

fugue

by

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## Cast of Characters

<u>Ryder</u> :	Mid-30s, intellectual, preoccupied.
<u>Marie</u> :	Mid-30s, whip-smart, fearless.
<u>Igor</u> :	Mid-60s, worldlywise, curmudgeon.
<u>Grigory</u> :	Early 20s, eager, unsure.
<u>Old Woman</u> :	Indeterminate age; beautiful, grounded.

ACT ONE: THEME

Contrapunctus I (I-1)

*MUSIC plays. On the second repetition of the theme, lights up on The Apartment. GRIGORY stands at the center of the room, listening with closed eyes, lost in the music. On the third statement of the theme, RYDER enters.*

*He wears a bathrobe and slippers, and carries a laptop and a coffee mug. He juggles these as he sets up the folding table beside the armchair, then carefully unwinds the laptop power cord. He is setting up his writing area ritualistically.*

*As Ryder is settling in, A HAIRDRYER starts offstage.*

*IGOR shouts, with Ryder:*

RYDER/IGOR  
TURN IT OFF!!

*Grigory exits left, turns the MUSIC OFF.*

*MARIE enters right, with wet hair.*

MARIE  
I have to dry my hair.

RYDER  
And I have to write.

MARIE  
Do you have to write, right now?

RYDER  
Do you have to dry your hair right now?

MARIE  
Yes!

RYDER  
Why?

MARIE  
Because. It's wet.

*Marie exits right.*

*A moment later, the HAIRDRYER starts again.*

*Igor enters left, calls back to Grigory.*

IGOR

Get your set Grigor. I have to make phone call.

GRIGORY

*(offstage)*

Right now?

IGOR

Yes! Is time for practice.

*Igor goes to the desk and dials an old phone.*

*Ryder's CELL PHONE RINGS on the table. He answers.*

RYDER

Hello? Oh, hey Becca.

IGOR

Hello! This is Igor Radomir Medinsky, I am calling to see what time is appointment.

RYDER

Meeting? What meeting?

IGOR

I make appointment last week.

RYDER

That's not until next month.

IGOR

Next week? No. Is for today, I am certain.

RYDER

He's in town?

IGOR

Because- I out of town next week.

RYDER

Tomorrow? No. No way. I can't do it.

IGOR

Well, I coming today!

RYDER

Because it doesn't give me enough time, Becks!

IGOR

Yes, I coming today. What time?

RYDER

I understand he has other appointments. Of course I understand that.

IGOR

Other patients! Do you know who you talking to?

RYDER

No, I don't. I'm calling it *The Unnamed Man*.

IGOR

You never heard of Igor Radomir Medinsky?

RYDER

I know it's a bad title. The whole thing is bad. The first act is all over the place, I don't have an ending-- that's why I need more time.

IGOR

You hear this?  
(*coughs intentionally*)

RYDER

Yes, I hear everything you're saying, Becks, but-

IGOR

You want to kill old man? Ah?

RYDER

I'm killing you? You're killing me!

IGOR

Okay! Now we talking. What time?

RYDER

Yes, I do. I do want this deal.

IGOR

Okay. I come this afternoon and wait.

RYDER

Fine, yes, I'll have a draft. Yes, a complete draft!

IGOR

Thank you.

RYDER

Yeah. Thanks.

RYDER

(*together*)  
See you then.

IGOR

*(together)*  
See you then.

*They both hang up.*

*Grigory returns with a well-worn travel CHESS SET.  
A handle on top makes it resemble a briefcase.*

*Ryder picks his coffee cup and laptop off the  
table and sits down in his armchair, just as  
Grigory moves the table around to face Igor and  
begins to unpack and set up the chessboard.*

IGOR

We start with the Lopez. You need to learn Exchange  
variation.

*Lights dim on The Apartment.*

*Ryder reads from the screen.*

RYDER

"Fade in: wide shot, a city park."

*Lights up slowly on The Park.*

*Sounds may accompany the description below.*

RYDER

"Early morning. Blue light. The birds are awake, but  
not the people. At least not many of them. Close-up on  
a sparrow in a tree. His brown feathers against the  
bright oranges and yellows of autumn. Medium shot a  
pile of dead brown leaves, being raked by a city  
worker. On the park bench a man is asleep. Behind his  
head, a briefcase. An old woman enters."

*Old Woman enters from left. She wears a bright  
yellow sweatshirt, hood up, and a pastel tie-dyed  
skirt. Over the sweatshirt is a jean jacket.*

*She reacts to her description as it is read aloud.*

RYDER

"She is wrecked and ruined with age, her loose skin-"

OLD WOMAN

Hey!

RYDER

No, no.

*(deleting, retyping)*

*(MORE)*

RYDER (cont'd)

"An old woman enters. She was a beauty in her youth."

OLD WOMAN  
Ahem.

RYDER

No-

(retyping)

"She was a *stunning* beauty in her youth, and time has only deepened the vibrant color of her charming eyes."

OLD WOMAN

Such a nice young man!

RYDER

"She is passing out religious pamphlets. She calls:"

OLD WOMAN

Guided evolution is the choice of a new generation!

RYDER

"She approaches the bench, awakening the sleeping man."

OLD WOMAN

Am I... dreaming?

*Old Woman addresses the couch where Igor and Grigory play. Ryder speaks his responses to his screen, as if reading.*

RYDER

Are you?

OLD WOMAN

You look familiar to me.

RYDER

I know you. Do you know me?

OLD WOMAN

I used to know you. But I've forgotten.

RYDER

We were very young.

OLD WOMAN

Everything was simpler then. Wasn't it?

RYDER

Yes. Our lives were open-ended.

OLD WOMAN

For Channel Four News, this is Marie DiGiorgio saying  
"Watch the news if you don't want to lose."

*Lights out instantly on The Park.*

*Lights back up fully on The Apartment.*

*Marie stands next to Ryder.*

RYDER

What?

MARIE

That's my sign off! I want a good sign off, you know.  
Like "Good night and good luck."

RYDER

Honey I'm in the middle of-

MARIE

How about: For Channel Four News, this is Marie  
DiGiorgio saying "If you want the news, don't hit your  
snooze."

RYDER

Fine but aren't you on the *evening* news?

MARIE

Okay, how about: For Channel Four News, this is Marie  
DiGiorgio saying "That's the news, according to Suze."

RYDER

According to who?

MARIE

According to Suze. I'd have to change my name for that  
one.

RYDER

Honey, I'm very happy for you but-- could you possibly  
leave me alone? Today? I'm almost finished with this.

MARIE

Fine.

*She exits right.*

*Ryder takes a sip of his coffee, which is cold.*

RYDER

Ugh. Honey? HONEY??

MARIE

*(offstage)*

WHAT!

RYDER

Could you bring me some more coffee?

*Ryder returns to his laptop.*

*After careful study, Igor moves a piece.*

IGOR

Check.

GRIGORY

You just gave up your Queen.

IGOR

What? No!

GRIGORY

You can take it back, if you want.

IGOR

No, it wouldn't be fair.

GRIGORY

Suit yourself.

*Grigory takes the Queen.*

IGOR

Sometimes in life, my son... is important to have perspective. Is important to know what matters.

GRIGORY

Oh no, you're lecturing. That means you're about to win. Where is it? What did I miss?

IGOR

Many times we make mistake, focusing on what is not important. Today is Queen is important. Tomorrow-

*As Igor reaches for the board, Grigory sees the move and makes it for him.*

GRIGORY

Checkmate!

*He knocks his own King over.*

IGOR

It was good try, Grigor.

GRIGORY

Look at this. My pawn structure is all over the place.

IGOR

It was good game. You getting better.

GRIGORY

I should have left myself an escape square.

IGOR

Is okay. Is tricky line.

GRIGORY

Pawn-d6 was a mistake. I opened my left flank to attack. I should have pushed to a4 instead.

*Grigory rearranges the pieces, working backwards through the game.*

*Igor stops his hand.*

IGOR

Grigor, my boy. Is not possible to *think* to victory.

GRIGORY

I know, Papa.

IGOR

You know who said that?

GRIGORY

Mikhail Tal.

IGOR

Mikhail Tal!

GRIGORY

The greatest chess player in the world.

IGOR

Greatest chess player in the world!

GRIGORY

For a year.

IGOR

Ah?

GRIGORY

He was only world champion for a year, Papa.

IGOR

But what a year!

GRIGORY

Mikhail Tal was highly inconsistent. Smyslov said-

IGOR

Smyslov! Smyslov was ugly. Misha was handsome. And young! Youngest player to win world championship!

GRIGORY

Not anymore.

IGOR

Still, younger than you!

GRIGORY

Yes, I know Papa.

IGOR

And he was not only world champion chess player/

GRIGORY

For a year.

IGOR

-he was world champion, what you say- woman-killer?

GRIGORY

Ladykiller.

IGOR

Yes! Ladykiller!

IGOR

Mikhail Tal could look into crowd, in middle of match, and *with his eyes* he could tell girl his room number-

GRIGORY

I doubt that.

IGOR

But I saw it many times! Once he seduce the young wife of Yuri Averbakh *during* a game. Yuri force him to draw, but when they shake hands he say "Mikhail? I believe you have my Queen." And once, in Belgrade, he bring every pretty girl in the city over! I tell you this?

GRIGORY

Yes, Papa.

IGOR

Fifty girls we had! Fifty girls in one hotel room!

GRIGORY

The only part of that story I believe is that there are only fifty pretty girls in Belgrade.

IGOR

You don't believe?

GRIGORY

Nevermind. I'm going to play piano for a bit, okay? Then you can show me what I did wrong.

IGOR

Humph. Going to play more Ba-rock music?

GRIGORY

*Baroque* music. Do you mind?

IGOR

Ach! Is so tinkly.

GRIGORY

Tinkly?

IGOR

*(does an impression of tinkly music)*  
Anyway all you do is playing piano! Play piano, listening music and reading books, all day.

GRIGORY

I'm not bothering anyone.

IGOR

Exactly! Twenty-two years old? You should be bothering everybody! But you only bothering me.

GRIGORY

Very funny.

IGOR

Last weekend when I leave, I think maybe you will have party while I gone. But I come back, house is clean! No stains, no bottles! Only my is music all mixed up.

GRIGORY

I alphabetized it.

IGOR

Grigor. You should be meeting girls.

GRIGORY

Yeah, well. It's not that easy.

IGOR

Is not so hard, either. Let's go to park, eh?

GRIGORY

I'd rather not.

IGOR

You need fresh air. You a growing boy!

GRIGORY

I'm twenty-two years old.

IGOR

Still growing! You going to be strong man, you see.

GRIGORY

I'm pretty sure this is it.

IGOR

Also: I have appointment.

GRIGORY

With the doctor?

IGOR

Yes.

GRIGORY

That's not until next week.

IGOR

*(realizing his earlier mistake)*

Ah. Well, now they want me to come today. Doctors!

*He makes a spitting gesture.*

*An awkward silence, as Igor readies himself and moves toward the door.*

IGOR

So, ah... you would like to come with me?

GRIGORY

No thanks.

IGOR

What you going to do here? Play with yourself?

GRIGORY

You can't say it like that, Papa.

IGOR

Like what?

GRIGORY

Nevermind. Yes, I'll play by myself.

*A beat. Igor prepares to leave, moving slowly.*

IGOR

Okay. I going alone to see doctor.

