

THE VISITOR

(ZİYARETÇİ)

A Black Comedy in Two Acts

by

Tuncer CÜCENOĞLU

Translated by **Emre İz'at**
Edited by **Michael Joyce**

1996 Lions Writers Award

To all mothers around the world with personalities like my mother...

Tuncer Cucenoglu

cucenoglutuncer@gmail.com
tcucenoglu@hotmail.com

<http://www.tuncercucenoglu.com/>

Characters:

MAN: Around 35. Psychiatrist. Understands everything spoken, but can only respond with his eyes.

WOMAN: Around 30. Man's wife. Works in an office. Healthy and beautiful.

MOTHER: Around 60. Man's mother.

VISITOR: Around 40. Angel of Death (Gabriel).
Very handsome.

PHONE VOICE: A womanizer with a very effective voice.

Scene Layout:

A modern hospital room. Windows with heavy drapes. The bed's headboard is upstage. A couch big enough for a visitor to sleep on. A door leading to the hallway and one to the bathroom. Any equipment one would see in a modern ICU room.

Place: Any country.

Time : Today.

ACT ONE

(MAN and WOMAN are in the room. MAN's eyes are closed; he is lying there, lifeless. WOMAN is worried. WOMAN carefully takes

MAN's hand, thinks. Feeling like she has to do something, she turns on the radio. The music is instrumental. WOMAN looks at her watch; starts pacing around the room. Phone rings.)

WOMAN: (Quickly answers) Hello..

VOICE: Hello.

(VISITOR enters, listens unobtrusively)

WOMAN: Is it you?

VOICE: Yes, I'm not bothering you, I hope..

WOMAN: Why?

VOICE: It's just that your voice sounded ...If my frequent calls make you uncomfortable, please tell me.

WOMAN: Of course not, you know the situation I'm in.

VOICE: How's our patient?

WOMAN: Nothing's changed. He's exactly the same as when you saw him four days ago. The professor came by about an hour ago.

VOICE: How nice, they're showing special interest.

WOMAN: To tell the truth, it's a good thing my husband's a doctor. The medical experts are like windmills. One goes out and another comes in. They look, they research...

VOICE: Good thing it's not me on that bed. No doctor would look at me. I'm not one of them.

WOMAN: (Smiles) Please don't make jokes.

VOICE: I'm happy, I got you to laugh.

WOMAN: (Tries not to cry) It's so...so...

VOICE: Please...Please...

WOMAN: (Regains control) My nerves are shot. The professor said the artery going to his brain is blocked. If his body can't expel the blockage there's no hope. He'll stay like this...forever.

VOICE: Please, I can't stand you being in pain. You'll see, he'll walk again. He's a young man.

WOMAN: I don't know...

VOICE: If sadness would make him healthy again, I'd be sad too.

WOMAN: I've been here for four straight days. The days aren't so bad, plenty of people visit and at least there are people walking the halls. But the nights? It's so silent. Just him and me. If there weren't a radio, I'd go crazy.

VOICE: And my calls. I should call more often.

WOMAN: Thank you.

VOICE: Still no word from his mother?

WOMAN: She's coming tonight. I'm going straight home. Do you know I haven't showered in four days?

VOICE: If his mother comes, you must return to work tomorrow.

WOMAN: Did something happen?

VOICE: You'll think I'm being over-sensitive, but I'll tell you anyway. While he was signing a paper for me, our HR manager said, "the economy is comatose." Then he added, full of meaning, "Under these circumstances, how long can we afford to carry all of these people on our backs?"

WOMAN: What does that have to do with me? After all, I'm only missing a week. They know it's an emergency situation.

VOICE: Maybe it's just me. Maybe the word "comatose" scared me. But we should still be careful. In the past six months they've fired all seven people who used their legal holidays. Of course I took care of most of your work for you without letting them know it, but still... They can't think that things are fine here without you around. Am I being clear? You must come in tomorrow.

WOMAN: I will.

VOICE: When his mother arrives, you can come over here...tonight.

WOMAN: I don't understand.

VOICE: We'll sit comfortably and talk things over.

WOMAN: That would be wrong ...very wrong. *(Politely)* Besides, I have to shower.

VOICE: You can shower at my place.

WOMAN: No, no. That would be worse.

VOICE: Or don't you trust me?

WOMAN: This doesn't have anything to do with trust. I have to go home.

VOICE: You can still call if you change your mind. Don't be shy, okay?

WOMAN: Thank you for calling.

VOICE: Take care.

(WOMAN hangs up, but doesn't take her hand off the receiver for some time)

VISITOR: *(Offstage)* Good evening.

WOMAN: *(Upon seeing the VISITOR, she covers her chest as if caught naked)* Who are you looking for? *(Scared)* You...

VISITOR: I'm a friend of your husband.

WOMAN: Oh, good evening.

VISITOR: May I sit down?

WOMAN: *(Scared)* Please.

(VISITOR leans the sheath next to the couch, looks at MAN...WOMAN tries to recognize the VISITOR)

VISITOR: I'm sorry.

WOMAN: Thank you.

VISITOR: I got the news today. I was very saddened. I immediately got on a bus and came. *(Extends a bottle of cologne. WOMAN accepts)*

WOMAN: Thank you. They don't allow visitors at this hour. How did you get in?

VISITOR: The guards are people too. They have wives and children. It isn't easy to make a living these days.

WOMAN: I don't understand.

VISITOR: We must take care of these sacrificing people. It is a sacrifice to work at an hour when everyone else is sitting at home watching television. They should be rewarded for this. Or don't you approve of such gestures of help?

WOMAN: As far as I can make out you bribed them.

VISITOR: Whatever. If I hadn't, I couldn't have gotten in and I wouldn't have been able to see my friend. After a six-hour trip I couldn't have endured such a tragedy.

WOMAN: I'm sorry but I don't recognize you.

VISITOR: I recognize you.

WOMAN: But we've never met. I don't think you were at our wedding.

VISITOR: No, I wasn't. Your husband is my childhood friend. He was always the goalie when we played soccer. He was quite good. He leapt like a cat, punching away balls from the corners. He could have been a soccer star. Do you know what it means to be a soccer star? Lots of money and fame; Cars, houses, the adoration of the people. At this age he could have retired and become a sports writer. Or a soccer commentator on television. How wonderful...*(Plays a commentator with an imaginary microphone in his hand)* Now let's get the view of our respected analyst...Yes, would you say there was an offside situation in this position? Was that a trip or was he going for the ball? Is there a penalty for pulling down an opponent's shorts, even if it was unintentional? If the goalie jumps out before a penalty kick and smothers the ball, is there a do-over? Or is there a penalty for the ball hitting the armpit? Would your husband have accomplished a small feat if he had educated millions of viewers on these matters? We must not forget that everything is for the sake of people's happiness. But he chose to be a doctor. He made a sacrifice. He tried to care for patients by writing prescriptions that only pharmacists can read and lived in very unpleasant conditions for the best five years of his life. Unpaid rent, tax debts...You know better than I do how many times did he try to close up his practice? If he had become an OBGYN, things might have changed but his biggest mistake was choosing to be a psychiatrist.

WOMAN: We went through a lot.

VISITOR: This is all stuff you know, what about the things he couldn't tell you? The things he kept inside; the sleepless nights. While you were afraid there was another woman, he was

dealing with day-to-day troubles. Do you know the hopeless anticipation that comes with an auditor's call?

WOMAN: One night he was calling out another woman's name in bed. I was so suspicious of him. But when I learned that the name belonged to one of his patients...

VISITOR: Actually it was a bad idea for him to open a practice. The best thing for him would have been to work in a hospital.

WOMAN: He tried for months. But he couldn't find a position. He had just finished medical school. Because of his lack of experience, he couldn't get a job.

VISITOR: He did all of this in a big city, he could have tried his luck in a small place.

WOMAN: He couldn't. Small town people never feel like they need psychiatrists.

VISITOR: Why? Are conditions better in small towns?

WOMAN: Our people only go to a dentist to get another tooth pulled.

VISITOR: I didn't think of that. It was a good thing you didn't. I'm afraid that it would be both of you lying there with his mother in the middle. Taking care of both of you at once.

