that heaven on earth?

SYLVESTER It is easier for you if I do nothing. If I upset your grandfather, it could kill him. You want him to live. He is the only person you really love.

JETTA He's the only person who really loves me. He believes in God. You're all afraid of him.

SYLVESTER Dr Zoltan says fear is not scientific. I am not afraid of Mr Swinyard's dreams.

JETTA I like to dream. To dream of love, and fun, and rushing in the wind. Sometimes I wish grandpa's dreams were true, and your facts were wrong.

SYLVESTER There's no hope of that. The facts are proved.

JETTA You're creating a wonderful world to live in, but it's full of desperate people. It's a dream too. Just like grandpa's God. Only yours is a bad, bad dream.

SYLVESTER It will bring hope to millions. That is good, not bad.

JETTA I don't believe in you, Sylvester. You say this world of yours is going to be perfect. It will benefit everyone. But you're just like us, just as selfish and greedy – yes, and lustful as the people you hate. I wish I wasn't having your wretched child.

SYLVESTER Jetta –



JETTA Leave me alone.

SYLVESTER I don't understand you, Jetta. What do you want?

JETTA I don't want anything except to clear out, except to have someone who cares about me. You all treat me like dirt, everyone except grandpa.

SYLVESTER You can't live in a world of dreams all your life, Jetta. You have got to grow up. You have got to stop being a little girl, running to grandpa every time something goes wrong. There is no tragedy about your life. A lot of people have been pregnant before.

JETTA Yes, and a lot of men like you have left them afterwards to struggle through life with nothing. You may be bitter, Sylvester, but you make other people bitter all round you. It's got nothing to do with colour. It's just the way you are, rotten all through.

SYLVESTER I wasn't rotten the night I loved you, Jetta, was I? You thought I was strong and warm and wonderful. I gave you what you wanted. Now you want more from me, but I am not going to pay up. Do you blame me?

JETTA No. I don't. I don't belong with any of you. You have got nothing to offer me, nothing big enough, fast enough, free enough for me. I hope I never see you again. *(She runs)*

SYLVESTER *(Shouts after her)* Jetta, come back here. Come back.

*(As the lights come up on Esteban Zoltan and Becky, it is clear that an argument is in full swing. The voices rise in a crescendo, with Becky's as usual taking the dominant part. Jetta is there. She is listening with some amusement.)*

BECKY It's revolting!

ZOLTAN Becky, control yourself.

BECKY I warned you that this would happen. It's all your

fault. You've spoilt and pampered her until she doesn't mind what she does.

ZOLTAN Nonsense. Jetta is at perfect liberty to do as she wants. I don't intend to stop her. She will learn by her mistakes.

BECKY She's fooled you all. Mincing up to you with her tight pants and painted eyes. Men are idiots.

ZOLTAN I would say the female sex is not immune.

BECKY At least I've seen Jetta clearly. You never have. I've seen her worming her way into Josh's pockets. Taking my money off him.

ZOLTAN It's not yours.

BECKY It will be. Josh will never leave his money to a common tart.

ZOLTAN For God's sake don't talk about your daughter like that.

BECKY Yes, that's what she is. Flaunting her body around. Asking for trouble. Now she's got it. One thing I know about father - he is proud of his family. The Swinyards matter to him. Once he knows Jetta is pregnant, she won't get a penny.

ZOLTAN That should please you.

BECKY Don't be cynical. It bores me.

ZOLTAN Why should Josh be told? It would probably kill him.

BECKY He has a right to know. He has pinned all his hopes on Jetta. He must know the truth about her.

ZOLTAN Well, I'm not going to tell him.

BECKY Of course not. Jetta must tell him.

JETTA Why should I?

BECKY You have deceived enough people, Jetta, with your fantasies, your dreams, your lies. This time you're not going to get away with it. Josh is old. You deliberately exploited him so that you could get what you want.

ZOLTAN You see everything in terms of good and bad, black and white, truth and lies. There are no shades of grey. No tolerance. Sometimes I think there is more of Josh in you than in the old man himself. You might almost believe in his God the way you go on.

BECKY I don't. This is not a question of belief. It's a question of hard cash.

ZOLTAN If it's so important to you, why don't you tell Josh yourself?

BECKY He wouldn't believe me. He'd dismiss it as gossip.

ZOLTAN Exactly what it is.

BECKY No. Josh is dying. He may already be dead. He has been fooled and he does not know it. If Jetta cares for him at all, she has to tell him.