*(spits)*

My only son would rather spend time with Ba-rock music/

GRIGORY

*Baroque music.*

IGOR

/than see outdoors. My only son does not want to come with his only father to see doctor/

GRIGORY

Papa.

IGOR

Is okay. I go to doctor many times alone. Does not matter for me. Only so my son is happy.

GRIGORY

If I go with you, can we stop by the music store on the way back?

IGOR

You will practice openings? Play with yourself in park?

GRIGORY

*(a beat -- not worth it)*

Yeah. Let's walk.

*Grigory starts to follow him out the door, left.*

IGOR

Ah-ah! Don't forget chess set.

*Grigory returns for the chess set.*

*Marie enters, startling Ryder awake.*

MARIE

Have you seen my shoes?

*She begins searching around The Apartment.*

RYDER

Did you make more coffee?

MARIE

No. Have you seen my shoes?

RYDER

Sorry. Becca called. She wants to see a draft.

MARIE

You haven't seen my black shoes? The ones I hate?

RYDER

I haven't seen them!

MARIE

They were just here.

RYDER

Are you sure?

MARIE

Yes! Will you help me look for them?

RYDER

Why don't you wear your other shoes?

MARIE

Which other shoes?

RYDER

The other black shoes.

MARIE

You mean my *comfy* black shoes?

RYDER

Yeah.

*She stops, looks at him.*

MARIE

You really know nothing about women's fashion, do you.

RYDER

Just trying to help.

MARIE

Try looking for my shoes!

RYDER

Honey, I'm telling you Becca called and she/

*Marie closes his laptop. Smiles cutely.*

MARIE

Help me look for my shoes.

*He gets up and begins to hunt around the room,  
following behind her.*

MARIE

So Becca called?

RYDER

She wants to see a draft! Tomorrow!

MARIE

And let me guess: you don't have a draft.

RYDER

No!

MARIE

Of course not.

RYDER

I'm close, I just have to work out the ending.

MARIE

Can you possibly *not* look where I'm looking?

RYDER

Fine.

*Ryder finds her shoes under the couch.*

RYDER

Here.

MARIE

Oh. Thank you.

*She smiles cutely again. He grumbles, sits back  
down with his laptop. She puts on the shoes.*

*He tries to focus on the laptop.*

MARIE

How do I look?

RYDER

Fine.

MARIE

You didn't look.

RYDER

I just saw you.

MARIE

You didn't see me with my shoes on!

*Ryder looks at her, pointedly.*

RYDER

You. Look. Fine.

MARIE

No, I don't. I look fabulous! Local news correspondent Marie DiGiorgio. I can't believe it.

RYDER

Hmm?

MARIE

Five years playing second fiddle to John Pendergast, fetching his coffee and sucking up to the producers and I finally get to be on camera. It's really here.  
(a beat)

I said, it's REALLY HERE.

RYDER

Hmm? Oh, yes. It is hard to believe.

MARIE

I hope they give me a good story. I don't want to end up doing some boring story about duck migration.

RYDER

Yeah.

MARIE

Some scientist at the University's been calling the station for weeks, telling us about this abnormal duck migration. But nobody wants to hear about that. They want an inspirational story about overcoming obstacles that reminds us what it means to be human. Right?

RYDER

Sure.

MARIE

*(testing him)*

Yeah. And John told me you can buy the entire island of Nova Scotia on eBay for like, twelve dollars.

RYDER

Huh. Good price.

*(a beat)*

Wait. What did you say?

MARIE

You're doing the spacey thing. I hate it when you do the spacey thing.

RYDER

Oh. Oh, honey, I'm sorry/

MARIE

Forget it.

RYDER

No, don't let's forget it. What were you saying? Something about- Nova Scotia?

MARIE

It's nothing. Just drop it.

*She goes offstage.*

*A beat.*

RYDER

Damn.

*He tries to concentrate on the screen.*

RYDER

Okay, genius ending. Coming up. Tie it all together.

*She re-enters, opens her briefcase on the side table, sorts through it. Her motions deliberate.*

*Ryder ignores it for as long as he's able.*

RYDER

Are you doing the silent thing now? Is that what you're gonna do? Honey? HONEY? Will you say something? Please?

*(a beat)*

You realize I'm sitting here working, right? That I'm trying to transport myself into another world, trying

(MORE)

RYDER (cont'd)  
to build whole people out of words and actions, that  
I'm not just frigging typing?

MARIE  
I know.

RYDER  
Okay, so. Duck migration is not exactly...

*Marie slams her briefcase closed.*

*She crosses left to the exit, pauses.*

MARIE  
You realize all my dreams are coming true, right?

*SLAM! And she is gone. Ryder shakes his head,  
takes a sip of his coffee.*

RYDER  
Ugh!

*He exits right, cursing to himself.*

*Lights dim on The Apartment.*

Contrapunctus II (I-2)

*Music.*

*Lights up on The Park. Blue light. Early morning.*

*The SOUNDS OF BIRDS.*

*Perhaps the sound of a city worker RAKING LEAVES.*

*Eventually the Old Woman enters, left.*

*She carries a stack of hot pink pamphlets which  
prominently feature the acronym for her cause:  
Coalition to Awaken Guided Evolution.*

OLD WOMAN  
Put a tiger in your tank! Try guided evolution! It's  
the pause that refreshes. Guided evolution! The mind is  
a terrible thing to waste. Awaken guided evolution!

*She wanders through The Park and offstage.*

*The bench sits empty for a moment.*

Contrapunctus III (I-3)

*Music.*

*Igor and Grigory enter The Park.*

IGOR

I am nineteen years old, remember. Younger than you!

GRIGORY

Yes, Papa. You said that already.

IGOR

So! Here is scene. I am here, Nicolai here, Mikhail Tal in next room, he talking with someone from newspaper--

GRIGORY

*The newspaper. English uses definite articles.*

IGOR

Yes, yes, was for some article, is not important. Now, young lady is just coming out of doorway-

GRIGORY

*The doorway.*

IGOR

What you are, English teacher?

GRIGORY

Nevermind. Go ahead.

IGOR

So. Young girl behind THE doorway. OK? Nicolai can no see her. And Nicolai very drunk--you met Nicolai, ah?

GRIGORY

The English professor? Yes, Papa.

IGOR

So. Nicolai coming close, telling me about this girl, and he say *kurite moju trubku*. You know what means?

GRIGORY

No.

IGOR

Ach! Grigory my son, you should know THE language of THE fatherland. *Kurite moju trubku*, it means ah... "smoke my pipe." Ah?

*Igor winks and nudges him.*

GRIGORY

Umm...

IGOR

"Smoke my pipe." Is-- "kiss my penis with your mouth."  
You see?

GRIGORY

Yes, yes, I get it.

IGOR

So Nicolai saying this, I waving my arms at him saying  
"Stop, stop! Red light! Red light!" but he think I am  
saying, "Yes, yes! She should kiss my penis too!"

GRIGORY

Gross.

IGOR

So he continue to talking about this girl, saying all  
kinds of things: how she is beautiful whore, she love  
to kissing penises, so on. Now Mikhail Tal, from other  
room remember, sees already what is happening. His mind  
is like giant... ..mind. He see everything! He see  
this young lady, getting so upset, he see me making  
this sign- immediately, he shout: "Fire! Fire! Everyone  
out!" Ah?

GRIGORY

But there wasn't a fire.

IGOR

Ho ho! We all looking around, saying "What? What fire?"  
But Tal, he so convincing, you see, he is pushing us  
all out of door, reporter, young girl, everyone...  
finally we are outside hotel, all five of us-- no  
alarm, no fire truck, no smoke. No fire! And reporter?  
Very confused, he thinks we play a trick on him, but  
Mikhail is ab-so-lute gentleman. He take all blame on  
himself, he say there was pipe smoke from other room,  
so on and so on, he caught glimpse of something in  
corner of his eye... So. Back to room. Everyone talking  
about fire. Everyone completely forget dirty talk in  
hallway! Until next morning. We all sitting on train,  
tired, quiet. And Misha say to Nicolai: "This girl last  
night: did my pipe smoke make her smoke your pipe?"  
*(a hearty laugh, which ends in a short  
coughing spell)*

GRIGORY

I'll bet that's funnier in Russian. Are you okay?

IGOR

Fine, fine. But not finished. That week, Moscow paper write that Mikhail Tal is taking drugs! They say he suffering hallucinations! But when he show up at tournament? Twelve move checkmate. No hallucination!

GRIGORY

What happened to the girl?

IGOR

Ah?

GRIGORY

The girl in the doorway. What happened to her?

IGOR

Ah, who can say? I go back to Kiev, marry your mother. I did not see Mikhail for another year.

GRIGORY

When he lost to Botvinnik.

IGOR

Yes.

GRIGORY

And lost the world championship.

IGOR

Yes, yes. Set up board. We work on Ruy Lopez. I think you like Morphy variation. Is very exciting!

*They sit.*

*Grigory sets up the pieces, they play a few moves.*

*Then Marie enters right, carrying a microphone.*

*Her makeup is plastered on thickly and her hair is an immovable object; she's ready for broadcast.*

*She speaks to the microphone and listens on an earpiece, pressing her finger to her ear.*

MARIE

Here? Here? Back? This way? Your right or my right? John? Hello? John? Did I lose you?

*She exits again.*

IGOR

Pretty girl!

GRIGORY

Yeah.

IGOR

She look familiar, no?

GRIGORY

You think all pretty girls look familiar.

IGOR

True! Only grave will cure hunchback. So. Is white to move. Who stronger?

GRIGORY

Well, Black has a decent pawn structure, but White has control of the center... White has one weak bishop versus Black's two bishops, but the White Queen is better placed. White can castle sooner than black...

IGOR

Too much thinking! Who is stronger? Look at board!

*Just then Marie returns, and Grigory is distracted. He is clearly smitten with her.*

GRIGORY

Uh- I think-

MARIE

Okay, here? Yeah, I can hear you. Can you hear me? Testing, testing one two one two. This is good? What?

*She turns to Igor and Grigory, at last.*

MARIE

Oh! I'm sorry, I didn't see you there.

IGOR

Is okay. You very pretty!

MARIE

Oh- thanks. It's the makeup.

IGOR

You are TV reporter?

MARIE

Yes. Well, I'm about to be. It's my first day.

IGOR

Ah! Congratulations. You going to do great.

MARIE

Thanks, that's very kind of you to say.

IGOR

You very smart, I can tell. Very smart, very pretty!

MARIE

Well, thanks. Is there any way I could talk you into...

IGOR

This my son Grigory. He is great chess player. Also very smart. Very smart, very handsome. Is good man!

MARIE

Yes, well-

GRIGORY

Do you need us to leave?

MARIE

Yeah, well actually we're hoping to shoot the bench, with the duck pond in the background.

GRIGORY

No problem. Come on, Papa.

IGOR

I am Igor Radomir Medinsky. This my son, Grigor.

*Marie presses her finger to her ear.*

MARIE

What's that?

IGOR

THIS MY SON, GRIGOR. HE THINK YOU VERY PRETTY TOO.

MARIE

John? What?

GRIGORY

Papa!

MARIE

Lunch? All right. Sure. Uh- excuse me. We're taking lunch, apparently. So you don't need to move just yet.

IGOR

Aha! You see, Grigor? Where we should go.

MARIE

I'm sorry?

IGOR

For lunch! You invite us for lunch, no?

MARIE

Oh. I think you misunderstood-

IGOR

Okay, we invite you for lunch.

GRIGORY

PAPA!

