

C o d a

by

Colin Pink

Everything looks permanent until its secret is known.

Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Cast:

Martin Frankel, a young composer.

Elise, nurse to Helene Berg, Martin's partner.

Helene Berg, the elderly widow of the composer Alban Berg.

Alban Berg, (doubled by the actor playing Martin Frankel).

Hanna Fuchs (doubled by the actor playing Elise).

In scenes where Helene hears Berg's voice in her head the sound should be slightly distorted in order to indicate it only exists in Helene's mind.

A / indicates cue for next line in overlapping dialogue.

A } indicates lines begin simultaneously.

Ideally, a significant amount of Berg's music should be used throughout the play, particularly in the interludes between scenes, so that the drama is punctuated by his music.

Programme Note.

Alban Berg (1885-1935), widely regarded as one of the greatest twentieth century composers, was, along with Arnold Schoenberg and Anton Webern, one of the principal composers of the Second Viennese School which broke away from the tradition of tonal music in the early years of the twentieth century. His principal works are the operas *Wozzeck* and *Lulu*, the *Lyric Suite* for string quartet and the *Violin Concerto*. Berg died suddenly, at the relatively early age of 50, leaving *Lulu* unfinished. His widow, Helene Berg, lived on to be 92, only dying in 1976. She steadfastly refused to allow anyone to complete the opera. The complete version of *Lulu*, was finally premiered in Paris in 1979. This play uses the circumstances just prior to Helene Berg's death as its premiss.

Prologue.

At rise music, for instance, the introductory orchestral music from 'Schneesturm' from The Altenberg Lieder. Each of the actors sits in a separate space, isolated in a pool of light which is extinguished after they have spoken.

Martin Music! What is it about music? I think I'm right in saying there's no human culture known to have been without music. It's part of us. Like - breathing. Like - the beating of our heart. [Pause.] All my life music has been the thing. The Thing. The reason for everything. But it gets harder, every day. I have to work harder. I have to prove there is, something, there. [Pause.] The first time. The first time I heard Berg's music it was . . . it was as if a veil had been torn away.

Elise Fidelity. We set such store by it, don't we. Be mine. Forever. But can a person ever be another person's, for an instant, let alone forever? You can't own people. Not really, not ever, no matter how hard you try. And the more you try, oh I don't know, the less likely it seems. But we always talk in terms of possession, don't we, my husband, my lover, my friend, as if we owned them. Really wanted them to have no choice. The only person you can own is yourself. And that isn't easy.

Helene Alban? [Pause.] Are you there, Alban? [Pause.] I have news. They've just published another biography of you. I thought you'd be interested. That makes the third. It arrived today. A very handsome volume. Nice paper. Very thick. Such a heavy book. Too heavy for me to hold for long. Still, it looks good. [Pause.] Do say something. I hate to feel I'm talking to myself. People will think I've gone dotty. [Pause.] Are you paying attention? Perhaps you're busy. Is that it? Am I interrupting anything?

Act 1 Scene 1

Martin and Elise's apartment in Vienna.

Elise [Elise, partly clothed, runs into the room, pursued playfully by Martin.]

Get off. I haven't got time.

Martin There's always time for lurve.

Elise Not today there isn't.

Martin I know what you like.

Elise You're insatiable.

Martin It's your fault, strutting around like that.

Elise I'm trying to get dressed.

Martin Come here.

Elise Some people have to go to work.

Martin Work can wait.

Elise No it can't, I'll be late.

Martin Then be late.

Elise It's not worth it.

Martin Oh great!

Elise I didn't mean it like that, of course it's worth it, it's just . . . if I'm late it'll put her in a bad mood and it's tough enough getting through the day as it is.

Martin You shouldn't let her walk all over you.

Elise I don't. But she is my employer; I can hardly tell her to go boil her head,

however tempting it may be.

Martin No, I suppose not.

Elise Get off!

Martin Only playing. Why don't you ask her today if she'll see me?

Elise I don't think today would be a good day.

Martin It's never a good day!

Elise You must be patient. She's in a lot of pain, her arthritis makes her irritable. I have to wait for the right moment, otherwise she'll just say no and it'll all be a waste of time.

Martin It's so frustrating. I know, if only I can see her, I'll be able to persuade her I'm the right person to complete the score.

Elise You'll just have to be patient for a little longer.

Martin It must be easier to get to see the Pope.

Elise I'm doing all I can, but really, you mustn't get this thing out of proportion.

Martin "This thing"!

Elise You know what I mean. Give us a break. You'll drive us both crazy obsessing about finishing Berg's opera. You need a change of scene. Have you thought any more about the weekend?

Martin The weekend?

Elise Are we or are we not going to visit my parents this weekend? I said we'd let them know. We've already put them off once.

Martin It'll be awkward this weekend.

Elise But every weekend is awkward. It's going to be *awkward* for me to tell them we're not coming again.

Martin Well, you see, I'm expecting an important package to arrive any day now. You

know that musicologist in the States, he's found a rare annotated score of the Lyric Suite. He's sending it to me. But I can only keep it for a few days. I won't have any time to study it if we go away for the weekend.

Elise You're always studying, Martin. Can't you bring it with you?

Martin I won't be able to concentrate at your parents. Why don't we go the following weekend?

Elise If we put them off again we must go the next weekend. They'll get offended if we don't see them soon.

Martin I don't know why they want to see me. They don't like me anyway.

Elise Yes they do.

Martin They're suspicious of me.

Elise Don't be silly.

Martin Yes they are. I think they'd prefer it if I was a used car salesman rather than a composer. I'm sure they regard that as a more honourable profession.

Elise You'd certainly make more money.

Martin Thanks a lot.

Elise You just need to make more of an effort to be pleasant when you're with them. Talk about something other than music, sport, or something like that.

Martin I can't talk about sport. I don't know anything about sport. I couldn't care less about sport.

Elise That was just an example. Make small talk.

Martin I'm not very good at small talk.

Elise Well, you've got another week to perfect it. You can practice by talking to me a bit more. Sometimes I think I might as well be living alone. You spend most of your time with your head stuck in a book. You can't be working all the time.

You need to separate out work from the rest of your life or it'll take over everything.

Martin But music is my life. All my life.

Elise And what about me?

Martin And you too, of course. It's so obvious it's not worth saying.

Elise It *is* worth saying Martin.

Martin I'm sorry. Everything I say is coming out wrong today. I love you. You know that don't you?

Elise Yes. But it would be nice if you demonstrated it a bit more often.

[They kiss.]

Look, why don't we ring up Freida and Karl and go out for a meal or something. They're always good fun, you get on with them.

Martin I'd like to but I don't think I've got the time. I'm still trying to finish this piece for the Graz festival.

Elise Don't work too hard, Martin, you'll make yourself ill.

Martin Okay. But I must get it finished.

Elise [Checking her watch.] I better get going.

Martin Oh, Elise.

Elise Yes?

Martin See if Helene Berg will give me an interview today?

Elise I'll see what I can do. But the topic has to come up naturally otherwise she'll become very suspicious. Don't fret, I'll get you in to see her in the end.

Martin But how much longer will I have to wait?

Elise I don't know. How would I know? Anyway, if you knew what she was like you wouldn't be so keen to see her.

Martin She can't be as bad as all that.

Elise Oh no?

Martin No.

Elise You don't know the half of it. She can be very difficult. Sometimes I think she does it on purpose. It's her form of entertainment. There she is, stuck in bed most of the time. There isn't much she can do, so, to entertain herself, she becomes difficult. It amuses her to exasperate people.

Martin Hmm.

Elise I'm sure she'll have fun toying with you. Assuming she doesn't throw you out immediately.

Martin Your words fill me with such confidence.

Elise That's why we mustn't rush things. Trust my judgment. In the meantime you can get on with your own work.

Martin I am, but it's so hard to concentrate. I can't stop thinking about completing Lulu.

Elise You must get this into perspective. It might never happen. You can't put your own work on hold indefinitely; you have to lead your own life not finish Berg's for him.

Martin But it's so tantalising, to have such a marvellous work performed without the ending. It needs closure. The way things are it's just all left hanging.

[Reaches over to Elise and strokes her hair.]

Ellie. I'm relying on you. You must help me. You said you would.

Elise I'll do my best. But I don't have any influence over her. You must realise that. She might be physically frail and a bit forgetful at times but she has a will of iron. No one tells *her* what to do.

Martin I'll be very tactful. Turn on the charm. I'll tell her how wonderfully she's preserved Berg's memory.

Elise I think she already knows that.

Martin You know what I mean. I'll butter her up. Flirt with her. Have her eating out of my hand.

Elise Dear Martin. [Elise kisses him]

I will certainly do my best to introduce you. But she's far more likely to bite off that sweet hand of yours.

[Walks towards door.]

Martin You won't forget.

Elise I'll do my best, when the time is right.

[Exit Elise.]

Martin Bye. See you later.

[Sighs. Switches on hi-fi and listens to the opening bars of Berg's Piano Sonata.

Pulls out a letter and starts reading it. Smiles to himself and carefully tucks the letter under some papers on the desk. Switches off stereo. Picks up phone and dials. Speaks into the phone.]