ZOLTAN What is there to tell? Jetta is pregnant. There is nothing to be ashamed of in that. You were once in the same condition yourself, Becky. You should remember.

JETTA She'd like to forget.

BECKY How coarse you are, Esteban. I suppose even your own daughter is an experiment in molecules. I shall not lift a finger to help her, I promise you. She deserves everything that's coming to her.

JETTA Except the money.

BECKY Yes, except my money.

ZOLTAN The fact that Jetta is pregnant is not a bad thing. It is a natural instinct fulfilled. There is no reason to stop this instinct unless it gets out of hand. A far more important factor is who made her pregnant.

BECKY That philosophy of yours has ruined the child.

ZOLTAN It may be your lack of motherly love which has ruined her. In fact it is far more probable.

BECKY I have sacrificed my life to keep this home going. But for me it would have broken up long since. Isn't that love?

ZOLTAN No that is duty. Love is very different. One is an instinct, the other an emotion.

BECKY A lot of rubbish. It's Josh I'm worried about.

ZOLTAN It's Josh's money you've worried about. Well, Jetta - who was it? There's no reason why you shouldn't marry the man - unless he's married already. It happens in the best families.

JETTA Especially in the best families. But supposing I don't want to marry anybody, Father?

ZOLTAN Marriage is convenient for the sake of your mother's friends. It means nothing.

BECKY Who is the man, Jetta?

JETTA Suppose I don't know?

BECKY It wouldn't surprise me in the least. How filthy.

ZOLTAN You'd better tell us, Jetta.

JETTA It's Sylvester.

ZOLTAN What?

JETTA The father of my baby is Dr Sylvester, Father.

ZOLTAN Why the hell didn't you say so?

JETTA You never asked. Anyway, what's wrong with Sylvester?

ZOLTAN What's wrong!

BECKY So you're angry now. At last.

ZOLTAN After all I've done for him. He'd be nothing without me. I've given him everything. He couldn't keep his dirty hands off Jetta.

BECKY (*Taunting*) Heavens, you are blind, Esteban. The two of them carrying on under your nose, and you never even knew it. (*Turning on Jetta*) You deceitful little bitch.

ZOLTAN Leave her alone. It's not her fault. I have made Sylvester into a better scientist than I am. I have given him the power to break through problems, and forge new

answers. He has spat in my face. He has hurt my Jetta. I shall never forgive him.

*(Esteban Zoltan leaves)*

JETTA Don't go, Father. You mustn't blame Sylvester. It's not his fault. Come back. Please come back.

*(Exit Zoltan)*

BECKY Pull yourself together.

JETTA Leave me alone, Mother. Don't you care what I feel? It's impossible to tell you anything. All I get is hate, hate, hate. Is there nothing else inside you?

BECKY I don't know what you mean, Jetta. I have done everything for you, which is more than can be said for your father. He would have let you drag yourself up with nothing. At least I have tried to set you some example.

JETTA You have never loved me, Mother. You have never cared what happened to me. I don't think you have ever loved anybody except yourself.

BECKY You're wrong. I loved my father very much, and he loved me. But you wanted to have that, too. You have always had what you wanted. Nobody has ever stopped you. So you took away the one thing that meant something to me. Now you are trying to take my money. Well, you shall not have it.

JETTA I don't care about money, Mother. I just want somebody to love me.

BECKY Why should anybody love someone as selfish as you are? You've lived for nothing except the next thrill, the next party, the next man. That's your trouble, Jetta. You have never earned anything - friendship or money - and now you expect sympathy and understanding. Well, you won't get it from me.

JETTA What's wrong with you, Mother? How can you earn something like love? I thought it was free.

BECKY Far too free. You don't know the first thing about

love, Jetta. It is not all bed and kissing. A lot of it is tough, ordinary hard work.

JETTA And fights, bitterness, hatred, spite, revenge. All my life that's what it has been. You have hated father, and you have hated me. Why don't you look at yourself, Mother. You are a frustrated, middle-aged woman who hates everybody who has got more than you.

BECKY You little beast.

JETTA The one time I need help and understanding and some sort of hope you turn on me.

BECKY You've fooled everybody, Jetta, with your lies and tears. It means nothing to me.

JETTA Who do you think I learned it from? You have pretended to be so right, Mother, but I know what you are like, pretending to care for Josh, when all you wanted was his money. We all know what you're like, and I hate it. I tell you, I hate it. (*Jetta runs. Becky grabs her*)

BECKY Don't run away, Jetta. You must go and see Josh this minute and tell him the truth. He won't be fooled by your tears this time.