WOMAN: She would take care of her son but not me.

VISITOR: You're right. I forgot for a minute that his mother doesn't exactly hold you in the highest regard.

WOMAN: That's right...but how do you know all this?

VISITOR: I told you I'm your husband's friend. Actually it would be better to say he was my friend.

WOMAN: *(Reactive)* But he's alive!

VISITOR: Is he? He can't even reach over and grab a glass of water. He can't walk to the toilet to piss. He can't...make love to you. Just as a society's not alive if it doesn't have a stable foundation, I can't say he's alive either; am I wrong?

WOMAN: What is that supposed to mean?

VISITOR: Everything. Doesn't he need you to perform even the most basic bodily functions? Does he have the ability to voice his opinion on any matter concerning him? Can he react to an activity that he doesn't approve of?

WOMAN: Are you a revolutionary?

VISITOR: Now where did you come up with that?

WOMAN: When I was a student, I got involved in issues just like everyone else.

VISITOR: I think you were a sympathizer.

WOMAN: My friends all said I could never be a true revolutionary. They called me little bourgeois. They didn't think I was realistic enough.

VISITOR: I think you are realistic. Otherwise you would have found a peaceful life lying underground about now; an egalitarian life without conflict. Where on certain days your friends would

place red carnations on your grave, making it beautiful. A very ideal picture, isn't it? Maybe I would have brought about that beautiful, infinite life..

WOMAN: Or are you an anti-revolutionary?

VISITOR: Do I come off that way?

WOMAN: What you just said conflicts with what you said before.

VISITOR: No it doesn't.

WOMAN: You're listing the prerequisites for being human.

VISITOR: True, a person who is unable to make decisions for themselves and unable to react isn't alive.

WOMAN: So you like reactionary people.

VISITOR: Beyond liking, I approve of them.

WOMAN: But you assert that you could kill them.

VISITOR: That's a private issue. (*Under his breath*) You can't say everything we do is enviable.

WOMAN: Forgive me for saying so, but you have very strange views.

VISITOR: I'd prefer it if you said realistic instead of strange. If Marx were alive today, he would have certainly revised his view according to the afterlife. And he would have been able to prove his dream. Because both the wealthy and the rich meet in a pauper's egalitarian world. The only world free of wars and oppression is underground. It's impossible not to respect those above ground who fight the good fight, how could we not? They fight with courage. They place their lives, their families; everything on the line. All to reach the equality that naturally exists in the afterlife. Please listen carefully to what I'm saying. Because therein lies the secret.

WOMAN: What do you do for a living?

VISITOR: What could I do?

WOMAN: (*Caught up in the mystery of the subject*) You...you're a musician.

VISITOR: How did you arrive at that conclusion?

WOMAN: (*Points at the sheath*) This is a violin, isn't it? Maybe a saxophone.

VISITOR: It is in fact an instrument. But it has nothing to do with music. I'm not a musician.

WOMAN: Wait, don't tell me. I'm going to figure out your career.

VISITOR: I doubt it but go ahead and try. You can even ask questions. And I'll give you clues just like I have been from the start. Go ahead and ask. You may ask me five questions about my career. But let's lay down some rules. I will only respond in a "yes" or a "no." "Yes" or "no," agreed?

WOMAN: Agreed.

VISITOR: I only have one more rule. At the end of your five questions you may make two guesses. Agreed?

WOMAN: Two isn't enough, make it three.

VISITOR: Is three a lot?

WOMAN: It's more than two. It'll be enough for me.

VISITOR: All right, you may make three guesses.

WOMAN: Maybe I'll finish it on the first guess.

VISITOR: Who knows? Hold on (*Thinks*). Let's decide what we win or lose in the end. Otherwise it'll be a dry and boring exercise.

WOMAN: You know, I'm so happy all of a sudden. Four days of sadness has come to an end.

VISITOR: The sadness in your life hasn't been for just four days. It's been at least six months. The heart attack was six months ago, right?

WOMAN: How did you know?

VISITOR: He struggled for quite some time.

WOMAN: Struggled with whom?

VISITOR: With Gabriel...and he won for a while. His doctor friends sprang into action as a part of professional dependability. They took him in their care. But it was incredible. They sent him home with you after a month in the hospital. You went to work during the days but his mother was at his side.

WOMAN: (*Affected*) It was unbearable.

VISITOR: Yes it was unbearable, because he could have died at any moment.

WOMAN: The unbearable thing for me was not that he could have died at any moment, but that his mother was always around. She had settled in the house and stuck her nose in everything. She was suffocating me with her eyes, as if I was the cause of all this. I was to blame. Because I had taken away her son and become the key player in his stressful life. It was inevitable for him to have a heart attack, because I had ruined her son.

VISITOR: If you start getting into how you feel about your mother-in-law, guessing my age will be left for another season. It could take a lifetime. I don't have that kind of time! If I fool around this much everywhere, I won't be able to do my job. Yes, let's get back to the task at hand. What will you ask from me if you can guess my occupation.

WOMAN: I don't know...

VISITOR: Wish from me what you will.

WOMAN: (*Laughing*) Or are you the genie from Aladdin's lamp?

VISITOR: He has one lip in the sky and one on the ground, I won't count that as one of your guesses. Go ahead.

WOMAN: What can I wish for? Should it have something to do with your career?

VISITOR: (*Pleased*) It should...For instance, an application, a demonstration. But a real demonstration.

WOMAN: At this hour?

VISITOR: Nighttime is usually the best time.

WOMAN: What if sound goes to the other rooms. What if the whole hospital wakes up.

VISITOR: Hospitals are used to it. They won't mind, they witness it three or four times a day.

WOMAN: So it's something that everyone is familiar with.

VISITOR: You could say that. Usually people see the end result. But there are those who watch the act from time to time.

WOMAN: Now I'm really curious. But if it's inappropriate, please say something now, and we'll forget the whole thing.

VISITOR: We can stop if you want when I explain it.

WOMAN: Well, what are you going to wish from me?

VISITOR: You are my friend's wife. Keeping both of you in mind, I'll request something that is to your mutual benefit.

WOMAN: Our mutual benefit, huh?

VISITOR: In fact even for his mother's benefit.

WOMAN: Benefits both his mother and me, huh? Not likely.

VISITOR: You will be surprised how well it works. Let's begin now. But just like I said, "yes," or "no."

WOMAN: I didn't forget. (*Thinks*) Does your work take place in a single location or many?

VISITOR: I can't reply to that question with a yes or no. Please rephrase the question.

WOMAN: Does your work take place in a single location?

VISITOR: No.

WOMAN: Yes, it's a traveling profession. You aren't tied to a single place. Now I'll move on to my second question. Does your work deal solely with women?

VISITOR: No.

WOMAN: Good. So it deals with men too. Women, men, old, young, doesn't matter. Traveling...does your job involve food or clothing?

VISITOR: That's also a two-part question.

WOMAN: Do you work with food?

VISITOR: (*To himself*) They say life comes from food, how should I reply? (*Thinks*) No.

WOMAN: Okay, how about clothing?

VISITOR: That's not a proper question.

WOMAN: Does your work involve clothing?

VISITOR: No. This is your last chance, think it through before you ask.

WOMAN: (*Thinks*) Do you work in healthcare with a musical instrument?

VISITOR: So you're saying a doctor can care for his patient by playing the violin. Or did I misunderstand you?

WOMAN: You understood correctly. Doesn't that happen?

VISITOR: I've never seen it. Even if you have I'd rather not discuss it. So I'll accept it as a proper question and reply. No. No more questions. Now you may use your three guesses. But think it through. Take your first guess. I'm waiting.

WOMAN: You travel, it has to do with all people, of all ages, isn't that right?

VISITOR: But now you're asking more questions. All right, I'll give you this one, yes.

(WOMAN thinks)

VISITOR: I'm waiting. I don't want to discourage you, but I'm going to win in the end.

WOMAN: Please don't roll your pants up without seeing the stream. Maybe I'll guess right.

VISITOR: There's no need for all this effort. Even if you win, you'll be the one who gives up something. But you'll win out in the end anyway.

WOMAN: I don't understand how I'm to give up something and still be the winner..

