

A GOD IN THE HOUSE

A Drama in Two Acts

by

Peter Selgin

A GOD IN THE HOUSE

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A GOD IN THE HOUSE

for Susan Forest Castle

*If there must be a god in the house, let him be one
That will not hear us when we speak.
— Wallace Stevens*

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A GOD IN THE HOUSE was first produced at the Town & Gown Players in Athens, Georgia, directed by Léland Downs with the following cast:

Dr. Peter Katseus:..... Steve Elliot-Gower
Juduth Birch: Julia Wilson
Douglas Birch: Will Riley

CAST of CHARACTERS

Dr. Peter Katseus:..... a retired pathologist
Juduth Birch: a former music teacher
Douglas Birch: Judith's husbandy

SCENE

The outskirts of a Midwestern U.S. city

TIME

1989

A NOTE ON PERFORMANCE: The actor playing Judith is encouraged to be free with her hesitations, confusion, malaprops, and other manifestations of aphasia occasioned by her illness. Players should not hesitate to step on each other's lines. Delivery should be brisk.

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ACT I

SCENE 1

A dark stage. Bach's "Sheep May Safely Graze" is heard as a spotlight illuminates a tabletop device consisting of three inverted glass bottles of diminishing size suspended from a wire strung between twin laboratory stands. A clear plastic tube hangs from the mouth of each bottle. The table holding the device rotates slowly.

As light gleams off the three bottles the faces of tarot cards are projected onto an overhead screen: Justice, The Devil, the Chariot, Death, Wheel of Fortune, Judgment, The Magician, The Lovers, The Hermit. As The Lovers card is projected we see Judith and Douglas Birch, a couple in their fifties. They sit watching a television with its back to us, their faces glowing in its blue light. Judith plays with a deck of tarot cards, using her lap as a table. Douglas makes notes on a musical score.

With the appearance of The Hermit card we see — at the far side of the stage — Dr. Peter Katseus [pronounced: Kat-soos] seated in one of several chairs arranged as on a talk show. Also in his fifties, Katseus wears an unfashionable tie. His face is gaunt, stern, faintly belligerent and — where not shadowed by five-o'clock stubble — pale from lack of exposure to sunlight. It is, all in all, the face of a man who doesn't give a damn what others think of him.

Talk show music; applause. As soon as the lights come on him he speaks.

KATSEUS. *(Confrontational.)* You tell me: has there ever been a simpler device? Three bottles, a few yards of plastic tubing, a wire stand, a couple C-clamps, and a single I.V. — that's all there is to it. An instrument that, with the pressing of a single button, can deliver

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people from helplessness, can put an end to their suffering and despair! (*Judith Birch's attention shifts from her tarot cards to the television screen. She gets her husband's attention. He watches with her.*) We choose so many things in life. The clothes we wear, foods we eat, the books we read, the music we listen to. Our friends, our careers, our spouses. We choose where and how we live, and the things we live for. The only thing people aren't free to choose is the time and manner of their own deaths. Which, in my opinion, is absurd! (*Faint applause. Judith's eyes well with curiosity and admiration. Douglas, meanwhile, looks — if anything — faintly alarmed. To an audience member.*) Yes, it's completely painless, except for the prick of an I.V. needle. That's the beauty of it. Yes, please, the lady in the back row. (*A pause.*) No, absolutely not. Under no circumstances should the device be used without proper medical supervision. That would defeat the whole purpose. (*Scanning the audience.*) Yes, this man in the third row, wearing the red sweater. What's that? No sir, I do not charge for my services. (*Looking to another part of the audience.*) Excuse me? What was the question? Yes, ma'am, I know what the medical establishment thinks of me and my device. Let them think what they like. It wasn't created for them. It was created for those who need it, for these people, here. (*From a briefcase Katseus withdraws a fistful of letters and shakes them.*) Tens of dozens of suffering people begging me, asking me, "Please, Dr. Katseus, please, let me be the first to use your device!" As far as I'm concerned, these are the only "medical" opinions that count! (*Applause. With a great smile on her face, Judith takes Douglas' hand; he looks increasingly distressed.*) Yes: yes, I'm ready. As soon as the right candidate comes along, we'll be there for them. Me and my device. (*Katseus looks proudly at his device. Judith nods her head rapidly while squeezing her husband's hand.*)

JUDITH. (*Exuberant with enthusiasm.*) Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes! (*Blackout.*)

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SCENE 2

Music from one of Bach's Brandenburg Concertos as tarot No. 9, The Hermit, is projected on the screen. We are in Dr. Katseus' "office" — actually a portion of his one-bedroom apartment. A wooden desk, several chairs, a sofa, and a small antique church organ — all covered with papers — medical journals, research articles, books. Those surfaces not covered with papers are strewn with bottles, chemical jars and chemistry apparatus. Hung crookedly on a wall: a painting of a woman, its frame a deep, brownish red. Rising placidly from the center of all this chaos is the so-called "device."

Katseus, at his desk, eats cookies from a bag with one hand while holding a small microphone in the other. He speaks into a recording device.

KATSEUS. Thursday, April 29. Have arranged to meet this morning with potential candidate, Mrs. Judith Birch of Santa Barbara, California. Former high school music teacher, married, no children. Subject to be accompanied by her husband, Mr. Douglas Birch, also a musician ... (*Judith and Douglas Birch appear just outside the office. She wears a vividly patterned dress; he looks professional in a tweed jacket and bowtie. She carries a small, red velvet pouch. Their conversation overlaps Katseus' dictation.*)

JUDITH. The name — tell me! What's the ... the name again?

DOUGLAS. Katseus.

KATSEUS. Subject's age: fifty-one.

JUDITH. Katseus, Katseus. Why can't I remember that? Like when ... blowing your nose... when you...Like sneezing!

KATSEUS. This past November subject diagnosed Stage 2 Alzheimer's.

JUDITH. Katsoos! *Gesundheit!*

KATSEUS. Subject and spouse both members of Hemlock Society.

JUDITH. My ... my hair — does my hair look — does it look — ?

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DOUGLAS. You look fine, dear.

JUDITH. The color. It always gets the wrong. I mean — no. Not the color. The long. The — the — oh, oh, God — !

DOUGLAS. It's all right, Judith. Calm down.

JUDITH. It's not — it's not. Damn — why can't I make sense?

DOUGLAS. You're nervous. It's understandable.

JUDITH. Hold — hold me! Please! *(He does.)*

DOUGLAS. We don't have to do this, you know. We can turn around.

KATSEUS. *(Examines wristwatch.)* Subject ... eight minutes late ...

DOUGLAS. It's up to you. It's all always up to you.

JUDITH. No.

DOUGLAS. We can call from the hotel and say we changed our minds.

JUDITH. No. No! I want to — Please!

DOUGLAS. You're absolutely sure?

JUDITH. Yes. Yes! Sure.

DOUGLAS. Long as you're sure. *(He gives her a last, searching look, hoping for a trace of doubt in her face, for some sign of hesitation, for a last-minute retrieve. She is resolute. Resigned, he presses the doorbell.)*

KATSEUS. Subject arrived at — *(He checks his watch.)* — ten past the hour. *(He switches off the tape recorder, puts the microphone down. He finishes his cookie. Having wiped the crumbs off his shirt, goes to and answers the door.)*

KATSEUS. Please — do come in.

