

The Rats

a city tragicomedy

freely adapted by Mark Jackson
from *Die Ratten* by Gerhart Hauptmann

Draft 2.5b

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The Rats

a city tragicomedy

CHARACTERS

Henrietta John, about forty.

Paul John, works in construction, a few years older than his wife.

Bruno Mechelke, younger brother of Henrietta John, a simple brute with a perpetual nosebleed.

Paulina Piperkarcka, an unlucky girl.

Harold Hassenreuther, a former theatrical manager now apartment building manager.

Willa Hassenreuther, his earnest daughter, precise in her speech.

Alice Knobbe, once a child actor, now perhaps involved in prostitution and definitely an addict.

Selma, teenage daughter of Alice Knobbe.

Emil Quaquaro, the building handyman.

Erika Spitta, theology student and would-be actor. Like Willa, there is a kind of romantic properness about her that is nevertheless utterly sincere.

TIME & PLACE

An economically depressed time in a struggling neighborhood of a large American city.

SCENE

A single space that evokes an old apartment building. It is bare and open, like a stage, save some racks of old theater costumes and a few trunks of the same. As in classic theaters, this space may serve for all locations in the play, and nothing else but essential props need be used. Somewhere on the street below maybe there is a discarded piano, accordion, percussion, zuka or other instruments, which could be used by characters not in a given scene to underscore the action.

NOTES

Gerhart Hauptmann wrote Die Ratten in 1911 in a thick, heightened Berliner dialect, the nuances of which are sometimes untranslatable into English. I've attempted to invent an American dialect so as not to limit the play to one U.S. region, era, or another. The play could be set in the Seventies, Thirties, or on theater time. In any case, due credit must be given to Ludwig Lewisohn, whose 1913 English translation of Hauptmann's play was of great help to me in deciphering Hauptmann's idiosyncratic grammar and spelling.

Regarding race and ethnicity. I encourage casting that reflects the American neighborhood and era a given production decides upon. Character names may be altered accordingly with my prior written permission. Except for Paulina Piperkarcka! That's too good a name to change, so keep her Polish. Unless of course you come up with another good idea. ;-)

A slash (/) at the top of a line means it overlaps at a logical point in the previous line. A dash (-) at the top of a line means one should come in tightly to the previous line.

Texts in [brackets] are possible additions, cuts, questions, or alternate translations, tbd.

ACT ONE

HENRIETTA JOHN enters the attic abruptly, shoving PAULINA PIPERCARCKA by the scruff of the neck, then cornering the girl. PAULINA's face shows signs of long weeping, and her belly betrays imminent motherhood.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Alright then, that's right, what I say to you, Paulina.

PAULINA

I'll jump in the canal and drown myself.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Paulina! Why then? Why then, Paulina? Pay attention to what I'm proposing to yuh. I says to you right out when I seen your condition. He don't want to acknowledge nothin', eh? The pig! That's what I asked you straight out. Happens to a lot o' girls here, to all of 'em, a million girls or so. And then I said. What did I say? Come on. I said I want t' help yuh!

PAULINA

'Course I can never show myself at home now, what I've turned into. Mother, she'd scream at the first look a' me. Father, bash my head on the wall and chuck me in the street. And money, I don't have that now either.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Miss, my husband is in construction. He goes places and gets work all the time. Why he's been away good part of a year now an' workin' steady. You'll be helped out an' the same way I'll be. And Paul, that's my husband, he'll be helped, because he'd like more than anything to have a kid, and our little Albert he died o' the cough. Your child will be cared for like it was our own. The kid 'll have it good. And nobody in the whole world has to know.

PAULINA

I'll drop myself in the canal! An' write a note! I'll leave a note in my jacket, says you drove Paulina into this water with your damned meanness! Then he'll see how with my death on his conscience HE'LL be finished!

BRUNO, with his perpetual nosebleed, older than his age on the surface but younger in the head, whistles from the fire escape like to a dog.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Bruno. What do you want then?

BRUNO

Thought I was to set those traps.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Did you put the bacon in 'm? It's jus' my brother.

PAULINA starts to move but MRS. JOHN holds her in place.

HENRIETTA JOHN (cont'd)

It's jus' my brother, you can stay put. Boy, what are you lookin' that way for again? The young lady is o' course gonna get scared o' yuh.

BRUNO

Broo-hoo-hoo-hoohr! I'm a ghost!

HENRIETTA JOHN

Hurry up into the back and set your traps.

BRUNO

Yeah, that's business to die starvin' on.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Do you wanna go and leave me alone then?

BRUNO

Don't go on so, I'm goin' soon enough.

PAULINA

I wouldn't want to meet that one in the park. Not by night and not by day neither.

HENRIETTA JOHN

God help whoever I set Bruno on an' he gets at him.

PAULINA

G'bye. I don't like it here, Miss John.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Paulina, I brought up Bruno with trouble an' grief day an' night. Your kid'll have it twenty times better. So when it's born, Paulina, I'll take the kid, and I swear by my mother an' father who died with God, who I go visit every Sunday an' put a pair o' candles on their grave, the little worm 'll have it good, better than any born prince or princess would have it.

PAULINA

I'll go with my last penny and buy me some gasoline. My landlady can wait. I don't care who it hits! An' throw it in that girl's face he's goin' with. I don't care who it hits! Right in the face! I don't care who it hits! Burn his whole damn pretty mug off him! It's the same to me! Burn his hair right off him he goes to some other girl's room! I don't care who it hits! Cheated me! Ruined me! Stole my money! Stole my honor! Like a damned dog he seduced me, left me, lied to me, kicked me like a bum! I don't care who it hits! I want him blind! I want his nose burned off! I want him off the whole face o' the earth!

HENRIETTA JOHN

Paulina, with all my happiness, from the minute that child is born into the world, from his first look, he's gonna have, like if he, I don't know what! Like he was born in silks and satins! I've thought it all out. It can be done, Paulina, it can, it can, I tell you! And no doctor or police or landlady has to know anything! And then first thing you get [a hundred twenty dollars] I saved scrubbin' here for Mister Hassenreuther.

PAULINA

I'd rather strangle it when it's born than sell it.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Who said anything about selling, Paulina?

PAULINA

Look what all the heavenly misery I've stood from October last year to this day. My felluh throws me out.

(more)

PAULINA (cont'd)

My landlady throws me out. What do I do that I have to be hated and people damn me an' throw me around?

HENRIETTA JOHN

That's what I say. It's because now the devil is always gettin' the upper hand on our Lord Jesus.

BRUNO

-(teasing) Street lamps!

HENRIETTA JOHN

You wanna go where you're supposed t'?

BRUNO

Ah Jette I only said "street lamps."

HENRIETTA JOHN

You cracked? What does that mean, street lamps.

BRUNO

Well, isn't that the front door bell ringin'.

HENRIETTA JOHN

...I don't hear it.

BRUNO

You old dried up nut box, get yourself a better pair o' ears on yuh. If that theater felluh comes he could ask me what's up on the spot.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Don't talk nonsense. Why would HE ring the door to get in?

BRUNO

(to Paulina) You might not believe it, Miss, but at the circus I took that dumb clown's donkey around the ring three times. I'll do anything. I'd be afraid o' me.

PAULINA

...Joseph 'n' Mary where am I?

HENRIETTA JOHN

Miss, you go in the back for two minutes if y' would.

PAULINA does what she's asked, and begins to sob horribly as she exits.

BRUNO

...What do you want with her, merciful sister?

HENRIETTA JOHN

Not your business, understand me?

BRUNO

I just ask because you was so afraid you kept her hidden between you and the wall. Otherwise it doesn't make no difference to me.

HENRIETTA JOHN

And it never should!

BRUNO

What are you gettin' worked up for, what did I do to you? What do you want, I gotta go to my girl now, I'm sleepy.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Stay here and don' move, Bruno, you're always goin' in bad directions.

BRUNO

Aw what do y' want with me? And then let me get goin'.

HENRIETTA JOHN

You're good for nothin' but your sister, who's not right in 'er head to feel sorry for such a lowlife and hoodlum.

BRUNO

Could BE you're not right in the head sometimes.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Our father always said to me to put no more stock in you an' that I should let y' hang. And my husband, you can't be seen next to so good a man.

BRUNO

I know I know all that, Jette! But things aren't so easy to even out these days. I Know I weren't born in no castle. Good then! What do y' want? You're not keepin' me to get rid of the rats. You just wan' 'o hush up something wi' that little blackbird.

HENRIETTA JOHN

You give one dead word o' this away and I'll make a cold corpse o' you!

BRUNO

Well look, you see? I'm makin' myself scarce.

BRUNO slips into the back room where PAULINA went. MRS. JOHN stands thinking for a moment. Then WILLA HASENREUTHER tiptoes in, not seeing MRS. JOHN at first. WILLA looks about eighteen, innocent, bookish, earnest, and dressed in an intentionally plain way, though she appears to have attended to her appearance just a bit more today than she might normally.

Papa? Papa?

WILLA

Well, Miss Willa.

HENRIETTA JOHN

/Oh!

WILLA

Don't ring the alarm, you can be quiet. It's just me here.

HENRIETTA JOHN

(trying to laugh) God! I had a horrible fright there, Mrs. John.

WILLA

What are you so merrily searching for on Sunday here? An' who's scarin' you? Y' ought 'o know from your Papa that Sunday and every weekday I'm workin' up here on keepin' his boxes and racks free o' dust and moths. By the time I finish goin' over the eighteen hundred theater rags he's got up here it's time to start all over again. What's frightening? I don't see nothin'.

HENRIETTA JOHN

But you do look like a ghost, Mrs. John.

WILLA

Well, little ghost, why've YOU come here?

HENRIETTA JOHN

Me? Oh. I'm only going for a walk.

WILLA

To here? Well you can walk right back out.

HENRIETTA JOHN

You needn't tell Papa that I was up here.

WILLA

I don't have anything better to do?

HENRIETTA JOHN

And should Erika Spitta ask after me...

WILLA

...Well?