Hello . . . is that Herr Fischer? . . . Yes . . . Yes . . . It's Martin Frankel . . . Frankel. I called in last week. Yes . . . But . . . Yes . . . But I only wanted to look at the score . . . Yes . . . Yes, I know that . . . Yes . . . But . . . Yes. Goodbye.

[Slams down phone.]

Bastard!

[Fade to black.]

Act 1 Scene 2

Helene Berg's apartment in Vienna. Helene Berg sitting up in bed with pillows piled behind her. Elise, her private nurse, stands near the bed sorting out some medicines.

Helene I love the spring. Don't you, Elise?

Elise Yes, it's lovely.

Helene Yes. [Sighs] Another spring. Nature is so wonderful! Around and around it goes. Just like one of those old fashioned carousels. [Pause. With an edge of puzzled suspicion.] Where the horses are always smiling.

Elise [Elise walks towards the bed with a small cup of pills.]
It's time for your medicine.

Helene I don't want to take that stuff.

Elise Now you know you must. Doctors orders.

Helene [Helene takes the cup from Elise.]

Fat lot of good it does. What is *in* this stuff? That's what I'd like to know. It could be anything.

[Swallows one pill with exaggerated jerking of head and shudder.]

We are such fools for swallowing everything the doctors tell us; and everything they give us.

[Swallows another pill. Pause.]

They're just guessing half the time.

[Pause, waiting for response from Elise but getting none.]

They are just guessing, I suppose you know that.

Elise Science.

Helene [Loudly, holding hand to ear.] What!

Elise [Louder.] Science. It is all scientific now. They are not guessing, the doctors, they know what they're doing and they have your welfare at heart.

Helene Well, of course, you're bound to say that. You're one of them. [Pause,

thinking.] You are one of them, aren't you?

Elise What?

Helene One of the medical profession. A healer. You are one of the medical [pause, searching for the correct word] fraternity.

Elise I am fully qualified. You know I am. The agency sent you my credentials.

Helene Yes, you're one of them, all right. But, of course, I am being unreasonable. I cannot expect a member of a profession to criticise it - can I? That is the thing about professions. Don't you think? That is the whole *point* of professions.

Elise What?

Helene Sticking together. Standing up for one another. The lawyers, doctors, accountants. If they let on they didn't know what they were doing half the time no one would pay them - would they. [Pause, Elise ignores Helene's comments and busies herself changing the dressing on Helene's ulcerated leg.] Spring. [Pause.] Another spring. They come around so soon. They never used to be so fast. But now the years whirl around and around. Just like a carousel.

Elise You said that.

Helene What?

Elise You said that already.

Helene What?

Elise About the carousel. Going around and the horses always smiling.

Helene [Shocked.] I did not. [Indignantly.] I did not say any such thing. I was talking about doctors. [Pause to think. Puzzled.] Horses? Why would I be talking about horses? I haven't been near a horse for years. I never liked them. Unpredictable things; horses. The motor car is far more reliable; usually at

any rate, in my opinion; though not as picturesque. [Getting more exasperated.] I never talk about horses!

Elise They were on the carousels.

Helene What carousels?

Elise You spoke about the . . . oh, never mind. Spring. You were speaking about spring.

Helene Elise, my dear, I worry about you, sometimes. I don't know what you'll do when I'm gone. You need a husband. A reliable man. Admittedly a commodity harder to find than a reliable car; which is all the more reason you should get looking now; quickly, before it's too late, while you still have your looks.

Elise I have my profession.

Helene Yes, [heavy with irony] the medical profession. And what a bunch of charlatans. They finished off my poor Alban. Insisted on giving him a blood transfusion and it killed him. His heart couldn't take it. He always had a weak heart; poor thing. His heart was his Achilles heel. [Pause.] What you need is a man, not a profession. A man, he needs a profession; unless he already has money, in which case he need not bother. If you don't have money, my dear, you must marry it.

Elise But you didn't marry for money.

Helene No. [Warmly.] I married for love. But it wasn't easy; my parents were opposed to the match, especially my father. The whole Berg family was far too 'artistic'. [Conspiratorially.] And his *sister!* She was living openly as a lesbian – in those days! They were beyond the pale as far as my parents were concerned. My father said, with perversion running in the family who

knows what might happen. [Pause, thinking.] They were worried for me.

D'you know what my father did?

Elise No. What?

Helene He wrote to Alban and he said: intellectually you are inadequate, you have no money *and* no profession, you are in poor health, which I believe is largely self-inflicted and, in addition, you come from depraved stock; and yet you expect me to be content for you to marry my lovely daughter. I believe I have more than adequate reasons for saying no. And no he said.

Elise How rude!

Helene My father believed in straight talking. As you can imagine, it made poor Alban terribly angry. Father's attitude hurt his male pride. I had to restrain him. I knew a better way to get around my father. Softly, softly, catchee monkey. That's what they say, isn't it. I wore him down. It took a while, but eventually I got him to say yes.

Elise It sounds very romantic.

Helene It was hard work. In the end Papa realised that only Alban would do for me. I was in love and there was an end to it. I would not look at another, even though my parents were always inviting around young men they thought more suitable, in the hope that I would be tempted away from my dear Alban. [Fluffing up her hair.] I was quite a beauty in those days. I could have had my pick. There was no shortage of admirers. Of course, Alban was handsome too, in his own way. Everybody said what a glamorous couple we made. The day we were married was like this. It was beautiful. The sun shone, the air was full of the scent of blossom. My father sulked. But he knew it was Alban or no one as far as I was concerned, and he didn't want me to end up on the

shelf, like you. It was a small affair. Though both our families were Catholics Papa insisted that we get married in a Protestant church; that way it would make it easier to get a divorce later.

Elise Did he really do that?

Helene Yes. It was hardly a vote of confidence, but we didn't mind. We were in love and we were finally getting married. That was all that mattered. And besides, we had a proper Catholic ceremony, in secret, in 1915; just to set everything right in our minds, because Alban was going into the army, and you never knew what might happen. Fortunately he never had to go to the front. With his asthma and his weak heart the basic training nearly killed him. In the end they gave him a desk job. When we were married we moved into this apartment. I have lived here ever since; deep in the embrace of our love

Elise I suppose you were married a long time.

Helene Thirty-four glorious years.

Elise It's hard to imagine being with the same person for so long.

Helene Things are different now. People chop and change. Not so in my day. I gave up everything for him. From the moment we were married I said, I no longer exist, it is only we, inseparable, indivisible. From now on we will exist only for each other. I will give up my ambitions and live only to help him achieve his. I was studying singing when we met. I could have become an opera singer. But I gave it all up for love.

Elise Oh no.

Helene That was what we used to do, in those days. We sacrificed ourselves on the altar of our husbands. You see, choosing a husband was not just a matter of picking a companion, as it has become now, it was much more akin to

selecting a ship to voyage in. Is it sturdy enough? [Tone of innuendo.] How elegantly appointed are the state-rooms? Can it withstand stormy seas or will it be liable to capsize at the first big wave? Because you were going to entrust everything you had, your very soul, to that vessel, and you wanted to be sure it wouldn't sink a few minutes after leaving harbour.

Elise You make it sound very frightening.

Helene All great commitments are frightening, my dear. But, you are forgetting, we were in love. Love conquers all. Love fears not and is true. Our souls were joined. They still are. The ship sails on.

Elise [Under her breath.] Like the Flying Dutchman.

Helene What! [Sudden change of demeanour, enraged.] What did you say?

Elise Nothing.

Helene I'm not so deaf as to be impervious to insults.

Elise I didn't mean anything -

Helene I know you mean nothing. Do you hear *me!* *You Mean Nothing!* You are minuscule. A footnote to a footnote. If that!

Elise I don't understand -

Helene Clearly. I trouble myself to confide in you and what do you do? You ridicule that which you do not understand. You people are such dullards. You all seem to be born soulless these days. [Elise looking baffled.] Your incomprehension speaks volumes. You may go. I will not be needing you anymore. I will summon you if I want anything. [Elise walks towards the door.] We need to be alone, Alban and I. It is so tiring entertaining. [Pause. Helene waits until she is sure Elise has gone.] It's all right. You can come out now. I've got rid of her. [Pause.] Don't dawdle. [Pause.] We've been talking about

horses and cars. I told Elise I preferred cars. Do you remember that Ford motor car you bought? You were so proud of it. People used to stop and stare as we whizzed by. No one had seen the like of it. Those were / the days.

Berg [V.O. Like an echo.] Those were the days.

Helene Ah, there you are. For a moment I thought you were sulking. I've published your letters. Oh don't worry, I cut out the tasteless bits first.

Berg [Chuckles.]

Helene I couldn't resist; you wrote some lovely letters. So ardent.

Berg Dear Helene, My golden one, my little peach . . .

Helene That's it.

Berg My Schnudoa, from the Flea.

Helene Yes, yes.

Berg My dearest Pferscherl, from your lonely Miffka.

Helene Yes, yes, yes. [Sighs.] I never could understand why you couldn't settle on one pet-name and leave it at that.

Berg My dearest Pferschi, why haven't I heard from you?