MARIE

Thanks. I'm gonna eat in the van. But thank you.

IGOR

Okay.

*She exits right.*

*A beat. Grigor glares at him.*

IGOR

What? I invite her for lunch. What is big deal?

GRIGORY

You're twice her age!

IGOR

I don't invite her for me, I invite her for you.

GRIGORY

For me!

IGOR

Yes. What is problem? You no like brunette?

GRIGORY

It has nothing to do with her hair color!

IGOR

I trying to help you, you just sitting there quietly, staring like this-- At least I talk to her!

GRIGORY

You weren't *talking* to her, you were-

IGOR

What.

GRIGORY

Nothing. Forget it. So who's stronger?

IGOR  
Grigory, what? I just talking.

GRIGORY  
Forget it, all right? Who's stronger?

IGOR  
Black.

GRIGORY  
Why?

IGOR  
Because, is White's turn. White have superior position,  
but forced to create weakness. She is nervous, I make  
her feel better. What is wrong with that?

GRIGORY  
I don't want to talk about it.

IGOR  
You got nothing to learn? Got whole world figured out?

GRIGORY  
I don't. Want to talk about it.

IGOR  
Even Kasparov don't know everything, Grigor!  
  
*A beat. He stands.*

GRIGORY  
Where are you going?

IGOR  
I have appointment.

GRIGORY  
Not for another hour.

IGOR  
You stay here, I be back soon.

GRIGORY  
You want me to come with you?

IGOR  
No. Stay here, play with yourself.

GRIGORY  
You can't SAY it that way, Papa, you sound/

IGOR

How I sound, ah? You tell me.

*A beat. Igor starts offstage.*

GRIGORY

I'll come with you.

IGOR

No. Stay here.

GRIGORY

Papa you need someone to talk to the doctor/

IGOR

NO! I have been to many doctors!

*(he spits)*

I don't need you. I am strong, like bull! You think I am old, you think I am foolish- but I am man, Grigor. Strong man!

GRIGORY

Papa-

IGOR

What? What you want to say to me, ah?

GRIGORY

Nothing.

IGOR

I will not be long. You stay here, practice Hungarian defense. Hungarian is best for quiet player like you.

*Igor exits left.*

*Grigory moves pieces half-heartedly across the board. As he does, he begins to hum the next statement of the theme.*

GRIGORY

E4, E5... F3, C6.

Contrapunctus IV (I-4)

*Music.*

*Grigory continues, losing himself in the music.*

*Suddenly he snaps out of it. He packs up the chess set and begins to search his pockets for paper.*

*As he's doing this, Old Woman enters.*

OLD WOMAN

Guided evolution: it's everywhere you want to be. Try it, you'll like it! This is your brain. This is your brain on guided evolution. Any questions?

*She sees Grigory, stops short.*

OLD WOMAN

Am I... dreaming?

GRIGORY

Are you?

OLD WOMAN

You look familiar to me.

GRIGORY

I don't know you. Do you know me?

OLD WOMAN

I used to know you. But I've forgotten. We were very young then. And everything was easier.

GRIGORY

Umm- you don't have a pen by any chance, do you?

OLD WOMAN

Of course. How much do you know about DNA?

*She hands him the pen, sits beside him.*

GRIGORY

I don't really know anything about DNA.

OLD WOMAN

Do you know it's called the building blocks of life?

GRIGORY

Yes.

OLD WOMAN

Good! That's a start.

*(she recites from the pamphlet)*

DNA stands for deoxyribonucleic acid. It's a sequence of chemical bases paired with their opposite bases. Each base is represented by a letter, and only certain bases can bind with each other. You want a pamphlet? It's easier with a pamphlet.

GRIGORY

Yes! Thanks.

*She hands him one.*

*He flips it over and hums to himself, trying to remember the tune so he can write it out.*

OLD WOMAN

Because the base pairs only bind with their complement, when the strands are separated either strand can re-create the entire sequence by bonding with their opposite pair again. What are you doing?

GRIGORY

Sorry. I want to get this down.

OLD WOMAN

Get what down?

GRIGORY

Just this- melody. That came to me.

*He tries again to recall it and grows frustrated.*

OLD WOMAN

DNA is all that separates you and me from this park bench. It's all that separates the rocks from the trees, the ducks in that pond over there from the/

GRIGORY

Damn it!

OLD WOMAN

What?

GRIGORY

It's gone.

OLD WOMAN

Don't worry. The world is full of melodies. And not one of them will go to waste. We're having a free class tonight.

GRIGORY

The, uh: "Coalition to Awaken Guided Evolution?"

OLD WOMAN

Yes. We believe that genetic evolution will not offer any profound advances over the current human phenotype. Further evolutionary success depends on transforming our brain chemistry. In fact we hope to recreate the evolutionary process inside our mind by eradicating linguistic thinking. In our view, language is a virus that breeds in the mind. We try to bring the mind to silence: the primordial soup of pre-linguistic thought. Will you come?

GRIGORY

What?

OLD WOMAN

To the class?

GRIGORY

Oh- umm- is this a God thing?

OLD WOMAN

Contemplation of self is a pathway to God; conversely, contemplation of God is a pathway to one's true self.

GRIGORY

I don't really believe in God.

OLD WOMAN

*(conspiratorially)*  
Neither do I.

GRIGORY

Okay.

*She smiles brightly at him, then stands to leave.*

OLD WOMAN

When you and I look at each other we are two beautiful, complex protein strands looking in the mirror. For the first time in history -- so far as we know -- you and I are DNA reflecting on itself. Isn't that wonderful?

GRIGORY

I guess. I mean, I don't really believe in God so if--

OLD WOMAN

Shhhhhh. Listen!

*A long, awkward silence.*

*Finally Old Woman exits left.*

*Grigory watches her go, as you watch a crazy person to make sure they are safely gone.*

ACT TWO: COUNTERPOINTContrapunctus V (II-1)

*Music.*

*Marie re-enters, carrying her briefcase.*

MARIE

Okay so I was sitting in the van having lunch, and I realized I really hate my producer so I thought I'd see if the offer to eat with you was still on the table.

GRIGORY

He left. He had an appointment.

MARIE

Okay. Do you mind if I have lunch with you then?

GRIGORY

Really?

MARIE

Yeah.

GRIGORY

Okay.

*He packs up the chess set, holds it on his lap.*

MARIE

I don't know if you know John Pendergast from the local news? Or if you even watch local news. But. He's a real-- and I don't mean this at all nicely-- asshole.

*Saying the word relieves her, briefly.*

*But a moment later she presses her hand to her ear in a panic.*

MARIE

Hello? John? John this is Marie, can you hear me?

*She waits a tense moment.*

*Removes her earpiece.*

MARIE

Seriously. A real asshole.

*She opens her briefcase, produces a paper lunch bag, then closes the case and eats over it.*

MARIE

I mean just because he has to do something for once,  
instead of smile and be pretty while I pull the whole  
rest of the show together-- sorry, are you eating?

GRIGORY

I don't have a lunch. I'm not hungry. I ate.

*A beat.*

MARIE

You were at the chess tournament!

GRIGORY

No.

MARIE

Yes you were! I did the pre-air interviews. I talked  
with you and your father. I thought I recognized you.

GRIGORY

That wasn't me.

MARIE

You're holding a chess set.

GRIGORY

Am I?

*She laughs. He doesn't know why.*

GRIGORY

I was just kidding. I have a terrible sense of humor.

*She laughs again.*

*He laughs too, for lack of anything else to do.*

GRIGORY

My father is Igor Radomir Medinsky.

*(realizing she doesn't know the name)*

He used to play with Mikhail Tal?

*(realizing she doesn't know Tal, either)*

Tal was a chess player. World champion. For a year.

MARIE

Oh, right! I remember now. And- your Dad donated one of  
his old chess sets to the tournament?

*Grigory points to the chess set.*

MARIE

You won!

GRIGORY

Yeah.

MARIE

Your father must be very proud.

GRIGORY

Yeah. I didn't even place at state.

*He puts the chess set behind him.*

MARIE

Do you mind?

*She hands him her briefcase, and he places it beside his chess set. They are very similar.*

*With less room behind him, Grigory has unconsciously shifted closer to her.*

*A beat as they process the new proximity.*

GRIGORY

You shouldn't be nervous.

MARIE

I'm sorry?

GRIGORY

You seem nervous. About going on air.

MARIE

It's my first time on camera.

GRIGORY

Don't be nervous. You'll do great. You were great when you interviewed me. And- what Papa said, it's true. You're very pretty.

MARIE

That's so kind of you to say.

GRIGORY

But I'm not saying it just because you have the make-up and everything. I thought you were really pretty that day we met, too.

MARIE

Well. I'm blushing!

GRIGORY

I can't tell. Because of the make-up.

*She laughs again.*

MARIE

You're very funny.

GRIGORY

Thanks.

*She gestures at the pamphlet in his hand.*

MARIE

She got you too, huh? She got the whole crew.

*Marie shows him a pamphlet.*

GRIGORY

Oh. Yeah. I didn't read it.

MARIE

What's that written on yours?

GRIGORY

Nothing.

MARIE

Is that music?

GRIGORY

No.

MARIE

Yes it is, it's music! Those are notes, aren't they?

GRIGORY

Yeah, but it's just counterpoint. It's not really music, it's more like practice. Set up a pattern, invert it. Like studying mating patterns in chess.

MARIE

How long have you been writing music?

GRIGORY

Oh, you have to study for years to write music. I just mess around. I don't really know what I'm doing.

MARIE

You think Hendrix knew what he was doing?

GRIGORY

Hendrix?

MARIE

Yeah. You ever listen to Hendrix?

GRIGORY

I'm not sure. Is he...? Eighteenth century?

MARIE

60s.

GRIGORY

Oh, so-- Vienna?

MARIE

1960s. United States.

GRIGORY

Oh. Oh!

MARIE

You've never heard of Jimi Hendrix.

GRIGORY

No, I've definitely heard of him. I just can't remember who he played with. Was it the- Doors? Or The- Beatles?

MARIE

He played with himself. By himself. He played by himself. He was left-handed, played a right-handed guitar. Seriously? You don't know Jimi Hendrix?

GRIGORY

No I know him. I'm just unfamiliar with his work.

*She laughs again.*

MARIE

Well. You should check him out. He was a bad-ass.

GRIGORY

I will. I'll check him out.

MARIE

How old are you?

GRIGORY

Twenty... five. How old are you?

MARIE

Twenty-eight.

*(half-beat)*

*(MORE)*

MARIE (cont'd)

No, I'm not. I'm thirty. Two. I don't know why I lied.  
You're not supposed to ask a woman her age, you know.

GRIGORY

Right. Sorry.

MARIE

I'm Marie. Marie DiGiorgio.

GRIGORY

I remember. Grigory.

*They shake hands. A moment.*

MARIE

Grigory, I hope this doesn't sound- what?

*She presses her finger to her ear.*

MARIE

Really? Where? All right. All right, yes. I'm coming!

*She packs up her lunch hurriedly.*

*Turns to Grigory.*

MARIE

Hey. It was great to see you again.

GRIGORY

You, too.

MARIE

I have to go. I'm sorry.

*She grabs his chess set by accident.*

GRIGORY

That's okay. I'll see you on TV.

*She smiles oddly.*

MARIE

Yeah. What's that, John? All right! I'm coming now.