HENRIETTA JOHN

Then be so kind as to tell her that I was here, but I left again at once.

HENRIETTA JOHN

So I'm to tell Erika Spitta, but not Papa?

WILLA

Oh please no, Mrs. John.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Just you look out. Many a one lookin' like you has come from your part of the city and gone to the dogs in some gutter or down some side street here.

WILLA

Surely you're not suggesting, Mrs. John, that there is anything [unlawful or] improper in my relations with Erika Spitta!

HENRIETTA JOHN

Shut your mouth!

MRS. JOHN has grabbed WILLA by the mouth and now hustles her into the back room where PAULINA and BRUNO both went, for SHE has heard someone coming. As soon as THEY are gone, HAROLD HASSENREUTHER appears. He is in his fifties, clean shaven, with a slightly grand, noble, at times fiery air about him.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

Mister John? Misses John? Misses John? John John?

HASSENREUTHER whistles a jaunty old music hall tune as he adjusts his clothing. Just then ALICE KNOBBE appears in the doorway. She's likely in her mid-thirties, but has lived a life that's added more years to her face. There is something at once confident and damaged about her. At present she is sober. Without even first turning to look at her, HASSENREUTHER has heard her and checks his watch.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER (cont'd)

On the minute. When these young ladies care to be they are punctual. Little Alice, little Alice!

ALICE

I haven't been little in years.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

Come here little Alice, into the light. I must see if you're still the same mad little, great little Alice from the best days of my directing career! Hopefully you have not forgotten how I was.

ALICE

Now, Mister Director, you don't think I'm ungrateful?

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

My lady, you have indeed grown even younger.

ALICE

Yes but you know it's a bit dim up here, Harro. You could open the window a little. The air's a bit thick.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

In all seriousness I've gone through dark and difficult times. Moths and dust! Dust and moths! *(laughs)* That is all that my efforts for American culture have earned me. But let us speak of happier things! You say you are still performing!

ALICE

I don't care about that. I'd rather perform for you, like the old days. And you must promise me, when you're running a theater again, promise me-

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

/(laughs!)

ALICE

I've had enough with that place I'm workin'. God, the people who goes there. Their hands on yuh. ...But you know I belong there too. ...I don't like this city.

ALICE looks at HASSENREUTHER, who opens his arms. After a moment's consideration SHE seems to fly into them and plants a kiss on him. Then:

ALICE (cont'd)

Go on then, Harro, now tell me. How is your wife?

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

Ah, Teresa? gets along very well, though she gets fatter from day to day. Young lady, young lady, how lovely you smell. Do you also know how devilish and dangerous you are?

ALICE

You think I'm an idiot? I know I'm dangerous. Your wife know you're here with me? She know about my letter and how you gave me and my two kids that little apartment downstairs on the cheap?

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

Holy christ.

ALICE

You think if I didn't know it was dangerous, dangerous for us both, I'd make this appointment with you up here in this lovely room? If I wasn't already goin' in bad ways?

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

Ho! Yes, but you see, one gets used to that here. All the soiled petticoats and trousers that have swept up and down these old steps, driving their dark trade with cries, cringes, creeping, moaning, sighing, sweating, cursing, muttering, stealing. The sinister people that hide here, living in need and hunger and misery. Too staggering to write it if one tried! And your old director, last but not least, runs, groans, sighs, sweats, cries and curses, as they say: with the best of them. Young lady, things have for me gone pretty wretchedly.

ALICE

Darling, you look like a senator, like an ambassador you look you do.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

Drink your fill. Carpe Diem! As they say. Seize the day!

THEY kiss again. But someone is coming!

ERIKA

(off:) Willa, it's me.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

Quiet! Quiet! Go! Go! *(to himself)* "Willa, it's me?" I'm not Willamina. Who's calling my daughter here?

ALICE has dashed off but is too late and vanishes amongst the costumes as ERIKA SPITTA enters. She looks twenty-one or so, wears glasses, has a keen look in her eye and is dressed conservatively like a theology student, which she is, but with a dash of adventure in the detailing. SHE does not stand up straight and her body shows signs of too much study and too little food.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER (cont'd)

Ah, it's you, Miss Spitta! Come. What is your wish? Did you intend to give my daughter a private lesson here in this attic?

ERIKA

Forgive my intrusion. I took the liberty of coming upstairs because I thought to myself maybe Willa might want accompaniment home from this neighborhood.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

Very good, very good, but I do regret she is not here, good Miss Spitta. I myself am here by chance to pick up the mail, and unfortunately I also have other pressing matters to get to, so. I am a hunted animal, my dear.

ERIKA

Even so, I must look on this unexpected meeting as fortuitous and beg a minute of your precious time.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

Exactly one minute, by the watch. ...Well?

ERIKA

Do I have the talent to be an actor on the stage?

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

For the love of God, have you gone insane? Forgive me, dear lady, if I am a bit uncivil. But you have made a very unnatural leap. I must first catch my breath, and then put an end to this. You are a theologian, my good Miss, and born in the house of a pastor. You have all the connections and everything you need for a smooth and comfortable life. How then did you arrive at such a thought?

ERIKA

Yes, that is a long story, a long story of great inner struggle, Mister Hassenreuther. A story that until this moment has been an absolute secret known only to me. But I had the good fortune to find my way to your house when you hired me as Willa's tutor, and from that moment on I felt myself nearer and nearer to my true purpose in life.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

That does me honor. An honor to me and my family. And yet I must now make the urgent request that from this moment you abandon any further discussion of this matter. Now if you will permit me my business cannot be postponed.

ERIKA

Then I would like only to add that my decision is absolutely firm.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

But dear young lady, you want to become an actor? With your sloping shoulders, with your spectacles and above all with your hoarse and sharp voice? It is not possible!

ERIKA

If in life such odd people as I exist, why shouldn't they also be on the stage? And I am of the opinion a smooth well-rounded voice combined with the classical school of idealized artifice is more harmful than helpful. My question is only whether you would take me, just as I am, as your student?

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

No! I could not be responsible to your father for such an action.

ERIKA

My father has already been informed of the change that has taken place in me.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

Enough! And now come with me, before I go insane!

HASSENREUTHER forcibly escorts ERIKA out of the room and they are gone. There is a silence in their wake. WILLA enters distraught, followed by MRS. JOHN.

HENRIETTA JOHN

What is it then? There's nothing happened.

WILLA

Mrs. John, I'll scream. I'll scream, I must. I can't hold it in, Mrs. John.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Then stuff a handkerchief between your teeth like I done THAT one. There certainly ain't nothin'. What's the matter with you?

WILLA

I'm frightened to death, Mrs. John!

HENRIETTA JOHN

I'd like to know what you're so scared about.

WILLA

Did you not see that horrible man?

HENRIETTA JOHN

What's so horrible. That's my brother.

WILLA

And that girl who sits with her back to the wall and whines?

HENRIETTA JOHN

You bet you're mother didn't do no different when you came into the world.

WILLA

I'm finished. I'm dead if Papa comes back.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Well then hurry and go an' stop foolin' around.

MRS. JOHN hustles WILLA toward the door. But HASSENREUTHER is coming so MRS. JOHN pulls WILLA to the side and covers her mouth. As HASSENREUTHER enters, whistling as he does, THEY slip back into the back room.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

...Alice? Little Alice, come again. *(to himself)* If anyone else dares interrupt our Sunday quiet... Where are you little Alice?

A half empty bottle rolls out from the costume racks.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER (cont'd)

Ope! Half empty. Someone's happier already.

HASSENREUTHER exits through the costumes where ALICE had vanished. After a moment, BRUNO enters and stands on the fire escape for a smoke. Then MRS. JOHN enters with bloody rags in her hands and stares out, stricken and hopeful.

ACT TWO

The Johns' flat. PAUL JOHN is on the fire escape having a smoke. MRS. JOHN is in the flat with the baby in her arms.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Must you smoke then, Paul?

PAUL JOHN

I don't have to, Jette, only I like to.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Do you have to go to the Public Registry Office again?

PAUL JOHN

That's what he said there, that I come back an' tell him the exact place an' time the little one was born.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Why didn't you tell him THEN?

PAUL JOHN

Do I know it? I don't know it.

HENRIETTA JOHN

You don't know it?

PAUL JOHN

I wasn't here was I?

HENRIETTA JOHN

If you go an' leave me sittin' here for a whole year, an' come visit me maybe once every too many months, what WOULD you know what happens in your own house.

PAUL JOHN

I go where I can earn good money.

HENRIETTA JOHN

I wrote you in my letter that our boy was born here in this room.

PAUL JOHN

I know that. An' I told him that. That's natural, I said, that it was born in my house. And he said: that is NOT natural! Well then, I said, for all I care it was up in the attic or the basement with the rats an' mice, I got so mad. Not natural. Then he yells at me: an' now I gotta give him the exact day an' hour.

HENRIETTA JOHN

And I wrote all that out for yuh in my note, Paul.

PAUL JOHN

When a man gets mad he forgets things. I bet if he'd 'a' asked me are you Paul John, construction worker, I'd 'a' answered "I don't know then." Well an' then I'd already been a bit jolly with ol' Fred and we'd 'ad some drinks an' who comes along but Sammy and Karl an' they says how I need to straighten up because I'm a father now.

HENRIETTA JOHN

I wish yuh had gone drinkin' after, Paul, and tended to what you were supposed t' before.

PAUL JOHN

THAT you say! But when you pull a trick like that at your old age, Mother, you can't blame me for bein' glad and a bit o' celebration.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Okay. And now go and say to the Registry that your wife had your kid at Noon exactly on May twenty-fifth in your apartment.

PAUL JOHN

Wasn't it the twenty-sixth? I told them it was May twenty-sixth.

HENRIETTA JOHN

...Ah-, that's right. Then leave it how it is.

PAUL JOHN

Well good then.

SELMA KNOBBE enters the apartment with a baby in her arms, clearly unhappy with it. SELMA seems a sullen teenager, occasionally determined if not too bright. MRS. JOHN moves away from her.