VISITOR: Don't worry about that. You'll see everything in the end.

WOMAN: I'd still like to win without giving up something.

VISITOR: Please don't drag it out. I'm waiting..

WOMAN: Are you a musician?

VISITOR: But I already told you I'm not a musician.

WOMAN: But that's an instrument case.

VISITOR: It isn't, it isn't! My god, I told you it isn't. Just so you won't give up a chance, I'll pretend I didn't hear that one.

WOMAN: Please don't get angry. This is fun. I've missed conversations like this for six months.

VISITOR: What we're having isn't a conversation, it's a contest.

WOMAN: Whatever. It's nice. Are you married?

VISITOR: Another question. We're getting further from your objective.

WOMAN: My question was outside of the contest.

VISITOR: *(Fed up)* I'm married. And I have three...angels of death.

WOMAN: *(Begrudging)* Your kids may be disobedient and loud but I must say I disapprove of you calling them angels of death.

VISITOR: *(Angry)* They are real angels of death! Do you understand me? All three of them! Two boys, and one girl!

WOMAN: Don't get angry. I can see your children make you very upset. But still don't describe them like that, please. They are still children after all. I am sorry they bother you so much.

VISITOR: *(Almost choking)* My wife is also an angel of death!

WOMAN: Oh dear, oh my! But you don't let on how much they upset you. You hide your sadness well.

VISITOR: (*Huffy*) I'm not hiding anything! They never upset me! We have a happy home! They wait in anticipation everyday for the presents I bring them! All four wait at the window! They love me! They can't wait for me to come home.

WOMAN: Are you all right?

VISITOR: Please don't test my good will any more. Go ahead and make your first guess. Stop dragging it out.

WOMAN: First you say I should think it through and then you tell me to hurry up.

VISITOR: Think quickly. Actually we should have put restrictions on this as well. We can even do that now. Let's say half a minute and leave it at that.

WOMAN: Half a minute isn't enough for me to think well. Let's say one minute, that would be better.

VISITOR: Why don't we make it five while we're at it?

WOMAN: Why not? That would be wonderful. That would be enough for me to think right. That's fair. Thank you.

VISITOR: For what?

WOMAN: For extending the time limit.

VISITOR: How much did we extend it?

WOMAN: Five minutes.

VISITOR: Did you think that was serious?

WOMAN: Didn't you say five minutes?

VISITOR: I did, but I didn't mean it like that. All right, let's make it a minute.

WOMAN: Are you going back on your word?

VISITOR: I have other work to do. I can't wait here with you for hours on end. If I spend this much time on every case, I won't have any energy left to do the rest of my job. Don't realize the fast times we live in? Don't you know that some wars end in three or four days?

WOMAN: And some take years. Why do you use the quick ones as an example? Why don't wars end quickly? Because some countries don't have the necessary weapons. And I don't have the necessary mental ammunition. You must understand my need for more time to think.

VISITOR: How can you compare thinking with weapons? These two words are complete opposites.

WOMAN: If you don't have a weapon in your hand, how can you carry out your thoughts?

VISITOR: Our contest has turned into a meaningless debate. If you can't come up with an answer, let's forget the whole thing.

WOMAN: Then I'll make my first guess. You are a salesman.

VISITOR: You guessed wrong, I'm not a salesman.

WOMAN: But you give that impression. I'm disappointed, believe me I'm disappointed.

VISITOR: I hate to see women and children upset. That's the reason I don't do my job sometimes. I've had two warnings and a pay cut because of my soft side. Please don't be upset. Besides, you can't say I haven't been giving you hints and trying to help you. I'll pretend I didn't hear the salesman guess. Did you even say that word? I honestly can't remember. Would you please use your first guess.

WOMAN: *(Thinks)* You are a teacher.

VISITOR: Now where did you get that idea?

WOMAN: Teachers travel a lot.

VISITOR: What does this thing have to do with teaching?

WOMAN: Yes, I haven't been able to figure that out yet. What could it have to do with it? Or are you a music teacher?

VISITOR: How many times did I tell you that this is not an instrument?

WOMAN: It's like teaching suits you.

VISITOR: It very well might, but I'm not a teacher. And don't even let the thought that the thing in this case is an instrument enter your mind. I'm waiting for your next guess.

WOMAN: *(Looks at her watch, thinking)* A traveling job...there isn't a musical instrument in your hand, definitely not...in your work you target men and women of all ages.

VISITOR: You're getting closer. Target is an excellent choice of words. If you dwell on this, your chances will improve.

WOMAN: Target!...Target!...Target!...Target, is that right?

VISITOR: I'll give you another clue. What are targets used for? *(Defining it)* You know, there are circles, and a big dot in the center.

WOMAN: Weapon, it's used for weapons. Is that a weapon?

VISITOR: *(Happy)* Yes. This can be considered a kind of weapon. No, this is a real weapon. Good job! You're going to figure it out.

WOMAN: You...

VISITOR: It has to do with taking life. Please think carefully. Be careful! Taking Life! Who takes life? Think! Don't hurry. Use your last chance well.

WOMAN: Since you said it has to do with taking life, I figured it out. Thank you.

VISITOR: *(Happy)* Say it!

WOMAN: You're a cop...A cop, a cop.

VISITOR: Come on!

WOMAN: I guessed it, didn't I?

VISITOR: No, you didn't. I told you I didn't work in a single place. You knew I traveled.

WOMAN: But there are special traveling teams.

VISITOR: Let's not drag this out any longer. You can't figure it out. But you'll still come out the winner.

WOMAN: Will you explain how that's going to work?

VISITOR: Don't you want me to tell you my job?

WOMAN: Can I please take a guess?

VISITOR: There's no need. It will drag things out. Besides, I'm positive you won't be able to figure it out. Even though I gave you so many clues. But you are insistent in your ignorance. However, once you see my outfit, you will have to know.
(The VISITOR takes off his overcoat, standing in front of the WOMAN in his traditional garb)

WOMAN: Oh! It was so easy.

VISITOR: I told you. Yes, now let me hear you say it so I can feel the satisfaction of victory. Come on!

WOMAN: You're a scuba diver.
(VISITOR starts to shake uncontrollably)

WOMAN: What's not to know here? It was easy. And you said you were giving me clues, shame on you. *(Giving examples)* Sea, strokes, diving, you could have helped me out.
(VISITOR starts stupidly flipping out, maybe he pulls at his hair, does handstands, cartwheels, runs and slams his head against the wall. Then, with great effort, he attempts to regain the appearance of control and motions for the woman to be quiet. With shaking hands, he draws his scythe from its sheath and holds it in the traditional pose)

VISITOR: *(With a constrained voice and with great pain)* How about now?

WOMAN: You're a scuba diver with a scythe in your hand.
(The VISITOR throws himself on the couch with difficulty, he is fainting. WOMAN puts some cologne on a piece of cotton and holds dabs it under his nose, his face, and his neck. VISITOR opens his eyes after a while and looks around)

WOMAN: What's wrong with you? High blood pressure? A salty yogurt shake would have been good for you. But where could we get one?
(The VISITOR pleads in gestures for her to stop talking)

WOMAN: What can I do for you?

VISITOR: *(With great difficulty)* Silence...your silence is enough...Please...

WOMAN: I can call the doctor on duty.

VISITOR: *(Loses his temper and grabs the WOMAN's arm)* Shut up! Shut up! If you don't I'll shut you up! I swear I will!

WOMAN: Let go of my arm! You're hurting me. Please come to your senses.
(The VISITOR lets go of the WOMAN's arm and returns to a pleading look)

VISITOR: I apologize. I lost control all of a sudden. I didn't know what I was doing. (*Gets up, he is quite lively*) It happens once in a while. Nothing to be afraid of. Please forget the whole thing. If it gets out, I'll be ruined.

WOMAN: I won't tell anyone. You can trust me.

VISITOR: Your mother-in-law should be here soon. Let's get to the point. Are you listening to me?

WOMAN: Yes.

VISITOR: Now listen carefully. Look, don't think with your emotions. Use your mind. From now on, we're going to be rational and not emotional, agreed?

WOMAN: But first will you tell me what I gain by losing?