*Grigory watches her go.*

*He hums a variation on the melody from earlier.*

*It is the motif from the next fugue.*

GRIGORY

Ma-rie, Ma-rie, Ma-rie... on the TV... A3, D3... E,  
F3... G, A3... Ma-rie, Ma-rie... think of... me.

*He scribbles it all down on the pamphlet.*

*Presently he sees Marie's briefcase on the bench.*

GRIGORY

Oh, crap. Hey! Hey, you took the wrong case!

*He picks it up and runs off right.*

*Leaving the written-on pamphlet behind.*

Contrapunctus VI (II-2)

*Music.*

*The bench sits empty as the somber 6th variation  
plays. Perhaps the light changes. Perhaps the  
sound of a city worker raking leaves again.*

*Finally Marie enters right, with the chess set.*

*The Old Woman enters left.*

OLD WOMAN

Where did you get that?

MARIE

It was a gift. But it belongs to you.

OLD WOMAN

Yes, I recognize it. From long ago.

MARIE

Were things much easier then?

OLD WOMAN

I don't know. Stupid! Stupid stupid stupid stupid!

*Lights out on The Park, instantly.*

*Lights up on The Apartment.*

RYDER

This whole scene is stupid!

*Ryder sits at his laptop, reading from the screen.*

RYDER

The dialog is totally over-blown, it's unbelievable and doesn't match the rest of the piece tonally.

*He deletes the last line.*

RYDER

Okay. Here we go. Brilliant ending, coming up.

*He stares at the screen, poises his fingers.*

*A beat.*

RYDER

Send 'em into the aisles talking, here we go.

*A beat.*

RYDER

Tying it all together, wrapping up those loose ends.

*A beat.*

RYDER

Damn. All right, let's go back a bit. "Fade in. Wide shot, city park. Early morning, et cetera..."

*Blue lights fade up on The Park, empty as before.*

*Grigory's pamphlet on the bench.*

*The Old Woman enters.*

RYDER

The old woman. A park bench. And there needs to be something on the bench. Some kind of symbol. But what?

*Old Woman crosses from The Park to The Apartment.*

*Lights change.*

OLD WOMAN

Perhaps I can help.

Contrapunctus VII (II-3)

*Music.*

*While Ryder is confined to The Apartment, Old Woman moves freely around the entire stage. She addresses both Ryder and the audience.*

RYDER

Who are you?

OLD WOMAN

According to your script I'm just "old woman." But I don't like being called that. I would prefer at least "older woman."

RYDER

Sorry.

OLD WOMAN

I'm only sixty-three.

RYDER

Right.

OLD WOMAN

And what's with the pamphlets?

*She crosses to The Park, picks up Grigory's pamphlet from the bench.*

RYDER

Well, you're a symbol of sort of- organized religion, or at least the dogmatic aspects of it.

OLD WOMAN

That's what this "Coalition to Awaken Guided Evolution" thing is supposed to be? Religion? Gimme a break.

RYDER

The point I'm making is that organized religion over-emphasizes its traditions while under-emphasizing the experience of true personal transcendence... and it doesn't matter what the religion is, or even if it's a religion at all, because ultimately it's all semiotics.

OLD WOMAN

Come on. Pamphlets? Ad slogans? Isn't that a bit much?

RYDER

I guess-- maybe?

OLD WOMAN

You're hitting us over the head with it!

RYDER

You're right. I should tone that down.

OLD WOMAN

I would. You don't want to embarrass yourself.

RYDER

No.

*She hands him the pamphlet.*

*He stuffs it in the pocket of his robe.*

OLD WOMAN

Also: it's a little confusing.

RYDER

What is?

OLD WOMAN

The whole thing! The different worlds, the sense of time, what's real and what's not. It's not very clear.

RYDER

Yeah, you're right.

OLD WOMAN

I mean, what are you trying to prove?

RYDER

I'm not trying to prove anything! I'm just trying to write an ending so I can give it to Becca tomorrow.

OLD WOMAN

So write an ending.

RYDER

It's not that easy.

OLD WOMAN

It's not that hard, either. Big climactic battle, hero finally gets what he wants, long zoom out to the wide world beyond... rising orchestra music, roll credits. You're done.

RYDER

You don't understand. I don't want to be just another hack screenwriter. I want to be someone original, someone with a distinct voice and something to say.

OLD WOMAN

So you are trying to prove something.

RYDER

Yes. That I'm not like everyone else.

OLD WOMAN

Well there you go. Accept that you are like everyone else and finish your script.

RYDER

I can't!

OLD WOMAN

Then why not?

RYDER

I don't know. I don't know why I can't finish it.  
Celesta was so easy to write. This feels impossible.

*Old Woman picks up his laptop, scrolls and reads.*

OLD WOMAN

What is it about, exactly?

RYDER

It's about, uh- about a lot of things, but mostly- Um.

OLD WOMAN

You're not sure?

RYDER

No, I mean it's- it's about death.

OLD WOMAN

Overused.

RYDER

And transcendence. Personal, you know- transcendence.

OLD WOMAN

Transcendence of what?

RYDER

Transcendence of, you know- of yourself, and of- death?  
Oh, God. It's horrible, isn't it?

OLD WOMAN

Forget the theme. What happens? What's the plot?

RYDER

There's this writer, and/

OLD WOMAN

Wait. This isn't one of those self-indulgent pieces  
about a writer trying to finish a script is it?

RYDER

Oh, God no.

OLD WOMAN

Good.

*She hands him his laptop and takes a sip of his coffee. It's cold.*

OLD WOMAN

Ugh. So there's a writer?

RYDER

Yeah, this writer-- he falls asleep on a park bench. And when he wakes up, he has no idea who he is.

OLD WOMAN

Amnesia. There's one we haven't heard!

RYDER

No, not amnesia. He enters a fugue state. It's like amnesia, but you don't know you have it. Instead of forgetting who you are, you invent a whole new identity. So- he wakes up and he finds this briefcase, which belongs to somebody else, and he takes on this whole identity based on what he finds inside.

OLD WOMAN

And then?

RYDER

Then- there are these other characters. The writer's father, who it turns out is the owner of the briefcase, and this Old Woman/

OLD WOMAN

Older woman.

RYDER

*Older woman*, sorry- and she's wandering around, sort of handing out answers. And then in the end, uh- you know, it all comes together, and everything- uh- works out...

*A beat.*

OLD WOMAN

You have no idea what this is about.

RYDER

Oh my God, what is this about? What the hell is it about? It's horrible. This whole thing is useless!

OLD WOMAN

Not the whole thing. Just the characters, the theme, the plot... a lot of the dialogue is not very good.

RYDER

Oh God oh God oh God!

OLD WOMAN

Now don't freak out on me.

RYDER

It's too late. I'm freaking out.

OLD WOMAN

Take a deep breath.

RYDER

I can't. I can't breathe!

OLD WOMAN

That's ridiculous. Everyone can breathe.

RYDER

Not when they're freaking out!

OLD WOMAN

Look do you want my help or not?

RYDER

Yes. Please. I need your help.

OLD WOMAN

The first thing you need to do is suffer.

RYDER

What?

OLD WOMAN

All the great writers suffered greatly for their work.

RYDER

No. I know English professors love to make writing into some kind of mysterious spiritual pursuit, and to paint this Romantic picture of the lives of great writers as if misery is a prerequisite for genius. But the truth is that writing is work, just like digging a ditch. Maybe not so much mud, but the same back problems.

OLD WOMAN

Oh yeah? Care to ask Joyce? Coleridge? William Blake? If you want to be a great writer you have to live miserably and die alone, the victim of your own genius. Ask anyone!

RYDER

Now you sound like my father.

OLD WOMAN

Ah yes, your father. He was a writer, wasn't he?

RYDER

Well, he wrote. He wasn't a writer.

OLD WOMAN

I thought he was a genius who languished in obscurity?

RYDER

Ha! My father reveled in obscurity. He believed that same kind of crap, that writing comes from suffering. He had that whole fainting poet thing, you know? He used to say things like, "When people speak I don't hear words-- I hear music." Right. Who cares if you never get published or produced? Or even read? As long as you stay true to your "Art." Whatever that means.

OLD WOMAN

Whatever does it mean?

RYDER

It means you can spend thirty years working on your masterpiece and in the end you'll die alone with a stack of papers that no one but your son will read.

OLD WOMAN

Perhaps that's who you're trying to prove something to?

RYDER

Don't psychoanalyze me. This isn't about that. This is just a beautiful, simple meditation on life and death.

OLD WOMAN

Since when is life beautiful and simple?

RYDER

I'm not saying it is, I'm saying/

OLD WOMAN

Since when is madness as cute and harmless as going through somebody's briefcase?

RYDER

First off, it's not madness, it's a fugue/

OLD WOMAN

How many fugues have you been in?

RYDER

None. It's a device indicating a sense of confusion/

OLD WOMAN

A device! You think I'm screwing around here?

RYDER

No, I'm just saying/

OLD WOMAN

You're sitting there working, right? You're trying to transport yourself into another world, trying to build whole people out of words and actions? You're not just frigging typing!

RYDER

Now you're stealing my lines.

OLD WOMAN

The problem with writers today is that they don't know how to die on the cross. You want to write madness, but you haven't gone mad. You haven't let yourself go mad!

RYDER

I'm talking to you, aren't I?

OLD WOMAN

A good start. But you have to go further. You have to lose yourself in the work. The writer's journey is the audience's journey -- everything starts out fine, the hero knows what he wants and sets out to get it. But then things get hairy. Unexpected setbacks. New monsters appear, more terrifying than the hero could have imagined. The first taste of failure. Maybe he's not up to the challenge after all? Maybe he's not such a hero? Maybe he's just like everyone else...

RYDER

Right, right. And then he learns some lesson or finds some new faith in himself and rides into the final battle with guns blazing. I know the form.

OLD WOMAN

Why do you try to keep your writing separate from the world and the world separate from your writing?

RYDER

I don't!

OLD WOMAN

Then why do you keep your wife at arm's length?

RYDER

What?

*The phone RINGS.*

*Ryder produces his cell phone from his robe.*

RYDER  
Hello?

*Lights up on The Park.*

MARIE  
Thank God you're home!

RYDER  
Of course I'm home. I'm writing.

MARIE  
I need my briefcase. It has all my notes on this damn duck story, can you bring it down to The Park for me?

RYDER  
Sorry honey, I can't.

MARIE  
Why not?

RYDER  
Because I'm working. I told you, I have to finish this.

MARIE  
You can't take an hour break to bring me my case?

RYDER  
No! I'm up against a deadline.

MARIE  
You know if you were in the same situation/

RYDER  
I don't want to get into this with you right now. Okay?  
Come back and get it yourself.

MARIE  
If I don't have my notes I can't go on camera, and if I  
can't go on they'll put John Pendergast on instead/

RYDER  
I'm sorry, I have to go. I have to get back to work.

*He hangs up on her.*

*Lights out on The Park.*

OLD WOMAN  
That was cruel.

RYDER

She knows how I am when I write.

OLD WOMAN

Misery isn't the only prerequisite for genius, Ryder.

RYDER

Very funny. But this has nothing to do with Marie.

OLD WOMAN

Doesn't it? Or perhaps you think your personal life has to be a wreck in order to be taken seriously.

*Ryder's CELL PHONE RINGS again.*

*He sends it to voicemail.*

*He and the Old Woman exchange a look.*

RYDER

Fine. Perhaps I keep Marie at a certain distance when I'm writing/

OLD WOMAN

Perhaps!