DOUGLAS. *(Extending his hand.)* Dr. Katseus, I'm Douglas Birch.

KATSEUS. Yes, I know. And this must be Judith.

JUDITH. I'm Judith Birch.

KATSEUS. Yes, good. Pleased to meet you. Come in. Sit down. Make yourselves comfortable. *(He clears papers from the sofa, where Judith and Douglas sit holding hands.)*

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KATSEUS. You found your way here with no trouble?

DOUGLAS. (*Looking around skeptically.*) No. No trouble.

KATSEUS. My directions weren't incomprehensible?

DOUGLAS. They were ... fine.

KATSEUS. Good. Good! Can I get you some ... some coffee?

DOUGLAS. No, that's —

JUDITH. Yes, yes! Coffee. Please.

KATSEUS. I only have instant, I'm afraid. Sanka.

JUDITH. You're welcome.

DOUGLAS. He meant the coffee.

JUDITH. What?

DOUGLAS. (*Too loudly.*) He was referring to the coffee. The kind of coffee.

JUDITH. Oh! The coffee!

KATSEUS. Shall I get you some?

DOUGLAS. Sure. Yes, please. Thank you. (*Katseus exits.*)

DOUGLAS. (*Rises, looks around, picks up a journal, a flask, a bottle.*) So — this is his ... “office.” Certainly not what I expected. I mean — it's a bit messy, isn't it? I guess I was expecting ... I don't know ... something ... something a little less ... a little more ... I don't know ... clean. A little less ... disheveled. (*He wanders over to the Thanatron, stands looking down at it.*) It doesn't exactly inspire ... confidence ...

JUDITH. Shhh!

DOUGLAS. Sorry?

JUDITH. Don't! Please! You're always so ... so — !

DOUGLAS. Skeptical? I don't mean to be. I just can't help ... well, I'm sorry. But you have to admit, it's such a —

KATSEUS. (*Returning with two mismatched mugs of coffee and a quart of milk. He clears a space and sets them on a table near the sofa.*) Two Sankas. I brought some milk. I should have put it in something. Ah, wait — here. (*He has found a chemical flask, examines*

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it for cleanliness.) Clean. (Doug watches, horrified, as he pours milk from container into the flask.) I've got some cookies, here, I believe. Chocolate chip. Tollhouse. Would either of you care for some?

DOUGLAS. *(Adamantly.)* No, thank you.

JUDITH. Yes! Cookies!

KATSEUS. *(Putting cookies on a plate.)* I'm afraid I'm not much of a host, but then you haven't come here to socialize, now, have you? *(He offers the plate of cookies to Judith, who takes one.)*

JUDITH. Thank you, DrDr. Kat — Kat —

KATSEUS. Katseus.

JUDITH. Katseus. Why should that be so hard? All I have to do is think of ... of catsup! Heinze! 57 Varieties! *(She has wandered to his desk, where she picks up his business card.)*

DOUGLAS. Judith, why don't we let the doctor —

JUDITH. Dr. Catsup! *(She extends her hand. An awkward moment as Katseus and Douglas exchange glances. Katseus shakes Judith's hand.)* You were so wonderful on that — Oh, the — the thing with the lights. The ... Oh, the, the whatchamacallit. The —

DOUGLAS. The Donohue show?

JUDITH. Donohue! Yes! Wonderful!

DOUGLAS. We were watching Phil Donohue when she first —

KATSEUS. Yes, you said so in your letter. Not the ideal forum, but ... I myself never watch those types of programs. Still, it got the word out. That's what matters.

JUDITH. Wonderful!

KATSEUS. Well ... I'm glad —

JUDITH. Wasn't he wonderful, Doug?

DOUGLAS. Doctor, perhaps we should —

JUDITH. Wonderful!

KATSEUS. Yes, why don't we get started. *(He adjusts a small video camera.)*

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DOUGLAS. What — what's this?

KATSEUS. I'm setting up the video recorder. I'm going to videotape our conversation. You don't mind?

DOUGLAS. Well, I —

KATSEUS. It's imperative that I do so, for the record. Everything we do, every matter discussed, has all got to be part of the record. Assuming we go through with this, that is.

DOUGLAS. I see.

KATSEUS. So there can be no possible misunderstanding.

DOUGLAS. I see.

KATSEUS. These videotapes could be all that stands between me and a long prison term. As it is, I'll be risking my neck.

DOUGLAS. I appreciate —

KATSEUS. Though of course ultimately the decision rests with your wife. And you.

DOUGLAS. Yes. Ultimately.

KATSEUS. And me, of course.

DOUGLAS. Yes. Of course. Naturally.

KATSEUS. *(He switches the camera on. Lights flood the sofa where Judith and Douglas sit. Their faces appear on the screen.)* So. Let's start by going over Judith's medical history.

JUDITH. My — history? Oh, the ... the things ... the records! We forgot the records!

DOUGLAS. The doctor has them, dear. It's all right. We sent them to him. Remember? *(To Katseus.)* She's nervous.

KATSEUS. *(Coolly.)* Understandable.

JUDITH. *(Getting lost.)* We ... sent them?

KATSEUS. Now. According to these records, the subject was first examined by a Dr. Ruff on October 9th, nineteen —

JUDITH. We did everything all so quickly. Moving in. Putting in the trunk. The papers. In the papers. Oh, and everything was so crowded.

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Did you see? And the motel. That man at the motel. Anyway, they're so crowded. The rooms. Going by so fast. With all the doors. Why do they go so fast? I couldn't tell what we hadn't left behind. I thought we put everything in there, but how could I know for sure? How do you know you're not leaving something important. You could be leaving the most important thing but you don't know it, until it's too late? You don't know it.

KATSEUS. *(After a pause.)* Yes. Well. According to Dr. Ruff —

JUDITH. You don't know it. You don't!

KATSEUS. According to Dr. —

JUDITH. You just don't.

DOUGLAS. Judith, please. Let the doc—

KATSEUS. According to Dr. Ruff's office, during the months of October and November subject underwent a series of cognitive and neuropsychological tests, for memory, vision-motor coordination, and abstract problem solving. An MRI or brain-imaging scan was also performed. As a result of these tests, on November 9 Dr. Ruff concluded —

JUDITH. *(Seeing the organ for the first time.)* Oh! What a beautiful ...! Beautiful! Whose — ?

KATSEUS. It's mine.

JUDITH. You? *(Gestures: playing.)*

KATSEUS. Hmm? Oh, very little. A little Bach — now and then.

JUDITH. Bach!

KATSEUS. Strictly for my own amusement.

JUDITH. *(With adoration, dreamily.)* Bach.

DOUGLAS. Judith loves Bach.

JUDITH. We're both music ... musicians! I ... I play — *(Gestures: violin.)*

KATSEUS. So I'm told. Now, then, if we —

JUDITH. I don't — *(Gestures: violin.)* — anymore. No more. I ... I

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teach. Taught. No longer.