VISITOR: No, I can't. Because in order to have an effect on you I have to leave the explanations to the end. If I behave like an inexperienced politician and say outright what should be saved for last, my failure will be imminent. And failure is an intolerable result in our profession. Let's begin. All right?

WOMAN: All right.

VISITOR: First look at your husband. Look, look.

WOMAN: I'd forgotten all about him in the excitement of our contest.

VISITOR: What do you see?

WOMAN: I see him.

VISITOR: What is he doing?

WOMAN: He isn't doing anything. He's just sleeping.

VISITOR: Like a corpse, isn't that right?

WOMAN: No, he opens his eyes from time to time. He sees me. He sees his surroundings. He blinks, and cries. He knows his predicament. But I get very sad when I look at him.

VISITOR: Good. Your assessment is valid. What are you doing for him?

WOMAN: I look at him. When he cries, I try very hard to keep myself from crying. Sometimes I fail and I run into the bathroom. Or I turn on the nightlight so that he doesn't see my tears.

VISITOR: So you feel pain.

WOMAN: Yes.

VISITOR: Does he understand that you're in pain?

WOMAN: Yes.

VISITOR: Then he is also in pain. You're in pain together. You spend your days and nights in pain.

WOMAN: But what else can I do?

VISITOR: There! There's the awful truth! You can't do anything for him except be in pain.

WOMAN: Isn't that enough?

VISITOR: Is it? I can see you love your husband...

WOMAN: Yes, I love him. We had some great times together. Unforgettable times; unforgettable nights. How could I not love him? He's my everything.

VISITOR: A little while ago you had a contest with me, you forgot him. It was like he wasn't here.

WOMAN: How could I forget him?

VISITOR: You're saying what should be, not what is. You're hiding the truth. Let's not fool each other, please.

WOMAN: It's true, I did forget him. But what else can I do? I've been at his side for four whole days. I'm tense, the question of what's going to happen is eating away at me.

VISITOR: One way or another, you are able to hide from reality when you have the opportunity.

WOMAN: Doctors recommend people who are in stress to fish or knit. My husband recommends the same thing, or he would. This is a kind of escape for me.

VISITOR: True, now our conversation is beginning to take a little meaning, you see. We're talking about truths. Continue. You'll feel better. You haven't been going to work for four days.

WOMAN: Yes.

VISITOR: But now you have to start going. In this economic crisis, no one can fend for anyone else much longer. They may terminate your job.

WOMAN: True.

VISITOR: How will you get by if you lose your job? Do you have other income?

WOMAN: No, plus we've been trying to get by solely on my salary for the past six months. The practice closed down. We even had to sell a few things from around the house.

VISITOR: That's terrible.

WOMAN: But I won't be fired. My mother-in-law gets here tonight. She'll stay with him during the day. I'll be able to go back to work.

VISITOR: You're going back to the real world, I'm glad to hear it.

WOMAN: After work, I'll come here. I'll stay with him at night.

VISITOR: Sleeping on the same couch with your beloved mother-in-law, is that right?

WOMAN: For a while. I think we'll be able to take him home in a month. I think his special bed will arrive by then.

VISITOR: And you and your mother-in-law will get along like two peas in a pod.

WOMAN: Yes, because he's our shared love. We have to put up with each other. We agreed on the phone.

VISITOR: In tears, right?

WOMAN: Yes, in tears.

VISITOR: So both of you were emotional and not intellectual, is that right? His mother and his wife. But did you ever think of the fact that his mother is an old woman? What if his mother leaves the surface tomorrow? Did you think of that?

WOMAN: No, I didn't.

VISITOR: Than think of it. One day you come home from work and...she's flown up to the sky. What will you do then?

WOMAN: I hope something like that..

VISITOR: Why? She's an old woman. She has a son who cries whenever he opens his eyes. Who cries hopelessly. How can a mother withstand such pain? Then who will look after him during the day? Don't forget, you're at work during the day.

WOMAN: I'll use my annual vacation time.

VISITOR: Look, you're getting emotional again. After all is said and done, you have a month of vacation time. I already told you I'd advise against taking time off these days. What if it lasts eleven months?

WOMAN: I don't know.

VISITOR: And I don't think you own the house you're living in.

WOMAN: We solved the house issue. His mother is going to sell her house in the country. She's going to buy a smaller condo here. We won't have to worry about rent.

VISITOR: I like that. But what are you going to do when you're out of a job? What will you eat and drink? I hope you won't give me some ridiculous answer like I'll go on a diet. Because it looks like you don't exactly have a weight problem. In fact, maybe you lost a little weight these past six months. Even more so these past four days. Right?

WOMAN: Right.

VISITOR: Besides, being a homeowner doesn't solve the problem, there's the doorman, power bills, water, heat, and other expenses. How will you keep up with these payments?

WOMAN: My mother-in-law gets Social Security.

VISITOR: I guess you're not too familiar with Social Security. Besides, even that is left to her from her husband...smaller than small. I don't want to discourage you but it might cover the power bill.

WOMAN: It's not that bad, it'll cover it all. And with mine, we'll get along fine, we don't eat much anyway.

VISITOR: (Seeing that MAN has opened his eyes) He's opened his eyes.

(WOMAN looks at MAN...MAN looks like he wants to say something. WOMAN tries not to cry, escapes into the bathroom. MAN finds the VISITOR with his eyes. Looks at him with gratitude, as if to say, "thank God you're here." The VISITOR smiles, they smile at each other like old friends)

VISITOR: You can hear me, can't you?

(MAN happily and rapidly blinks his eyes)

VISITOR: I came to take you away.

(MAN smiles)

VISITOR: But there's still some more time.

(MAN is disappointed)

VISITOR: I know your desire to come with me is unbearable. Hopeless patients like you are almost always eager to come with me. But unfortunately the Human Rights Commission is putting on a lot of pressure. In cases like this, they want approval from next-of-kin such as the mother, the wife, father, siblings, what have you. They're a strong lobby group. We have to acquiesce. Our group decided to try a verbal coercion technique. You are the first experimental subject.

(MAN looks worried)

VISITOR: Your wife and your mother must approve, do you understand?

(MAN scrunches up his face, hopelessly)

VISITOR: Don't be such a pessimist. Your wife is about to approve. The one whom I'm worried about is your mother. But rest assured, I'll get both.

WOMAN: *(Enters)* My God, I can't stand it. I don't want him to cry. I get so awful inside.

VISITOR: There is a solution.

WOMAN: I told him not to cry so many times.

VISITOR: He can't help it. He knows the situation.

WOMAN: There's a chance he'll get rid of the blockage. He knows this. But he cries anyway.

VISITOR: He's aware of the improbability of clearing the blockage. Because he himself had given many patients like this hope. Let's not fool ourselves, there's only one solution to this. *(He pauses)* For him to fly away.

WOMAN: *(Turns up the radio so that MAN cannot hear)* What are you saying?

VISITOR: I'm saying he has to die. Do you understand me?

WOMAN: I don't even want to think of such a thing.

VISITOR: That will be the best for all of us. In a few days, you'll say "it was for the best, he's free now." Problem solved...

WOMAN: Even the possibility that he will clear that damned blockage is enough not to wish for something like that.

VISITOR: This is no wish. Your desire and your verbalization of this desire will bring the solution.

WOMAN: How will that be? I won't do it.

VISITOR: No, no. That would be murder.

WOMAN: Then what are you saying? Who will it be, who is gonna do it?

VISITOR: You needn't search so far for the one who'll take him away.

WOMAN: I don't understand you.

VISITOR: I'm right next to you.

(Silence)

WOMAN: You! What kind of person are you? Are you crazy? How can you suggest such a thing?

VISITOR: I'm neither a person nor am I crazy. I'm a real angel of death.

WOMAN: *(As if she didn't hear him)* On top of it you're his friend.

VISITOR: I'm not his friend. I said that so I wouldn't frighten you, a white lie. You know, the kind most people use all the time. You actually understood right away that I was that much anticipated angel of death but you pretended not to. Because, sub-consciously your emotional self became dominant and pushed your intellectual self aside. I owe my immediate recovery from fainting to this realization. As if you've never seen a drawing of me with my scythe in your whole life? Didn't you promise to approach this matter intellectually? What happened? Or are you going back on your word? You are a young woman. You are beautiful and quite attractive. You are the pinnacle of desire for many men, especially one particular man from your office.