Helene I'm busy.

Berg I long to get a letter from you.

Helene I was never a very assiduous correspondent. Be patient, Alban, good things are worth waiting for.

Berg When can we meet again? I long to see you.

Helene Soon, dear, soon.

Berg I long to hold your hand, to touch you, to -

Helene That's enough of that, Alban.

Berg I'll write you a letter, a long letter.

Helene Yes, lovely letters.

Berg Dear Hanna,

Helene What?

Berg Not a day passes when I don't think of you.

Helene What?

Berg Yearn for you. Miss you. The real me longs for you, only you,

Helene Stop that!

Berg while the public me is just a puppet, pretending, / always pretending.

Helene I won't have it! Stop at once!

Berg My dearest Hanna -

Helene No. Not Hanna, Helene!

Berg } Hanna!

Helene} Helene!

Act one, Scene 3

Martin and Elise's apartment. Martin sits at his desk trying to compose. Elise comes home tired from work.

Martin [Enter Elise. Martin looks up.] How was it?

Elise The usual.

Martin Did you ask if she'd see me?

Elise No.

Martin Why not?

Elise It wasn't the right moment. She was in a funny mood today.

Martin And yesterday, and tomorrow. She's always in a "funny mood".

Elise Then you know how difficult it is.

Martin At this rate I'll be waiting forever.

Elise [The phone rings, interrupting their argument. Martin and Elise both go to answer it but Elise reaches it first.]
Hello? . . . Hello? Hello? [Puts phone down.] That's funny, no one there.

Martin Must be a wrong number.

Elise We're getting a lot of those calls.

Martin Not that many surely.

Elise I hope it isn't some weirdo. Maybe we should change our number.

Martin I don't think that's necessary.

Elise That's what I hate about phones. They just interrupt.

Martin Can't do without them.

Elise I hate phones. You never know what's at the other end.

Martin Don't get paranoid.

Elise But it makes you wonder. [Pause.] How's the score going?

Martin Don't ask. I've been struggling with the bloody thing all day. I just can't seem to . . . can't seem to, make it fit. I keep telling myself there should be more . . . something missing.

Elise Just give it time -

Martin I haven't got time! I've got a deadline.

Elise You'll get there in the end. You always do.

Martin I can't finish this thing. This . . . thing. And what does it matter? No one's going to hear it anyway.

Elise That's not the point. You have to do it. Alban Berg wouldn't think like that. He'd carry on regardless. What was it you told me about his quartet? He had to wait over 13 years before it was performed. But it didn't stop him. He waited. And you'll have to wait too. [Pause.] Have you heard about Frieda?

Martin No. What?

Elise She's left Karl.

Martin Never.

Elise Yes. Turns out they haven't been getting on for some time.

Martin Really.

Elise Yes, makes you think, doesn't it. Bit of a shock. I always thought of them as the ideal couple, didn't you?

Martin Yes.

Elise They always seemed so together, I found it hard to separate them out in my mind. It kind of gave one hope. Somehow.

Martin You can never tell.

Elsie But I thought with them, it was . . . I don't know, I just thought they had something really good.

Martin I always thought it was a bit too good to be true.

Elise Oh did you.

Martin Yes; all that lovey dovey stuff. It got quite sickening at times.

Elise I thought it was charming.

Martin I thought they were always trying to prove something.

Elise I wonder what people say about us.

Martin I shouldn't think they say anything.

Elise No?

Martin No.

Elise Bet they do. Bet they say: I don't know what he sees in her.

Martin Of course they don't.

Elise Bet they do.

Martin They say: What a lucky guy.

Elise They probably think I'm not clever enough for you.

Martin This is silly. Don't put yourself down.

Elise Yeah, suppose it's bad luck to talk about these things. I feel so tired today. So tired, like I've lived too long already.

Martin Have a bath, it'll make you feel better.

Elise Oh I wish we could just go away. Get out of Vienna, out into the country, up in the mountains; I want some air! It's stifling in Vienna, don't you find it . . . stifling?

Martin No.

Elise No, you wouldn't.

Martin I like Vienna. There's always something happening.

Elise Yes, like friends splitting up. [Pause.] Oh well, I think I'll have that bath. I need to wash the day off me. [Gets up to go.] Are you coming?

Martin Not just yet. I'll join you later.

Elise Don't be too long.

Martin [Exit Elise.] Have a nice relaxing soak.

[Martin tries to work again but can't concentrate. He sighs. Pulls out letter and glances through it again, hides it again. Picks up phone dials, waits, speaks.]

Hi Anna. Was that you just now? I told you not to phone. . . I know . . . But it looks funny . . . Elise will get suspicious. . . Let's not argue. I know it's hard. I

miss you too. . . . No. No luck so far. I've spoken to Sovak, he confirmed the last act is virtually complete, only the orchestration left to do . . . Yes, it should be easy. The hard part is getting past Helene Berg. . . . Yes, I'm still hoping Elise can get me in to see her. It's the only chance, really. . . . I don't know when I'll be able to get back to London. . . . Yes. Yes, I miss you too, of course I do. . . . No, don't come here, not yet, it's not a good time. . . . Of course I will, when the time's right. . . . Me too. Yes, yes, bye; love you too.

[Puts phone down. Fade to black.]

Act 1 Scene 4

Helene Berg's apartment. Helene lies in bed, still, her eyes shut.

Berg	[V.O. Whispered, as if not wishing to disturb her.] Helene. [No reaction from Helene.] Are you awake?
Helene	[Eyes open.] I'm always awake.
Berg	Just checking.
Helene	No / need.
Berg	[Like an echo.] No need.
Helene	I was trying to / nap.
Berg	[Like an echo.] To nap.
Helene	I can't sleep.
Berg	Get up.
Helene	I can't get up.

Berg Rest.

Helene Rest.

Berg Just rest.

Helene I'll rest. [Pause.] Why are you here? [Silence.] What are you doing?

Berg [Pause.] Nothing.

Helene Are you sure?

Berg [Pause.] Yes.

Helene Like me. I'm getting pretty expert at doing nothing. But I'd rather be doing nothing with / you.

Berg [Like an echo.] With you. Soon.

Helene Do you pro / mise?

Berg [Like an echo.] Promise.

Helene That would be nice.

Berg I always keep promises.

Helene Yes, you always / did.

Berg [Like an echo.] Always did.

Helene [Sighs.] It's no good. You've got me wide awake now. I'm wide awake and there's nothing I can do about it. And it's all your fault. You really are the limit. [Silence.] There's no point in sulking. [Helene rings a bell. Enter Elise.] Ah, there you are.

Elise What can I get you?

Helene I want something to read. Would you be so kind as to fetch my Proust?

Elise Proust?

Helene Yes. I thought I'd read something where it doesn't matter if you never make it to the end.

Elise Where is it?

Helene On the bookcase, under P, I should think. [Elise goes to fetch the book.]
It's just a wild guess.

Elise [Voice off.] Which volume?

Helene I'm up to "Albertine Disparue". I'm so glad she's at last left that awful
Marcel. I really don't know how she put up with him for so long. [Elise
returns with the book.] Just because he had money he thought he owned
her. Such prying! Never a moment she could call her own, the poor girl.

Elise [Handing Helene the book.] Men are like that.

Helene Yes, I suppose they are.

Elise Think they own you.

Helene Yes. You should try the classics, Elise. There's a lot of wisdom in the
classics.

Elise Yes, I'm sure there is.

Helene But unfortunately a lot of tedium too.

Elise Pity. [The bell rings. Elise answers the door. Martin is at the threshold.]
What are you doing here?

Martin I couldn't wait any longer. I have to see her.

Elise You've picked an awful time. She's in a bad mood today.

Martin We can't keep putting things off, waiting for her mood to change, we'll be
waiting forever.

Elise Well it'll be an uphill struggle. She's feeling cantankerous.

Martin You'd better wish me luck then. [They walk to Helene's room. Elise enters
first, Martin hovers outside.]

Elise Excuse me, Frau Berg; I have a visitor to see you.

Helene I'm not expecting anybody. Who is it?

Elise Martin Frankel, the composer.

Helene I've never heard of him. Tell him to go away.

Martin [Martin walks into the room.] Good afternoon, Frau Berg. What lovely weather we're having.

Helene [Fixing Martin with an icy stare.] I didn't realise the meteorological office had taken to delivering weather reports by hand. And to employ a composer for such a purpose seems quite mad.

Martin I regret I didn't have time to arrange a formal appointment, Frau Berg. I've come to speak with you about obtaining your permission to examine the score of Lulu. The National Library will not allow access without your permission.

Helene Quite right. We cannot have just anybody idly browsing through such valuable documents.

Martin I've taken the liberty of bringing along my credentials [hands papers to Helene]. I think you will agree that my purpose in wishing to examine the score is not idle. I wrote my dissertation on your husband's music. [Helene examines the papers Martin handed her with a sour face while Martin waits nervously. She returns them to him as if they were slightly soiled.]

Helene Why do you want to see the score?

Martin I'd like to determine whether it's possible to complete the third act.

Helene Oh you would, would you.

Martin With your permission, Frau Berg.