KATSEUS. Now, then, Mr. Birch, I understand that your wife has Alzheimer's disease and as a result she wishes to die.

DOUGLAS. (*Horried; confidentially.*) That's putting it bluntly, don't you think?

KATSEUS. I see no point in beating around the bush, Mr. Birch.

DOUGLAS. Still, you needn't be so — !

JUDITH. Yes, yes: Dr. Catsup: I've made myself ... I've made up my mind. I want to ... to end ... my ...

KATSEUS. Your life?

JUDITH. Yes! My life!

KATSEUS. By "end your life" — I take it you mean that you want to kill yourself?

DOUGLAS. Now just a minute — !

KATSEUS. Please, Mr. Birch. With due respect, given what we're dealing with, we can't afford euphemisms. Call it "blunt" if you must, but when a person decides to die, they're deciding to die. Not to "end their suffering" or "deliver themselves" or any other delicate-sounding euphemism. It may sound crude, but better to be crude than unclear. We must be absolutely clear.

JUDITH. I want to ... to die. Yes! (*Both men face her.*)

KATSEUS. Are you absolutely certain?

JUDITH. Yes. To die. Yes! (*Douglas rises suddenly from the couch, rubs his forehead.*)

KATSEUS. Is something wrong?

DOUGLAS. Yes. This whole thing. This whole thing is wrong. (*To Judith, desperately.*) I'm sorry, Judith.

KATSEUS. No one has forced you to come here.

DOUGLAS. I know that! Don't you think I know that? Whatever my wife wants, that's what we've decided, she and I. That doesn't mean I have to like it. Or you.

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JUDITH. Please! Don't — !

KATSEUS. Just what do you know about me, Mr. Birch?

DOUGLAS. I know that you're a retired pathologist with a less than stellar academic or medical record.

JUDITH. We read about your thing, with the ... with the —

DOUGLAS. (*Wearily.*) Prisoners.

KATSEUS. My death-row organ donor campaign?

JUDITH. Those poor men! What a — what a — waste!

KATSEUS. (*To Judith, lighting up.*) So — you thought it was a good idea?

JUDITH. Oh — yes!

KATSEUS. (*To Douglas.*) I take it you weren't as impressed?

DOUGLAS. I thought it was an ... an interesting concept.

KATSEUS. An interesting concept? Are you aware that every time a prisoner is condemned to death in this country, six other totally innocent lives are likewise condemned? That's two lungs, two kidneys, one heart, and one liver. Six organs — enough to save six lives. But instead of being saved and donated, those good organs are immolated. To what end? To serve an abstraction known as "Justice"!

DOUGLAS. Yes, I... I see your point.

KATSEUS. Yes, well, unfortunately the medical establishment failed to see it. They fought me and my initiative tooth and nail. They've always fought me. When I suggested that the blood of cadavers might be used in human trans-fusions, why they practically revoked my license — as if blood weren't a tissue like any other. It is, you know. Nothing more or less. No different than skin or hair. Or an organ, for that matter. (*Judith wanders to the organ and sits. She strikes a dissonant series of chords.*)

DOUGLAS. Yes, well, that's all very interesting, Doc —

KATSEUS. (*Appealing to Judith.*) You thought it was a good idea?

JUDITH. (*Playing discordantly.*) Oh! Yes! Yes! Absolutely!

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DOUGLAS. Judith?

KATSEUS. Pardon me one moment ... (*Nodding, dictating into his recorder.*)

Subject appears to be of sound judgment ...

DOUGLAS. (*As Judith keeps playing.*) Judith, please, you probably shouldn't —

JUDITH. (*Rising.*) It's ... it's ... out of ...

KATSEUS. (*Absently.*) Hmmm? Oh, yes, I've been meaning to have it tuned. No mean feat finding a harpsichord tuner these days.

JUDITH. (*Having crossed to the Thanatron.*) On this you make a different ... kind of ... (*Touching the bottles.*) Beautiful.

DOUGLAS. (*Rising.*) Doctor, I think maybe it might be best if we —

JUDITH. How — does it — ?

KATSEUS. Work?

DOUGLAS. (*Taking her.*) Come on, dear. You're tired. (*To Katseus.*) I think perhaps we'd better —

JUDITH. Yes! Tell me.

KATSEUS. (*Appealing to her.*) Well, it's really very simple. See, the largest bottle — this one here — contains a harmless saline solution. Salt water, basically. Now, with the I.V. attached, when you, the patient, are ready, you press this small button here, see? That triggers the solenoid, which is up in here. The solenoid turns a valve that releases the solution in the second bottle. That's sodium pentothal.

JUDITH. Sodium ... penta ...

KATSEUS. The pentothal induces unconsciousness. Sixty seconds later the device switches automatically to the third bottle, which contains a lethal dose of potassium chloride.

JUDITH. That's the ... the ...

KATSEUS. The poison.

JUDITH. Poison. Yes.

KATSEUS. You see, the potassium chloride produces hyperkalemia,

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which leads to myocardial infarction.

JUDITH. Mio ... car —

KATSEUS. A heart attack, essentially. The whole procedure takes less than five minutes.

JUDITH. (*Impressed.*) Five ... — !

KATSEUS. Give or take. And it's painless. Completely.

JUDITH. Completely...

KATSEUS. Save for the prick on an I.V. needle.

JUDITH. (*Expressing wonder.*) How ... how ... —!

KATSEUS. (*Warming to her flattery.*) What may be most remarkable of all is that all the parts came from flea markets, thrift stores, and garage sales. I even broke some kiddie toys apart to get some of the gears. This big red gear? Comes from a Mouse Trap game!

JUDITH. (*Impressed.*) A Mouse ... ?

DOUGLAS. (*Appalled.*) A Mouse Trap — ?

KATSEUS. You know, the game where you have to catch the little gray plastic —

DOUGLAS. Yes, I know what a Mouse Trap game is.

JUDITH. One ... but?

KATSEUS. Hmm? Oh, yes! That's right. One button. The patient has complete control. That's the whole point of the device.

JUDITH. The ... device? Is that what you — ?

KATSEUS. For a time I thought of calling it the Thanatron, after the Greek god Thanatos. God of Death. But ... apparently some found that objectionable, I don't see why.

JUDITH. A name ...

KATSEUS. Hmmm?

JUDITH. It needs a name.

DOUGLAS. Judith —

JUDITH. Names are important! If a thing doesn't have a name it may as well not ... not ... Judith — that's *my* name.

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KATSEUS. Mrs. Birch, I'm wondering, given your husband's —

JUDITH. It must ...

KATSEUS. — ambivalence ...

JUDITH. (*An outburst.*) It must have a *name!*

DOUG. (*Taking possession of her.*) All right, dear, it's all right. Doctor, if it's all the same with you, I think we'll head back to our motel now. My wife is ... tired. We'll go back, talk things over, give it all some ... some more thought.

JUDITH. God.

DOUGLAS. Judith?

JUDITH. God!

DOUGLAS. How does that sound, Judith?

KATSEUS. God?

JUDITH. Yes — God.

KATSEUS. (*Pondering.*) God ...

JUDITH. Yes: God.