HENRIETTA JOHN

No no Selma, comin' in our place with that sick kid. That was okay before but not now.

SELMA

Mother ha'n't been home yesterday or today. I can't sleep at night with this kid. Thing moans the whole night. I have to get some sleep sometime. I'll jump out the window, or I'll leave the thing in the middle of the street and run off!

PAUL JOHN

He looks bad. Mother, why don't you take the unlucky little heap a while.

HENRIETTA JOHN

March on out. That's no good, Paul. When you got your own y' can't look after strangers' too. That Alice Knobbe should look after what she does.

PAUL JOHN

You used t' always look after the Knobbe woman's little snot noses.

PAUL winks to SELMA and nods at her to go away, which SHE does.

HENRIETTA JOHN

I don't want our little Albert catchin' sore eyes or cramps or some other contagious thing.

PAUL JOHN

That's prob'ly right then. Only don't call him Albert, mother. That's no good, callin' a kid by the same name o' one that died unbaptised eight days after it was born. Don't do that. I can't stand for that, mother...

THEY are in silence for a moment. Then WILLA enters a step with a large wrapped gift and stops. Not seeing her, MRS. JOHN exits with the baby into a back room. WILLA stands silent and awkwardly for a moment before HASSENREUTHER'S booming voice is heard and he enters.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

My God this city is hot, ladies and gentleman! Ah, good day, Mister John! So, one gets a glimpse of you again. We are come to greet you after the happy event.

PAUL JOHN

Mother's gettin' along again halfway.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

One must say that your dear wife throughout the long period of waiting never once complained, her work upstairs with my costume stock always well done.

MRS. JOHN has entered, without the baby.

HENRIETTA JOHN

I have a good husband, Mister Hassenreuther, who's solid and cares for me. But for such a man where his brother has a young son in the army now, it's no kind o' life havin' no kid his own. Starts thinkin'. There he is on the road makin' good money and opportunity, and then wants maybe to go wander out to California.

PAUL JOHN

Oh, Jette, that was only a thought.

HENRIETTA JOHN

You see, with us small people it's a sore earned living we make, but still. (*runs her hand through PAUL'S hair*) If there's one more who has even more worries than you - you see there the tears in his eyes - then he's happy.

PAUL JOHN

Ah, those are for three years ago: we had a little feller, and in eight days he left us.

HENRIETTA JOHN

I can still see Paul how he sat with the little coffin on his knees and wouldn't let the cemetery felluhs take it.

PAUL JOHN

That's right. That I wouldn't...

MRS. JOHN claps PAUL on the shoulders. A short silence, soon broken:

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

And just think, today at our dinner table we raised a glass of wine - did we not Willamina? Wine! For years now, tap water in decanters is all we have raised at the table. But we must drink, said I, to the health of our good and brave Mrs. John, as she is proof that God is not indifferent to the cry of a mother's heart! And so we drank to you. And now I bring to you this very special and particular gift.

HENRIETTA JOHN

What is that then?

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

An Apparatus for the Sterilization of Milk! Now, of course, it is one of the symptoms of the general decadence of our age that the majority of mothers are either unwilling to nurse their offspring or incapable. I am certain you are neither of these, Mrs. John. But as you have already lost one child on account of diarrhea or some similar ailment, in order that such things may not happen again, I say, I have brought you this apparatus. And so, I congratulate you with all my heart. Brava! And you, Mister John, Bravo. An emperor needs soldiers.

HASSENREUTHER shakes PAUL'S hand vigorously.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER (cont'd)

How much did he weigh at birth?

HENRIETTA JOHN

He weighed exactly eight pounds ten ounces.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

Eight pounds ten ounces of fresh American flesh! I expect he has your nose and eyes, Mister John. His father all over again. And what are his baptismal names to be?

HENRIETTA JOHN

I thought Bruno, but he doesn't want it.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

Bruno? That's not a bad name.

PAUL JOHN

That may be, that Bruno is no bad name. I won't say no more about it.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Why don't you say that I have a brother named Bruno twelve years younger that sometimes goes a little off the way? Only 'cause of temptation. The boy is good. Just you don't believe in him.

PAUL JOHN

Jette you know what a cross Bruno's been. What do you want? Should our little feller be the namesake of a man under police supervision? God help me! I tried with Bruno, got him a job in that machine shop and got nothin' back but annoyance an' disgrace. God help me he come around an' have anything to do with my little feller. Then Jette, then I woul'n't be responsible for myself.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Don't go on, Paul, Bruno isn't comin' around. But I can tell you this much, that my brother has been good and helpful to me through this hard time!

PAUL JOHN

Why didn't you send for me, Jette?

HENRIETTA JOHN

-Because I didn't want a scared man!

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

...So then: the whole business with this Apparatus is child's play. A frame holds the bottles, each bottle is to be filled with two-thirds milk and one-third water and is lowered into the boiler, itself filled with boiling water. By keeping this water at the boiling point for one hour and one half, in this manner the content of the bottles is rendered free of germs.

PAUL JOHN

I'll uncork the good brandy.

An uncomfortable silence while PAUL leaves to fetch a bottle and four shot glasses. WILLA quietly hands MRS. JOHN the package. PAUL returns, passes out the glasses and pours the first shots.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

Those who have shall be given, Mrs. John. ...Come, Mrs. John, you must drink with us.

PAUL JOHN

Well come, mother, we'll all drink together.

MRS. JOHN sets down the package and takes the shot glass. THEY all raise them and toss them back. PAUL pours a second round and THEY raise and toss it back. PAUL then pours a third round and THEY raise and toss it back.

PAUL JOHN (cont'd)

My boss c'n send some other feller on the road. It won't do for a father to be always an' ever away from his family. For twelve years I been workin' for that boss. I can afford to make a change sometime.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

Our family life is a matter that neither money nor kind words can buy from us.

ERIKA SPITTA enters dishevelled, with mud on her clothes, her glasses broken, and looking pale and worked up.

ERIKA

Forgive me, could I come in to clean myself up a little, Mrs. John?

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

Ho ho! For God's sake what have you been up to, good lady?

ERIKA

I only escorted a woman home, Mister Hassenreuther. I've often seen her on the steps of this building and she had an unfortunate accident in the street.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

What do you say? Tell us, Miss Spitta.

HENRIETTA JOHN

It's that Alice Knobbe woman. She ought to be put up in some public place she ought, strapped to a block an' beaten with a lash, with a stick until the blood spurts out her.

ERIKA

I have never imagined that the Middle Ages were really over and done with. I'll have to go to the optician.

PAUL JOHN

Jette she knew right off it couldn't be anyone but than the Knobbe woman, that's known for sendin' girls o' twelve out into the streets when she's not there herself or drinkin' or all kinds o' customer service. And her kids she don't take care of. And when she's drunk and wakes up and beats 'em through with her fists an' umbrella?

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

Come Willamina. Until we meet again, ladies and gentleman!

HASSENREUTHER makes a quick exit. WILLA lingers near the door. A moment's silence.

PAUL JOHN

...G'bye then too, Mother. I gotta go see the boss.

PAUL smiles to MRS. JOHN and pats her shoulder. HE looks at ERIKA, pours her a shot and leaves it near her along with the bottle and a rag, and then goes.

ERIKA

Could you lend me a shirt, perhaps?

WILLA steps back in, closer to ERIKA.

HENRIETTA JOHN

I'll see what I can find.

As MRS. JOHN exits to do this, ERIKA continues using the rag to clean herself up a bit and WILLA comes closer to her. ERIKA briefly touches her tenderly and then keeps cleaning up.

MRS. JOHN returns slowly as if in a trance, with a small lock of hair tied with a blue ribbon in her hand.

HENRIETTA JOHN (cont'd)

I found a little lock of hair here, that was cut off the head of my little boy, my little Albert, by his father when he was lyin' in his coffin there... An' now the crib is full again after all. Look. Look, isn't this just the same hair, just identical as on my new one wouldn't you say?

ERIKA

Exactly the same, yes.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Good. Good. That's all I wanted.

MRS. JOHN exits with the lock of hair.

WILLA

Don't you find, Erika, that Mrs. John's behavior is peculiar?

ERIKA

I don't know. My opinion can't count at the moment because everything that's happened colors the world and my mind is torn.

WILLA

You want to be an actor? Is it true?

ERIKA

What I'll be in the end is up to God. My father is coming to visit, Willa, and no doubt the old sir will make trouble for us.

WILLA

An evil, envious, venomous star hung over our unlucky rendezvous. How I used to admire my Papa! But since that Sunday I blush for him. Since then I can't look him straight or freely in the eye. Now I tremble that even you might find out, and you would despise us.

ERIKA takes WILLA by the hands.

ERIKA

Despise you? Willa, I will only be frank with you, from this moment on. My sister, six years older than me, something happened to her, and she sought refuge in my parents' home, and my Christian father put her out the door! His Jesus would have done the same! And so my sister gradually sank, and someday if you like we can go together to visit her in the little graveyard for suicides where she finally found rest.

(more)

ERIKA (cont'd)

You're always surprised when I get worked up and that I sometimes can't control myself when I see some poor devil get kicked around, or when I see people mistreat some unlucky girl. I have hallucinations sometimes, in broad daylight, and think I'm seeing the ghost of my dear dear sister in them.

PAULINA PIPERKARCKA has entered already, dressed as before. Her face seems to have grown paler.

PAULINA

Good morning.

HENRIETTA JOHN

(*off:*) Who is it there?

PAULINA

Paulina, Mrs. John.

MRS. JOHN enters and looks at PAULINA.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Paulina? I don't know any Paulina.

PAULINA

Paulina Piperkarcka, Mrs. John.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Who?

WILLA

Adieu, Mrs. John.

WILLA looks to ERIKA, and THEY exit hastily. PAULINA steps forward into the room. Then MRS. JOHN does as well, and looks at PAULINA very firmly. PAULINA is unable to look back, though her voice nevertheless reveals a certain strength.

HENRIETTA JOHN

So it's you then, Paulina. An' what is it you want then?