Helene And who would do this?

Martin Why, me.

Helene And your name. Your name is Frankel?

Martin Yes.

Helene [Thinking, muttering.] Frankel. Frankel. Frankel is the name under which you compose?

Martin Yes.

Helene Mmm. I haven't heard anything by you. Tell me, has *anybody* heard anything by you?

Martin Well [clears throat] yes, they have. I've had works performed by chamber groups here in Vienna.

Helene Really.

Martin Yes.

Helene I haven't heard of it. I suppose I am a bit out of touch these days. I used to know everything that was going on. I created the Alban Berg Foundation to help struggling musicians, such as yourself.

Martin The Alban Berg Foundation is a very fitting and practical tribute to your husband.

Helene Yes, I thought so. But these days things soon get taken over by accountants and bureaucrats. Before one knows it one is surrounded by rules and regulations and all the pleasure is taken out of helping people. I didn't want people to have to struggle the way we did. When Alban was ill he delayed seeing a doctor because we couldn't afford it. I often wonder about that, what might have been if he had been treated earlier.

Martin It would help me if I could see the score.

Helene No doubt it would.

Martin Do I have your permission?

Helene I'd have to ask Alban.

Martin Umm, isn't that . . .

Helene Difficult?

Martin Yes.

Helene No. Death does not separate those whose spirits are joined.

Berg [V.O. Like an echo.] Joined.

Martin I see.

Helene Yes / s.

Berg [Like an echo.] Yes. [Chuckles.]

Helene He said no.

Martin No?

Helene That's what I said.

Martin But if I could just explain.

Helene I don't need your explanations. I've heard enough. Good day.

Martin The world deserves to hear your husband's music.

Helene I couldn't agree more.

Martin Including the last act of Lulu.

Helene I'm afraid it's a hopeless case. How could you possibly complete the work as Alban would have wished?

Martin That would, of course, depend on the condition in which your husband left the score. If I could see the manuscript I could assess whether it is feasible.

Helene You may not be aware of this, Herr Frankel, but I have already had the score 'assessed'. Shortly after my poor dear Alban's death I had it 'assessed' by Arnold Schoenberg, Anton von Webern and Alexander von

Zemlinsky. You have heard of them, have you not?

Martin Yes, of course, Frau Berg. But -

Helene *They* told me. Each one of them, independently, told me that it could not be done. Each of the three composers who most understood his work told me it could not be finished. [Decisively.] It is a hopeless case. It can only be spoiled by cobbling together the final act.

Martin That was a long time ago. Perhaps, at the time, there were other reasons, non-musical reasons, why they did not feel able to complete the score.

Helene You are young. You think you know better. You think you understand everything; even that you understand the music of Alban Berg better than Arnold Schoenberg, his teacher; better than Anton Webern, his friend?

Martin It is not a question of better or worse. It is, perhaps, more a question of time. They examined the score a long time ago. It was shortly after your husband's death -

Helene It is *always* 'shortly after my husband's death' to me.

Martin . . . but now it needs looking at again. Times have changed. Attitudes have changed.

Helene Not mine. I'm afraid you do not understand what you are proposing to do. How could you possibly expect to get inside my Alban's head and complete his opera with the genius he would have put into it?

Martin I merely wish to see the score so that I can ass. . . decide whether, now, at this time, with all that we now know, it would not be possible, based on the quantities of genius already injected into the work by your husband, to complete Lulu. It should not require genius, whether I have it or not, merely empathy. I love your husband's music. I love it more than my own. That is

why, that is the only reason why, I would like permission to complete Lulu. Not for myself; for him. So that it can be heard as he would have wanted it heard.

Helene Your enthusiasm is admirable, Herr Frankel. We can all do with enthusiasm – it is a very necessary thing. But I am not sure that enthusiasm alone will get us very far. How can you know how Alban would have wanted it to sound? He might have changed his mind. He tells me he had doubts. This music, it causes nothing but trouble. In the early days we were treated like heretics. No doubt, Herr Frankel, the worst you have to put up with at a performance of your music is polite indifference. But when my husband's music was first performed we were frequently heckled and abused by the audience. Music communicates directly with the emotions, that is its power, but the emotion Alban's music so often conjured up was anger.

Martin People didn't understand it.

Helene No they didn't. They didn't even try. People used to go along just to mock. A riot broke out at the first performance of the Altenberg Lieder. I remember it as if it was yesterday. When the singer came to the part where she sings the words 'Suddenly all is over', some wag in the audience shouted out - **Thank God!** Well, that was it. All hell broke loose. Fights started between those who wanted to hear the new music and those who came only to sneer. People were clambering over seats to hit one another. You never saw such a commotion. It was quite frightening. I thought poor Alban might get hurt.

Martin Perhaps audiences don't take their music so seriously now.

Helene Perhaps you are right.

Martin But it must have been a very exciting time. So many things happening in Vienna.

Helene Yes it was exciting. We could feel that change was in the air. It sustained us, knowing we were part of it. We knew Freud, slightly. He once treated my husband for influenza, he was the only doctor staying at the hotel we were in. He made a complete hash of it. We always had a laugh about that. Stick to minds, Sigmund, we used to say, jokingly. And we knew the Wittgensteins. I don't mean Ludwig, everyone's heard of Ludwig now but he was odd, no, I mean Paul. Paul was a dear, he was a wonderful pianist, many times we heard him play, he played like an angel, but he lost his arm in the Great War. You'd think that would've been the end of his musical career; not a bit of it. He simply commissioned all the composers he knew to write piano works for the left hand only; you couldn't keep a Wittgenstein down. [Pause.] But it makes me sad, remembering the past. All the things that are no more. All the time we wasted. All the things that might have been. The spirit of my husband is all around us. He has never left this place. We were so happy here. Sometimes I can sense him coming back to me, as in the old days, and I would say: Is that you Alban?

Berg [V.O.] Yes, my little peach.

Helene I've missed / you.

Berg [Like an echo.] I've missed you. Here, I've brought you a little present.

Helene He always brought me a little something back from his trips. He had to make so many / trips.

Berg [Like an echo.] Many trips. You're always in my thoughts.

Helene And you in mine. [Pause, sadly remembering.] And you in mine. [Jerking out of her reverie.] Where was I? Oh yes, he told me; he said, pferscher! – he

always used to call me that – don't let anyone touch it; they will only spoil it. It can't be done. And it performs so well as two acts. Be content, Herr Frankel, with what is – I have to be.

Martin I understand how important this is to you. I know what a momentous thing it is to give up something so precious, to entrust it to another.

Helene Then you know why it cannot be done.

Martin Think again. Ask him again.

Helene Ask him again? [Look of shock on Helene's face.] Ask him again?

Martin Yes. Ask him.

Helene You are very impertinent, Herr Frankel. You have bad manners. I do not wish to be cross-examined. I'm tired now. All these questions; all this arguing is most fatiguing. You must forgive me, Herr Frankel, but this interview is at an end.

Elise [Taking Martin's arm and steering him to the door.] Come on, Herr Frankel.

Martin Perhaps we could discuss the matter again at a later date. [Exits.]

Helene Goodbye, Herr Frankel. [As Elise returns to the room.] That is a very importunate young man.

Elise I hope he didn't upset you, Frau Berg?

Helene I am not as easily upset as people seem to think.

Elise I'm so glad. You must forgive him; he's just enthusiastic, too enthusiastic.

Helene Can one have too much enthusiasm? - possibly. If one also lacks judgment. [Pause.] Tell me, Elise, do you consider that Herr Frankel lacks judgment?

Elise I wouldn't know.

Helene You wouldn't know?

Elise No.

Helene But surely there is some [pause for emphasis] connection between you two. There were vibrations when you were together. A distinct air of complicity.

Elise We do know one another. That is true.

Helene Are we being biblical in the employment of that term?

Elise I really don't think that it can be any concern of yours -

Helene I like to know where I stand - however inappropriate that term might currently be - that is why I asked. It is only fair that I know, do you not agree, where I stand with my employees.

Elise Yes, Frau Berg.

Helene Just so.

Elise Yes, Frau Berg.

Helene I know the answer anyway.

Elise You do?

Helene Yes, I do. It's the vibrations, you see. I can tell from the vibrations.

Elise Vibrations?

Helene Or aura - if you prefer. I am not certain that there is a precise employment of semantics with regard to these matters yet.

Elise So, you're telling me that you can . . . read minds or something like that.

Helene Goodness gracious no! What a silly notion. Imagine the havoc that would cause. I merely mean to indicate that I am sensitive to these things.

Elise When did you first realise you had this gift?

Helene I've always been sensitive. It goes with the artistic temperament, I suppose. But Hildegard Jone, the poet, she brought it out. It was she who encouraged me to get in touch with Alban.

Elise She introduced you?

Helene Oh no. I only met Hildegard after Alban's death. She was a great help.

Elise I can imagine.

Helene She was a very sensitive person; more sensitive than I.

Elise Really?

Helene You needn't sound so surprised, Elise. Surprise does not suit you. And it is not clever.

Elise Martin, I mean Herr Frankel, he is very clever.

Helene Is he now.