RYDER

But she'll understand. When the script is finished, she'll understand.

OLD WOMAN

And what if she doesn't?

RYDER

Then she'll forgive me.

OLD WOMAN

Like you forgave your father.

RYDER

This is not about him, all right? Can we just- Can we focus on the script, please? I need to finish this script. I need a good ending!

OLD WOMAN

Not everything ends nicely. Some things are just over.

RYDER

She knew what she was getting into when she married me. All right? She signed up for this.

OLD WOMAN

Can I ask you a question?

RYDER

Yes.

OLD WOMAN

What did you think of your father's manuscript?

RYDER

I never read it.

OLD WOMAN

Why not?

RYDER

Because- my father was a difficult man. He was very smart. I mean, you have to understand he was a smart man. He read everyone. And he had an opinion on all of them. His own opinion. He wasn't someone who read one book about something and made his mind up about it. He read everyone. If he found an author he liked, he'd read their book, all the books about them, letters they wrote, or diaries- and then when he talked about them he'd have something specific and real to say. I'll never catch up to that. Too smart. But- that was the thing. Too smart. He'd work on this manuscript, you know- this giant- sprawling metropolis of story that he built and he'd just keep adding to it. He'd tell me about a new twist or a character he'd added and every time he thought-- *this is what it needs, this is what makes me great...* but I always knew. Every new character, every obscure reference, all the quotes and symbols and hidden meanings he buried in there like a treasure map- hoping that some day, someone would trace all the connections back, point out all the stylistic flourishes, and find, at the heart of the whole thing, his genius... every time I read it, whatever the new thing was, I didn't see genius. I saw a little, small, scared version of my father-- like a little boy in the center of the thing, surrounded on all sides by these walls of words. So. I know what you're saying. You're saying that's what I do. That somehow I've internalized all that and I'm recreating it here in my relationship to Marie. Well. Maybe that's true. Maybe I've pushed everyone in my life away to make space for this. And maybe if I don't have this then I don't have anything. I don't have friends, I don't have family... This, writing, is my constant companion. And I can't get close to anyone because this- is always in the way. The next script, the next big project... the next brick in my city. Well if that's true then so be it. All the more reason that I have to finish this script. It's all I've got. This script is all I've got. Hello? Hello?

*Under the preceding, Old Woman has disappeared.  
Ryder has stood up and wandered into The Park.*

Contrapunctus VIII (II-4)

*Music.*

RYDER

Hello? HELLO? Marie?

*Lights up as Marie enters The Apartment.*

MARIE

Hello? Hello?? Ryder?

*She is surprised to not see Ryder in his chair.*

*They turn to look at each other.*

*Blackout.*

ACT THREE: INVERSIONContrapunctus IX (III-1)

*Music.*

*Lights up on The Park and The Apartment, combined.*

*Marie enters left, with Grigory's chess set.*

MARIE

Hello? Hello?? Ryder?

*Ryder enters right, still in his bathrobe.*

RYDER

Marie? Marie!

*Marie sets Grigory's chess set on the couch/bench and searches around, expecting a note.*

*As Bach's frenetic 9th fugue plays, Marie searches The Apartment while Ryder wanders around The Park.*

*They continue calling out to one another urgently, their dialog overlapping as they get increasingly frustrated. Marie can't find her briefcase, and Ryder is confused about where he is. He may run into the audience, trying to get his bearings.*

*Finally Ryder lies down on the couch/bench, the chess set beneath his head.*

*Marie crosses to Ryder's chair.*

*She takes a sip of his coffee. It's cold.*

MARIE

Ugh!

*She exits right.*

MARIE

*(offstage)*

GODDAMNIT!

*As if awoken, Ryder sits up.*

*He looks around, confused.*

*Picks up the chess set.*

*Stares at it.*

*Marie re-enters.*

*She dials her cell phone.*

*Ryder's phone begins to RING.*

RYDER

*(to phone)*

Hello?

MARIE

John it's Marie.

RYDER

Becca? Becca who?

MARIE

No, I can't find it.

RYDER

I'm afraid you have the wrong number.

MARIE

I swear it was here. I'm not usually this-- out of it.

RYDER

I'm not joking. I don't know anyone named Becca.

MARIE

I know you did, John. And I appreciate the opportunity.  
I really, really do.

RYDER

Well I don't appreciate your tone right now.

MARIE

No, I understand. You have to do what's right for the  
station.

RYDER

What's wrong with me? Nothing's wrong with me!

MARIE

Yeah of course. I'll pick it up on the way back.

RYDER

Of course I picked up! This is my phone!

MARIE

Dry latte, no sugar?

RYDER

No, sugar-- you listen to ME. I don't know who you thought you were calling, but I'm... I'm...

MARIE

Bye, John.

*She hangs up.*

RYDER

I'm John!

*He hangs up.*

MARIE

*(to herself)*

Damnit Ryder!

*She exits left.*

Contrapunctus X (III-2)

*Music.*

*Ryder opens the chess set and examines the pieces.*

*His movements indicate a sense of wonder and  
curiousness -- he is in a new world, after all.*

*Presently Igor enters.*

IGOR

Am I dreaming?

RYDER

Are you?

IGOR

You look familiar to me. But you not my son.

RYDER

Are you sure?

IGOR

Of course I am sure! Where is Grigory?

RYDER

I don't know.

IGOR

Why you have this chess set?

RYDER

Oh. I... won it.

IGOR

You beat my son?

RYDER

It sounds strange when you say it that way, but yes.

IGOR

Igor Radomir Medinsky.

RYDER

John. John...

*(searching his surroundings)*

John Bench.

IGOR

John Bench. I am very sorry, but this set... is not belong to my son. In fact is my chess set. You see? You know how can be, with children telling stories... you have children, John Bench?

RYDER

No.

IGOR

Well. They tell stories.

*A beat.*

RYDER

Would you like to sit down?

IGOR

Thank you.

*He sits.*

IGOR

You know where is my son?

RYDER

No.

IGOR

Probably he went to music store.

RYDER

Yes.

*Igor waits for Ryder to speak.*

*But Ryder is preoccupied, taking in his surroundings with new eyes.*

IGOR

Grigory love music. All the time he is playing piano: tinkle, tinkle, tinkle. Is Ba-rock music. You know?

RYDER

No.

IGOR

Terrible. Very boring. I always fall asleep when he play. I am like little baby and he is singing lullaby.

RYDER

Yeah.

IGOR

You mind if I smoke?

RYDER

No.

*He takes out his cigarettes.*

IGOR

You like?

RYDER

Yes.

*Igor offers a cigarette to Ryder. Lights it.*

*Ryder puffs on it, curious.*

*He takes too much and begins to cough.*

*Igor slaps him on the back.*

IGOR

You OK?

RYDER

I think so.

IGOR

You don't smoke much, ah?

RYDER

I don't think I've ever had a cigarette.

*Igor examines him closely.*

*Suddenly decides that he must be deadpanning.*

*He lets out a hearty laugh as he smacks Ryder on the back. But his laugh turns quickly to coughing.*

*Ryder smacks him on the back, much too hard.*

IGOR

Ow!

RYDER

You okay?

*Igor remains doubled over.*

IGOR

No. I have cancer.

*A beat.*

*Igor spits, continues smoking as Ryder processes.*

IGOR

My boy Grigory. He live downstairs. Has very nice room, with very nice TV, cable, so on. But piano is upstairs. So Grigory is upstairs. All the time, upstairs! When Grigory is in college, I think-- maybe he bring girl over, sneak into room. Every night, when he go out, I leave back door unlocked. HOPING he will come home late and sneak in. But not once. Home early every night! Every morning, no smell like alcohol, no party. Just library. He GO TO LIBRARY! When he say he going to study he actually GO TO STUDY. He make me so crazy!

RYDER

I'm sorry.

IGOR

Ah, well. I love him. I do anything for him.

RYDER

I meant-- about the cancer.

IGOR

Pah. Today, I am with doctor--  
(spits)

They take test, find out how bad is it. They tell me maybe is nothing. Maybe is something else. But I know what is. I smoke. Twenty years I smoke, is no surprise. In America everyone afraid of Death. Is like obsession, but reverse. Nobody talk about it. Nobody see it. Everyone afraid of it. I was twenty when my father die. We did not take him to hospital. What is point? We know

(MORE)

IGOR (cont'd)  
he is dying. Why take him to die waiting for doctor? We wrap him up in blankets. Sit with him all night. Several nights. And one day... pfff. That is death. Nothing to be afraid of.

RYDER  
Were you with him?

IGOR  
No. I was at chess tournament. Just local players, nothing important. I could have stayed! But my father insist I go. And while I am gone, he die. I am watching Mikhail Tal at simultaneous exhibition when suddenly- this great sadness. It was my father, saying goodbye. Everyone die. I know I am not special. But of course sometimes... you forget. Ah?

RYDER  
Yeah.

*A beat.*

IGOR  
John Bench, listen. You beat my son for this chess set?

RYDER  
I won it off of your son, yes.

IGOR  
So. You beat him off. Can you beat me off?

RYDER  
Uh. You want to-- play a game?

IGOR  
Yes. For chess set.

RYDER  
Okay.

*Igor watches, excited, as Ryder unpacks the set. He seems a bit bewildered by the pieces.*

*Igor watches him for a moment, increasingly suspicious. Finally he offers his assistance, exuding condescension and polite enmity.*

*Igor scoops up a pawn of each color, places his hands behind his back for a moment then offers his closed fists to Ryder. Ryder chooses and Igor turns over his open hand, revealing a White pawn.*

*They begin to play.*

IGOR

Two Knights opening! Interesting. Will be good game.

RYDER

My father had cancer.

IGOR

And? He is dead?

RYDER

Yes.

IGOR

Was it long and painful? Because I don't want to hear.

RYDER

No. It was very sudden. He never told me how sick he was. I kept asking him if I should come visit, but he always said he was fine. I realize now he didn't want me to see him. Maybe that's why your father sent you to that tournament. He didn't want you to see him weak.

IGOR

My father was strong man, true. A boxer. He was champion in all of Kaliningrad Oblast. Short, solid. Like bulldog. Me, I was skinny. A schoolboy, not fighter. A book, uh- snake?

RYDER

Bookworm.

IGOR

A bookworm, yes. Very... weak. And he always remind me I am weak. "Stand up for yourself!" He say, "You have to punch this guy and this guy and this guy!" That is his advice, always. But when he send me to chess tournament it was not because he is afraid of me seeing him weak. It was so I have something to make me strong. You see? Everyone need something like that. Something to keep you strong for your Death. Maybe is woman, is family. For me, is my boy.

RYDER

But what if-

IGOR

Ah?

RYDER

What if that one thing you hold, that makes you strong-- what if you have to give up other things to be

(MORE)

RYDER (cont'd)

close to it? And you end up missing out on those other things. Like your family. Like your son.

IGOR

*Skol'ko volka ne kormi, on vsyo v les smotrit.*

RYDER

What does that mean?

IGOR

No matter how much you feed the wolf, he still looks at the woods.

RYDER

Oh, yes.

*(a beat)*

I don't get it.

IGOR

You want to hear music but you want good life, too.

RYDER

Yes. And love, and maybe a family some day.

IGOR

I know what you mean. When I am young, I wanting to be chess player. Every day, playing for hours and hours. Training. I very good. Beat all my teachers. My uncle, my uncle's friends. One day my uncle take me on trip to Kiev, to see man he knows there who is chess master. I play strong for ten, maybe twelve moves. And then: pah, pah, pah, pah, pah-- he have both my knights and control center squares. I almost resign. But I don't.