PAULINA

What would I want? It drove me here. I couldn't wait no longer. I had to see how it goes.

HENRIETTA JOHN

What then? How what goes?

PAULINA

Well, if it's well. If it's gettin' on okay?

HENRIETTA JOHN

What should be well? What should be gettin' on?

PAULINA

You should know what without my sayin'.

HENRIETTA JOHN

What ought I know without your sayin'?

PAULINA

Whether the kid isn't alright, or.

HENRIETTA JOHN

What kid? And why would anything not be alright? Talk straight, y're babbling and there i'n't a clear word out o' your mouth.

PAULINA

I'm only sayin' what's true, Mrs. John.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Well what then?

PAULINA

...My kid.

-MRS. JOHN slaps PAULINA across the face.

HENRIETTA JOHN

You say that again and I'll bang my boots around your head so long you'll think you're the mother o' triplets. Now get out! And don't ever come lookin' around here!

PAULINA

She hit me! Help! Help, she's mistreated me, Mrs. John has!

MRS. JOHN'S attitude changes completely.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Paulina, for God's sake, Paulina, I don't know what got into me! You just be good an' I beg your pardon! What should I do? Should I get down on my knees, Paulina? Paulina! And beg your pardon?

PAULINA

Why d'yuh go 'n' hit me in the face? I'm goin' to the Police and tell them that you hit me in the face here! I'm tellin' 'em! I'm goin' to the Police!

MRS. JOHN takes PAULINA'S hand and starts slapping her own face with it.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Here! You c'n hit ME in the face! Then it's good! Then it's even! Come, Miss, make it exactly even! Come!

PAULINA pulls her hand away and MRS. JOHN starts slapping her own face herself.

HENRIETTA JOHN (cont'd)

There, come, Miss, hit ME! Hit ME! Come! Make it even! Come, hit ME! Hit ME! Hit ME! Hit...

MRS. JOHN has spent that and stops, panting. PAULINA is bewildered and takes MRS. JOHN in steadily and wide-eyed.

PAULINA

Why do you has to be so mean an' rough on a poor girl like me, Mrs. John?

HENRIETTA JOHN

That's it. That's what I'd like to know myself. It's fine tha' you come to see me. How many beatings did I get from my mother because sometimes I didn't know myself. How goes it with y', Paulina, and what are y' doin' now then?

...PAULINA reaches into her jacket pocket, pulls out a wad of money and thrusts it toward MRS. JOHN without looking at it. MRS. JOHN immediately looks away from it herself.

PAULINA

...Here's the money, I don't need it.

HENRIETTA JOHN

I don't know nothin' about any money, Paulina.

PAULINA

It's burned me. It was like a snake under my pillow.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Oh, where now.

PAULINA

It crept out. It tormented me. It wound around me. It squeezed me so th't I screamed right out.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Let that be now, Paulina. Take some of this brandy here first.

PAULINA

No I don't want nothin'! ...Now I want to have a look at it.

HENRIETTA JOHN

At what then, Paulina? What would you want 'o see then?

PAULINA

I want to see what I come to.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Ah! What d'you wanna see? What d'you wanna see now all of a sudden? That what yuh wanted with those two hands of yours to throttle?

PAULINA

Me?

HENRIETTA JOHN

You wanna lie about it still? I'll report YOU then!

PAULINA

Now you've tormented and bled and tortured me enough, Mrs. John! YOU followed ME! Followed ME and wouldn't leave me no peace! 'Til I brought my kid into the world on a heap o' rags in your attic! Yuh gave me hopes! Yuh scared me! Yuh baited and hounded me 'til I gone crazy!

HENRIETTA JOHN

And that's what y'are still! That's right: y're entirely and all crazy! What, I tormented you? Is that what I done? I picked you up out o' th' gutter, with eyes that was desperate scared! I tortured yuh! To keep you from jumpin' in the water with a child under your heart. "I'll throw myself in the canal, Mother John! I'll stab the worm to death! I'll go, I'll run, to the bar where his father plays the Zither [Zuka] and throw the dead kid at his feet!" That's what you said. That's how you talked - all the blessed day long and sometimes half the night too 'til I gave you a bed here and stroked y'r hair 'til finally yuh got to sleep. That's right, that's how I scared YOU, givin' you hope again, that's how I never gave y' any peace! Have you forgot all that have yuh?

PAULINA

(slowly, bewildered) ...But it's my kid, Mrs. John.

HENRIETTA JOHN

-You go an' get y'r kid out o' the canal! Jump in the water an' find it!

PAULINA

...'Til I know where my kid is, 'til I seen 'im with my eyes, nothin' an' nobody is gettin' me away from here.

HENRIETTA JOHN

...Paulina. ...I sent him away. ...To be looked after.

PAULINA'S heart breaks.

PAULINA

...Liar.

...PAULINA grabs at MRS. JOHN and shakes her.

PAULINA (cont'd)

Liar! Liar! Liar! Liar! You take me in to see my kid now!

MRS. JOHN grabs PAULINA hard and stops her.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Girl. You look at my face. You think you can play with a woman who looks like I do? If you want in here, then y're dead. Or I'm dead. And then that kid is also dead.

MRS. JOHN lets PAULINA go and PAULINA pulls away.

PAULINA

Good. Don't let me in, Mrs. John. G'bye. I only come anyhow to tell you be at home tomorrow evening at five o'clock. Why? Because tomorrow an official 'll come an' take a look. An' I don't ha' to worry myself with you here no more.

HENRIETTA JOHN

What, you-? You reported?

PAULINA

O' course so. I should want to go to jail? You got t' give notice o' that.

HENRIETTA JOHN

And what did you give notice about?

PAULINA

That his name was [Aloysius Theophil / Alojzy Teofil] an' he was bein' cared for with you, Mrs. John.

HENRIETTA JOHN

And tomorrow someone 'll come to see.

PAULINA

He's a gentleman from the Guardian Office. What else then? Now you be quiet an' be sensible.

HENRIETTA JOHN

(distracted) Of course now. Now there's nothin' else to do. There's not much more else.

PAULINA

...And now can I see him once?

HENRIETTA JOHN

...Not today. Tomorrow. Tomorrow, Paulina.

After a moment, MRS. JOHN takes PAULINA's head tenderly and kisses PAULINA on the cheek, and PAULINA hugs her. Then PAULINA stands there for a moment. SHE seems strangely changed and absent. PAULINA exits.

HENRIETTA JOHN (cont'd)

...Alright then. Let him come, girl.

SELMA appears in the doorway, and walks cautiously up to MRS. JOHN.

SELMA

...Mother's asleep, Mrs. John. An' I'm really hungry. Can I get a piece o' bread?

MRS. JOHN does not move or respond.

SELMA (cont'd)

...It's me. ...What is it then?

HENRIETTA JOHN

Fear. Trouble. That you know nothin' about.

SELMA slips back out. MRS. JOHN remains where she is a moment, then picks up the package Hassenreuther had brought and exits.

ACT THREE

The attic. ERIKA SPITTA is in the middle of a private acting lesson with HASSENREUTHER. WILLA is there. QUAQUARO, the building handyman, is on the fire escape smoking. Under HASSENREUTHER'S watchful eye, ERIKA is warming up with a rhythmic set of tongue twisters.

ERIKA

Whether the weather is cold, or whether the weather is hot, we'll be together whatever the weather whether we like it or not. Whether the weather is cold, or whether the weather is hot, we'll be together whatever the weather whether we like it or not. Clickety clickety clickety clickety clack. Clickety clickety clickety clickety clack. Red leather yellow leather good blood bad blood, red leather yellow leather good blood bad blood.

ERIKA repeats this many times, getting faster each time. Finally:

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

So, enough with the weather and leather, Miss Spitta, intoxicate us now with the text.

ERIKA stretches out her face a bit.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER
What are you doing now? For God's sake, Miss Spitta: *The
Bride of Messina* chorus now go!

ERIKA
...I salute thee-

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER
-No. Again.

ERIKA
...I salute thee-

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER
-Oh! Nonsense.

ERIKA
...I salute thee with reverence-

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER
-Are you not serious?

ERIKA
...I salute thee with reverence-!

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER
-No that is too loud.

ERIKA
...I salute thee-

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER
-Too quiet.

QUAQUARO begins to cough a bit.

ERIKA
...I salute-

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER
(to ERIKA:) Hold please. (Then to:) Quaquaro? Mister
Quaquaro. What is it? Finished? Thank you. Onward Miss
Spitta.

ERIKA
...I salute thee with reverence-

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER
No, take it as I said. Again.

ERIKA
...I salute thee-

-HASSENREUTHER chuckles despairingly.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER
Miss Spitta, it's too quiet. Go.

ERIKA
I-!

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER
No!

HASSENREUTHER raises a hand to conduct ERIKA.

ERIKA
...I salute thee-

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER
-Keep going-

ERIKA

-with reverence,

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER
-Yes-

ERIKA
-my glittering chamber; Thee, my ruler's royal cradle,
magnificent roof supported by columns. Deep in the sheath let
the sword rest. Before-

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER
-Pause! period, period, period! "Deep in the sheath let the
sword rest!" Pause!

ERIKA is not certain if she should speak.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER (cont'd)
...You may drive on, if you wish.

ERIKA
Deep in the sheath let the sword rest... Before the portal
lies discord's snake-haired monster confined, for this-

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER
False! Do you not know what a period means, have you no
knowledge of the elementary? "Snake-haired monster confined,"
period. You must imagine a post is planted there. Period. And
for one moment all is still as death, Miss Spitta! Like you
are wiped out of the world. For one moment: Stop! The
audience, to the last usher, has got to be one vast quivering
gooseflesh when you speak! One shiver must run through every
bone in the house!

(more)

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER (cont'd)

And THEN, out from your chest with your best trumpeting voice: "Deep in the sheath let the sword rest, period period period; Before the portal lies discord's snake-haired monster confined. Period!" Now, Mister Quaquaro is waiting endlessly. Let us break for a moment. Mister Quaquaro, I asked you to please come up here because it has become clear to me that several costumes have gone astray, in other words been stolen. But before I go to the authorities, I want to hear your advice as handyman of the house. For in a back corner there was found, how should I say, a peculiar mess, a bloody display, a find of which a hospital might be best to notify.