JETTA I'm going. I couldn't stick it here any more. It's hell.

BECKY I shall be waiting for you. I want to know what Josh has to say.

(*Jetta goes out as the light fades*)

(*The lights come up on Josiah Swinyard. He lies in bed. His eyes are closed. For a moment he seems so still he could be dead. Then he starts to talk. As he talks, the lights show Jetta far away, writing a letter*)

SWINYARD I'm an old man. A very old man. Each time I sleep I say goodbye to life. Then when I stumble through dreams and memories to another waking moment, I

wonder if I'm still here. I do not fear death. 'The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer. My God, my strength, in whom I will trust.' I do trust Him. Funny none of them believe. Sometimes I wonder when they shout and taunt – 'Poor old Josh. He's senile. There is no God.' They must doubt and question. They have to convince themselves they're right. Sometimes I wonder if they are right. If there's nothing to hope for but the long darkness – the blessed silence. That's what they want me to think. But I know the truth. Better hold on to the end. It won't be much longer, you know. One more slumbering dream, one more endless day. It can't last forever. 'By faith I hold fast.' Sometimes I see the outstretched arms. 'He that endureth unto the end, the same shall be saved.' 'When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee. For I am the Lord thy God.' *(He sleeps)*

*(Jetta enters with her letter. She stops by the bed)*

JETTA Good night, dear Grandfather. Sleep well. Thank you for everything.

*(She slips the letter into the Bible, and moves away. The light fades on to Josiah Swinyard's face. He is quite still)*

*(Out of the silence comes the voice of Esteban Zoltan. It is angry)*

ZOLTAN I know. I know. I know what you have done, blast you.

SYLVESTER Don't blame me, Dr Zoltan.

ZOLTAN I do blame you.

SYLVESTER It was Jetta's fault. She encouraged me.

ZOLTAN You took advantage of her. She's a child. You destroyed her. I can never forgive you.

SYLVESTER This sort of thing never mattered to you before. How was I to know you would take it like this?

ZOLTAN Jetta is my daughter. Don't you see what you have done?

SYLVESTER No. Man is a machine. What he does or does not do is irrelevant. You said so yourself – often.

ZOLTAN I gave you everything. You would be nothing without me. Why did you do it, Sylvester?

SYLVESTER Because I believed you. I believed you when you said people should do as they want, when they want, as often as they want. I believed you when you said colour was nothing – an accident of genes and pigmentation. I should have known better.

ZOLTAN What I say and what I feel are quite different.

SYLVESTER Then you are not sincere.

ZOLTAN I took you in against all the best advice, Sylvester. Josh was furious with me. He thought I did it to annoy him. In a way I did. He always thought I was soft on you, just because you were black. Josh hates that. 'You'd do just as well with one of your own kind,' he said. I wanted to prove how wrong he was about you. Now you have made me look a fool. Josh is right. He's always right, damn it.

SYLVESTER Mr Swinyard is an old man. He has very strong opinions.

ZOLTAN He loves Jetta. This will kill him.

SYLVESTER Because I am black?

ZOLTAN I suppose so. I don't know. I'm not sure.

SYLVESTER I know. I am sure.

ZOLTAN I tell you, I am not conscious of colour.

SYLVESTER Not in your mind, perhaps, but in your heart and spirit you are.

ZOLTAN I have no spirit, nor do you.

SYLVESTER Oh yes, you have. I have seen it with my own eyes. A spirit of revenge and hatred. A spirit contrary to all your ideas and doctrines. In spite of you, your spirit lives and speaks.

ZOLTAN I believe what I see. I see nothing except what you



have done to Jetta. I love her more than anybody. I gave you everything I had to offer. And you had to take Jetta as well. Why?

SYLVESTER If man is an animal – he must live like an animal. Why do you expect anything more?

ZOLTAN Because you had the knowledge to know better.

SYLVESTER What knowledge? The knowledge of right and wrong?

ZOLTAN The knowledge of loyalty to somebody who had helped you. I trusted you. You betrayed me.

SYLVESTER Can you see loyalty, Professor Zoltan? Can you prove trust? What are they made of? How much do they weigh?

ZOLTAN You have destroyed Jetta. Surely that means something to you. Do you feel nothing?

SYLVESTER I feel everything. I feel lust, hate, hurt, sorrow and shame, just as you do. I have proved that man is an animal, a clever animal who can do without God. I learnt it from you, Dr Zoltan. Now I learn from you that man is more than an animal. What am I to believe?