RYDER

And?

IGOR

Suddenly I find weakness in left flank. But I need to distract. So I push G-pawn onto unprotected square-- complete surprise. He stand up, actually stand up and saying, "What a move! What a crazy, wonderful move!" You see? Never be afraid to make big move.

RYDER

Hmm. So what happened?

IGOR

Ah?

RYDER

With the game, what happened.

IGOR

He push his Queen to back rank, take my knight, rook, bishop, pah, pah, pah. Game over.

RYDER

Oh. I thought maybe you beat him.

IGOR

You kidding me? He have two knights and control of center! How I am supposed to beat him?

RYDER

I don't know, sorry. I misunderstood.

IGOR

Many years later, Botvinnik play this exact move in tournament. I think maybe is good move. Is interesting. "What a move! What a crazy, wonderful move!"

*He laughs. A beat.*

RYDER

How long did you play chess?

IGOR

Ach! I study with this man for a year, he teach me everything he know. I go to tournament and lose in first round to Mikhail Tal.

RYDER

I don't know who that is.

IGOR

Tal was-- a great chess player. Greatest. Everyone love him. Girls. Old men. Young men. Everyone. I love him, too. I move to St. Petersburg with him. Arrange competitions, book hotel rooms and flights. For three years I follow him everywhere. When he beat Smyslov in 67, there I am in front row, watching. They take picture for paper, there I am standing just behind him. My face, all over the world... just behind him. Then-- Girl, phone call, baby. Twenty-two years.

*He looks at Ryder, as if he's made his point.*

RYDER

Oh.

IGOR  
So.

RYDER  
So you never followed your dream.

IGOR  
What?

RYDER  
Chess was your one thing, that was your thing and now--

IGOR  
No. Chess was... way for me to meet girl. And girl  
was... way for me to meet boy. Boy is my one thing.

RYDER  
But that just seems so arbitrary.

IGOR  
Ah?

RYDER  
I mean, if things had gone differently you'd be sitting  
here telling me that chess was your one thing!

IGOR  
Why you so angry? You no have cancer!

RYDER  
I know, but I mean-- if everything is just arbitrary  
like that, then it doesn't matter what I do.

*Igor makes a move.*

IGOR  
Probably not. Just don't smoke. Check!

RYDER  
You just gave up your Queen.

IGOR  
What? No!

RYDER  
You can take it back, if you want.

IGOR  
No, it wouldn't be fair.

RYDER  
Suit yourself.

*Ryder takes the Queen.*

IGOR

Sometimes in life, John Bench... is important to have perspective. Is important to know what matters. Now, you think you never die. When you old like me, very different. Your friends, family, everyone is dead. I am alone in graveyard. Everywhere is Death around me. I am alone. But! Not alone. I have Death. My whole life, I have Death. Always with me. When I play chess, when I love woman-- Death is chess. Death is woman. Now? Death is boy. You see?

RYDER

No. No, I don't see at all!

*Igor makes a move, knocks over Ryder's King.*

IGOR

Checkmate. You are not chess player, John Bench.

*When he says the words, they strike Ryder deeply. It is a grave and terrifying realization for him.*

RYDER

No, I'm not.

IGOR

Tell me. What you do with my boy?

RYDER

I... I can't remember--

*Igor knocks the chess set over, suddenly furious.*

IGOR

WHERE IS MY BOY! WHAT YOU DO TO HIM??

RYDER

Nothing, I swear--

IGOR

Why you have his chess set! Where is he??

*Igor seizes him, shaking him.*

RYDER

I don't know! I woke up on this bench, I had the chess set beneath my head, and I-- I don't know where he is, I promise you.

*Igor sits again, heavily.*

*He is clearly exhausted from the confrontation.*

*He begins to cry.*

IGOR

I'm sorry. I believe you.

RYDER

Are you all right?

IGOR

No! I have cancer!

RYDER

Right.

*Igor takes out a cigarette, lights it.*

*Off Ryder's look:*

IGOR

What? Not like I going to get *more* cancer.

*Ryder packs up the chess set, while Igor broods.*

*He hands it to Igor.*

RYDER

This is yours. I'm sorry.

IGOR

I am sorry also, John Bench. So. I will go home. Maybe Grigory is wait for me there. Probably he is buying more Ba-rock music to bother me with. If you see him...

RYDER

Yes. I'll tell him.

*He starts off, but turns back before he leaves.*

IGOR

You know-- you not right. Chess is not my one thing. I know that when I first play Mikhail. I watch him play, see how he lean over board, like he is leaning over fire. Chessboard never light me on fire like that. Ah?

RYDER

Right.

IGOR

*(meaning the set)*

Thank you, John Bench. For the game, and... for this.

*Igor exits right.*

*Ryder lies down on the park bench.*

Contrapunctus XI (III-3)

*Music.*

*Grigory enters left, with Marie's briefcase.*

GRIGORY

Hello! Marie? Marie!

*He searches around The Park.*

*Igor enters The Apartment, searches around it.*

*Though they occupy the same physical space, Igor can not see Grigory.*

IGOR

Hello, I am home! Grigory? Grigory!

*They call out to each other, awakening Ryder.*

*Ryder watches them both.*

*Finally Grigory exits.*

*Igor sits down heavily in Ryder's chair.*

*Ryder reaches into his robe, finds Grigory's pamphlet with the music written on it.*

*As he pores over it, Grigory returns.*

GRIGORY

Have you seen an old man around here?

RYDER

Hmm? What?

GRIGORY

Have you seen an old man around here?

RYDER

No. Do you hear that?

GRIGORY

What?

RYDER

Music. Beautiful, tinkly music! Every time you speak.

*Grigory gives him a look.*

*He starts off, then comes back again.*

GRIGORY

How about a young woman? A news reporter.

RYDER

I remember an older woman...

GRIGORY

With the pamphlets? She got me earlier.

RYDER

It's so beautiful! I should write this all down.

GRIGORY

You write music?

RYDER

Yes.

GRIGORY

For how long?

RYDER

I haven't written anything, yet. I don't have a pen.

*Grigory searches his pockets, hands him the pen.*

GRIGORY

How do you do it?

RYDER

What do you mean?

GRIGORY

Do you start with a melody? Or the structure? Do you work the piece out on piano before you orchestrate it?

RYDER

Trust me: starting's the easy part. It's the finishing that will kill you.

GRIGORY

Right.

RYDER

The blank page is a gift. It's the primordial soup! Everything is waiting to happen. A note plays, or it

(MORE)

RYDER (cont'd)  
doesn't. Someone speaks, or they don't. Doesn't matter.  
Just don't get cornered by your own fear. You'll never  
learn anything being afraid of it.

GRIGORY  
Make big moves, make bigger mistakes.

RYDER  
What?

GRIGORY  
Mikhail Tal.

RYDER  
Pleased to meet you, Mikhail. I'm John. John...  
*(he checks the pamphlet)*  
Cage.

GRIGORY  
John Cage. Really?

RYDER  
Yes!

GRIGORY  
Any relation to the composer?

RYDER  
Oh, yes. Yes, yes yes. He's my father.

GRIGORY  
It's truly an honor to meet you. I'm sure you hear this  
all the time, but I'm a huge fan of your father's work.

RYDER  
Oh, thank you! I actually don't get that very often.

GRIGORY  
Four thirty-three is... a landmark. I've studied it,  
I've read about it. I've played it. I'm still not sure  
I understand it.

RYDER  
Yes. I'm actually not sure what you're talking about?

GRIGORY  
Four thirty-three? The piece he wrote to take place in  
silence? It's one of his most famous works. And I  
think... sorry if I'm gushing... I think he's a genius.

RYDER

A genius who reveled in obscurity.

GRIGORY

Can I ask -- is it hard for you? To write music, too?

RYDER

You mean, because my father did?

GRIGORY

Yes.

RYDER

I started writing when I was very young. Younger than you. And I haven't stopped. So-- is it hard for me? Yes. Did I spend a long time writing in his shadow, trying to sound different but not too different? Yes. Is he, still, my only audience? How could he not be? The truth is I don't know any other way. Writing took me away from myself. And for a time it allowed me to try seeing the world as my father does. Do I understand him more because of it? No. But I understand myself more. And maybe that's worth something. Right?

GRIGORY

Contemplation of Self is a pathway to God.

RYDER

Hmm?

GRIGORY

Do you know what time it is?

RYDER

Umm... I think it's four/four.  
*(he counts along with the music)*  
--two and, three and, four and, one and-- yeah.  
Four/four.

GRIGORY

I wish I could do that.

RYDER

Do what?

GRIGORY

Let myself go like that. Lose myself in the music.

RYDER

But then how would you find your way back out?

GRIGORY

I don't know.

RYDER

Me neither.

GRIGORY

How long have you been hearing music?

RYDER

About two minutes.

GRIGORY

No, I mean-- in general. Do you hear it all the time?

RYDER

Yes. It's my constant companion.

*A beat.*

GRIGORY

I wish I had something for you to sign.

RYDER

*(of the pamphlet)*

I'll sign this.

GRIGORY

I couldn't. That's your music!

RYDER

Don't worry. The world is full of music.

GRIGORY

Write TACET.

RYDER

What?

GRIGORY

It's the score for four thirty-three. TACET: silence.

RYDER

Oh. Yes.

*He does.*

*Hands the pamphlet to Grigory.*

GRIGORY

Wait a minute. Where did you get this?

RYDER

I wrote it.

GRIGORY

No you didn't.

RYDER

No, I didn't. You're right. How did you know?

GRIGORY

Because I wrote it.

RYDER

Oh. I'm sorry.

*He hands it to Grigory.*

GRIGORY

You're not John Cage's son, are you.

RYDER

*(another terrifying realization)*

No, I'm not.

GRIGORY

And you don't write music either.

RYDER

No, I don't.

GRIGORY

You're just some crazy dude in the park in your bathrobe!

*Grigory exits, with the briefcase.*

RYDER

Wait! Where are you going? I need-- help. I need help. I'm... lost. Help me! Somebody, please!! Help me!!!

*Old Woman enters.*

*Instead of her earlier costume she wears the garb of a traditional Russian babushka: yellow headband covering her hair, long grey jacket and a floral print skirt.*

OLD WOMAN

Perhaps I can help?

*Ryder and Igor speak together.*

RYDER/IGOR

Am I... dreaming?

OLD WOMAN

Are you?

RYDER/IGOR

You look familiar to me.

OLD WOMAN

I know you. Do you know me?

RYDER/IGOR

I used to know you. But I've forgotten.

OLD WOMAN

I'm a huge fan. I've read *Celesta Soli* a dozen times.

RYDER

What?

OLD WOMAN

Your first novel? And I've read all your short stories. And... I actually met you once at a reading in Connecticut. I recommend you to all my friends.

RYDER

Who.

OLD WOMAN

I'm sorry?

RYDER

Who do you recommend to your friends!

OLD WOMAN

You! You are Ryder G. Simkin, aren't you?

RYDER

*(yet another stunning realization)*

Yes, yes I am!

OLD WOMAN

Are you working on anything new?

RYDER

I have a deadline. And a screenplay. That I'm writing. I was writing. I'm not sure now.

OLD WOMAN

Well if you never need a story, talk to me. What a life! And I suppose it's good for you, writing a movie and everything but I prefer reading books, myself. You

(MORE)

OLD WOMAN (cont'd)  
can't get lost in a book, you know? If you get lost,  
you can always go back.