Elise Yes. Very. I'm sure he would do a wonderful job with Alban's music.

Helene The world is full of clever people, Elise. It does not need any more of those. In fact one of the things wrong with the world is that there are far too many clever people around. Alban was never very clever, but he had fire, he had passion and he had integrity. Do you not find, Elise, that clever people often lack integrity?

Elise I've never thought about it.

Helene A little thinking never does anybody any harm. You should try it, Elise.

Elise Yes, Frau Berg.

Helene Am I being patronising?

Elise Yes, Frau Berg.

Helene I thought I was. It comes so easily at my time of life. [Sighs, looks around for something to do.] Boredom!

Elise Frau Berg?

Helene Boredom. It is a cross we all have to bear, I suppose.

Elise [Dully.] Yes, Frau Berg.

Helene Really, Elise. You needn't agree with me in such a bored tone. It is quite

depressing. Things can get depressing enough as it is, without your assistance.

Elise What are you going to do about Herr Frankel's request?

Helene Do? Do? I'm not aware that I'm obliged to *do* anything.

Elise It would please him so much.

Helene No doubt it would.

Elise To have your permission to examine the score in the library.

Helene Elise, at my age I have given up trying to please people. The world is full of people wanting to be pleased; and lately, it seems, half of them have taken to hammering on my door. But, for your sake, Elise, I will ask Alban. I can do no more than that. [Dismissive.] And now, you may go. I feel very tired. I need to think. I will ring the bell if I need you.

[Exit Elise. Helene struggles out of bed. Painfully, slowly. She stands by the bed in her night-dress. This is evidently quite some achievement.]

You were very wise, Alban, not to get old. You would not have liked it. Just because the body starts behaving like a [winces as she moves] machine that is badly in need of oiling people start treating you like an idiot. You wouldn't have liked that would you, Alban. No, oh no, you wouldn't. [Slowly and painfully she walks around the room.] They won't leave me alone, Alban.

You've caused me a great deal of trouble! I hope you know that. Yes, I'm sure you do. You were always a lot of trouble, weren't you. Always a bit of a handful. But a dear trouble. [Looking at his picture.] I was always worrying about you. I worried about your health. God that was a joke. Your asthma, that was frightening. And I worried about your music. Yes, I did. I dreaded those early performances. One never knew what was going to happen. We

can laugh about it now. All your critics look very foolish now. We can have the last laugh. But the last laugh is never very funny, always a bit hollow, isn't it? Life is full of jokes, but they're always at someone's expense. My parents warned me. They said you would always be a source of worry, and you were. All that coffee you used to drink; I was sure it was making you ill. And the cigarettes. But the coffee was a real killer. [Pause.] I looked after you, didn't I, Alban. I know you didn't like it sometimes but I did look after you. But what am I to do with you now? You're just as much trouble now as when you were alive. [Pause.] They want Lulu. That old tart. You would think she would have lost her charms by now, wouldn't you. [Sourly.] You must have built her to last. What do you think? What should we do with her, eh? [Pause.] I wish you would speak to me, Alban. Please speak to me. Speak to your schnudoa. [Walks down stage and gazes out hypnotically past audience.] I'm so tired, Alban. More tired than you can imagine. [Pause.] Come on. What is it? What do you want to tell me? [Helene waits, listening for an answer, silence. Fade to black.]

Act 1 Scene 5

Martin and Elise's apartment, Vienna.

Elise [Elise walks into the apartment and flops down on a seat.] God, I'm tired. That old woman has been running me ragged all day. [Pause.] Be a dear and get me a drink.

Martin [Sullenly sitting at the desk.] What do you want a drink for? There's nothing to

celebrate.

Elise I want to celebrate the end of the day. I think I'm entitled to it. It has been a very long and trying day. [Martin pours the drink and hands it to Elise. She drinks.] Mm. I deserve that. [Drinks again and then stands up and walks over to Martin, who has resumed his seat at the desk. Puts her drink on the desk and her arms around Martin's neck.] I have good news. I think I've persuaded her to reconsider.

Martin [Martin twists around, excited.] Really!

Elise Yes. Well, sort of. I think so. I told her what a marvellous composer you are.

Martin What did she say!

Elise [Cheekily.] Well, she didn't fall for that but [pausing for emphasis], she's going to ask Alban.

Martin [Groans.] That's what she always says. She just says it to get rid of people. Alban's answer is always no; and Helene always does what her husband tells her to do. How convenient that the dead's wishes always coincide with those of the living.

Elise Well, it's the best I could do. I told her what a good job you'd make of it. Why don't you show her some of your pieces, [mischievously] perhaps it would help Alban make up his mind. [Martin still looking despondent, Elise disappointed at his response moves away from him.] At least I got her to think about it again. She virtually threw you out!

Martin Thanks for reminding me.

Elise Oh, don't be so down! Maybe Alban will break the habit of a life-time - or should that be death-time? - and say -

Martin Don't mock.

Elise Well! You take it all so seriously.

Martin It is serious, Elise.

Elise I know it's important to you Martin. I know it is, but we don't want this thing to get out of hand, do we. It's not healthy to be so obsessed with another man's work. You need to get on with your own life.

Martin But it *is* a part of my life.

Elise And not a very healthy part.

Martin What the hell would you know!

Elise I'm entitled to an opinion. Don't be so prickly. You must get things into perspective. There is more to life than work. I think you should forget about it, leave her alone, she hasn't done anything to you.

Martin You make it sound as if I'm persecuting her. I got the impression it was the other way around.

Elise Can't you see the strain you're putting her under? I can.

Martin Good.

Elise Good?

Martin Yes. I'll never get anywhere without a bit of pushing.

Elise I don't believe this.

Martin What?

Elise I don't believe I'm hearing this. Can you hear yourself? You sound so selfish. Here was I, thinking all you had at heart was your obsession with the great Alban Berg and now I see it's all just for you. It's all just to further your career.

Martin Don't talk nonsense. If anything it's likely to ruin my career, such as it is. If I get permission to complete Lulu and it is a success all the credit will go to Alban Berg and if it is a failure all the blame will fall on me.

Elise All the more reason to drop the project. Why risk so much? It won't do anyone any good.

Martin But you don't understand. Look, let me put it like this: imagine what it would be like if Beethoven had died before putting the finishing touches to his ninth symphony, and because his heirs didn't like it everyone had to perform the thing minus the Ode to Joy at the end. Imagine what a tragic loss that would be.

Elise [Elise quietly hums the famous tune from the ninth while Martin speaks.]

Martin Well that is the kind of situation we are in. That is why it is important. That is why it is worth having an obsession about. Wouldn't you want to do everything you could to persuade them to allow you, or *someone*, to finish it?

Elise Yes, Martin. I know. I just don't want it to finish *you* off. [Comes over and hugs him again.] If she says no, you'll just have to accept it.

Martin It's not fair that someone like that can have so much power. I'm not even convinced she likes Berg's music. I suspect a Strauss waltz would be more to her taste.

Elise I'm sure she's only doing what she thinks is right. She loves Alban.

Martin The music is all that counts.

Elise *All* that counts?

Martin Yes. Everything else is trivial in comparison. Nothing must stand in the way.

Elise I hate it when you talk like that.

Martin I wish you'd be more sympathetic.

Elise [Losing patience.] I am sympathetic, Martin. I've been sympathetic till I've had it up to here. How about you being a bit sympathetic to me.

Martin What?

Elise [Tidying up.] I have needs too. Look at the place! I come home from work and nothing's been done since this morning, it's a mess!

Martin I've been busy working [gestures to a score on the desk].

Elise I don't expect very much; I just wish you'd help out once in a while. You said you would. It wouldn't take much time. [Flops back onto a seat.] God I'm so tired. I don't think I can take much more of this. I haven't got the energy to argue but I'm not so exhausted that I don't care anymore. I'll be relieved when she finally says no and we can forget about it and get on with our lives again.

Martin [Petulant, like a child, while exiting.] I can't believe you say such crass things!

Elise [To the retreating Martin.] Don't go. [Without conviction.] I'm sorry. [Martin ignores her and walks out. Elise, getting angry, says to herself.] That's right, walk out, run away. Don't face up to reality if you don't like it. We can always pretend it isn't there. Bloody prima donna. [While speaking Elise walks around angrily. She brushes past the desk and knocks some papers onto the floor.] Shit! [She gathers up the papers. Among them is the letter to Martin. Elise glances at it, something seizes her attention and she starts reading:]
Dearest Martin, I'm so sorry to hear you're having such a horrible time in Vienna. How awful for you having to endure the company of someone who doesn't understand anything about music. It must be very frustrating for you. Still, I suppose you must put up with it if it means having a chance to see Helene Berg and get her permission to work on Lulu. I can't wait to see you again. I'm sure I'll find lots of ways to cheer you up on your next trip to London. Do try to get away again as soon as you can; you know there's always a warm welcome for you here. Love and [puzzled, can't make out the writing], something, Anna! [Elise flops down into a chair, shattered. Quietly,

to herself.] Anna? [Slightly louder.] Anna. [Fade to black. End of Act 1.]

Act 2, Scene 1.