QUAQUARO

...Well, Mister Hassenreuther, if you like I can go back and take a look.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

Oh-ho! You do that. "Take a look." Mrs. John was even more disquieted by this find than myself, and Miss Spitta, my pupil, may now not be persuaded that something like a murder has not taken place up here. But you go "take a look," yes.

With no apparent urgency, QUAQUARO heads over to the entry of the back room, stands and looks in for a moment, then exits there.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER (cont'd)

Alright, Miss Spitta, in medias res.

ERIKA recites this text simply, clearly, and sincerely, without any bombast.

ERIKA

Anger burns my heart in my breast. My fist is clenched for the struggle. For I see the head of Medusa, my enemy's hated face. I can scarcely control my boiling blood. Shall I grant him the honor of words? Or obey my angry courage? I only fear the Fury that abuses this place and the good sense of God's grace.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

...Finished, Miss Spitta?

ERIKA

Yes.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

Thank you. ...You see, Miss Spitta, either I say to you brazenly to your face that I find your elocution beautiful, and be guilty of the most contemptible lie, or I say I find it hideous and then we have between us another most beautiful row.

ERIKA

-Yes, all this stilted rhetorical speaking is unnatural to me. That is precisely why I have abandoned theology, because to me the preacher's tone is repulsive.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

Therefore you wish to reel off this tragic chorus like a court clerk or like a waiter mumbling a menu?

ERIKA

I hate the entire sonorous bombast of *The Bride of Messina*.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

...Say that again, Miss Spitta?

ERIKA

It's not something that can be changed, Mister Hassenreuther. Our conceptions of dramatic art diverge totally in certain respects.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

Madam! Your face at this moment is the very emblem of impudence and delusionary grandeur! I, and you?! You, the total Neophyte? *Pardón!* But you are MY pupil now and no longer the tutor of my child. I have already told you ten times that your puerile little views on Art are nothing but a paraphrase of the wish to idiocy. Of the heights of humanity you know nothing. You recently asserted that under certain circumstances a barber or a cleaning woman would make as good an object of tragedy as Lady Macbeth or King Lear?!

ERIKA

Before Art as under the law all human beings are created equal, Mister Hassenreuther!

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

/Oh, is that so!

ERIKA

This ideal has to me become second nature!

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

Is that so!

ERIKA

And if the American theater is to recover, it must grasp the youthful, vigorous truth, the full complexity of Art and the richness of all people in life, in order to be a match to Nature!

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

If human arrogance and especially that of the young could be crystallized, humanity would be buried under that rock like an ant beneath the granite masses of the Himalayas!

(more)

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER (cont'd)

You are a symptom. So don't take yourself as something important. You are a rat! You cheat us of the reward of our efforts! And in the garden of American art this rat plague gnaws at the roots of the tree of idealism. Down, down, down in the dust with you! Out, Miss Spitta! Up and out of here, Miss Spitta! Out!

MRS. JOHN has entered and caught the end of this and ERIKA now passes her by on her way out. WILLA stands amazed and remains. HASSENREUTHER points to MRS. JOHN'S pale, astonished face.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER (cont'd)

Oh ho! Here comes your tragic muse, Miss Spitta! *(laughing)*
Oh thank God she is gone! But tell me, have you seen a ghost?

HENRIETTA JOHN

Why do you ask that?

QUAQUARO returns from the back room.

QUAQUARO

-Well I had a good look around came to the conclusion that maybe some homeless rabble spent the night back there, though how they got in I don' know. And then I found this here in a boot.

QUAQUARO holds up a half-full baby bottle.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Oh. That there. I was up here organizin' things once an' had little Albert with me. But I don't know nothin' about the rest. How Albert came into the world, how he died, nobody should come and tell me what a real mother is. But I have to go now, Mister Hassenreuther. I can't come up here for two or three days. G'bye, I have to go with my new little Albert out to my sister's and show him the summer air.

MRS. JOHN exits.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

What did she just babble there?

QUAQUARO

There's been a screw loose in her ever since she had her first kid, and looser after it died. Since she now had the second one, there's two screws wobblin'.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

And, so, what should I, the robbed, now do?

QUAQUARO

That depends on where the suspicion is.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

Someone in this building?

QUAQUARO

That's true alright. It shouldn't be long before the next clean out, if you ask me. There's that gang that lives in the back, that the police should be diggin' out soon. And then there's that Alice Knobbe woman and her crowd should be thrown out. How she managed to get herself put up here I'll never understand. Must 'a' known somebody. ...Always put it plain, Mr. Hassenreuther. Always put it plain.

Having said this last bit rather pointedly in HASSENREUTHER'S direction, QUAQUARRO exits. WILLA and HASSENREUTHER are alone.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

A dreadful, greasy fellow! And you, my dear, you'll get boxed about the ears if without my permission you exchange two more words with this wretch of a broken theologian! This bean sprout behind whose mask the most shameless impertinence lies!

WILLA

I do not share your opinion of Erika, Papa.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

You give her the boot or out with you! I will have nothing to do with such daughters!

WILLA

You have always said, Papa, that you too had to find your own way without your parents.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

You are not a man.

WILLA

Certainly not. But you think a moment about Alice Knobbe.

FATHER and DAUGHTER look one another firmly in the eyes.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

...What are you-? Mad? Eh? Have you a fever?

...PAULINA enters carrying a baby in a bundle, rubbing its head. QUAQUARO soon enters after her. WILLA remains as well.

PAULINA

I only want 'o speak to Ms. John. She's always up here with you.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

Yes. But I am beginning to regret that fact.

PAULINA

I couldn't find her downstairs in her place, Mrs. John.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

Well she can't be found up here with us, either.

QUAQUARO

This young lady's had her little son taken care of by the Johns, she says.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

Very good.

QUAQUARO

And now a gentleman's come from the City Child Protection Office to see how the kid is and if it's well cared for and in good health an' all.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

WHERE has the child been taken care of?

QUAQUARO

With Mrs. John, she says.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

That is complete nonsense. That is incorrect. Mrs. John has nobody else's child in her care but her own.

PAULINA

She had a kid in her care. She had my kid in her care. An' a gentleman from the city came an' said the kid was in bad hands an' neglected. She nearly destroyed my kid she did. I want to see Mrs. John. I want to say to her face. She's gotta make my kid well again. I gotta go to court. I want 'o speak to Mrs. John. That's all I say. I don' need t' tell all the world everything.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

My young lady, you seem to mean that Mrs. John has no child of her own and that what you are holding there is yours.

PAULINA

Lightning strike me down if that's not so.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

May God not take you at your word in this moment. You must know that I am the manager here, Hassenreuther, and I have personally held Mrs. John's child in my hands two or three times. It weighs over eight pounds. This poor child here must weigh no more than four.

(more)

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER (cont'd)

[On the basis of this fact I assure you this child is indeed not the child of Mrs. John.] I know Mrs. John's child, and I am certain that THIS child is not at all identical to it.

PAULINA

This child is plenty enough identical, even if it's a bit badly fed and weak! Everything here is exactly right! I'll swear an oath that it's correctly identical! The man from the city was here with me! I got my kid out o' Mrs. John's room where it wasn't cared for!

QUAQUARO

It could also 'a' been the door across the way to Alice Knobbe's you went through. Who knows what you're up to with that kid, who sent y' or bribed y'. You don't have a good conscience. You took it and then ran up here, because it's rightful mother, Alice Knobbe, where it's been stolen from, is searching all over the stairways and halls and because a police detective is across the way.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

Everyone here knows Mrs. John's child, and the one you have there is another. Do you understand?

QUAQUARO

That's right, and the Knobbe woman's kid has been stolen.

ALICE KNOBBE enters in a rush, very emotional, failing to mask it well when she tries, and her eyes betraying addiction in action. SELMA follows soon and slowly after her. And ERIKA also comes back.

ALICE

Harro- Ah, Mister Hassenreuther, pardon me if I am intruding, I, I am looking for my little son. He's disappeared from my room. I don't want to disturb you. I'm afraid I caused an alarm downstairs. I asked whether my uh, (*snaps her fingers trying to remember, then does*) Selma, was with them with my son. But I don't want to cause a scandal, or. Draw attention. Harro. Hassenreuther. Sir. I'm a poor one, pursued by Fate; I have sunk and I have seen better days. But I don't want to bore you. I am hunted and there are those who would rob me of my last hope. Not enough to put away my good name. I lived in Paris. And married a brutal person. Because I had the foolish thought that my life might be better that way.

QUAQUARO

She's far gone.

ALICE

I'm so glad, Harro Director, to look in the eyes of a man of culture and wit.

(more)

ALICE (cont'd)

I could tell you a story- when I was young I was not far off from being a "countess." That's what they called me. I was an actress. And in my youth my, naiveté-. I made a mistake. Oh I could perform for you a story of my life, of my past, so exceptional it could not be invented.

QUAQUARO

Ah, who knows.

ALICE

My misery is not invented. I am a trodden worm, sir. And yes, I don't long for one second to go back there, to that brilliant misery.

QUAQUARO

Now would you mind coming to the point?

ALICE

Mister Hassenreuther, I' forgotten what shame is. Whatever you've heard about me don't think my better senses 'ave sunk entirely into this swamp I've had to drop myself into. I need this swamp I'm on equal footing there this- look, look!

ALICE pushes up her sleeves and stabs playfully at the underside of her arms as with a fork:

ALICE (cont'd)

Forgetting, unfeeling, freedom, tied and shackled to this forgetful unfeeling freedom, (*showing her arms*) this is how! (*suddenly defiant to the world*) ...And why not? Who am I responsible for?! Mama and Father tore at each other over me because each said I loved them best!

QUAQUARO

Shut up! Now tell us if this here is your kid!