WOMAN: But I was never with any man other than my husband.

VISITOR: I didn't say you were. But a six-month drought has awakened in you the need to feel certain pleasures again. Please don't fool yourself. You're right. Your predicament isn't easy. At least in your mind you think of being with another man. Even in seemingly happy relationships, these kinds of thought can become driving forces for such unions. Sexologists call them fantasies. Don't blame yourself. Everyone has these dreams. Even while they're in their spouses' arms, they're able to imagine another man or woman's smell, nose, mouth, lips, or sexual organs. Haven't you ever fantasized about another man? Even while in this man's arms? Tell me, didn't you?

WOMAN: *(Bewildered. Thinking MAN's asleep but still in a low voice)* I'm frightened of you. It's like you're reading my mind.

VISITOR: I've been a part of many such sessions. I understand. But now, even your fantasies won't be enough for you. Don't blame yourself, it's just reality. You've really missed the smell of a man. Maybe you've even begun feeling immensely happy that the man at work wants to be with you.

WOMAN: But I still don't go to his place, even though he invites me.

VISITOR: How long won't you go? Or are you waiting for it to turn into longing? Or waiting to hide in drunkenness?

(WOMAN crosses to MAN. Holds his hand. Thinks.)

WOMAN: Whatever you say is useless. You won't get results from me. Leave here. I love my husband. If there's even a possibility, I'm going to wait for him.

VISITOR: But I came here to take him away. I'm going to take him no matter what it takes.

WOMAN: No.

VISITOR: Otherwise they'll punish me.

WOMAN: I don't care!

VISITOR: But I do. Then let's find another solution. Let's find another solution together. I don't want to give up my chance to become a first-degree angel of death. Do you understand?

WOMAN: I don't want you to be harmed either. What can I do for you?

VISITOR: Let me take you.

WOMAN: What do you mean?

VISITOR: I'll do it easily. It's your choice. Believe me, it's not very hard to go. You'll be happy when you do.

WOMAN: Do you realize that you're making no sense?

VISITOR: You'll let your husband live by making a sacrifice. The High Council will disapprove of this but I may get away with a slap on the wrist. It'll be the first time in my career. There are examples...

WOMAN: No, no! That would be a meaningless sacrifice. (*Drops MAN's hand*) He's a patient whose recovery isn't certain.

VISITOR: Are you so quickly unwilling to exchange your life for his? While taking care of him, you won't even be able to go to the theatre. A person who doesn't attend the theatre is already dead. Then let's make it official and you'll be free of me.

WOMAN: You're wasting your breath.

VISITOR: You're blocking all options for me. But don't think I'm going to withdraw silently. I'm warning you! (*Takes up scythe*) Do you hear me? I'm going to take you!

(WOMAN tries to run away in the room)

VISITOR: This way your sacrifice will be realized!

(*Swings the scythe, WOMAN dodges every time*) And it would have been so nice to wash yourself with warm water and feel your friend inside you. And who's this sacrifice for? Your husband isn't exactly in an enviable position. While you were in the bathroom, he even signaled with his eyes for me to take him away.

(*The chase continues, but it is apparent that the VISITOR is trying to convince the WOMAN. He's missing her with his scythe on purpose*) Most important is your mother-in-law. If you expect her approval, that'll be your biggest mistake. She'll be alone with her son. Do you understand? They'll be alone together! (*WOMAN suddenly stops. So does the VISITOR*)

WOMAN: They'll live and I...

VISITOR: Yes, you won't even be able to shower! And that woman who's supposed to be your mother-in-law won't even bring flowers to your grave!

WOMAN: No, she won't...

VISITOR: In that case?

WOMAN: Isn't there another solution?

VISITOR: Is there?

(WOMAN thinks.)

VISITOR: There is no time left to think. Wait for your mother-in-law. Excuse yourself and go. Take a shower, water will bring you peace. Then a deep sleep. Don't blame yourself. Later on you'll say it was for the best, that he's free. You'll thank me.

(WOMAN sits on couch. The VISITOR lowers his scythe.)

VISITOR: And the Human Rights Commission won't be able to do a thing. They'll even get a bit puffy with the inner peace that comes with properly carrying out one's duties. And I'll go back to my wife in my red-shuttered home, to my three little angels with presents in my hands and the happiness of a job well done in my heart. My children and my wife will be waiting for me at the window. You're going to make everyone happy, including yourself. This will be the best solution. And your beloved husband will be free, everyone will be free!

(The VISITOR is silent. As WOMAN thinks uneasily...)

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

(The Visitor is in his overcoat. He puts his scythe in it's sheath. Woman is thinking on the couch. She is not, however, undecided. MAN's eyes are closed. He is lying motionless. There is some instrumental music playing on the radio. The VISITOR leans the zipped up sheath against the couch.)

VISITOR: *(Looks at his watch)* She's late!

WOMAN: She'll be here any minute.

VISITOR: I'm way behind schedule!

WOMAN: She shouldn't see you here. You should meet after I've left.

VISITOR: Don't even think about that part. You can rest assured that everything will stay between the two of us.

(Silence. Phone rings, WOMAN answers)

WOMAN: Hello!

VOICE: Hi!

WOMAN: Hi!

VOICE: Is his mother there?

WOMAN: She'll be here any minute.

VOICE: I hope she gets there soon.

VISITOR: *(Quietly)* Who is it?

WOMAN: *(Covering the phone with her hand)* My friend from work.

VISITOR: Oh him! Speak comfortably...*(Smiles knowingly)* Take advantage of the situation.

VOICE: Are you bored?

WOMAN: A little.

VOICE: It'll be good if she comes soon.

WOMAN: Yes.

VOICE: You feel bad, don't you?

WOMAN: Very.

VOICE: A nice hot shower will relax you.

WOMAN: I hope so.

VOICE: I just took one, it loosened me up. And a drink felt good. All my exhaustion is gone. I'm listening to some Vivaldi. My offer still stands.

WOMAN: I haven't forgotten.

VOICE: Will you come?

(WOMAN doesn't reply. The VISITOR can't stand it any more and motions to WOMAN to say yes)

VOICE: You haven't answered my question.

WOMAN: Yes...

VOICE: You just made me very happy.

WOMAN: *(Her voice is shaky)* We'll talk about this more.

VOICE: Yes, we will...we'll have plenty of time, after all.

WOMAN: But it all depends on her arrival.

VOICE: She must come soon. What should we do?

WOMAN: We're going to wait for her.

VOICE: I assume you won't take too long once she does.
(WOMAN and the VOICE are alone now, WOMAN Woman is unaware of the rest. We hear footsteps in the hall, the VISITOR realizes it's MOTHER and tries to warn WOMAN in gestures)

VOICE: I'm going to start drawing you a bath now. I'll even open the cap on the shampoo, so you can reach comfort as soon as possible.

(Even after shaking WOMAN, the VISITOR has no results, so he grabs his sheath and hides behind a curtain)

VOICE: You also ought to unlatch your bra now, you know how they can be hard to open.

WOMAN: Mine's easy.

(MOTHER enters. She has a music stand and a suitcase in one hand and a cane in the other. WOMAN sees her)

WOMAN: (Hangs up) Welcome.

MOTHER: (Puts down her things and quietly crosses to her son) Oh! Do I have to see you like this? (She is struggling not to cry. She holds her son's hand and begins to stroke it)

WOMAN: He'll wake up..

MOTHER: (Shooting a wild-eyed look at WOMAN) He's my son!
(Returns to the same softness as she turns to her son. MAN wakes up, sees his MOTHER. Her face slowly scrunches up, she's fighting the urge to cry)

WOMAN: (Softly) Don't cry. The doctors warned me not to cry in front of him. Go to the bathroom.

(MOTHER goes to the bathroom in fear of doing harm)

WOMAN: (After her) Cry your eyes out. When you come back you should have no more tears left to cry.

(There is a sound from the bathroom over the noise of the turned up faucet.)