Martin and Elise's apartment, morning. They are having breakfast.

Martin You're quiet this morning. Anything wrong?

Elise No.

Martin You look tired.

Elise I didn't sleep very well.

Martin Poor thing.

Elise Martin?

Martin Yes?

Elise Tell me you love me.

Martin I love you.

Elise Say it like you mean it.

Martin [Laughs.] I can't just . . . say it on order. To sound right it has to be spontaneous. It has to -

Elise Oh forget it!

Martin Elise. Is something the matter?

Elise No, no. What could be the matter?

Martin Only -

Elise Who's Anna?

Martin Anna?

Elise Yes, Anna, who's Anna?

Martin I knew someone called Anna at the Royal College of Music in London.

Elise That must be who I'm thinking of.

Martin What is this?

Elise Nothing. Just thinking.

Martin Really, Elise, you come out with the most -

Elise I must go. Frau Berg will be expecting me.

Martin I wonder what the old bird will be like today? Perhaps Alban will have given her a good talking to, told her to pull her finger out and stop sitting on the score of Lulu.

Elise You never know.

Martin See what you can do.

Elise I can't do anything. I know nothing about music.

Martin What?

Elise That's right isn't it. I'm ignorant.

Martin That's got nothing to do with it. Butter her up. Make her feel good.

Elise Lie to her?

Martin I mean . . . oh you know what I mean.

Elise D'you know something I like about Frau Berg?

Martin What?

Elise She might be difficult, she might be rude, but at least you know where you stand with her, she's honest. I like honesty. [Exit Elise. Martin sits a moment looking thoughtful.]

Act 2, Scene 2

Helene's apartment, morning. Helene in bed, sleeping fitfully. She is dreaming. Martin and

Elise appear in her dream as Alban Berg and Hanna Fuchs, his mistress, meeting at Hanna's house in Prague in the 1920s.

Hanna Darling Alban!

Alban Hanna! It's so good to see you. [They embrace.]

Hanna Did you have a pleasant journey?

Alban I love the train to Prague because it brings me to you.

Hanna How's Helene?

Alban Oh you know. Same old Helene. She sends her greetings.

Hanna D'you think she's suspicious.

Alban No. What gives you that idea? No, she doesn't suspect a thing. Why d'you ask?

Hanna Oh, it was just, when she stopped here, on her way to Berlin, I thought, oh perhaps it was my imagination, but I thought she looked at me in that way, that way women look at other women they regard as rivals.

Alban She was worried at one point. When she saw how beautiful you are. But I reassured her. I told her: I'm impervious to your charms.

Hanna And she believed you?

Alban Of course she believed me. I meant it.

Hanna Oh dear.

Alban And I mean this too. [Alban embraces Hanna and they kiss.]

Hanna You're a man of contradictions.

Alban No I'm not. I'm very simple and very honest. When I tell Helene I love her, I mean it. When I tell you I love you, I mean it.

Hanna All very neat and tidy.

Alban Tidy or not it's true.

Hanna But life isn't tidy, is it, Alban.

Alban I don't care whether it's tidy or messy provided it includes you. [Alban kisses Hanna again.] These moments are so precious. This time we have together, how little of it there is. I want to savour each moment, just as it's happening, but then, doing that, I miss the next moment, [Alban kisses Hanna.] and the next, [Alban kisses Hanna.] and the next. [Alban kisses Hanna.]

Hanna Our moments are only so precious because they are so few. You'd tire of me if we were together all the time.

Alban How can you say that! I'd never tire of you.

Hanna No?

Alban Never! You are my inspiration.

Hanna I always wanted to be a muse.

Alban Did you see that nonsense they wrote about me in the programme notes for the Zurich concert?

Hanna No?

Alban [Pulling out programme.] Listen to this: "A complete happy domesticity, with which his wife surrounds him, allows him to create without disturbance!"

Hanna [Laughs.] Really.

Alban Yes, it's so wrong it's laughable. Nothing could be further from the truth. I struggle to compose in that stifling Viennese atmosphere. My music is fuelled by passion, not 'domesticity', God they make me sound like a cow!

Hanna I always think of you as a bull.

Alban Speaking of bulls, where's your husband?

Hanna He's in town, on business, he's looking forward to seeing you - later.

Alban And in the meantime?

Hanna I'll have to think of some way to entertain you. [They embrace.]

Helene [Helene starts awake from her dream. Alban and Hanna are no longer there. Helene is alone in her room.]

 Alban? Are you there? [Pause.] No. No, of course you're not, you're away, away on one of your trips. Those incessant trips. Always going somewhere. Berlin. Prague. Leningrad. Zurich. Cambridge.

Elise [Enter Elise. Businesslike she walks into the room and draws the curtains at the window beside Helene's bed, light floods into the room.]

 Good morning, Frau Berg.

Helene Another day.

Elise [Depressed tone.] Another day.

Helene What sort of day?

Elise [Looking out the window. Making an effort to be pleasant.] Bright; sunny; a few clouds. They say it's going to rain later. [Elise goes to the door and brings in a breakfast tray.] Did you have a good night?

Helene [During this speech Elise tidies the room, brings in flowers in a vase and tidies the bed]

 Tolerable. I wonder, what exactly is a good night? A night free of dreams; free of demons, perhaps. If the truth be told I don't *have* much of a night anymore. I've been lying awake since five. Just counting the minutes as they go by. Curious, the little jokes God plays on us. When we are young, and have so many things to fill our days, we can never get enough sleep. We are forever struggling to drag our poor protesting bodies out of bed and into another day. But now, when we have nothing but time on our hands, we wake with the lark

but have nothing to do. Time gets heavier as one gets older - along with everything else. [Pause.] I expect you have many demands on your time, Elise.

Elise [While tidying the bed.] Yes, I do.

Helene I bet there aren't enough hours in the day for you.

Elise True enough.

Helene There are too many in mine.

Elise We should do a swap.

Helene Yes; we should 'do a swap'. [Looks at the breakfast tray, toys with the food.] I'm not hungry. All that lying around has quite sapped my appetite. I should like to get up before this bed and myself become inseparably joined, like some new species of animal. [Elise helps Helene out of bed and into the nearby easy chair.] Don't get old, Elise. I do not recommend it.

Elise I'll bear that in mind.

Helene It's all down hill, after eighty. One must simply hope that one can coast down as gracefully as possible.

Elise I think you're doing very well.

Helene Thank you. [Pause.] Is everything all right? You don't seem quite yourself today.

Elise I'm okay. Just a bit tired. What did Alban say?

Helene You mustn't be so literal, Elise. We do not have conversations, like one might have at the grocers.

Elise I mean, did he say anything . . . Did he communicate with you.

Helene I think he said no. It's hard to tell.

Elise Oh.

Helene It's sometimes hard to tell whether the voice in my head is his or mine. It gets me confused. Isn't it strange how, just when things seem to be going well, everything can go wrong. At the end of his life Alban was composing at a great rate. He was planning to write another string quartet, he had a commission for it from America, a symphony and something for the films; he so wanted to write for the films. [Pause.] But it was not to be. [Pause.] Dear Alban, I miss him so.

Elise You must have been very happy.

Helene Yes, we were.

Elise You were lucky. Tell me, Frau Berg, what do you think about men?

Helene Men? As a species you mean? Well, of course, I haven't had a great deal of experience of men. I do not count, of course, the lawyers, accountants and bankers who surround me these days, I refer to real men.

Elise So do I.

Helene One was far more circumspect in my day. Of course a lot went on, but, more circumspectly.

Elise I think they're all self-centred bastards myself. Pardon my frankness, Frau Berg.

Helene No doubt there is some justice in what you say. Though it comes across a trifle intemperate. [Pause.] I take it Herr Frankel is not in the pink at the moment. I detect that his stock is down at the Elise exchange.

Elise I think my boat's sprung a leak.

Helene Oh, I'm so sorry. They have an unfortunate tendency to do that.

Elise You just can't trust them.

Helene Yes, I wouldn't recommend it. It is better to expect to be disappointed; that

way one can often be pleasantly surprised.

Elise But you trusted Alban.

Helene Well, what is trust? Trust is not limitless. I trusted him - most of the time. After the success of Wozzeck he had to gad about a lot, attending rehearsals and premiers here, there and everywhere. I didn't go with him, I hated travelling, but he used to write to me every day, sometimes several times on the same day, when he was away. He was always complaining that I didn't write back, but I couldn't keep up.

Elise At least you knew he was thinking of you.

Helene Yes. He was always very attentive.

Elise I wish Martin was more attentive. He ignores me most of the time. Sometimes I feel like I don't exist, not to him, not really.

Helene I expect he is preoccupied with his music. It's one of the disadvantages of living with a composer.

Elise Yes, that must be what it is.

Helene Half the time Alban was in another world. He had to concentrate a lot, when he was working. We bought a lovely house in the country with the money from Wozzeck; somewhere Alban could work in peace and quiet, without the distractions of life in Vienna. He was happy there, before the money worries started again. Those damned Nazis. They spoiled everything. Just when things were getting good. Just when Alban at last had achieved success, in they came and stomped over everything. They banned his music, accused us, Aryans who had been born and lived all our lives in Vienna, of not being 'indigenous'! They thought all modern music was 'decadent' and 'Jewish' and banned it.