RYDER  
Go back?

OLD WOMAN  
To earlier. In the book.

RYDER  
Oh. Right.

OLD WOMAN  
I wish I had one of your books with me. But would you  
mind signing a pamphlet instead? Everyone at the group  
loves you, too.

*She hands him a pen and a pamphlet.*

RYDER  
At the... Coalition to Awaken Guided Evolution?

OLD WOMAN  
You've heard of us!

RYDER  
Yes. You don't think the name is...

OLD WOMAN  
What?

RYDER  
A bit much?

OLD WOMAN  
Oh yes. We like it because it uses the symbols for DNA.  
Do you know much about DNA?

RYDER  
I know it's the... building blocks of life?

OLD WOMAN  
That's right! We're having a free class tonight.  
You see, DNA is a sequence of chemical bases paired  
with their opposite bases. Each base is represented by/

*Ryder suddenly starts to shake Igor.*

*Old Woman can't see what he sees.*

RYDER

Father! Please don't die, father. Please!!

OLD WOMAN

Well, I imagine you have a deadline or something. And we're all supposed to be out of here before the ducks come, so. Stop by the class. If you like. Or not.

*She exits quickly.*

RYDER

Please, don't die. Please! I'm sorry, father. So sorry.

*Ryder continues mumbling softly to himself.*

Contrapunctus XII (III-4)

*Music.*

*Grigory re-enters with Marie's briefcase, though he is now in The Apartment. He sets the briefcase on the couch/bench and goes to his father quickly.*

GRIGORY

Papa? Are you all right?

*As Igor awakens, he grows angry.*

IGOR

You. Stupid. Stupid, stupid, stupid boy! Careless boy! You leave my chess set!

GRIGORY

I'm sorry, Papa.

IGOR

I'm sorry, Grigor? That is all?

GRIGORY

I left it accidentally. I had lunch with that reporter.

IGOR

You know who give me that chess set?

GRIGORY

Mikhail Tal.

IGOR

No! Was not Tal. You see? Think you have whole world figured out, ah? Even Kasparov not know everything!

GRIGORY

I'm sorry, all right? I said I was sorry.

IGOR

Why you so afraid of me, ah?

GRIGORY

I'm not afraid of you.

IGOR

Yes, you are. So afraid of me, of making wrong move. When you young, you always pushing pawns unprotected. Now, everything tight. Tight, tight pieces, little bunches all across the board. What happened?

GRIGORY

I got better.

IGOR

But you not better! Last tournament, lost five games. Not draw, Grigor. Lose!

GRIGORY

What do you want from me? I'm doing the best I can.

IGOR

No, no. You thinking too much. I don't understand you anymore, Grigor. When you were child... it was yesterday. Yesterday, you were child. You no walk, you no speak. Need me to teach you everything. Now, you wake up one day and know everything. You know whole world, got all figured out on your own. But is more to world than you know. Is more than you think.

GRIGORY

You can't keep teaching me. I have to learn on my own.

IGOR

I not teaching you because I like to teach you.

GRIGORY

Are you sure?

IGOR

One day in your life, you will wake up and when you look in mirror you will see you are closer to death than to birth. There is nothing special about this day, other than that. And when that day come you are forever different. I know I am different. Someday I will tell you about my life, Grigor. Then you will understand.

GRIGORY

When? When will you tell me?

IGOR

When you are old enough.

GRIGORY

Are you... crying, Papa?

IGOR

Crying for my son! My son who know nothing. My son who is afraid, afraid, afraid!

GRIGORY

Papa.

IGOR

Listen to me, boy. Please listen to me. You are scared. Okay, is fine for now but if you live your life, scared, you will find out is no life! Is only scared! You see?

GRIGORY

Yes, Papa. I'm sorry.

IGOR

Why! Why you are sorry?

GRIGORY

I don't know, because of the chess set and/

IGOR

Why! You tell me why, Grigor! Tell me!

GRIGORY

Nevermind.

IGOR

Why you so sad always? Why you no like playing chess?

GRIGORY

I do like playing chess.

IGOR

No, you don't! You no practice, you no study/

GRIGORY

Because I'm not a chess player!

*A beat.*

IGOR

I know.

GRIGORY

Do you? Do you know? Because it doesn't seem like it.

IGOR

Don't be angry.

GRIGORY

I don't want to play chess! I don't want to!

IGOR

All right, all right. Calm down.

GRIGORY

I'm not the one who is afraid, Papa. You are. You spent your whole life living in the past, remembering the glory days when you were on top of the world. I used to worry that I would never have glory days like that. I used to hate myself for studying so hard, because I thought I should be making memories like you did. But now I see that you were just using those memories to hold yourself back. To keep yourself safe.

IGOR

That's not true!

GRIGORY

Yes, it is. All my childhood, you talked about the past so much you never paid attention to the present.

IGOR

Because I want you to learn. I want you to know my life so you can have better one. I only want you to have best life, Grigor. Please, please believe me.

GRIGORY

I used to think you were superhuman. There was nothing you couldn't do. But now I see... there's lots of things you can't do.

IGOR

Like what!

GRIGORY

Take care of yourself. Quit smoking. Forgive my mother.

IGOR

Your mother is difficult woman.

GRIGORY

You're a difficult man! Isn't that why we came to America? Because you wanted to get away from her?

IGOR

No! No no no! Is not why! You see? You no understand! You know nothing! You think you grown up? You think you old enough to yell at you father! *Vot zasranec!* You not even speak Russian! I am only man, Grigor. I am not perfect man. I am difficult man. Okay! Maybe I am afraid. Okay! Everyone afraid. Is okay to be afraid. You trying to pretend you not afraid, but only make you more afraid.

GRIGORY

I just want to be good enough for you. That's all. I want you to tell me I'm good enough. Am I good enough? Papa? Am I?

*A beat.*

IGOR

Oh my boy... you do not understand. Nothing in my life give me so much joy. As you. I never think of myself as something special, until you see me. Everything I do is special to you. I never had so much love. I do not know how to hold it, Grigor. I am sorry. Now you are old, now I am losing you. Now is best part of my life is over. I do not know what is next. I am selfish with you, maybe, I know that. I always know you will regret giving me so much love. I think I can hold it forever. Now you want it back. Of course. I am sorry. You are best part of my life, Grigor. I am sorry. I am sorry.

*They embrace.*

GRIGORY

I'm sorry too, Papa.

*Igor wipes his eyes.*

IGOR

Stupid. Stupid, stupid, stupid.

GRIGORY

What's wrong, Papa?

IGOR

We forget to stop at music store. Come, Grigor!

*They exit together.*

*Leaving the chess set in the chair.*

Contrapunctus XIII (III-5)

*Under the preceding, Ryder has lain down on the bench with Marie's briefcase beneath his head.*

*Marie enters, crosses the stage quickly carrying a paper to-go cup of coffee.*

*After a moment she returns.*

MARIE

Ryder?

RYDER

*(awakening)*

Marie? What are you/

MARIE

Are you all right?

RYDER

Oh God I'm so glad to see you.

*He embraces her.*

MARIE

What are you doing in The Park in your bathrobe?

RYDER

I... honestly, I don't know how to answer that.

MARIE

Are you all right? I came home and you weren't there.  
Is that my briefcase?

RYDER

Yes. It must be. Of course it is. That would make sense, right? That would make perfect sense!

MARIE

How did it get here.

RYDER

Well, I followed this woman/

MARIE

A woman.

RYDER

No, not a woman like that, an old woman.

*Marie gives him a look.*

RYDER

You don't understand. This old woman, she's a character in my script and I just met her- I saw her, just now. I was at The Apartment, I was in the middle of writing and she appeared to me out of nowhere, then you called/

MARIE

You sent me to voicemail.

RYDER

I know, and I'm sorry about that. I'm sorry-- about all kinds of things. I know I've been blocking you out, and keeping you at a distance. And I'm sorry.

MARIE

I don't have time for this right now. I have to get John his coffee. We can talk about it tonight.

RYDER

Hang on. I... What I realized today is that I let writing take over my life, in this unhealthy way, and I think it's because I have this thing from my father, about how you have to suffer to write? So I... like sub-consciously, create this distance between us. So I can have tension in my life. And that isn't fair, to you. I think the truth is, I've just been under a lot of stress. Because Becca called this morning, you know, and she wanted to see a draft, and... I didn't have a draft. And as it turns out, I still don't have a draft. But the point is/

MARIE

Do you know what you're doing right now?

RYDER

What.

MARIE

You're apologizing for being self-obsessed and obsessing about yourself while you do it.

RYDER

I am. I am! You're right. And I'm sorry. Again.

*He tries to embrace her.*

*She pulls away.*

MARIE

See, that doesn't mean anything to me anymore.

RYDER

What do you mean?

MARIE

This was supposed to be my day. My perfect day. But in typical Ryder fashion, you put all your crap on it, and now your crap is all over my perfect day. And now I'm standing here with John Pendergast's coffee, again, because he's the one getting prepped for camera and all I'm hearing about is your stupid, stinking-- shit!

RYDER

Okay, I understand. But I'm not the only one at fault. You want to talk about your crap? How about sabotaging yourself by leaving your briefcase behind? Huh? I mean/

MARIE

Damnit, Ryder!

*A tense beat.*

RYDER

All right. Let's talk about this tonight.

MARIE

No.

RYDER

No?

MARIE

I'm done. I'm sorry. I don't have the energy anymore.

RYDER

Okay, you're tired. Let's do this: I'll run you a hot bath, when you come home I'll give you a nice neck rub/

MARIE

Did you not hear me? I'm done. I'm gonna stay with my sister tonight. I'll come by tomorrow for my things.

RYDER

That's ridiculous.

MARIE

What is.

RYDER

This. Come on, I understand. I know you're upset. I made a mistake, and I apologized. I know I've been careless with your feelings. But I figured it all out.

MARIE

You figured it all out.

RYDER

Yeah.

MARIE

So we have to, what? Reconcile, now? You think you get to just screw things up over and over and fix them again, over and over, and I'll keep taking you back?

RYDER

Well. Yeah.

MARIE

Well I'm tired of that. Exhausted, actually.

RYDER

So...

MARIE

So that's it. I need to be with someone who's all there. Not someone who's there part of the time, or partly there all the time. I deserve the whole thing. And with you, only one person who gets the whole thing.

RYDER

Who?

MARIE

Becca.

RYDER

Is this a jealousy thing? Is that what this is?

MARIE

Go home. Please.

RYDER

Because I can assure you, Becca is not/

MARIE

Go home.

RYDER

Marie. Come on. At least let's talk about this.

MARIE

What is there to talk about? Not everything ends nicely, Ryder. Some things are just over. Go. Home.

*Ryder searches her face for some other option.*

*Finding none, he turns and exits right.*

*Marie sighs, deeply.*

*She takes a sip of the coffee. It's cold.*

*She holds her briefcase close. Caresses it.*

*Begins to cry.*

*The Old Woman enters.*

OLD WOMAN

Reach out and touch someone! Awaken guided evolution.  
Think different! Awaken- Oh. Hello again.

MARIE

Now is not a good time.

OLD WOMAN

Are you all right?

MARIE

I'm fine. Please, just go away.

OLD WOMAN

Oh my God.

MARIE

What?

OLD WOMAN

Oh my God!

*Old Woman picks up the chess set. She flips it  
over and examines an inscription on the inside.*

OLD WOMAN

Where did this come from?