KATSEUS. (*Considering.*) God? (*He laughs. Judith joins him in his laughter. Douglas watches them both, his expression one of bewilderment. Katseus meanwhile returns to his desk, shakes his head, smiles.*)

KATSEUS. God ...

DOUGLAS. Judith?

KATSEUS. So — shall we resume?

DOUGLAS. Judith?

JUDITH. Yes. Yes: resume!

KATSEUS. Now, then, Mr. and Mrs. Birch, you both realize, I'm sure, that with Alzheimer's the full constellation of symptoms comes on very slowly.

DOUGLAS. Dr. Katseus, I really think —

JUDITH. Yes: we realize.

KATSEUS. You could expect a reasonable quality of life for at least a

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year or two, maybe longer.

JUDITH. Reasonable.

KATSEUS. What I mean is —

JUDITH. Reasonable to who? I can't play or ... or ... music! A life without ... without living ... without music — how is that ...? Half of the time I don't ... I can't ... make something ... sense! Is that — reasonable?

KATSEUS. My point is, Mrs. Birch —

JUDITH. No!

DOUGLAS. Please. Listen to him, Judith.

JUDITH. You said you'd help me! You said —

KATSEUS. I said I'd consider your case.

JUDITH. (*To her husband.*) Douglas, tell him for me!

KATSEUS. Mr. Birch, exactly what is your position in all of this?

DOUGLAS. It's her decision. Long ago we agreed that if something like this were ever to happen to either of us, we'd have the option to end our own lives with dignity. It's why we joined the Hemlock Society. We believe that ... people have the right to ... to deliver themselves from ... from suffering.

KATSEUS. Euphemisms. All well and fine, Mr. Birch, but do you want your wife to die — here, with me, sooner than later?

DOUGLAS. What I want doesn't matter!

KATSEUS. As far as the law is concerned it matters a great deal. If I'm to do this, I'll need your total cooperation and your consent. Do you or do you not want your wife to go through with this?

DOUGLAS. I'm here, aren't I?

KATSEUS. That's no answer. Mr. Birch. If you're ambivalent now, how will you feel when she's gone?

DOUGLAS. How ... dare you!

JUDITH. What? No. No!

KATSEUS. You've answered my question, I believe.

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DOUGLAS. How dare you speak to us — to people — this way? How can you be so insensitive?

JUDITH. No! *No!*

KATSEUS. Good day to you both ...

JUDITH. *(To Katseus.)* No, please!

KATSEUS. I'm not about to sacrifice the hopes of thousands of people for the sake of one patient who apparently does not have her spouse's support. If I go through with this, and you decide to prosecute me, everything that I've dedicated my life to over the past fifteen years will go down the drain. Sorry, I can't risk it.

JUDITH. Douglas — !

DOUGLAS. You're incredible. Do you know that? Here we are, two people faced with the most monumental decision a person can ever possibly face, a decision that transcends every other worldly concern, and all you care about is you're bloody career, such as it is!

KATSEUS. Need I remind you that I'm not the one who's considering suicide.

DOUGLAS. *(Practically forcing her.)* That's it! We're leaving, Judith. We should never have come here in the first place. I should never have agreed to come. It was a mistake. A terrible mistake!

KATSEUS. I wish you both the best of luck.

DOUGLAS. Go to hell!

JUDITH. *(Struggling.)* Wait! No! No! Please — Dr. — !

KATSEUS. You may change your mind.

JUDITH. I won't! *(Douglas takes her by the arm. She frees herself. They exit. Katseus watches them both go. After several desultory moments picks up the tape recorder.)*

KATSEUS. Concluded meeting with prospective subject Judith Birch. Though clearly determined to cease living, I found the subject to be ... in complete control of her faculties and hence capable of living a ... a reasonable ... *Sstops, rewinds.)* I found subject capable of living ...an adequate ... *(Stops, shakes his head rewinds again.)* I found the subject

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capable of ... of living. (*Katseus switches off the recorder. He looks up and sees the red velvet pouch that Judith has left behind on his sofa. He crosses over and picks it up. Inside, he finds a deck of tarot cards. He examines them as the music of Bach's Concerto No. 2 in F rises and—Blackout.*)

SCENE 3

The Polonaise movement of Bach's Orchestral Suite No. 2 in B-minor accompanies the patter of falling rain and rumbles of thunder. The Wheel of Fortune card is projected onto the screen. It is about three a.m. the following day. We are in Katseus' office. All is dark save for traces of light reflected off of the bottles of the device. Judith Birch appears at the door and knocks. She wears a jacket over sleeping clothes. She knocks gently at first, then frantically.

KATSEUS. (*Entering.*) Coming, I'm coming ... (*He switches a light on. He fusses with the belt of his robe. We see the tarot cards spread out on his desk. The pounding on the door continues.*) I said I'm coming! (*At the door.*) Who—who is it?

JUDITH. It's me!

KATSEUS. Me? Who's me? Me who?

JUDITH. (*Desperate.*) Me! Me! Birch! Judith Birch!

KATSEUS. For God's sake — ! Mrs. Birch? (*He opens the door. Judith enters, soaking.*) What are you doing here?

JUDITH. Water! The water! So wet. I ... Do you have a — a — a — (*She mimes: smoking.*)

KATSEUS. I don't smoke.

JUDITH. Me, either. (*Looking around.*) You don't have any ... any ... tob ... tob — ?

KATSEUS. Tobacco? No.

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JUDITH. No?

KATSEUS. No. I never smoked.

JUDITH. Never?

KATSEUS. Well — a pipe. Briefly.

JUDITH. A pipe?

KATSEUS. Yes.

JUDITH. Where ... ?

KATSEUS. Where did I smoke?

JUDITH. No, where is it. The — ?

KATSEUS. God knows. I probably threw it out. Unless ... *(He opens a desk drawer, removes a small box. Sure enough, it holds a pipe and a pouch of tobacco.)* Huh, I'll be darned ...

JUDITH. Give me!

KATSEUS. Oh, no!

JUDITH. Please!

KATSEUS. This tobacco must be twenty years old!

JUDITH. I don't care! Please! Give!

KATSEUS. *(Reluctantly, he holds the box out to her. Judith takes the pipe, smiling. She nods to the pouch of tobacco. He holds it open for her. With difficulty she tries to fill the pipe.)* Here ... *(Katseus loads the pipe and hands it to Judith, who puts it in her mouth. She gestures for a match.)* You really shouldn't, you know.

JUDITH. It won't kill me. *(She glares ironically at him. Katseus finds a match, lights her pipe. With it lit, puffing it, Judith wanders to the device. She strokes one of its bottles.)* Hello, God.

KATSEUS. Have you any idea what time it is, Mrs. Birch?

JUDITH. Time? No. I don't ... What time is it?

KATSEUS. Three o'clock in the morning.

JUDITH. Good.

KATSEUS. Not so good. Does your husband — ?

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JUDITH. He's ... what do you call ... asleep.

KATSEUS. Does he know you're here?

JUDITH. Know? No. He doesn't —

KATSEUS. How did you — ?