VISITOR: (Sticks his head through the curtain) What if he gives up? (He motions for WOMAN to come closer. WOMAN crosses to him.)

A bath will relax you, relations will relieve you, and sleep will revive you! When you wake up in the morning you will feel like you were born again. Your skin will be tighter and more beautiful. It will come alive. You're lucky, tomorrow morning you will be rejuvenated. Turn your back to me.

(The VISITOR reaches up the back of WOMAN's blouse and easily undoes her bra. He does it not with the clumsiness of most men, but with ease, gentility, and care. Like pulling hair from butter) Now you're ready.

WOMAN: (Spellbound) Thank you. (Kisses the VISITOR's hand with deference)

VISITOR: You can't waste time or happiness. There is no greater pain than keeping a man waiting. If he douses his own flame, yours won't be satisfied. Waiting is also the greatest pain for

women as well. The volcano misses deflating and being left breathless. You have to prevent the lava from scouring the area.

WOMAN: What can I do?

VISITOR: Get her to come out quickly. Listen to her. That's too much crying, even for a mother. She'll refuel and let loose later anyway. Come on, hurry.

WOMAN: *(Crosses to the bathroom and knocks)* Come on out now.

MOTHER: Aren't I supposed to cry as much as I can?

WOMAN: Let's talk a little. How was your trip?

MOTHER: You think I even noticed what brought me here?

WOMAN: I'm very tired, I've been sleepless for days.

Actually, we already covered everything about him over the phone.

MOTHER: Who's him?

WOMAN: Your son.

MOTHER: My son and your what?

WOMAN: And my husband, but if I call him that, this will drag out.

MOTHER: Let it.

WOMAN: I just told you I'm very tired.

MOTHER: You know I enjoy this. I thought you did, too. Why did you lead me astray?

WOMAN: I don't and I didn't. But I do have to go to work tomorrow. I still have to take a bath. Otherwise we might have to get by on your social security.

MOTHER: Let's not.

WOMAN: Then let's finish this quickly.

MOTHER: As far as I can see, you don't enjoy arguing as much as you used to. You didn't used to stop just because you were tired. Admit it.

WOMAN: Maybe I'm not making myself clear. I've been taking care of your son for six months now.

MOTHER: If you hadn't sent me away, you wouldn't have gotten so tired.

(The VISITOR sticks his head out the curtain and motions for WOMAN to hurry)

WOMAN: Let's not open old files. I won't be the one who loses out in the end..

(The VISITOR is pointing insistently at his watch)

MOTHER: You think I will? Everyone knows who you are.

WOMAN: No one knows you, because you are an angel.

MOTHER: Don't you call me an angel.

(Even MAN has had enough of this. He's nearly on his feet just to put and end to it)

VISITOR: If they fight any more, he's going to clear the blockage. More importantly, the voice on the phone is going to be quiet, relax, and fall into a deep sleep.

WOMAN: All right, as you wish. You are not an angel, you're a demon.

MOTHER: That's enough!

WOMAN: No it isn't! I call you an angel and you take offence, I call you a demon and you get angry. I don't know what to say!

MOTHER: An angel she says! You think I don't know what you mean by that?

WOMAN: That's refreshing. Thank you, you've saved me the effort.

VISITOR: *(Sticks his head out and yells)* Get to the point, already! *(Withdraws)*

WOMAN: We'll pick up where we left off tomorrow night.

MOTHER: Then let's get to the point.

WOMAN: It'll be just as we discussed. I'll go to work during the day. I'll stop by here in the evenings and then go home. I doubt if you'll want to share this couch either.

MOTHER: I won't. My house will be sold next week anyway. The money will get here at the beginning of the week.

WOMAN: I found a condo to buy. It has two bedrooms and a nice big living room. One of the bedrooms is definitely mine.

MOTHER: That will be just fine. You won't be in the way all the time. And no one will be allowed in my room. My son will sleep in the living room.

WOMAN: We'll use your salary for the electric, water, gas bills and the like and mine for clothing, entertainment, and special needs. We'll get along famously.

MOTHER: Is there anything we haven't agreed on yet?

WOMAN: Not for now. But I'm sure that you'll do whatever's necessary when a new problem arises.

MOTHER: I hope you won't hold back your help. You're new at things like this, but you've gained a bit of experience. There's nothing left we haven't discussed. You may go.

(WOMAN puts on her raincoat and picks up her purse)

MOTHER: Oh, I almost forgot. Did anyone come by?

WOMAN: His friends, and mine from work, plus your lazy uncle.

MOTHER: Your ugly uncle didn't come?

WOMAN: Yes, my handsome uncle did. Oh yeah, and your idiot, I can't even remember his name. You know, that gossipy damned fool. Whatever his name was, he came by.

(The VISITOR Visitor angrily shows WOMAN his watch again)

WOMAN: I'm leaving.

MOTHER: Go!

(WOMAN exits. MOTHER loses her monstrous look and turns to her son with a soft, loving, and understanding gaze.)

MOTHER: My son! My child! *(Turns her back)* If he's like this because of her, may she have it ten times worse! *(Turns back to*

her son. She's loving again. So is he. They gaze at each other, full of love. MAN is barely keeping himself from crying. MOTHER takes a large towel from her bag and goes into the bathroom. The VISITOR comes out of hiding and goes out the door. MOTHER reenters with her towel, wipes away her last tears and wrings out the towel. Tears drip down. She lays the towel out to dry.) We're alone at last. You're going to clear out that blockage and get better. Maybe in a year, maybe in a month. Who knows, maybe in just a little while. Why not? As long as you believe. Because I'm by your side. Your mother...I'll always be here. I'm going to live for you. Now, we're going to start all over again, from the beginning. It's like you just let out your first cry. Your voice is still in my ears. They just washed you, wrapped you in a blanket and handed you over to me. You were such a beautiful baby. We're starting everything over from scratch. We're even going to talk to each other.

(MOTHER pulls a large box from her suitcase. All the letters of the alphabet are written on it. She places it in the music stand in such a way that both the audience and MAN can see it.) Do you see it? When you want to say something to me, just blink. Then I'm going to point to these letters, one by one. You're going to pick letters with your eyes. After each letter, I'll start over again. Up until you finish whatever it is you want to say. (MAN blinks to show he understands. Then he starts blinking more) You want to say something. Look, I understood right away. (She starts pointing at the letters one by one. After he picks one, she starts over) I...L...O...V...E. I love Y...O...U. I love you. Yes. M...O...T...H...E...R. Mother. (MOTHER leaves the box and hugs her son. They stay like this a while. MOTHER lets go her son and backs away a bit.) I want you to promise me something. No crying. None! (MAN blinks in agreement)

VISITOR: (Knocks on the door) Is anyone there?

MOTHER: Who are you?

VISITOR: (Opens the door and enters) Good evening.

MOTHER: Good evening, my child.

VISITOR: I'm a friend of your son's.

MOTHER: I don't recognize you.

VISITOR: Years can change a person. You fed me many a piece of candy in your lap.

MOTHER: I don't remember. (Still suspicious) Turn around, let me see.

VISITOR: I was shocked when I heard what happened. I came right away, despite the hour. How is he? How did he get like this?

MOTHER: You bribed the guards to come in.

VISITOR: (As if surprised) How did you know? Did you do that too?

MOTHER: Yes, I did. Plus they took it even after I said my son was lying in here. Tell me...

VISITOR: Your son is a bit younger than me. I was really fond of him. He was good at soccer, he chose becoming a doctor. You were going to match him up with such fine women, but he went and married a woman with no family history. Their unhappiness really upset his father, your husband. How old was your husband when he died?

MOTHER: Seventy. He was more fit than any young person I know. He didn't have any problems with his heart, his kidney, or with cancer. He didn't go to pray. He hadn't gone on the pilgrimage, but he was secretly very religious. He had a lot of compassion for people, especially women. He used to say there wasn't another country with as many widowed women. Then he'd add, "We have to take care of these women who are left behind."

VISITOR: I don't quite follow.

MOTHER: He took care of three other women besides me. He fed them and kept them full. He went too early, much too early. Was he the type of man to fall down a fire escape and die? Poor thing thought there was a step where there was a gap. He didn't see so well towards the end.