ZOLTAN I believe nothing. Nothing at all. I believe what I can prove, what I have proved. Otherwise nothing. Nothing.

*(The light fades. It comes up again on the face of Josiah Swinyard. Biggs has just put him into the wheel-chair. He is shouting in a loud voice)*

SWINYARD No, Biggs. This is my last birthday and the dinner is going to be as I planned it.

BIGGS Not so loud, sir. The doctor says it's not good for you. Here's the rug, sir. *(Biggs starts to tuck a rug round Josh Swinyard's knees)*

SWINYARD Take it away, Biggs. I'm not going downstairs wrapped up in that thing. I want to look my best. I'm not an invalid, you know.

BIGGS The doctor said you should have the rug. I have to do as the doctor says.

SWINYARD You do as I tell you, Biggs. That's what you're paid for. Take it off at once.

BIGGS You don't know what's good for you, Mr Swinyard.

SWINYARD It's good for me to enjoy myself, isn't it? It's good for me not to get excited. You said so yourself, just now. I won't enjoy myself, and I will get excited if you smother me in this rug. So take it off, Biggs.

BIGGS Just as you say, sir. But I don't like it. I don't like it at all. *(He folds the rug)*

SWINYARD How do I look, Biggs?

BIGGS Wonderful, sir, if I may say so. I've seldom seen you look better.

SWINYARD You old liar. I've never looked worse. I'm deadly ill. Every time Tarquin sees I'm still breathing he jumps a mile. They've been waiting for me to die all day. I know. Half of them will be wondering whether I'm going to turn up for dinner.

BIGGS I don't think so at all. Everybody has been looking forward to this evening. I'm sure they would be very disappointed if you weren't there.

SWINYARD Some of them would. Some of them wouldn't. I know them better than you, Biggs. I'm going to say grace tonight. Esteban doesn't like it. But this is my birthday dinner and no meal is complete without a blessing. What do you think, Biggs?

BIGGS A very suitable end to a party, sir. I always enjoy a good grace. It gives the dinner a proper setting.

SWINYARD My family would disagree with you. I'll have my Bible please, Biggs.

*(Biggs hands Josh Swinyard the Bible)*

BIGGS And your spectacles, sir?

*(Josh searches for them in his pocket. Biggs looks under the pillow. They are there. He hands them to Josh)*

BIGGS Under the pillow as usual, sir.

SWINYARD Clever of you to find them. I never can.

*(Biggs starts to push Josh in the chair. He stops for a moment and looks down at the old man)*

BIGGS I'd just like to say, I'm sure it will be a wonderful evening, sir, and how happy I am to see you enjoying it. It's just like old times.

SWINYARD Thank you, Biggs.

*(The lights fade on the two of them. As they come up again Biggs is clearing the dinner table. It is a quiet party. They have eaten well. There are candles on the table. The place next to Josh is empty. Tarquin sits next to Becky. Esteban Zoltan on the other side, and Dr Sylvester at the end)*

TARQUIN That was a wonderful dinner. Thank you, Josh. I wish you had a birthday every day.

SWINYARD This is the last one I'll have, Tarquin. I'm glad you were here to share it. I like to be with old friends.

TARQUIN You mustn't talk like that, Josh.

BIGGS Coffee, sir? *(Offering it to Josh Swinyard)*

SWINYARD Thank you, Biggs. If I'm allowed it. *(Biggs looks at Dr Tarquin)*

TARQUIN I should think so, just this once.

SWINYARD This doctor of mine spends his time telling me what I cannot do.

ZOLTAN And you spend your time doing it with amazing regularity.

SWINYARD Exactly. Here I am alive and well, when you would have me buried and forgotten – or is it frozen? If I'd taken your advice, Esteban, I'd have been dead long since.

ZOLTAN You never take my advice, Josh. I've been trying to

tell you the scientific facts of life and death for a long time, without success.

BECKY You might at least listen, Josh. Even if you don't want to believe him.

SWINYARD I believe the truth.

ZOLTAN And what is the truth?

SWINYARD The truth is the choice in your heart and mine, Esteban. The choice between good and evil.

ZOLTAN (*Lighting a cigarette*) Your heart beats with life, or lies still in death. That is the only choice it makes. It pumps blood to your brain, and into your body - and when it stops doing so, there will be no choice for you, Josh. I believe in the work of man's brain, not in the myth of his conscience.

TARQUIN Does it matter tonight, Esteban?

BECKY Of course not.

TARQUIN Then let's not discuss it.

BIGGS (*Offering coffee to Becky*) Some coffee, madam?