Under the following, ALICE, who up to now has seemed not to even notice the baby, becomes fixed on it and draws closer. PAULINA doesn't moved.

PAULINA

Wha' do want o' me? Why you comin' after me? I should be goin' in houses and stealin' kids? You got no sense! When I ha'n't enough to eat for even myself and my own kid!

QUAQUARO

The main thing is still who here does the kid belong to.

The room's attention is very much on the baby.

ALICE

...I swear by the holy mother of God, by Jesus the father and son an' ghost, I am the mother of this kid.

PAULINA

An' I swear by the holy mother of God...

WILLA

Papa. Papa, look at the baby.

EVERYONE looks closely but PAULINA, who continues to stroke the baby's head.

QUAQUARO

Ye'. I think that kid's been dyin' since I went into that back room there.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

This child is dead.

PAULINA

What's the matter then?

QUAQUARO

Come with me.

ALICE seems to have lost the power to speak. WILLA pulls at ERIKA and they exit, but ERIKA stops near the door, where QUAQUARO is also waiting. ALICE turns and looks uncomprehendingly at SELMA. Then SHE sticks a handkerchief in her mouth. A sob is heard growing deep inside of her. SELMA exits. ALICE turns and slowly staggers out, her sob growing louder through the handkerchief as she goes. PAULINA has not moved.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

Invent something like that, Miss Spitta.

ACT FOUR

The Johns' flat. PAUL JOHN is on the fire escape having a smoke. QUAQUARO is there with him.

QUAQUARO

...Tell me Paul, how long has your wife been with the kid at 'er sister's?

PAUL JOHN

Oh, that must be around a week now, Emil. You want something from 'er? ...By the way, I might as well tell y' Emil. We're goin' on the first o' October. I got it to the point at last we can move out o' this shaky ol' barracks an' to a better neighborhood.

QUAQUARO

Ah. An' not goin' out on the road no more?

PAUL JOHN

No, no, no! Stay here in the city and eat honestly. Not always goin' from place to place. A man don't get younger. No, it's good this never-ending wandering comes to an end.

QUAQUARO

Your wife must be good an' happy then.

PAUL JOHN

Well, a new marriage where there the first kid just come? Yeh, I said to the boss: I'm newly married! He asked me if Jette was dead. On the contrary, she's lively an' happy as she jus' brought a new little American kickin' into the world. When I was on the train back into the city this mornin' an' stepped off it for the last time the devil nab me if I didn't sigh to God. He may not o' heard me over the noise o' the trains. Last time I hear that noise.

QUAQUARO

...Did yuh hear, Paul, that over at Alice Knobbe's the youngest has been taken away dead?

PAUL JOHN

No. But if it's dead that's good. When I saw that worm a week ago it was plenty ripe for Heaven the looks of it.

QUAQUARO

Your wife was always burnin' to 'ave a son.

PAUL JOHN

Well d'yuh mean something like I didn't? What do I slave away for then?

QUAQUARO

...Can you give me any tip where the last roof your brother in law's been under?

PAUL JOHN

What, Bruno?

QUAQUARO

Yeh.

PAUL JOHN

I'd sooner look after the dogs in the gutter. I don't want to know nothin' more about Bruno.

QUAQUARO

Listen to me Paul now an' don't get riled. Namely that at the police station they know Bruno was seen with that Polish girl, the one tha' made a claim to that dead kid, first outside the door here an' then another place. Now that girl 'as entirely disappeared.

PAUL JOHN

I don't know, but I don't wanna hear about that this mornin'. I was enjoyin' myself and now I'm in a bad mood. I don't wanna hear more about it.

QUAQUARO

I only thought I might tell y' a little about what's been happening in your own house.

PAUL JOHN

My own house?

QUAQUARO

Yeh. An' there's more. That girl more 'an once said in front o' witnesses, first that that worm o' Knobbe's was her kid, and that it had been put specifically in your wife's care, Paul.

PAUL JOHN

That's it then, she's not entirely right in the head. So good, Emil, I know now an' I'll do what's right by it.

After a moment QUAQUARO exits. PAUL sits thinking as he looks over the city...

PAUL JOHN (cont'd)

...Selma!

SELMA comes in and pretends to be annoyed to have been beckoned by PAUL.

SELMA

...What then?

PAUL JOHN

Now tell me what's happened here with your little dead brother and with that strange girl?

SELMA, who clearly has a bad conscience, now steps forward hesitantly. SHE then recounts the details a bit too loudly.

SELMA

...I- brought the kid over. Your wife wasn't there. An' I thought, what- since my brother was sick and always cryin', that there'd be more quiet for him here. Then all of a sudden, this man and a lady come in.

(more)

SELMA (cont'd)

And then she picks up the kid, and carried him off. Any more I can't say. I just don't know. So I just can't say. They wanted to take my mama to jail because people put together an' lied that our little kid starved to death.

PAUL JOHN

'S 'at so. Well you go an' make some coffee or somethin' for y'self now.

SELMA gladly scuttles out to get herself something from the John's kitchen. PAUL thinks more. ERIKA slips in and up to PAUL. ERIKA appears ashamed.

ERIKA

Hello Mister John, is your wife here?

PAUL JOHN

No.

ERIKA

...I really hoped to see her. Someone told me, Mister John, that your wife sometimes lends out small sums to students against some security. I'm a bit embarrassed.

PAUL JOHN

That's her business, Miss. ...Muggy day. It'll thunder soon.

ERIKA

I'll be entirely frank, if I don't get some money by tonight I'll be on the street.

PAUL JOHN

I thought your father was a preacher.

ERIKA

Last night I had a terrible fight with my father the preacher.

PAUL JOHN

No one wouldn't believe how many starved idiots there are with you students. But none o' y' wanna touch straight honest work.

ERIKA

You can't say that of me, Mister John, that I don't want to do straight, honest work. I've been through everything already. And at the same time I've hauled my books and ground away at my studies.

PAUL JOHN

Oh, then let 'em give you a job as a bricklayer. When I was old as you I was already on the road and makin' coins for it.

ERIKA

I'm an intellectual worker, Mister John.

PAUL JOHN

I know that kind.

ERIKA

Is that so? I don't think you know that kind, Mister John.

PAUL JOHN

Well, good then! ...Selma!

SELMA slips back in promptly and PAUL beckons her to come next to him.

PAUL JOHN (cont'd)

Tell me exactly how it was with that strange girl an' kid that she took out o' our room here.

SELMA

I don't know, everyone asks me that, if I seen Bruno, if I know who stole costumes out from up in the attic. If it goes on that way-

PAUL JOHN

(emphatically) -Why didn't you do nothin' when that man and girl took your little brother out o' here?

SELMA

I didn't think nothin' would happen to him but he'd get some clean clothes.

PAUL JOHN

...Well you come with me. An' we'll go over an' see your mother.

PAUL grabs SELMA by the wrist and drags her out, leaving ERIKA there. WILLA soon enters in great haste.

WILLA

Erika are you alone?

ERIKA

For the moment, yes.

WILLA

Am I too late? It was only with the greatest cunning and recklessness that I got away from home. I'm more dead than alive. But I am ready to the end. How was it with your father, Erika?

ERIKA

We're finished with each other. You can't imagine what deep hatred a man like that has against everything to do with theater.

WILLA

Erika. Erika, if you'd heard with what horrible names my Papa abused me in his rage. I would have liked to say something to him, but I was so horribly ashamed of him.

ERIKA

You're so beautiful, Willa.

WILLA

I trust you, Erika, nothing else matters.

ERIKA

And I will not disappoint you. You see, a woman like me in whom everything is stirring, who wants to achieve something special and great, the whole world is against her, and she is to that world a burden and laughing-stock. But believe me: it will not always be so. We are the future. The time must come when this great, beautiful world is ours.

WILLA

Go on, Erika.

ERIKA

When I awoke today in the park beneath that heavy sky, full of lightning and thunder waiting to unleash itself-

WILLA

-You spent the night in the park Erika? That's why your fingers are so cold and you look so horribly tired.

ERIKA

(breaking a bit) I'm so nervous. I'm so exhausted.

MRS. JOHN enters, agitated and suspicious.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Well? Wha'd y' want here? Is Paul home yet? I was jus' down the street with the kid for a bit. ...Did you hear, that down the way an' across by the canal lighting struck a man a woman and a little girl this morning. They were under a tree.

ERIKA

No, Mrs. John.

HENRIETTA JOHN

It'll be comin' down again, the rain.

WILLA

Come Erika, let's get outside anyway.

HENRIETTA JOHN

An' you know what, I was talkin' with the woman 'at was struck by lightning a short time before. She said, if you take a dead kid lyin' in a carriage and push it out into the warm sun - but it's got 'o be summer in midday - it breathes in, it cries, it comes to life again! You believe that, huh? I saw that with my own eyes. You don't believe that? Then it's mother can come and nurse it straight away. You don't believe that? That is holy it is! Anybody that don't believe that don't know nothin' about the whole secret that I discovered!

MRS. JOHN'S attention has actually barely been on ERIKA and WILLA during this strange rant, and toward the end of it ERIKA and WILLA have slipped out hand in hand. PAUL enters, just catching the last of it.

PAUL JOHN

Mother! What's that secret you're talkin' 'bout then?

HENRIETTA JOHN

I say somethin' about a secret?

PAUL JOHN

Well I think so. Are you a ghost or is it you?

HENRIETTA JOHN

Why should you think I'm a ghost?

PAUL JOHN

Jette, don't bite me now. I'm happy you're back and with the kido. With the boss Jette, everything's been settled. No more goin' off. ...I brought something back with me, too.

HENRIETTA JOHN

What then?

PAUL shyly but proudly reveals a baby rattle from his pocket. MRS. JOHN stares at it. PAUL shakes it.

PAUL JOHN

Somethin' to bring a bit o' life into the room, because it's sometimes pretty quiet in this city. No, when a kid cries I'd give all America for it.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Have you spoken with anyone yet, Paul?

PAUL JOHN

No. Just Quaquaro, earlier.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Well? And?

PAUL JOHN
Oh leave it, nothin', it was nothin'.