VISITOR: Was there a fire in your house?

MOTHER: He was in the apartment of a woman he was caring for. He was trying to escape when... (*Suspicious*) what is that, in the case?

VISITOR: It's a violin. Just a violin.

MOTHER: Why do you have a violin?

VISITOR: I'm a...musician. I'm a violin virtuoso.

MOTHER: That's wonderful. I like artists. They're sensitive people. So, I like you too. Would you give me a little concert?

VISITOR: When?

MOTHER: Now!

VISITOR: Where?

MOTHER: Here!

VISITOR: Here?

MOTHER: Or don't you play in hospital rooms?

VISITOR: I can't.

MOTHER: Why not?

VISITOR: Would it be appropriate for me to play while my childhood friend lies here in this condition. I must say, I'm a bit put off.

MOTHER: There's nothing to be put off about. You know as well as I, music is the food of the soul.

VISITOR: That saying is for the healthy. Your son is sensitive as it is. The sound of the violin will make him more sensitive and he'll cry. Do you want him to cry?

MOTHER: If my son's sadness is an issue, I'll make any sacrifice. Please, don't play.

VISITOR: Thank you for your understanding.

MOTHER: But you can't tell me he'll cry just from seeing the violin.

VISITOR: I don't understand.

MOTHER: There's nothing not to understand. Open the case and show me the violin!

VISITOR: It is a violin.

MOTHER: Then there's no reason for you not to show it to me.

VISITOR: You don't trust me, I'm saddened.

MOTHER: Show me!

VISITOR: You're implying that I'm a liar. I'm not a liar.

MOTHER: Prove it!

VISITOR: You're the one calling me a liar. If I am a liar, you should have to prove it.

MOTHER: Easy, hand it over.

VISITOR: Why should I?

MOTHER: If a violin comes out of it, we'll see that you aren't a liar.

VISITOR: Take your hands off it! You may not touch something that belongs to me!

(There is an unbelievable struggle between the VISITOR and MOTHER. The VISITOR hugs the case tight as MOTHER tries to take it from him. MAN moves his brows and eyes as if trying to help the VISITOR. The VISITOR finally wins the struggle and wrests the case away from MOTHER)

VISITOR: You can't prove that I'm a liar. As you can see, I'm not a liar.

MOTHER: Get out of here. Otherwise I won't give up trying to prove you're a liar.

VISITOR: I applaud your effort.

MOTHER: You cannot be my son's friend. I don't know you. Leave.

VISITOR: Do you see what condition you put your son in? I'm afraid that if you behave that way again, you will do him a lot of harm. You are a mother, but with these actions you are close to being your son's reaper. People should leave that job to professionals.

(MOTHER crosses to her son and strokes his hair lovingly)

MOTHER: Don't be afraid! As long as there is life in this body, no one will harm you.

VISITOR: There isn't anyone who wants to harm him. That is a meaningless paranoia.

MOTHER: Isn't there?

VISITOR: No.

MOTHER: There is!

VISITOR: Who?

MOTHER: You!

VISITOR: (*As if he's surprised*) Me?

MOTHER: Yes you. I don't like you, you're an odd person.

VISITOR: You're mistaking me for someone else.

MOTHER: I haven't gone senile yet.

VISITOR: Did I call you senile? Where did you get that from?

MOTHER: You're behaving just as I expected you to. You're hiding your identity.

VISITOR: I'm a musician, and I'm proud of it.

MOTHER: It's too bad you're not proud of the profession you aren't telling me about.

VISITOR: I told you I'm a musician.

MOTHER: One career isn't better or worse than another. The rain is bad for street vendors but good for farmers. Work is work. Tell me, who are you? What do you do?

VISITOR: (*Gives up resisting*) It's a tough job. It goes on day and night. There's no real family life. I'd like to take my kids out on the weekends. Of course, I go to fields and mountains by myself. I go out to sea, I fly in the air, but it's always on business. I'd be lying if I said I didn't resent it at first. But I got used to it. Because I have a holy, untouchable career. Do you know the pleasure of aiming a weapon that is about to fire? Or the wonderful anticipation that comes with knowing a plane engine will malfunction on your cue? Did you ever detonate a bomb? Have you ever seen kings, presidents, and prime ministers fall before you and shake? Were you ever the executioner who swings the blade to sever a head from its body upon a king's command? (*With pride*) I love my job very much.

MOTHER: I understand, you're the grim reaper. I knew your father. I remember you know. Your father was a successful reaper. What's he doing these days?

VISITOR: (*Thinks for a bit*) He retired. His emotional state was a bit low, he was institutionalized for a while. They suggested that he write his memoirs as part of his rehabilitation. Now, he writes his memoirs, gets sad about all of it and cries. He spends time with his grandchildren. He tried to issue a statement denouncing his actions. His friends from the Commission stopped him.

MOTHER: Maybe he should have, it might have brought him some peace. He hurt a lot of people.

VISITOR: But if you ask me, confronting his past isn't a good way to get him through the memoirs. Our only consolation now is that the book is going to sell a lot. It's already being translated into English, French, and German. The Russians and the Japanese have also expressed interested. The Japanese had an interesting idea. They want to put it on a cd-rom and distribute

millions of copies. Lower production costs make it possible, they say. But the Americans say a well marketed, easy-to-read and colorful book with pictures in it will reach large audiences, including kids. But our real goal is to have it translated into Chinese. It's a different world over there. Almost half the world's population.

MOTHER: What's he going to call the book?

VISITOR: "Memoirs of a Grim Reaper."

MOTHER: Good, it'll sell. I'll buy one right away.

VISITOR: Don't. I'll bring you a signed copy. But this Chinese translation business is dragging and it's bringing the whole family down. In order to bypass Party bureaucracy, they say we have to wait for the some planning period or another.

MOTHER: I guess they're going along with the privatization craze too, these days.

VISITOR: That's our only hope. If, amid this flurry, they find room to publish our memoir book, we're set. Sales will be enormous. Our heirs and their heirs will live well.

MOTHER: I'm glad. Tell him I'm congratulating him in advance.

VISITOR: What if the privatization falls through? Can't you see? It looks like the privatization of health, culture, and education seems to be causing even more problems around the world. Balances are being tipped. There are mix-ups, racism is rampant, wars are breaking out.

MOTHER: All this just because of privatization?

VISITOR: Undoubtedly not. But it sped up the chaos. I'm afraid the way things are going, our China dreams will evaporate. People are suffering a lot. I go to these countries often and I'm saddened.

MOTHER: Are their troubles your problem? Don't let it get you down, it'll get solved.

VISITOR: I talked too much, I think. My mouth is all dry. May I take something from the fridge?

MOTHER: If there is anything, go ahead.

(He goes to fridge, takes a soda)

VISITOR: Would you like one?

MOTHER: No, thank you.

VISITOR: *(Drinking from the bottle)* Since you know who I am, there's no need to draw it out any more.

MOTHER: I can pretty much guess what you're going to say, but go ahead anyway.

VISITOR: I've been given this assignment, but I have to get your approval.

MOTHER: You didn't use to get approval? You didn't care.

VISITOR: Old ways are all gone now. Democratization, human rights, there's all sorts of problems for us now. I want your approval.

MOTHER: That's up to God. How could you expect such a thing from me?

VISITOR: But there are good reasons here.

MOTHER: They may be good reasons to you, but they have nothing to do with me.

VISITOR: There are good reasons for you to.

MOTHER: What are these reasons?

VISITOR: There are so many, where should I begin?

MOTHER: Tell them all, lets hear these good reasons of yours.

VISITOR: Tell me, is there hope for our son's recovery?

MOTHER: It's just a little blockage. If he gets rid of it, he'll get up and walk. Isn't that a good reason?

VISITOR: I must say I'm surprised that you refer to it as just a little blockage. That little blockage is the reason he's in this condition.

MOTHER: If he clears it, the reason is gone.

VISITOR: When will he clear it?

MOTHER: I don't know, but he'll clear it.

VISITOR: A month, a year, five years...when?

MOTHER: I don't know that part, but whenever it is, he'll clear it.