Elise It must have been terrible.

Helene It certainly made one wonder what on earth the world was coming to. And shortly we were to find out. Though I regret his going I am thankful he did not have to suffer through the war years. It would have upset him so. He was very sensitive.

Elise Martin isn't sensitive. Oh, he likes to think he is, but he isn't, not really.

Helene True sensitivity, especially for others, is rarer than people think.

Elise I used to think he was someone special, someone like your Alban, but I don't think he is anymore. He's so self-absorbed hardly a chink of light from anyone else can get through. I don't know why I didn't see that earlier. I feel really stupid. I don't know why I keep letting people walk all over me. People who are supposed to like me.

Helene There, there. You're not stupid. You're very bright! And very attractive. You're too kind, that's why people take advantage of you.

Elise Martin thinks I'm stupid.

Helene That speaks volumes about Martin not you. Just because he has a puffed up ego doesn't make him better than you.

Elise Thank you.

Helene Not at all.

Elise But it's not just Martin. This sort of thing always seems to happen. Things start off so well; everything looking promising -

Helene Rosy.

Elise Yes, rosy. Everything looking rosy, but then it all starts going wrong. I can see them losing interest in me. Only afterwards, of course, when it's too late. I'm sure they make fun of me behind my back.

Helene They're very foolish.

Elise It's funny; it doesn't matter how stupid the people laughing at you are, it still hurts.

Helene Yes, there are many things that hurt. Which reminds me, isn't it time for my pills?

Elise [Pulling herself together.] Oh God, yes. Oh dear. I'm supposed to be the one reminding you. I don't know what's wrong with me. [Elise fetches the medicines. Helene starts taking the pills.] If only things in life could be solved by taking pills.

Helene It would be convenient, sure enough. But whatever's in these doesn't seem to solve anything. [Takes another pill. Flops back in chair.] You'd never believe how exhausting it can be just swallowing things. I used to have so much energy in the old days. Do you go out much, Elise?

Elise Not any more. I sometimes think Martin's ambition is to become a hermit.

Helene You should go out. Enjoy yourself. Keep going as long as you can. Never stop if you can help it. Seize life by the throat, my dear, it's the only way to handle it.

Act 2 Scene 3

Martin and Elise's apartment.

Elise [Elise walks into the apartment and flops down on a seat; Martin at the desk studying a score with intense concentration.] God, I could do with a drink. [Pause, Elise gets herself a drink, Martin ignoring her.] I wonder if I'm

becoming an alcoholic. I can't seem to get through the day without needing a drink at the end of it. [Martin, busily studying the score at his desk, ignores everything Elise says. Elise sits down and kicks off her shoes which land on the floor with a loud clunk. No reaction from Martin.] How was your day Elise? [Pause.] Oh, not bad. I went to work *as usual*. But I got bored so I danced down the street naked. [Pause, no response. Mischievously.] Then I saw the doctor and he told me I'm pregnant, well you can imagine my surprise. [Pause, no response.] I told my father to buy a shotgun - for the wedding. [Pause, no response.] Here's a bit of news you might be interested in: Alban's answer is no. [Still no response.] Lost interest, have we? Found something else to get obsessed about? [Pause, thinking.] What could it be? The ozone layer? No, too practical. The Graz Music Festival? Not important enough. Something unfinished by Webern perhaps. Now that would be a juicy nugget. But unfortunately nothing as big as an opera; nothing you could really get dressed up for. Probably all be over before it began, wouldn't it. [Pause.] I sometimes think I've been deposited on another planet. Perhaps I've slipped through space/time to some parallel universe and here I am watching you and talking into the void. We could be light years apart, you and I. Sometimes I can feel the coldness of space and all those stars between us. [Pause. Martin suddenly jumps up and turns to Elise.]

Martin

Elise, this is amazing.

Elise

Good grief, I must have dropped through a worm hole.

Martin

What?

Elise

Nothing. Something interesting in the mail again, was there?

Martin

It all becomes clear to me now.

Elise You're not the only one, pal.

Martin This score holds the key to the whole thing.

Elise I know the score!

Martin This is amazing.

Elise Martin, I think we should –

Martin Look at this!

Elise What are you going on about?

Martin This [holds up book] is a specially printed copy of the Lyric Suite that Alban Berg had made for Hanna Fuchs. Hanna and her husband were wealthy friends. When he went to Prague in 1925 for the premiere of *Wozzeck* he stayed with them, and it looks like a lot more than rehearsals went on. Berg was infatuated with Hanna and he composed the Lyric Suite as a sort of monument to their love.

Elise So he had an affair, there's nothing *rare* about that!

Martin [Elise looking increasingly annoyed but Martin oblivious of this.]
But Helene Berg has always portrayed their marriage as idyllic.

Elise Well I believe her.

Martin This is proof positive to the contrary. In his own hand Berg points out all the hidden meanings in the music. The whole thing revolves around the initials of their names in musical notation, A and B flat for Alban Berg and B natural (that's notated as H) and F for Hanna Fuchs. Their initials in the form of music intertwine and dance together. They literally make love *in* the music.

Elise It sounds like a cruel joke to me.

Martin [Not hearing Elise.] They must have been in love ever since then. For the last ten years of his life Berg was leading a double life; married to one woman and

yet passionately in love with Hanna, who was, of course, also married.

Elise How cruel.

Martin No wonder his late works are full of such passion.

Elise Poor Helene.

Martin This is such an exciting discovery. It changes everything. Don't you see? I've just discovered the key to the mystery - why Helene Berg is being so obstructive.

Elise Oh please.

Martin It's the only explanation.

Elise It's so sad. Poor Helene, all these years, living with Berg's memory, and all the time he was lying to her.

Martin In public he was the devoted husband, but in private the passionate lover.

Elise So how does it feel to realise your idol has feet of clay?

Martin It makes no difference. It's the music that counts.

Elise And what about poor Helene's feelings.

Martin She doesn't care about anyone else's, why should I care about hers?

Elise Oh you sound so –

Martin You think she cares about love?

Elise Yes.

Martin He's just her power base. Through him she's important, without him she's nothing.

Elise That's such a –

Martin She put it about that he was so . . . so infatuated with her to make herself seem more important. She's been feeding lies to his biographers for years. The woman who was really important, in terms of his music, wasn't her at all –

it was Hanna! She was the one who inspired all that intense musical expression.

Elise It would destroy her – if she knew.

Martin I think she knows already. That's why she won't let anyone near Lulu.

Elise But what if she doesn't?

Martin She needs to know.

Elise No she doesn't! Let her have her memories, they're all she's got left. Destroying her dreams, at her time of life, would be unforgivable. Some things should be left alone. Why do you think you have the right to demand so much?

Martin Lulu belongs to the world; it doesn't belong to Helene Berg any more than it belongs to you or me. What she is doing is criminal.

Elise What you'd be doing to that defenceless old woman would be criminal!

Martin I have to get her to face up to the truth of the situation.

Elise No you don't.

Martin [Exasperated gesture]. She's so . . . so smug . . . I want to make her recognise what she's doing. . . face reality!

Elise Why?

Martin What?

Elise Why make her face reality? If she doesn't like it why should she?

Martin She's living in a fantasy world!

Elise Good! If that's better than reality. Let her have her dreams, they're all she's got.

Martin The truth will out; somebody has to do it.

Elise Oh yes, the truth will out. You're right there. You, of course, are a great

upholder of the truth; you are the implacable enemy of falsehood. In which case I'd be interested to hear you explain this [pulling Anna's letter out and shaking it in front of him] It seems there are quite a few people around here who don't know the truth.

Martin It's not what you think.

Elise Oh, no I'm sure it's not. I was forgetting; I'm too stupid to ever understand what's going on, aren't I. My God! How could I have wasted my time with you for so long? I must be almost as stupid as people think.

Martin I can explain everything.

Elise And all this time. All the time I was helping you, you were complaining to your *arty* friends how frustrating it was living with such an *inferior* person.

Martin You've got it all wrong.

Elise No, Martin, it's you who's got it wrong.

Martin Let me explain.

Elise People told me not to waste my time with you. I should've known it wouldn't work.

Martin I can understand you're feeling hurt. But it wasn't anything serious. I was lonely in London. We're old friends, I knew her before I met you, when we were students, we just got carried away. It didn't mean anything.

Elise Oh, I'm sure she'll be pleased to hear that.

Martin I didn't mean it that way.

Elise No. You probably don't know what you mean anymore. You've been lying for so long you probably believe half the lies are true. But I can see what's been going on now. You were using me. I was just a way of getting through to Helene.

Martin Elise, you must believe me, it wasn't like that.

Elise Oh Ellie, please introduce me to Helene Berg.

Martin Elise.

Elise Pretty please, Ellie.

Martin Look –

Elise I believed in you, Martin. I did. But now I don't know what to believe any more, really I don't. I suppose this Anna is prettier than me, smarter, more musical -

Martin Don't compare yourself. It's not a competition.

Elise No?

Martin No.