HENRIETTA JOHN
What did he say?

PAUL JOHN
He asked me after Bruno.

HENRIETTA JOHN
Bruno, what should Bruno 'ave done then?

PAUL JOHN
Nothin'. But I'd say it wouldn't surprise me if Bruno someday comes to some bad end out in a prison yard. What's your sister up to?

HENRIETTA JOHN
I don' know.

PAUL JOHN
...Well, you was out with her.

HENRIETTA JOHN
Where was I?

PAUL JOHN
Look, Jette, you're shakin' there.

HENRIETTA JOHN
Paul you're gonna leave me alone again! For God's sake Paul say it! Just say it an' don't fool aroun' with me!

PAUL JOHN
What's with you today, Jette!

HENRIETTA JOHN
Ah- Don't listen to my ragin', Paul. It's nothin' just I been feelin' a bit weak.

PAUL JOHN
...Why don't you go an' clean y'rself up a bit then Jette.

HENRIETTA JOHN
...How long 'a' we been married, Paul? You came to me, an' you said, I shouldn't be so busy all the time, not always so here an' there, runnin' up an' down, I should take it a bit more easy.

PAUL JOHN
I'd say that today still, Jette.

HENRIETTA JOHN
An' then you kissed me behind my left ear. An' then-

PAUL JOHN

-Yeh yeh yeh. ...An' then, we were very much agreed, 'uh?

HENRIETTA JOHN

Then I laughed. And I was lookin' different then. An' then you said, when we have a boy... Pauly that was a hundred years ago.

PAUL JOHN

Not so long as that, Jette.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Tell me, how would it be if you took me and went with me and the kid to California now?

PAUL JOHN

-Jette, what's with you then? I don't un'erstand it? Am I goin' around here with a ghost then or what? The sun is shinin' through the clouds there now, it's bright, but I can't see nothin'. Then somethin' comes gigglin' an' whisperin' an' creepin' around. And when I try to get a hand on it, then there's nothin' to hold on t'. Now I want to know, what's the truth o' this story with the strange girl 'at was in this room here.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Paul, you heard that girl hasn't ever come back here, so you can see-

PAUL JOHN

-You say that to me with eyes that look like someone's tormentin' you, or what?

HENRIETTA JOHN

Yes, why do you leave me alone all year Paul?! Where I 'ave to sit in my cage an' no one to talk to, Paul! You've ruined me!

BRUNO, with his perpetual nosebleed, whistles as to a dog as he steps into the room.

HENRIETTA JOHN (cont'd)

Bruno, is that you now?

BRUNO

Yeh, sure it is, Jette.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Where'd y' come from then? What d'y' want then?

BRUNO

Well I danced all night, Jette, so you can see I'm in a good mood.

PAUL JOHN

You! Listen up!

As PAUL speaks BRUNO slowly steps farther into the room.

PAUL JOHN (cont'd)

...You're not fit to be with human beings! I told you, I'd smack you down if I ever saw you come through my door again. Now go! Or I'll crack you! Understand me?

BRUNO

I'm not scared o' your mouth [Musspritze, device that squirts frosting onto cakes].

HENRIETTA JOHN

-Then crack me, Paul. He's my brother.

PAUL JOHN

Spit on the devil, Jette, that your name is on the mug o' this criminal [Schubiak, crook, brute].

BRUNO

An' if you didn't wash yourself here with my sister then I'd 'a' dragged you out in the air, snot boy, an' thrown you ten floors down.

PAUL JOHN

(with great restraint) Tell me again, Jette, that that's your brother.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Paul, go on, I'll get'm him to go away.

PAUL JOHN

Well then I don't need to be here or what? Huh?! ...You twitter an' coo then.

PAUL leaves. Bruno spits after him as soon as he's gone.

BRUNO

If I ever had you out in the park!

BRUNO sits himself down on the fire escape.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Now what is it? Where'd y' come from? Where 'a' you been?

BRUNO

I danced, Jette, half the night, and then about sunrise I went out into the park for a bit.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Well? An' what's happened, Bruno?

BRUNO

No foolin' around, Jette. Gi' me some train money. I got 'o disappear or I'll have to sign out.

HENRIETTA JOHN

An' what 'a' you done with that girl?

BRUNO

I, gave her advice, Jette.

HENRIETTA JOHN

What does that mean?

BRUNO

I made her a little bit more agreeable.

HENRIETTA JOHN

An' she won't come back? That's sure now?

BRUNO

Sure. I don't believe she'll be comin' back now. But that was no light piece o' work, Jette. I'm thirsty, Jette. Give me somethin' to drink, Jette, you've cooked me real hot now.

HENRIETTA JOHN

People saw you outside the door with the girl.

BRUNO

I had to make arrangements with Arthur. She didn' want nothin' to do with me. But Arthur came dancin' up in fine gear an' carried her right off to the bar. She bit the bait that her boyfriend was waitin' there. *(sings to himself)* "Our whole life long we only go, from show to show, an' show to show. Our whole life long we only go, from show to show, an' show to show."

HENRIETTA JOHN

...Well an' then?

BRUNO

Then she wanted to go off because Arthur said her boyfriend had gone. So I wanted to accompany her a bit. An' next we went to Kalnich's, an' in the back room there she took a lot o' sips o' lot o' drinks and got 'erself pretty crocked.

Some church bells ring far off.

BRUNO (cont'd)

But the money is gone. I need dollars and cents, Jette.

HENRIETTA JOHN
How much do you need?

BRUNO
...What then?

HENRIETTA JOHN
The money.

BRUNO
...Listen, Jette. ...The bells is ringin'.
...But the bells have stopped.

BRUNO (cont'd)
...Ah I been annoyed by this nosebleed all night.

HENRIETTA JOHN
Who scratched your wrists like that, Bruno?

BRUNO
...Half past three this mornin' she could still 'a' heard them bells.

BRUNO looks at MRS. JOHN.

HENRIETTA JOHN
...Oh Jesus an' Mary, that's not true. That's not humanly possible! That's not what I meant, Bruno!

BRUNO
It's no jokin' with Bruno, Jette.

HENRIETTA JOHN
But if they catch you!

BRUNO
Well good, then I'm a dead man danglin' [dancin'] on a rope and the charity hospital has another something t' dissect.

HENRIETTA JOHN
That isn't true. What have you done, Bruno!

BRUNO
You're an ol' twisted person, Jette. You always say how I'm not good for nothin', but when things don' go right no more then you need me, Jette!

HENRIETTA JOHN
What did-? Did you threaten the girl that she shouldn't let herself be seen here no more? That's what you should o' done, Bruno! Didn't you do that?

BRUNO

I danced with her half the night. Then we went out on the street, an' a man come along, understand? An' I told him I had business with the lady and pulled my brass knuckles out o' my pocket an' o' course he took right off. Then I said to her "don't be scared, Miss. If you're agreeable an' don't make noise an' don't come to my sister's askin' after your kid no more, then everyone should be good an' square. So then she came along with me a bit.

HENRIETTA JOHN

An' then?

BRUNO

An' then. An' then she didn't want to. An' then she goes for my throat that I think- like a dog, she was, 'at still had juice in 'er bone. Then I thought. Well, an' then. Then I also got a bit riled. An' then it was- ...An' that's how it come to a stop.

HENRIETTA JOHN

...What time was it?

BRUNO

Somethin' between four and three. The moon had a big ring 'round it. Out in the square behind the fence some kind o' dog put up a howl. Then it began to drip an' then the thunder come.

MRS. JOHN gathers herself again.

HENRIETTA JOHN

...That's good then. Good then. She deserved nothin' better.

BRUNO

G'bye Jette. I s'pose we won't see each other a good many years.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Where you goin' to?

BRUNO

First I got 'o lie on my back a couple o' hours.

HENRIETTA JOHN

You wan' 'o 'ave a look at the kid, one more time?

BRUNO

(trembling) ...Nah.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Why not?

BRUNO

Nah, Jette, not in this life... G'bye Jette... *(brightly:)*
Oh, Jette! Here's a horseshoe! I found it. It brings luck. I
don't need it.

*BRUNO holds the horseshoe out but MRS. JOHN is
distracted and doesn't take it. BRUNO leaves it on
the floor beside her and exits.*

HENRIETTA JOHN

I'm not a murderer. I'm not a murderer. I didn't want that.
I'm not a murderer. I'm not a murderer.

MRS. JOHN looks down and picks up the horseshoe.

HENRIETTA JOHN (cont'd)

I'm not a murderer. I'm not a murderer.

*MRS. JOHN kneels and slowly pulls some clothes off
and lies down.*

HENRIETTA JOHN (cont'd)

I'm- not a murderer. I'm- I'm not a murderer. I'm not a
murderer.

ACT FIVE

*The Johns' flat. MRS. JOHN is asleep on the floor.
ERIKA and WILLA enter and step quietly up to MRS.
JOHN.*

ERIKA

Is she asleep?

WILLA

This woman scares me.

ERIKA

Look at the old rusty horseshoe she's clenching in her hands.

WILLA

...I hope my mother forgives me. I couldn't act differently.

ERIKA

How did you act?

WILLA

I threatened to drown myself. She said she's not a monster, she was young once too, and that just because life does not always go entirely like clockwork, we live only once and I had no right to stoop to a quick way out by which nothing is gained and everything is lost. I wish she was here.

ERIKA

I have hope. And I wouldn't think of putting an end to myself unless you refused me. I am certain of it.

WILLA

Mother says life is long and that we're still children. She also said she worked out a kind of truce with Papa for us. It wasn't easy and maybe impossible had he not just received an invitation to direct again from some theater.

MRS. JOHN suddenly sits up. It is not clear whether SHE is awake or talking in her sleep.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Bruno? ...Is Bruno gone? Was I asleep? ...Bruno, you're goin' bad ways. ...Are those the bells? ...Why didn't you take an axe an' skin my head off with it in my sleep? ...What did I say? Psht! Psht! Psht! Psht! Only don't tell no one a mortal word of it.