VISITOR: So you say you'll wait.

MOTHER: Do you doubt it? Why do you doubt me? I'm a retired woman. I don't have anything to do. There is nothing to tie me to life except my son. My house is about to be sold. I'm about to buy a condo nearby. I'm not going to leave my child's side.

VISITOR: Does buying a condo solve the problem?

MOTHER: In a large way it does.

VISITOR: Your social security won't even cover the incidental condo expenses.

MOTHER: We have the bride's salary, too.

VISITOR: I recommend that you don't place too much trust in her. She's a young woman.

MOTHER: I never have trusted her and I won't start now. My husband had thought it would be good for the future and bought some land. It's by the sea, fifteen hundred acres. I'll sell it. I'll have a comfortable sum. I'll put the money in an interest-bearing account. That'll be ten times more than both our combined salaries a month. And I won't have to depend on anyone for money.

VISITOR: But don't let the high interest rates fool you. They could drop tomorrow. And mountains won't last if you don't build on them. But forget that, too. You won't be able to go outside even for a minute. How would you leave this child? You talk as if you don't even know how much time it takes to pay the power bill. It takes at least half a day. And half a day for the telephone...what about the water?

MOTHER: These problems are solved once you pay the right people. You know the saying, money makes the world go round.

VISITOR: And what if they take the money and run?

MOTHER: Who?

VISITOR: These people you give the power money to.

MOTHER: I'll find a trustworthy people. For example, the doorman of my new building.

VISITOR: I see you have a lot of faith in doormen.

MOTHER: I take it you don't know how much cash it takes to become a doorman. Becoming a doorman is a good investment.

VISITOR: You've thought of everything.

MOTHER: How could I not? He's my son.

VISITOR: I'm going to violate etiquette, but may I ask how old you are?

MOTHER: Sixty.

VISITOR: And what if it takes twenty years for him to clear the blockage?

MOTHER: I'll be eighty.

VISITOR: How can you be so sure you'll live that long?

MOTHER: Since there's a hope of him walking, I'll live.

VISITOR: You shouldn't be so sure.

MOTHER: (Picks up her cane) Why?

VISITOR: You tell me. How's this going to work?

MOTHER: I eat a cucumber every morning. And I drink a glass of lemon water. Midday I eat a matchbox-sized piece of cheese. An apple, a small yogurt, in the evening a plate of salad. But never any butter. And at night I eat another fruit, in season. And one glass of milk. I don't watch scary movies. I don't ride busses, I don't smoke, I don't wait in long lines. I never eat the three whites, flour, sugar, and salt. Didn't you know that? They make you job much easier. And I walk a lot. Is there anything else to keep me from living a long life?

VISITOR: I can see you've prepared yourself for such a sacrifice.

MOTHER: You're misusing the word sacrifice. A sacrifice is to give from yourself. But I'm a mother, what I do isn't a sacrifice, it's my duty.

VISITOR: And what about me? Don't you feel for me? Don't I have a mother?

MOTHER: What does that have to do with anything?

VISITOR: I won't be able to do my duty! Because you won't give your approval!

MOTHER: There's no reason to drag this out, you may leave now.

VISITOR: I should leave, huh? I'll never get promoted. You are a mother. You should be concerned with the condition of all your children.

MOTHER: That's why I'm here.

VISITOR: Is it easy being a mother? It's amazing. "The only true tears are shed by a mother." They don't say it for nothing. You can be a true mother only when you've taken all the children of the world in your arms. Mother is not the one who gives birth, but the one who raises and feeds. Can just anyone become a mother?

MOTHER: You're saying things that could only come out of my mouth.

VISITOR: Please let me finish. I'm also one of your children. I can barely keep myself from calling you mom. Mom! Momma! Mother!

MOTHER: Don't get silly on me.

VISITOR: I'm sorry. What I'm trying to say is something else. Maybe you don't want to understand me.

MOTHER: You can't expect me to give up my child just because you're not going to get promoted. Get out of here. Grab your junk and go. Don't you understand, go now!

VISITOR: Then give me permission to take you in his place.

MOTHER: Is that a real suggestion?

VISITOR: I thought you'd do anything for your son? I see you will withhold your life.

MOTHER: If I go, he'll be left alone with his wife. And truth be told, I don't trust his wife. When I leave him, who will take care of this child? It is best you leave!

VISITOR: *(Gets angry)* Since I couldn't convince you, I'll have to use force! I'm warning you! I'm going to use force!

MOTHER: *(Wields her cane like a sword)* I wouldn't recommend it!

VISITOR: *(Takes out his scythe)* You're making me angry! I'm sorry to have to raise my fist at my elder, please God, forgive me!

(They circle each other, trying to find an opening...MAN is quite nervous...VISITOR swings his scythe, MOTHER expertly blocks...VISITOR swings again, another block)

MOTHER: As you can see, I know all defensive moves. Your effort is a futile one. Leave before defeat, keep your honor.

VISITOR: I've never lost. Besides, fighting isn't just defense.

MOTHER: Nine tenths of manhood is knowing when to run. Say goodbye and leave!

(VISITOR attacks with renewed vigor, MOTHER defends)

VISITOR: I only know attack and conquer. No need to waste time with defense. You can't be as experienced as me. Give up while the bear is big.

(VISITOR uses all his tricks, passes the scythe from hand to hand and attacks again. MOTHER sidesteps like a matador and sends the VISITOR in the direction of his attack. VISITOR slams into the opposite wall. MOTHER comes up behind him with incredible speed, grabs him by the neck of his coat and throws him on his back.)

She steps on his hand until he lets go of his scythe and kicks it away.)

MOTHER: I warned you.

VISITOR: What are you going to do to me?

MOTHER: What do you want me to do?

VISITOR: I want an honorable death.

MOTHER: Death is death, it's being extinguished. And mother's don't do that. Get up and leave before I change my mind! *(She picks up the scythe. The VISITOR gets up with great defeat)*

MOTHER: Say hello to your father for me. Congratulate him in advance on his book. If he signs it and sends me a copy, I'll read it with pleasure. I hope it sells well.

(Phone rings. MOTHER puts down the scythe and answers the phone.)

MOTHER: Hello?

WOMAN: *(In a nervous voice)* It's me...

MOTHER: What's wrong? Did something happen? Didn't you go home?

WOMAN: I did. But I came back. To apologize to you.

MOTHER: Where are you calling from?

WOMAN: The hospital entrance. Yes, we're going to take care of my husband together. Until he clears the blockage.

MOTHER: Understood. You forgive me. Go get some rest. *(Hangs up)*

MOTHER: *(To the VISITOR)* Why are you still here?

VISITOR: Aren't you going to give me my weapon?

MOTHER: No! Get out of here.

VISITOR: I hope we meet again someday. If I keep my job. Can I say one more thing?

MOTHER: Go ahead.

VISITOR: Whatever I say now is empty. You're going to live and see. Don't ever forget this...Human flesh is heavy.

MOTHER: But a son's is light.

VISITOR: What love is this? My lord, what endurance! Maybe this approach will bring heaven on earth. Who knows?

(VISITOR opens the door and exits)

MOTHER: That's done. But what about the reapers outside? *(MAN blinks)*

MOTHER: *(Crosses to box)* Go ahead, my son. Say it. W...I...L...L... Y...O...U... T...E...L... M...E... A... S...T...O...R...Y? Will you tell me a story? I'm going to eat up those sweet lips! Who else would I tell stories to? I'll always tell you stories.

(Turns on the radio. Sits down next to her son. WOMAN enters, silently sits down next to her husband. Holds his hand and caresses it. Listens quietly)

MOTHER: Once upon a time...in a land far away...when there were bad kings in most of the lands...there were those who thought they were

angels of death. The sky came tumbling down as if to feed the fields. In order not to see the young, lifeless bodies, people tuned off their televisions, didn't read the papers or magazines...The mothers were first to notice what was going on. At first one by one, then with their men, they took to the streets...
(MOTHER's voice has become inaudible. As she silently tells her story...)

THE END

First version: July 19 1994
Second version: January 3 1996
Third version: January 26 1996
Istanbul
Translation: October 9, 2000
New York