BECKY Thank you, Biggs. Have you seen Jetta?

BIGGS No, madam.

BECKY How rude that girl is. Fancy not turning up for your birthday dinner, Josh.

SWINYARD She's young. You were young once, Becky.

BECKY She's still terribly rude.

SWINYARD She gave me a birthday present. It made me very happy.

TARQUIN You'd better keep some food hot for her, Biggs. She may turn up later.

ZOLTAN I'm afraid she may have decided not to come. She was a bit tired and upset.

BECKY She was going to talk to you before dinner, Josh.

ZOLTAN Becky!

BECKY She had something very important to tell you. Did she see you?

ZOLTAN Becky, for goodness sake.

BECKY I want to know.

TARQUIN Josh was asleep before dinner. He saw nobody. I gave the strictest orders that he was not to be woken. Jetta was tired this morning – I expect she is sleeping it off.

BECKY More likely drinking it off. That girl never does what she's told. I told her to see Josh.

SWINYARD I wish she had come.

BECKY She needs a good talking to. It's time somebody dealt with her. Why don't you do it, Esteban?

TARQUIN Not now Becky. This is not the time.

BECKY No time like the present. I think somebody should find her, and we'll have it out with her here and now. She get's away with so much. It will be a change for her to face her father.

ZOLTAN I refuse to do it.

BECKY (*Getting up*) Very well. I'll go. I'm not afraid of her.

SYLVESTER (*Hurriedly*) I'll go. I'll look for her.

BECKY Certainly not. You're the last person to go.

SYLVESTER You're a vicious woman. You're full of hate.

ZOLTAN That's enough, Sylvester.

BECKY I won't have you talking to me like that. It's time you got rid of him, Esteban.

TARQUIN You must stop this. It's not good for any of us.

(*All talk heatedly at once*)

(*Enter Biggs*)

BIGGS Shall I take Mr Swinyard upstairs, Doctor?

SWINYARD (*Loud and clear*) Silence. I am going to thank God for the meal. It's an old-fashioned custom, but I believe in it. (*Josh Swinyard begins to stand with difficulty*) Help me, Tarquin.

TARQUIN I forbid it, Josh.

SWINYARD Help me, I tell you. If it's the last thing I do, I will stand for the grace.

*(All rise, except Professor Zoltan, who sits smoking his cigarette)*

SWINYARD I am waiting for you, Esteban.

ZOLTAN I will not stand for a god I don't believe in. Nor thank him for a meal he did not cook. You are at liberty to stand, and I am at perfect liberty to sit.

SWINYARD You owe your life and liberty to the Living God. This is my house. You will stand for the grace, Esteban.

TARQUIN For goodness sake, Esteban, get up.

*(Zoltan takes no notice)*

SWINYARD May God have mercy on you, Esteban.

ZOLTAN You should ask for it first, Josh. You will need it before me.

*(Josh Swinyard begins the 103rd Psalm by heart)*

SWINYARD

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits. Who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases. Who redeemeth thy life from destruction . . .

*(As he finds his place in the Bible, Jetta's letter fall out on to the ground. Biggs picks it up)*

Give it to me, Biggs.

BECKY *(Seeing the writing)* It's from Jetta. What does it say?

SWINYARD Give it to me. Oh God.

TARQUIN What is it, Josh? Are you all right?

*(Josh Swinyard sinks into his chair. He is white and shaken)*

SWINYARD Oh God, Tarquin. She's taken my pills. She's taken my pills.

*(The lights fade as Dr Tarquin and Professor Zoltan run out)*

*to find Jetta. The light stays on Josh Swinyard's face. He is quite still. In the silence he begins to speak.)*

SWINYARD Beloved Jetta, like the morning sunshine. These old bones live in darkness and sometimes in despair, but you warmed them with your laughter. After those long crawling nights came the day, with you Jetta. Talking, dreaming, asking, wanting so much from life. Looking forward to everything that could be yours, and which I longed for you to have. What have I done to deserve this? Why did you do it, Jetta? In God's name, why? I loved you as my own child, I wanted to live for your sake. God knows there was little else to keep this broken body living – but for you I wanted to keep breathing, keep fighting, struggling forward to the end. I wanted you to know that death is not the end. You were hungry for faith. I wanted to give you bread, the bread of life. Was it a stone I gave you?