JUDITH. By boat. I mean — oh, what are they called? The thing. A tax. Taxi. I took a taxi. I left him sleeping. Douglas. My husband. I had the man ... In the window. I had — I had your ... your thing that you gave us. I said, "Take me — !" "It's an emergency!" I said. It was. It is. He couldn't read the ... The water, it fell so ... Things were going like mad, all over ... back and forth. (*She gestures: windshield wipers.*) The way it was coming ... going through water. Like ... in a boat. The signals, they —

KATSEUS. You're soaked! Here, wait, let me get you a towel.

(He goes off.)

JUDITH. (*To herself, or perhaps to the device.*) So dark ... mystery ... thunder and ... just like a movie. Hitchcock. Alfred Hitchcock!

KATSEUS. (*Returning with a towel and robe.*) Here, dry yourself, then you can put this on. (*He goes to the phone and dials.*)

JUDITH. Where are you ...?

KATSEUS. Hello? Is this the Quality Court? Yes. I'd like to speak with Mr. Douglas Birch. I believe he's there. Yes, it's an emergency. If you would — (*Judith has grabbed the phone receiver from him.*) Please, Mrs. Birch! I need to let your husband know you're here!

JUDITH. No! Don't! I know ... I know — !

KATSEUS. (*Taking the receiver from her, cradling it.*) Please — sit down. (*He arranges the towel on the sofa. A car horn sounds outdoors.*)

JUDITH. The boat! I mean ... the — ! I haven't paid! I forgot my — my ... !

KATSEUS. It's all right. I'll take care of it. (*He gets his wallet, puts on a coat and starts for the door, then stops.*) Should I tell him to wait? (*Judith shakes her head. He hesitates, then nods and rushes out. She*

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crosses to his desk and sees the tarot cards. She picks one up, looks at it and smiles. The Hermit flashes on the screen. She picks up another card. The Lovers. She smiles. (Kaseus returns.) That's quite a fare you ran up.

JUDITH. Do you have — ? (*Mimes: swigging something.*)

KATSEUS. Hmm? Oh, liquor? No. I don't drink. Just grain alcohol. (*Judith nods enthusiastically.*) Trust me, you don't want to drink that. (*Judith keeps nodding. Reluctantly, he gets the bottle of grain alcohol, pours some into a coffee mug, and hands it to her.*)

JUDITH. (*Sipping, drawing back.*) Mmm. Good!

KATSEUS. That's — potent stuff.

JUDITH. Yes.

KATSEUS. Keep this up, you won't be needing my services.

JUDITH. (*Smoking, drinking.*) Penelope! That was her name. I remember now. A year ago she stopped ... walking. We found her on the ... the floor of the ... Her legs. The ones behind. She dragged herself. Pulled along. Crying. He wouldn't —

KATSEUS. Who wouldn't what?

JUDITH. Douglas. Husband. He kept saying ... she/d get better. She was ... old. He knew. I had to bring her. I watched them. I held her while he ... did ... Afterwards, he refused to talk to me. Douglas. For days. Wouldn't even look. All he could think was ... how he missed her. He wanted to keep her. Like that. In terrible ... He says no. Anyway, that's why we were ... why we both yelled. At each ... Penelope. Our dog.

KATSEUS. When was this?

JUDITH. Now. Tonight. No, *last* night.

KATSEUS. I see. You had an argument?

JUDITH. (*Having wandered to the device again.*) I'll pay for — for the boat. No! Taxi, the taxi!

KATSEUS. Forget about it.

JUDITH. Are you sure?

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KATSEUS. Anything for a patient in distress.

JUDITH. Almost anything.

KATSEUS. I'm sorry, Mrs. Birch, but without your husband's —

JUDITH. *(Stroking it.)* Why did you make him?

KATSEUS. Who?

JUDITH. God?

KATSEUS. God? Oh, the device, you mean. I saw a need and I tried to fill it, that's all.

JUDITH. What ... motive ... what moved you?

KATSEUS. It wasn't an emotional decision, if that's what you mean. It was purely practical, a rational decision. Emotions had nothing to do with it.

JUDITH. I don't believe ...

KATSEUS. Emotions are the very things that have kept others from doing so before me, despite the obvious, practical need. Irrational, impractical, unscientific emotions.

JUDITH. Still, you must have strong ... strong ...

KATSEUS. Convictions? Sure. But the idea for the device grew strictly from logic. Facts, Mrs. Birch, not feelings.

JUDITH. People are made of feelings, not facts.

KATSEUS. Mrs. Birch, it's three o'clock in the morning. You didn't come here in the rain to analyze my motives or teach me what people are made of. Or to smoke my pipe! *(He grabs the pipe from her mouth. Judith looks at him, again with that conviction in her eyes that takes no hostages and allows no escape. Cornered, Katseus puffs his own pipe, pours himself some grain alcohol, drinks.)*

KATSEUS. His name was Preston. Tony Preston. He was a patient of mine back when I was still involved in clinical practice. At nineteen he was paralyzed in a surfing accident and confined to a bed in a nursing home. That was six years before I met him. Since then he'd been stuck in that bed, unable to swallow food or to breathe on his own without a respirator tube down his throat, facing thirty to forty more years of so-

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called “life” as an immobilized, gasping corpse. He put an ad in the paper asking for some doctor to come forward and help him carry out his wish to die.

JUDITH. You ... ?

KATSEUS. I met with him. No one else was going to. I'll say this for that young man, he was determined. I'd never met a more determined person. I wanted to help him. The thing is there had to be some way to do it, so I wouldn't have to pull any plugs or push any buttons, which would have been as illegal then as it is now. If I could create a device of some sort, something Tony could manipulate with a stick or something else in his mouth, then he'd have the means to do it himself.

JUDITH. So — you made God!

KATSEUS. I'd prefer you didn't call it that. But yes, that's why I created the device.

JUDITH. But you never —

KATSEUS. Another doctor intervened. He pulled the plug.

JUDITH. You didn't — ?

KATSEUS. I was afraid they'd suspend or take away my medical license. Afraid they'd put me in jail. I have a morbid fear of jail cells. I kept putting him off, telling him I'd look into the matter, consider my legal options. For two years I put him off. Meanwhile he suffered terribly, senselessly. Does that answer your question?

JUDITH. So — you do have feelings!

KATSEUS. It's late, Mrs. Birch; I'm tired. Was there something in particular that you —

JUDITH. (*Crossing and picking them up.*) My cards!

KATSEUS. Oh, yes. You left them here.

JUDITH. You were — ? (*Mimes: playing.*)

KATSEUS. Hmm? No, I was just — admiring the illustrations.

JUDITH. Have you ever — ?

KATSEUS. Me? Had my tarot told? God, no!

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JUDITH. Never?

KATSEUS. I don't believe in any of all that ... gobbledegook.

JUDITH. Gobble — ?

KATSEUS. Astrology, tarot, numerology ...

JUDITH. Then you don't believe in re ... re ... ?

KATSEUS. Reincarnation? Certainly not!

JUDITH. Oh, but you will reincarnate!

KATSEUS. Over my dead body.

JUDITH. In a past life ... I was run over by ... by one of those things ... pulled by a — a — a cart! My legs. I couldn't walk. Like ... like ...

KATSEUS. Your dog?