*Blackout.*

ACT FOUR: CODAContrapunctus XIV (IV-1)

*Music.*

*After the first statement of the theme, lights up on The Apartment. The two sets are separate again.*

*On the second statement of the theme, Ryder enters with wet hair. He wears a bathrobe and a pair of slippers. Carefully, procedurally, he performs the ritual of setting up his writing area.*

*But his hair is dripping onto his laptop.*

*Frustrated, he gets up and exits the room.*

*We hear the sound of a HAIRDRYER start up.*

*Igor and Grigory enter.*

*Grigory carries a stack of NEW CDs. Igor, exhausted from the day, lies down on the couch.*

*Grigory exits.*

*The HAIRDRYER stops, and Ryder returns.*

*He sits at his laptop.*

RYDER

"An old Russian man, once a master chessplayer, lies on his couch. The room is bare. He begins to cough--"

*Igor begins to cough.*

RYDER

"--gently."

*Igor's cough gets worse.*

*Ryder looks over at him.*

RYDER

"He begins to cough loudly. His son enters."

*Grigory enters.*

RYDER/IGOR

"Go and get your music, Grigor. Play something."

GRIGORY

Really?

RYDER/IGOR

"Yes! Is time for practice."

RYDER

"He knows he will die soon. But he hasn't told his son.  
The phone rings."

*Ryder and Igor's phones start to RING.*

*Igor gets up, answers it.*

*Ryder picks up his cell phone.*

RYDER

Hello?

IGOR

Hello!

RYDER

Hey, Becca.

IGOR

Yes. Is him.

RYDER

It isn't done.

IGOR

Ah? You have results?

RYDER

Because I just can't do it.

IGOR

Why you can't tell me now?

RYDER

I'm sorry, Becks. I'll make it up to what's-his-name--

IGOR

I am Igor Radomir Medinsky! Now tell me results.

RYDER

Canceled? Did you say his flight was canceled?

IGOR

I have cancer or no? Just tell me.

RYDER

Because of ducks on the runway?

IGOR

No, I don't care for doctor's way!

RYDER

Yes, of course we can reschedule?

IGOR

You want another appointment?

RYDER

Next week? That doesn't give me much time.

IGOR

Tomorrow! Is bad news, ah?

RYDER

No, it's great news. It's wonderful news.

IGOR

Okay, I see you tomorrow.

RYDER

Next Thursday is fine. Thank you.

IGOR

Goodbye.

RYDER

Oh, and Becca? I have a new script. Yes, it's... well, it's still early to tell, but it's good. Might be good. We'll see. Okay, you too. Bye.

*Two very different moods.*

*Igor moves back to the couch and lies down.*

*Ryder checks his watch. He picks up a remote control and points it at the audience.*

*Lights up on The Park. Marie faces the audience from in front of the bench, holding a microphone.*

*Old Woman stands beside her, fidgeting.*

*Marie presses her finger to her ear.*

MARIE

Thank you, John. There are some that say love transcends all obstacles. Still others say that love never dies. But here today, at Jonathan Benassi Park,

(MORE)

MARIE (cont'd)

this reporter was lucky enough to bear witness to a truly inspirational story about overcoming obstacles, that reminds us what it means... to love.

*Marie holds the mic for her as she speaks.*

OLD WOMAN

Many years ago, I was engaged to a brilliant young man, a chess player. And he was-- so passionate, about the game. And about life. He was working for Mikhail Tal at the time. We spent a year traveling together. But one day my love, he got word that he had become a father. A girl in his hometown, they had been together just one night but it had... well, he was a father! And so he left me, because he was a good man. A strong man, with a good heart. And-- I couldn't bear the thought of staying in Russia. So I moved to America. I put the past behind me. I married, and I had a beautiful life. But my husband died about three years ago and since then I've been... sort of lost. Looking for answers. And then today, in The Park, I found this.

*She shows the "camera" the chess set.*

OLD WOMAN

This is a gift I gave to my love, thirty years ago.

MARIE

And you're certain this is the same set?

OLD WOMAN

Yes. There's a little inscription here on the inside. It's fading, but it's there. I'd know it anywhere. It says "think of me." And I do think of him, every day. Igor Radomir Medinsky, I love you. Please come find me.

MARIE

A simple sentiment, and a simple chess set. A symbol of lost love, traveling across the Atlantic Ocean to end up here, lost this very afternoon in this very park. So, Igor Radomir Medinsky -- if you're out there somewhere, call the station at the number on your screen. Of course Channel Four News will keep you updated as this love story unfolds, but in the meantime this is Marie DiGiorgio saying, "I'll see you on TV."

*Lights out on The Park.*

*Ryder has just turned off the TV.*

*He gets up and goes to the telephone. Dials.*

*Lights back up on The Park.*

*Marie stands in the same pose as before, waiting.*

MARIE

And we're out. Great. That was great. Thanks, everyone.  
And thank you so much, Ivanka.

OLD WOMAN

I can't believe he was really here today. It's like I'm  
living in a strange dream. It's wonderful! And scary.

MARIE

I'm amazed you missed each other. He was sitting right  
here on this bench. I had lunch with his son!

OLD WOMAN

That boy is his son?

MARIE

Yes.

OLD WOMAN

He did look so much like him. So sweet. You'll call me?  
If you hear anything?

MARIE

Oh, absolutely! We'll shoot the reunion live, we'll  
send you two to a fancy dinner, maybe put you up at a  
hotel. I mean this could be a five-part series...

*Her cell phone begins to RING.*

*She takes it out.*

OLD WOMAN

Do you need to take that?

MARIE

No.

*She puts it back in her pocket.*

*Lights out on The Park.*

*Ryder waits on the phone, for her voicemail.*

RYDER

Hey Marie. It's me. Ryder. Just wanted to let you know,  
I watched your report. You looked really great. Really.  
You did a great job. And: you should be proud of  
yourself. All right. That's all. I'll be up late. So.  
Maybe we'll talk.

*He hangs up.*

*Grigory enters.*

GRIGORY

Are you all right, Papa?

IGOR

Yes, yes. Very tired.

GRIGORY

What did the doctor say?

IGOR

*(spitting)*  
Ah, doctors!

GRIGORY

What did he say?

*A beat.*

IGOR

He say everything okay. No cancer.

GRIGORY

No cancer?

IGOR

Everything okay! He say my heart is so strong, he want me to come back tomorrow to study me.

GRIGORY

They want you to come back?

IGOR

You got good genes, Grigory! Sharp mind, strong heart!  
*(an apology)*  
But short fingers! No good for piano.

GRIGORY

Well, Paul Wittgenstein only had one hand.

IGOR

Paul--?

GRIGORY

Wittgenstein. The piano player? And Jimi Hendrix played a right-handed guitar, even though he was left-handed.

IGOR

*(a moment of slow, pure joy)*  
Jimi... Hendrix?

GRIGORY

I was just listening to his CD. And the guy at the music store recommended somebody called: David Bow-ee?

IGOR

David Bowie!

GRIGORY

He was a piano player, too.

IGOR

Yes, yes! I know. You have Elton John?

GRIGORY

Who?

IGOR

Okay, take these names down: Stevie Wonder, Elton John, Ray Charles...

*(a beat)*

Nevermind. We do that later. What you have there?

GRIGORY

This is *Art of the Fugue*. Bach's final masterpiece.

IGOR

More Ba-rock music?

GRIGORY

Yes.

IGOR

Okay. Play it.

GRIGORY

The *Art of the Fugue* is the last thing Bach wrote before he died. What's amazing is that at the end of the piece, Bach signs his name musically. For the first time in his career he uses the four-note--

*Lights up on The Park.*

*Marie starts packing up the microphone and wiping her makeup off.*

OLD WOMAN

--sequence of chemical bases paired with their opposite bases. So when they're separated, either one can re-create the entire sequence by bonding with their opposite base pairs again.

MARIE

Uh-huh. Is this a God thing?

OLD WOMAN

Here, take a pamphlet. It's easier with a pamphlet.

*She hands her one.*

*Lights down on The Park.*

*Ryder sits at his laptop, typing.*

RYDER

"She hands her a pamphlet. Ryder sits at his laptop, typing. He reads the words out loud: 'She hands her a pamphlet. Ryder sits at his laptop, typing.'" Damn it!

*Old Woman enters The Apartment.*

*Lights change.*

OLD WOMAN

More trouble?

RYDER

This ending, it's too -- it's too neat, now. I don't like the way everything wraps up.

OLD WOMAN

And why not?

RYDER

Because, that's not how life is! Life doesn't fit into perfect little patterns. It would be great if it had a clear beginning, middle, and end but in truth it's a handful of various beginnngs and ends, and you never know if you're starting something new or ending something old. And sometimes -- most times! -- the end has nothing to do with the beginning. You don't start out with a clear idea of what you want. That's not what ordinary people do, anyway. You try things, and fail. Mostly it's just walking around, trying to figure it out. A bunch of middle. No matter how hard we try to do or become something, the fact is we spend most of our lives not getting there, not finding something, just... wandering around The Park!

OLD WOMAN

Well, you know what they say.

RYDER

What?

OLD WOMAN

Have you seen my shoes?

*Lights change.*

*Marie stands beside Ryder's chair.*

MARIE

Honey? Have you seen my shoes?

*As if awoken, Ryder sits up.*

*He looks around, confused.*

RYDER

Uh?

MARIE

You haven't seen my black shoes? The ones I hate?

RYDER

No. I haven't seen them.

MARIE

They were just here!

RYDER

Are you sure?

MARIE

Yes! Will you help me look for them?

RYDER

Why don't you wear your other shoes?

MARIE

Which other shoes?

RYDER

Nevermind. I'll help you look for them.

*He gets up, out of his chair.*

*Finds her shoes beneath the couch.*

MARIE

Thank you. Was that Becca?

RYDER

Hmm?

MARIE

On the phone just now, was that Becca?

RYDER

Oh. Yes. She wants to see a draft.

MARIE

And you don't have one?

RYDER

Not yet.

MARIE

Well, I'm sure you'll figure it out.

*She exits.*

*Ryder takes a sip of his coffee. It is cold.*

RYDER

Was I... dreaming?

GRIGORY

Listen Papa! This is the best part.

*Marie enters.*

MARIE

How do I look?

RYDER

*(looking her up and down)*

Fabulous.

*He goes to her and hugs her.*

RYDER

I love you. And I'm so proud of you.

MARIE

Thanks.

RYDER

It's really here!

MARIE

Yeah.

*They cross left together.*

*She almost exits but he stops her.*

*Hands her the briefcase, kisses her.*

*She exits.*

*Ryder returns to his laptop.*

*Reads as he types.*

RYDER

"In an empty room, a writer confronts the blank page."

GRIGORY

In just a few moments the fugue stops suddenly. That's where the manuscript ends./

RYDER

"He wants to write about transcendence, but he can't."

GRIGORY

But there's a hand-written note in the manuscript./

RYDER

"He wants to apply structure to a shapeless world."

GRIGORY

And the note says: "At the point where the composer introduces the name BACH in the countersubject to this fugue, the composer died."/

RYDER

"But he understands that is the vocation of madmen."

GRIGORY

Many people have tried to finish the fugue. But you know what? I think it's done! It's exactly as Bach intended it to be: open-ended. Like life.

*The music ends.*

*In the silence, Grigory turns to his father.*

GRIGORY

Papa?

*Blackout.*