Dear Jetta, there was joy for you on earth. I remember the day you were born. Such a tiny thing. I had happiness to see you live. First crawling, then tottering, then racing towards me – always laughing with me. There was so much for you still to do, but you have thrown it all away. Why? Questions that go on and on and on. But no answers. Are they right after all? Perhaps there is no God in the shadows keeping watch over His own. Perhaps I told you a lie. Old men deceive themselves often enough. It's impossible to be sure. I can't prove it. I want to believe. . . . I wanted you to believe.

*(As the lights come up Tarquin stands behind Josh Swinyard's chair. Sylvester is there. Becky is sobbing quietly. Esteban Zoltan sits in silence)*

TARQUIN I'm so sorry, Josh.

BECKY Couldn't you have done something?

TARQUIN There was nothing I could do. I'm sorry. There was nothing anybody could do. She must have died an hour ago at least. I'm terribly sorry.

BECKY (*To Sylvester*) Don't you care? You killed her, you know.

ZOLTAN No, no, Becky. You can't blame anybody.

BECKY She would never have done anything if he'd left her alone.

ZOLTAN You mustn't say that.

BECKY I mean it. Oh God, don't you understand? Jetta is dead. I can't bear it, and it's his fault. (*Flies at Sylvester*) I hate you. You murderer. You killer.

(*She breaks down and Tarquin takes her by the arm*)

TARQUIN Becky. Come with me.

BECKY Oh God, I can't bear it.

(*Tarquin takes Becky out*)

(*Sylvester goes down to Josh Swinyard's chair*)

SYLVESTER I don't know what to say. I only wish I could do something.

SWINYARD I have used harsh words about you, Sylvester. I have said things I should not have said. May God forgive me.

SYLVESTER (*Moved and speechless*) Thank you. Thank you. (*He looks at Zoltan*) I'm sorry.

(*He turns and leaves*)

SWINYARD It was my fault. My life has been a fraud. I have spoken of God. I have believed in God. But I have helped nobody.

ZOLTAN Stop it, Josh.

SWINYARD I lost Becky. She had faith as a child, but I could not hold her fast. It was not real to her. Esteban, you hate the God I love. And I could not love you enough to pull your heart to heaven.

ZOLTAN (*Wheeling Josh Swinyard's chair downstage*) Josh, you're not to blame.

SWINYARD I wanted Jetta most of all to love the truth and live



for it. I failed her. It was never strong enough, pure enough, swift enough for her. I said I had no fear, but I was afraid. I said I believed but I doubted. My whole life has been a sham.

ZOLTAN No, Josh.

SWINYARD I have nothing to offer you or any man, Esteban. You were right, you have proved your case.

ZOLTAN No, no, Josh. It is not your lack of faith that killed Jetta. At least you tried to give it to her.

SWINYARD I gave her my love, but I could not give her the secret of life. Life is painful. It is born in pain. It grows in pain. It dies in pain. I never wanted Jetta to face the pain of the sword of truth. So she never knew how to find hope. I wanted to make her happy, but I could not make her believe. I have failed utterly.

ZOLTAN (*Furious*) No, no, Josh. You must not give in now. Don't you realise we all depend on your steadfastness? We attack you, we laugh about you, we lie about you. But in fact you are our faith.

SWINYARD My faith has failed.

ZOLTAN You stand for hope in a world where all hope is meaningless otherwise.

SWINYARD Dear Jetta. She paid the price of our iniquity.

ZOLTAN (*Pause*) Yes. She did.

SWINYARD What did you say?

ZOLTAN Nothing.

SWINYARD You did, Esteban.

ZOLTAN Yes I did. But there is too much for me to overcome. It is far too difficult.

SWINYARD It is not too difficult. It is impossible. Only one man on earth has ever done it perfectly.

ZOLTAN You mean God.

SWINYARD Yes. And we are made in His image, Esteban.

ZOLTAN I hated Him always.

SWINYARD How could you hate someone you thought was never there?

ZOLTAN I felt oppressed by the sense that He might be there. I was angry at His interference with my ideas. I could not get rid of Him. I killed Him quite deliberately. He could not live in my world. Nor could Jetta. It was easier not to believe in Him.

SWINYARD Now you have the knowledge to believe, Esteban. Please give me my Bible.

*(Josh Swinyard sits for a moment reading in silence. Then slowly Zoltan speaks)*

ZOLTAN I will read it for you, Josh, if you will let me.

SWINYARD Thank you, Esteban.

*(Zoltan takes the Bible from Josh and very slowly opens it. He has not held one before. He begins to read)*

ZOLTAN

'The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will He keep His anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him. As far as the east is from the west so far hath He removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him . . .'

*(As he reads, the curtain falls)*