JUDITH. Penelope. That's why in this life I ... I like to ... to dance — whenever I can! (*She does a little gavotte right there, in Katseus' office.*)

KATSEUS. (*As she dances.*) One life, Mrs. Birch. That's what I believe in. One life. Here, now. For the living. Are you aware that in you at this very moment are two healthy lungs, a good heart, two fine kidneys, and a liver big enough to be split in half for two infants, children that may be dying right now for lack of healthy livers? The organs in just us two alone could save the lives of ten, maybe twelve people!

JUDITH. (*Dancing.*) How very Roman. Romantic!

KATSEUS. Life from death, Mrs. Birch.

JUDITH. (*Still dancing.*) So then you do believe in re —

KATSEUS. My kind of reincarnation, not yours, Mrs. Birch.

JUDITH. Do you believe in God?

KATSEUS. No more than I believe in Santa Claus.

JUDITH. Too bad.

KATSEUS. I don't believe in belief. The very word implies a suspension of logic and objective, empirical judgment. If there's empirical evidence for something, if you can see it, taste it, touch it, to

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say that you “believe” in it is essentially a lie, since to believe in the obvious is at best unnecessary, at worst absurd. What’s known by the senses is known; what isn’t known we can either suspect or doubt. Those are the three realms in which human logic operates. There is no fourth.

JUDITH. My — so ... so ...

KATSEUS. Rigid? The trouble with most people is they either can’t or don’t choose to distinguish between thought and belief. I’ve no such difficulty. Others embrace the God of things unknown and unknowable. Me, I embrace things known and knowable. The rest I leave to prophets and mystics.

JUDITH. You have everything so ...

KATSEUS. I don’t pretend to have the answers, Mrs. Birch. But at least I haven’t closed my mind to the questions. In fact I think it a shame that so many perfectly good questions should be done in — obliterated — by a single word.

JUDITH. Which word?

KATSEUS. God.

JUDITH. But you do believe; you are a believer. I know you are.

KATSEUS. I don’t believe, Mrs. Birch; I *think*. There’s a difference.

JUDITH. Without belief people can’t live. So there must be belief. Ergo ...

KATSEUS. There must be a God? I disagree. Show me a God, and I’ll believe in Him. Till then, I’ll stick to Bach.

JUDITH. Bach?

KATSEUS. His Fugue in D minor is as close to a miracle as anything. Beats walking on water any day. *(He sits and plays a few bars on the organ. Judith hums along. He lets himself get briefly carried away before awakening to the circumstances and abruptly stopping.)*

KATSEUS. Was there something else you wanted, Mrs. Birch?

JUDITH. Yes. You. And — *(She points to the device.)*

KATSEUS. *(Rising, finding a phone book, looking up the taxi service.)*

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Mrs. Birch, we've already —

JUDITH. (*With difficulty.*) People. Other people. Like me. Even if you won't use God ... on me, still, I know ... what you've done ... what you'll do ... for others ... just knowing ... knowing there's someone who *understands*, that there may be ... a way ... What I mean ... what I'm trying to ... to ... Dr. Catsup ... whatever you do, please, please — don't give up!

KATSEUS. (*He stops searching through the phone book and looks up, quietly.*) I have no intention of giving up, Mrs. Birch. But tell me: why are *you* giving up? You're still in reasonably good health, you're still sharp. Witty, even. You've barely advanced to the second stage of the illness. You could have weeks, months, even a year left of ... Whatever time you still have, why give it up?

JUDITH. Dr. Catsup, I know that I'm going to ... that there's no hope. And I know what I *don't* want. I don't want to depend — to hope ... to be helpless, to have to — be dressed — and fed and ... and wiped and — to need to ask — for everything! I don't want that. My mind . . it's ... going. It's like — like a house with ... with the doors and the ... the windows all open. People ... the people ... the kind who ... who take things ...

KATSEUS. Thieves?

JUDITH. Thieves! They rush in ... they take ... steal ... (*Pointing to things in Katseus' office.*) ... a lamp, a ... a sofa, a chair, a table, curtains. No — No: I'm not giving up. This ...this thing — it's inside me. If I wait, it'll take ... take everything. Tomorrow, the next day, the day after that, I may not be ... I won't have any ... won't be able ... That's why. You see? I want to lock ... to look ... into eyes — someone's eyes ... *your* eyes ... and say: now! Now, Dr. Catsup. Now. *Now!* (*She reaches out to Katseus, who inadvertently takes her hand. Appalled that he has done so, he breaks away. He goes for his raincoat.*)

KATSEUS. Let's go, Mrs. Birch ...

JUDITH. Go? Where ... ?

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KATSEUS. I'm taking you back to your motel.

JUDITH. Back?

KATSEUS. Come ...

JUDITH. *(As he takes her to the door.)* Sorry. So sorry ... I shouldn't have ...

KATSEUS. *(Stopping, holding her.)* No. I'm glad you came.

JUDITH. I ... shouldn't have ...

KATSEUS. You misunderstand. I've changed my mind.

JUDITH. *(Confused.)* What? Changed ...?

KATSEUS. I'd like to make my device available to you.

JUDITH. You ... want — ?

KATSEUS. I'll help you, Mrs. Birch. *(Judith throws her arms around Katseus, who stiffens in her embrace.)*

JUDITH. Thank you! Thank you!

KATSEUS. One thing, though. We mustn't be swayed by emotions. If we're to proceed, it has to be done calmly, rationally, clinically — in the spirit of science.

JUDITH. Science! Yes!

KATSEUS. Think of it as — a scientific collaboration.

JUDITH. *(With mounting enthusiasm.)* A collaboration! Scientific! Yes! Yes!

KATSEUS. I'm going to drive you back to your motel, now. I want you to get a good night's sleep. Tomorrow, assuming you still feel the same, I want you to speak to your husband. You must convince him. It's imperative that we get his cooperation. Do you think you can do that?

JUDITH. Yes. Yes!

KATSEUS. Let me get my umbrella. *(He goes off to find it.)*

JUDITH. My cards! *(She hurries for them, replacing them in their red velvet pouch. Katseus returns.)*

KATSEUS. Ready?

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JUDITH. After you.

KATSEUS. No: after you. *(He gestures. They step out into the pouring rain. Blackout.)*

SCENE 4

The allegro assai movement of Bach's Concerto No. 2 in F plays briefly. Tarot card projection: The Devil. Katseus' office three days later. Katseus sits behind his desk, dawn light through the window rendering him scarcely visible as he dictates into his tape recorder.

KATSEUS. Monday, May 3rd, eleven a.m. Have arranged to meet with subject's husband Douglas Birch to discuss the procedure and to obtain his consent in writing. *(Lights up on Douglas Birch who stands before Katseus' desk. The office has been put — somewhat — in order.)*

DOUGLAS. What's to discuss? You and my wife seem to have everything worked out.

KATSEUS. Mr. Birch —

DOUGLAS. She's already been discussing some of the finer details with me. I must say, you've got her well-briefed. She's practically an expert on that machine of yours.

KATSEUS. Please — why don't you sit down?

DOUGLAS. I'd rather stand.

KATSEUS. I appreciate how you feel.