Elise Well, clearly I'm not enough for you.

Martin You're everything I want.

Elise Martin, how can you say that?

Martin But it's true.

Elise You think I'll believe everything you tell me.

Martin It's true!

Elise Hook, line and sinker, poor stupid Elise.

Martin You're being irrational.

Elise You needn't think I'm letting you near her now.

Martin Elise!

Elise You needn't think I'm letting you near me either. I want you out. Now. Get your things and go.

Martin But Ellie –

Elise I want you out.

Martin Let's talk about things.

Elise I don't want to talk. Talk doesn't mean anything. I'm going to see Frieda, and when I come back I want you out!

 [Exit Elise.]

Martin [Calling after her.] Elise, please, I can explain, come back.

 [After she has slammed the door.] Cow!

 [Martin collapses into a chair. Slowly, to himself.] Oh fucking hell.

 [Pause. Martin suddenly rises, looks around, crossed to the door where Elise's uniform hangs on a hook. He rummages in her pockets, retrieves the key to Helene's apartment and flings the uniform across the room. He contemplates the key, hesitates, pockets it and leaves.]

Act 2 Scene 4

Helene Berg's apartment. Helene in the chair by the bed. Martin stands by her.

Martin Elise said you refuse to give me access to the score of Lulu.

Helene That is correct.

Martin Why!

Helene Really, Herr Frankel. I have already explained the situation to you. It simply cannot be done to my husband's satisfaction. Any reasonable person would be content with my explanation and leave it at that. I do wish you would stop pestering me to explain my explanations.

Martin It would mean so much to me, Frau Berg.

Helene I'm sure it would. But we cannot always get what we want. That is life. I

should've thought you would know that by now. You'll just have to be content with your own music. I'm sure there must be many people avidly awaiting your next composition.

Martin I cannot accept your explanation because I know it is a lie.

Helene A lie?

Martin Yes, a lie! I know it's perfectly feasible to complete Lulu the way Berg would have wished it. Everybody knows! It's common knowledge the score of act three is virtually complete; only the orchestration remains to be done. It is you who do not wish it to be completed, not Alban.

Helene These accusations are quite preposterous.

Martin Oh, I don't think so.

Helene I do not care what you choose to think, Herr Frankel. Kindly go.

Martin You might not care what I think but what about the judgment of history? Don't you care about that? You'll be remembered as the one who prevented the world from hearing Berg's masterpiece.

Helene Really, Herr Frankel, what possible reason could I have for obstructing the progress of my husband's music when that is the very thing to which I have devoted my life.

Martin Don't make me spell it out.

Helene I have no interest in your hysterical theories about my husband's work.

Martin You don't want anyone to finish Lulu because you're punishing him.

Helene What nonsense.

Martin You're punishing him, even though he's *dead* because you know at the end of his life he was in love with another woman.

Helene What!

Martin That's what you can't face.

Helene Ridiculous.

Martin That's why you don't want Lulu to be completed – it reminds you of her.
Hanna Fuchs.

Helene This is preposterous.

Martin He was in love with her ever since 1925 when he stayed with her in Prague.

Helene You're just trying to upset me. I won't give you what you want so you want to
upset me. I will not have it!

Martin He wrote the Lyric Suite for Hanna.

Helene He wrote the Lyric Suite for Zemlinsky. He had always been a friend to us,
most faithful. Alban wanted to thank him and show him how much he
respected him. He quoted from Zemlinsky's Lyric Symphony to show his
respect.

Martin He quoted from Zemlinsky because the music he used originally accompanied
the words, 'You are my own, my own'. Who do you think those words were
for?

Helene It was the music that mattered.

Martin They were for Hanna. It was a love message to Hanna.

Helene Absurd.

Martin You must be blind if you can't see that. I know you know. Don't you see I
know the truth now. I know why you won't let anyone finish Lulu; it's because
of *her* isn't it. It's because it reminds you of Hanna. The woman your husband
–

Helene No, No, No! It's not true! Not true! He loved *me*; only me!

Martin And Hanna.

Helene He had great respect for both Hanna and her husband. They were cultured people. They admired his work. They understood his music. That was quite a rare thing in those days. That was the nature of their relationship, they were music lovers.

Martin More than music lovers.

Helene She was a very charming woman. We met on a number of occasions; we got on very well. She was very attentive.

Martin I bet she was.

Helene But Alban didn't love her. He enjoyed her company, I knew that, in fact we all enjoyed one another's company. I asked him one time and he told me. He told me he loved only *me*.

Martin He lied. He lied to protect you. He didn't want to shatter your cosy little world.

Helene [Angrily.] Our world was never cosy, Herr Frankel.

Martin Then why not allow Lulu to be completed.

Helene You want to know?

Martin Yes, I want to know.

Helene It disgusts me. One need only look at the characters. And you want to bring before the public, to the discredit of myself and my husband, the final act of those characters' tawdry lives. Why do you insist on lifting these stones and scrabbling around among the dirt? Are you obsessed with sex, perversion, immorality? Do you have no shame? Well I do! And I will not be a party to trumpeting my husband's ill judged choice of subject for his final opera. It is bad enough as it is without any more. It was beneath him. He should never have started it. I warned him against it. I said it would merely play into the hands of his detractors. Why write an opera where all the characters are

swimming in a sewer? Is that a good way to be remembered? It is too horrible. Especially the third act; the degradation; sinking lower and lower. He was too close to it to see what he was doing. It was all a fascinating musical problem to him. He didn't realise how it would come across. I had to protect him from himself.

Martin Punish him more likely.

Helene And me. Have I not been punished? All these years without him.

Elise [Elise walks in.] What on earth is going on!

Helene Herr Frankel is trying to intimidate me.

Elise I can't believe you came round here!

Martin I am just trying to get her to face reality.

Elise You're making her ill. Go.

Martin No. I must make her see how important this is. Art is more important than one person's feelings.

Elise [Shouting.] Just get out! Go!

Martin [To Elise.] Okay, I'm going. [To Helene.] I'll leave you to your [looks around] mausoleum of lies. But I'll never give up. [Pointing at Helene.] What you are committing is a crime against art. [Exit Martin.]

Helene [Sobbing to Elise.] Alban loved me. He loved *me*.

Elise We all know he loved you very much.

Helene He did. He did [sobs] didn't he? It's true. I'm the one he loved.

Elise [As if to a child, rocking her in her arms.] Of course you are. There, there. Martin's talking a lot of nonsense. He doesn't know anything.

Helene He said such horrible things.

Elise He shouldn't have spoken to you like that. He gets carried away and doesn't

know what he's saying half the time. He gets frustrated when he can't get what he wants.

Helene The world seems to be full of intemperate young men. What he said was very hurtful.

Elise I'm so sorry he upset you.

Helene He was wrong to say those things. He thinks he knows but he doesn't. He doesn't really know how things were.

Elise Of course he doesn't. He's obsessed. He can't stop thinking about that damned opera and his mind races off in all directions. I do hope you won't take to heart all the stupid things he said.

Helene I'll manage. I don't know what you see in him, Elise. You're too good for him.

Elise You sound like my mother. That's what she thinks.

Helene Evidently a very wise woman.

Elise Anyway, we're . . . splitting up. He's . . . too intense.

Helene You have to watch out for the intense ones; nothing but trouble.

Elise Yeah. Your pulse is racing. Try and rest.

Helene [Helene putting on a brave face.] I'll be all right. I'm a survivor, Elise. The Nazis couldn't finish me off so I don't think the dreaded Martin will succeed.

Elise [Smiling.] That's the spirit.

Helene I've seen so much in my time. So many changes. One can't keep up with it all. I try to tell myself it hasn't all been bad.

Elise That's right, and Alban's music is one of the good things.

Helene Yes, one of the good things. Oh, I feel so tired.

Elise Try and rest. [Elise bends down to Helene and kisses her on the forehead.] I'll look in later to see if you're okay.

Helene Don't worry about me. I shall be all right.

Elise Goodbye.

Helene Goodbye, Elise. [Watches Elise leave.] Take care. [Pause. Struggles to get out of chair and slowly walks down stage.] When I look back on my life, I'm staggered, truly staggered, by everything that's happened. The first world war, inflation, depression, the second world war – as if one wasn't enough – the Nazis and the Communists. Just thinking about it I wonder how I'm still sane. What a century. [Pause.] You would think, as one got older, that life would get easier. Nothing of the kind! I'm so tired now; it's been a long day. A day I could have done without. Are you there, Alban? I don't feel very well today. Too much talk. Everybody has something to say. It makes my head spin, or is it those tablets? They think they know all about us. [Laughs.] But we know they don't. We were happy weren't we Alban, they can't take that away. [Pause, remembering happy times.] I kept you going. You always said that, didn't you. You said, Helene, my golden one, what would I do without you? [Pause.] I've had to learn what to do without you. And it hasn't been easy. [Pause.] No, it hasn't been easy. [Reaches front of stage and stares into distance.] Alban! You can hear me, can't you? [Pause.] You did love me, didn't you? [Pause.] Tell me one last time. [Helene waits, listening intently for an answer. Silence. Fade to black. End.]