HASSENREUTHER'S booming voice is heard as HE enters, and this seems to wake MRS. JOHN up more fully.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

"See there, see there! The cranes of Ibicus!" Children, you may congratulate me! A week from now I will be in rehearsal! Everything is arranged! By the way, there are police standing outside the entry downstairs, and guarding it so closely even the Knobbe's can't leave for their child's funeral.

HENRIETTA JOHN

What child's funeral was that?

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

Don't you know? The little boy of Miss Knobbe died under my very eyes, likely from exhaustion.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Alice Knobbe's kid is dead? Now tell me, is that not God's finger at work that they didn't take my little Albert, and that my little Albert didn't die?

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

I don't understand this logic.

PAUL enters, followed by QUAQUARO who slips out onto the fire escape.

PAUL JOHN

Well, Jette. Wasn't I right? It's happened soon enough.

HENRIETTA JOHN

What then?

PAUL JOHN

Don't you know that all this business with police an' detectives is account o' Bruno's ways?

HENRIETTA JOHN

How then? What then? What ways!

PAUL JOHN

I am a man 'at's crippled with a wife devoted to a brother bein' pursued because outside, not far from the canal, under a lilac bush [tree], he killed a girl.

HENRIETTA JOHN

That's a lie! My brother did nothin' like that!

PAUL JOHN

Ah, di'n't he! That monster's been here. And if he comes again I'll be the first to hand 'im over t' justice!

HENRIETTA JOHN

What d' snot noses know about Justice? Up in Heaven there's still no justice. Not no one was here!

PAUL JOHN

You wasn't at your sister's at all. Quaquaro jus' told me that. An' the police confirmed it. You was seen in the park by the canal-

HENRIETTA JOHN

-Liar!

PAUL JOHN

An' also out in the suburbs where you spent the night at a motel.

HENRIETTA JOHN

What? You come in your own house an' tear everything t' bits?

PAUL JOHN

Good then! Alright that things have come out in the open, that there a' no more secrets with us, 'uh?

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

Did that Polish girl who fought like a lioness for Mrs. Knobbe's baby the other day show herself again?

PAUL JOHN

She's the one. She's the one this mornin' they found dead. An' that I'll say without bitin' my tongue off, that Bruno took her life. Ask mother!

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

Come children.

PAUL JOHN

No, stay here. Why then? Everyone stay here.

HENRIETTA JOHN

You don't need to go an' open the windows an' scream out everything for all the world on the street. Go on! But then you soon won't see me no more!

PAUL JOHN

Staight! Straight now, I'll call EVERYone in! an' explain what a woman come to with her ape love for her fool of a brother!

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

That pretty young person, who claimed that child, is actually dead today, Mr. John?

PAUL JOHN

Could be she was pretty, I don't know whether she was pretty or ugly. But that she's lyin' in the morgue, that's for sure.

HENRIETTA JOHN

I know what she was! A bad, nasty tramp she was! That went with a pig an' had 'is kid! That 'ad wanted most to kill that kid in her belly! If she also had something on with Bruno, how should I know? Could be, could be not!

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

So did you know this girl, Mrs. John?

HENRIETTA JOHN

...How so? I didn't know her one bit, Mister Hassenreuther. I'm only sayin' what everyone an' how everyone about that girl 'as said.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

You are an honorable woman. And you are an honorable man, Mr. John. But stay honest.

PAUL JOHN

I don't stay with such rabble.

PAUL pounds his fist against a wall or the floor, as if summoning attention. The building creaks and shifts.

PAUL JOHN (cont'd)

...Listen to that. How it cracks. How the plaster behind the wallpaper comes shudderin' down like gravel. Everything here is rotten. Everything is foul wood. Weakened by vermin. Eaten away by rats and mice. In one moment everything might crash [through / down] to the cellar. ...Selma! Selma!

HENRIETTA JOHN

What do you want with Selma?

PAUL JOHN

Selma's gonna take the kid, an' I'll go with Selma an' the kid out to MY sister's.

HENRIETTA JOHN

You just try that!

PAUL JOHN

Should my kid grow up in surroundin's like this?

HENRIETTA JOHN

That is not your kid! Understand me?

PAUL JOHN

Oh, so! We'll see about that then! Selma!

HENRIETTA JOHN

I'll scream. I'll rip the window open. They want 'o rob a mother of 'er kid. That is my right, that I'm the mother of my kid. If it wa'n't for me, it would 'a' been buried in the earth these past three weeks. Paul, that kid was cut out o' my body. That kid was bought with my blood. Not enough all the world is after me an' wants to take it from me. Now you come and don't do any different. You can kill me. But you can't take away my kid.

PAUL JOHN

I come home, Mr. Hassenreuther. I come this morning from the train with all my stuff, squeakin' happy. A clean break with workin' on the road. Take up a little kid in your arms. A little kid on your knee. That was my thinkin'.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Paul. Here, Paul. Tear the heart out o' my body.

SELMA has entered and steps up to PAUL.

SELMA

What am I supposed to do? You called me, Mr. John.

PAUL JOHN

Gather yourself, Selma. Take my kid up in your arms and come along with me.

SELMA

No I'm not takin' up that kid no more, Mr. John.

PAUL JOHN

Why not?

SELMA

No, it scares me, Mr. John. I'm afraid. I don't know what to think, why that Polish girl took my little brother away. Now he's waitin' for us in his coffin. An' they wan' 'o drag me to the foster care, Mr. John.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Ah, be happy then. It can't be worse than how it was for you at home.

SELMA

They say I carried the little kid that Polish girl had up in the attic down here to you, Mrs. John.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Come now get y'self out o' here.

SELMA

An' I don't wan' 'o betray nothin'. Mrs. John.

PAUL JOHN

...Truth! ...Truth! ...Truth! ...Truth! "I don' wan' 'o betray nothin'" you said? Before I know what this is with Bruno and his mistress, and if you all possibly did away with that dead girl's little kid, you're not leavin' this spot! Is that kid alive or is it dead?

SELMA

No, that kid is livin', Mr. John!

PAUL JOHN

Jette. Jette! For God in Heaven! You don't want them t' suspect you got your hands on that newborn jus' t' get the outcome o' your brother's mess [slovenliness/Liederlichkeit] out o' the world!

HENRIETTA JOHN

Me lay my hands on little Albert, Paul?

PAUL JOHN

-No one here's sayin' a word about little Albert, Jette! Jette? No one here's sayin' a word about little Albert! (to SELMA:) I tell you, I'll twist you around the neck if you don' tell me on the spot! where that child o' Bruno an' that Polish girl is?

SELMA

It's still with you, Mr. John!

PAUL JOHN
Where is it, Jette?

HENRIETTA JOHN
I'm sayin' nothin'.

PAUL JOHN
Truth, Jette!

SELMA
You know that kid real good, Mr. John!

PAUL JOHN
...Me?

PAUL looks to others, hoping to understand what he already fears he is beginning to.

HENRIETTA JOHN
Why do you look at me like that? Don't let such a low an' spiteful liar take you, Paul.

SELMA
That's a mean trick, that you make me look bad now, Mrs. John. Then I won't hold back signin' my mouth to who I out. You know well an' good that I carried that lady's kid down here an' put him in a nice clean bed! I can swear to that!

HENRIETTA JOHN
Liar! You're sayin' my kid isn't my little kid?!

SELMA
You haven't had no kid at all, Mrs. John!

SELMA runs out of the room. The building can be heard creaking.

HENRIETTA JOHN
...That is not true at all.

PAUL JOHN
...Don't dirty me, Jette.

HENRIETTA JOHN
Paul I, I couldn't do different, I had to do it. I told you about it in my letter when you was on the road. An' you was so happy.

PAUL collapses to the floor.

HENRIETTA JOHN (cont'd)
An' then I didn't want to turn back, an' then I thought, it has t' be. It can be we have a child this way too, an' then...

PAUL clasps his arms around his head and seems to sink inside.

PAUL JOHN

If that's true, Jette, I'll be shamed down to a dark place... So you got that kid, an' when the mother wanted it back, you let Bruno kill her, 'uh?

MRS. JOHN's stunned daze of grief seems gradually to start turning into something else as she looks at PAUL.

HENRIETTA JOHN

Paul...? Paul I...

PAUL laughs desperately. Then:

PAUL JOHN

Emil! Emil, come on in! Everything's in order here! Everything's alright!

QUAQUARO

Now don' get worked up now, Paul.

PAUL JOHN

Did you laugh, Emil? Ha ha ha? Ha ha ha? Ha ha ha!

MRS. JOHN drops the horseshoe and walks out. PAUL hears it and looks after her as she is going.

PAUL JOHN (cont'd)

What?

When MRS. JOHN is gone, PAUL turns to the others.

PAUL JOHN (cont'd)

Look out for [Be careful o'] mother. Mother. Mother.

HAROLD HASSENRETH

The woman is desperate.

ERIKA

A strong feeling tells me the child may only now have lost his mother.

QUAQUARO

That's right. The father's not here and don' want to know nothin'. The mother was a mess. Now things are such, it'll also have to die.

MRS. JOHN enters with a suitcase and the baby and crosses the room to exit the building.

PAUL JOHN

Mother! What are you doin' there now then?

HENRIETTA JOHN

-No Paul. Not now. You are not my husband.

PAUL JOHN

What?

HENRIETTA JOHN

You are not my husband. Go Paul you're not a human being. You're someone 'as got poison in 'is eyes and fangs like wolves 'ave. Now I see you how you are. You are not my husband.

MRS. JOHN exits right out through the auditorium of the theater and is gone. Between despair and rage, PAUL looks around helplessly at everyone in the room.

HAROLD HASSENREUTHER

She's gone. What has happened?

ERIKA

The child does have his mother now.

HASSENREUTHER looks at ERIKA, then at PAUL, then exits. QUAQUARO follows him out. WILLA starts to go, turns and waits for ERIKA a moment, then goes. ERIKA eventually also leaves. PAUL is alone. HE finds the horseshoe and picks it up, holding it out as if for someone to take it from him.

THE END