DOUGLAS. I doubt that. Very much.

KATSEUS. I mean I understand the difficult position you're in.

DOUGLAS. Difficult?

KATSEUS. What I mean —

DOUGLAS. I never wanted this. I was against it from the start. Against you. I don't like you, Dr. Katseus.

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KATSEUS. Professionally or personally?

DOUGLAS. Both.

KATSEUS. So — why did you come to me?

DOUGLAS. Because. It's what she wanted.

KATSEUS. You could have refused.

DOUGLAS. No. I couldn't.

KATSEUS. You could have talked her out of it.

DOUGLAS. Wrong again. Once Judith makes her mind up about something, anything, that's it. Whether she's losing it or not.

KATSEUS. She appears to be a woman of very strong convictions.

DOUGLAS. You're telling me. I'm sure it's why she's attracted to you, like the moth to the flame. To her you're the angel of deliverance, Hermes sent by Zeus to rescue Persephone from the underworld and carry her up to Olympus.

KATSEUS. I don't see it that way.

DOUGLAS. Neither do I.

KATSEUS. Just what is your impression of me, Mr. Birch?

DOUGLAS. Honestly?

KATSEUS. Yes, honestly.

DOUGLAS. I think you're evil.

KATSEUS. Evil?

DOUGLAS. I think you're the devil.

KATSEUS. The devil?! You seem intelligent, Mr. Birch. Surely you believe in devils?

DOUGLAS. I believe people do evil things.

KATSEUS. They certainly do. So — you think I'm evil, do you?

DOUGLAS. I think your motives are evil.

KATSEUS. Really? What are my motives?

DOUGLAS. Self-aggrandizement. You're name in the newspapers. Your fifteen minutes of fame on the Donohue Show.

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KATSEUS. An ego trip, is that why I'm doing this, you think?

DOUGLAS. I think that you're a third-rate pathologist and failed physician who gets a shiver of self-satisfaction every time he sees his name in the paper or hears it on TV. I saw you on Donohue, lapping up all that attention, bragging about all the poor miserable suicidal wretches out there, waving their letters into the camera, telling the world how much they all "need" you, how they've come to you begging — (*Slowly, with mounting cold fury.*) You reminded me of one of those revivalist preachers, but with television cameras and lights instead of a tent and sawdust. Instead of preaching salvation and miracles to the dumb and lame, you preach the Gospel of Death. And like all evangelists, you preach mainly to the converted, but instead of crying to be saved your congregants cry, Kill me, Lord! Please — kill me! And the hopeless, the desperate ones, the ones with nowhere else to turn and no one to turn to, they come flocking to you, because to them even a false God is better than no God at all. So you've gathered your little band of disciples. And now my wife is one of them. Well, you may have fooled her, doctor, but you don't fool me. Not for a minute.

KASTEUS. So: your wife thinks I'm God, and you think I'm the Devil. Well, you're both equally wrong. I'm just a doctor who's offering his services to you.

DOUGLAS. You're not offering *me* anything.

KATSEUS. To your wife, then. She wants to die. She's made up her mind. She says as much right here, in the sworn, signed affidavit you brought me. (*He produces the document.*)

DOUGLAS. I know; I wrote it for her.

KATSEUS. She's determined, Mr. Birch. Absolutely.

DOUGLAS. I've already said that I won't stop you. Even if I could, what difference would it make? I would still be losing her, my wife. I've already lost her ... So: I give up. Judith's all yours. You win.

KATSEUS. It's not a rugby match, Mr. Birch.

DOUGLAS. What do you want from me? My blessing?

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KATSEUS. No. Your approval — in writing. (*He produces another document.*) I've already taken the liberty of producing the affidavit stating in no uncertain terms that you approve —

DOUGLAS. I don't!

KATSEUS. — that you approve your wife's decision and agree to —

DOUGLAS. But I don't approve!

KATSEUS. Mr. Birch, are you or are you not willing to let your wife go through with this?

DOUGLAS. I'm willing, but that doesn't mean I approve.

KATSEUS. Of what don't you approve?

DOUGLAS. Of this way of ... of doing it. Of you and that "device" of yours!

KATSEUS. I know you don't like me. But what have you got against my device?

DOUGLAS. I find the very notion of it morally reprehensible.

KATSEUS. "Morally reprehensible." Can you be more specific?

DOUGLAS. It stinks, how's that?

KATSEUS. *Why* does it stink, Mr. Birch?

DOUGLAS. It pretends to be a "suicide" machine, when really it's a killing machine. A murder machine. And just about every doctor in the country agrees with me!

KATSEUS. If they didn't, do you suppose they'd say so? How many doctors are willing to stick their necks out?

DOUGLAS. Sure. In their hearts every physician in the country is really on your side, they're just too lily-livered to say so. They're not brave and noble and altruistic like you! They lack integrity! They're not willing to take on the medical establishment single-handedly! Dr. Peter Katseus, the great white angel of mercy, a one-man campaign to End Human Suffering. Don Quixote and his Sancho Panza! (*He gestures to the device.*)

KATSEUS. For someone who compares me to a tent revivalist, you make a pretty good evangelist yourself, Mr. Birch.

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DOUGLAS. Does it occur to you, doctor, that the reason every medical expert in the country is against you just might be because you happen to be wrong?

KATSEUS. (*Disdainfully, having heard it before.*) Argument by authority.

DOUGLAS. Or do you consider yourself to be the only real authority on the subject of death? As if you can possibly know any more about it than the rest of us?

KATSEUS. If you're talking about the afterlife, I claim no expertise in that area. That's your wife's purview.

DOUGLAS. Oh — so you're aware of Judith's ... mystical bent?

KATSEUS. Mystical or metaphysical. She spoke with me briefly of it.

DOUGLAS. You know she believes in reincarnation?

KATSEUS. (*Absently, wishing the subject would drop.*) Yes, she indicated something of the sort.

DOUGLAS. Did she "indicate" to you that she fully expects to return to this world in another ... embodiment?

KATSEUS. Her expectations of that sort are not my concern.

DOUGLAS. Yet you're perfectly willing to help her take the first step toward meeting them, an irrevocable step, though you don't for one minute believe that those expectations are reasonable, let alone that they'll be met.

KATSEUS. I'm here to help your wife die. What, if anything, happens to her afterwards is none of my business. Anyway, it's out of my hands.

DOUGLAS. You're wrong, doctor. In helping Judith die, you will be helping her into the afterlife. You'll be giving her the means to that end — an end that, at best, you know nothing about, and that at worst you consider an impossibility if not an absurdity!

KATSEUS. I'm no metaphysician, Mr. Birch. Nor am I a Hindi, or a Buddhist, or Lucifer, or Orpheus, or Houdini, or the angel of mercy. I'm not the guardian of the gates to Paradise, nor the captain of the ferry across the River Styx —

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DOUGLAS. Charon.

KATSEUS. I'm a physician. Plain and simple. Not a great one, as you've pointed out. Not good enough to sustain a clinical practice. But still, nevertheless, a physician.

DOUGLAS. Bound by a physician's oath?

KATSEUS. That's right.

DOUGLAS. "I will neither prescribe nor administer a lethal dose of medicine to any patient even if asked nor counsel any such thing nor perform act or omission with direct intent deliberately to end a human life. I will maintain the utmost respect for every human life from fertilization to natural death." A doctor's job is to prevent death!

KATSEUS. People die; I can't prevent that. No one can. A doctor's job is to heal people, and when they can't be healed, when there's nothing more than can be done, it's up to doctor's to make their patients as comfortable as possible and, if it comes to that, to offer some decent way out.

DOUGLAS. In your opinion.

KATSEUS. It's not just my opinion. I've got dozens, hundreds — (*He goes to his desk.*)

DOUGLAS. I know; I watched the Donohue show.

KATSEUS. (*Letters in hand.*) A seventy-six year-old woman in New Mexico dying of bone marrow cancer. A twenty-eight year-old man with ALS in Dallas. A sixty-four year old Brazilian woman suffering from Lesch-Nyhan Syndrome. People suffering needlessly and against their wishes, isn't that "doing harm?" You call my device "morally reprehensible." If your wife were to throw herself down a flight of stairs, would you find that any less "morally reprehensible"? If she were to slice open her wrists or swallow a bottle of potassium hydroxide or try to asphyxiate herself with a plastic bag, would any of those things be less "morally reprehensible" to you? Just because a suicide is carried out alone, under the worst conditions, by means violent and messy and unreliable, and that can possibly lead to even more suffering, does that make it somehow less "reprehensible" or

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more “moral” to you? You don’t like me. I accept that. But you love your wife, don’t you?

DOUGLAS. Of course I do! How dare you —

KATSEUS. Then you want what’s right for her. Correct? *(A pause.)*
Then why won’t you accept that we both want the same thing, whatever my “motives” are. I’m here to give your wife what she wants.
(Realizing he’s beaten, Douglas sits. Katseus gets him some water.)

DOUGLAS. *(Slowly, blowing his nose, drinking.)* May I ask a personal question?

KATSEUS. You may.

DOUGLAS. Were you ever married?

KATSEUS. Once. Long ago.

DOUGLAS. For long?

KATSEUS. Long enough.

DOUGLAS. Thirty-eight years. That’s how long Judith and I have been married. We met at a club where I played in a quintet. An odd musical couple, we were. Me: clarinet. Judith: viola da gamba. She: classically trained. Me: strictly jazz. How we made that work is anyone’s guess, but we did. We’d get together Sunday afternoons, back when we both still lived in the city, in Manhattan. She joined my quintet. Judith could improvise. She was good at it, very good. One night, there was supposed to be this lunar eclipse. My building had a roof you could go on. While the others were packing up their instruments she asked if she could stay and watch the eclipse with me. Sure, I said, thinking: boy, she’s a bold one. The eclipse wasn’t until two in the morning! We sat with our instruments on the roof and played until two. Then the earth’s shadow fell over us, like the lid of an eye closing. When it did, she leaned her head on me. She’d never touched me before. Six months later we were married. *(Catching himself.)*
Listen to me, reminiscing to you of all people. I may as well be talking to ... to this *thing* ... *(He rises, goes to the device.)*

KATSEUS. It might surprise you to learn that I have feelings.

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DOUGLAS. Like a vending machine. Press a button and bing: instead of a Snicker's bar or a Coke you get death. So convenient. Just dispose of the body and you're done. There's just one problem: how do you dispose of all those messy feelings? You've figured out how to dispatch the victims. Tell me, doctor, what tricks have you got up your sleeve for the survivors? What machine have you got for me? How do you propose to deliver *me* from *my* suffering?

KATSEUS. Mr. Birch, I understand how you —

DOUGLAS. No sir, you don't know how I'll feel. Thirty-eight years. Losing her will be like losing one of my own limbs, like losing myself ... No, you don't know how I feel. Because you don't know Judith. She's everything to me. What is she to you? A test subject, a dog for your space capsule.

KATSEUS. Why did you join the Hemlock Society?

DOUGLAS. It was Judith's idea.

KATSEUS. You just went along?

DOUGLAS. It's what she wanted. What she wants.

KATSEUS. Suppose she doesn't end up using my device? What alternative would you propose?

DOUGLAS. There are ... other ways.

KATSEUS. Oh? Name one. (*Douglas is silent.*) Could it be, Mr. Birch, that you really don't want to help your wife die?

DOUGLAS. (*Indignant.*) I'm here, dammit, aren't I? I flew her a thousand miles to see you! I helped her write that testimonial; I've drafted her will; I've planned her funeral! What more do you want? You want me to be happy about it? To be cold and clinical — like you? You want me to be like one of these bottles, to fall in line with your tidy little parade of sedatives and poisons, one more working part in your gristly little device? I'm a human being, not an apparatus. Emotions may play no part in your world, but they do in mine.

KATSEUS. You want to help her, but you don't want your wife to die.

DOUGLAS. Of course I don't want her to die!

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KATSEUS. Well, then you can't help her.

DOUGLAS. Do you happen to know what a soul is, doctor?

KATSEUS. *(Scoffing.)* A soul ...

DOUGLAS. Yes, doctor, a soul. You have no idea, do you? I'll tell what a human soul isn't. It's not a tissue sample. You can't stain it with dye and mount it on a slide. Emotions don't grow on sheep's blood. A heart may be a pump –

KATSEUS. Not may be, it *is*. A pump.

DOUGLAS. It's also a metaphor.

KATSEUS. *(Having none of it.)* There are alternatives, Mr. Birch. A dozen Seconal and a bottle of vodka, that's what most of my medical brethren would prescribe. With any luck your wife would die in her sleep. And her death would be totally painless. It would also be as insignificant as such deaths usually are.

DOUGLAS. A "significant" death, is that what you matters to you?

KATSEUS. Yes, it does. It matters to your wife, too. I think you know it matters. Don't you? *(A pause.)* I can't make you like me, Mr. Birch. But I can do this: I can guarantee you that if she dies using my device, your wife's death will not be insignificant.

DOUGLAS. *(Slowly, facing him.)* When do you intend to do it?

KATSEUS. As soon as possible. She doesn't want to wait, and neither do I. I can't afford to. *(He picks a legal document up off his desk, hands it to Douglas.)* An injunction handed down yesterday morning by the state District Attorney. So you see, Mr. Birch, your support is especially crucial.

DOUGLAS. You'll be breaking the law.

KATSEUS. Yes, I know.

DOUGLAS. You could go to prison.

KATSEUS. Without your signature, I most certainly will. But right now we should be thinking of your wife, don't you agree. *(He hands a pen to Douglas, who signs the affidavit and hands it back.)*

KATSEUS. I'll need three days. I have to find a place, somewhere

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close to a hospital so her organs can be donated right away afterwards. She wants to donate her organs.

DOUGLAS. I know.

KATSEUS. Also there are a few minor modifications I'd like to make on the device.

DOUGLAS. Three days. So — Thursday?

KATSEUS. Thursday. *(Douglas opens the door.)* Thank you, Mr. Birch.

DOUGLAS. I'm doing this for my wife, not for you. I'll bring her Thursday. The rest will be between you.

KATSEUS. I think she'll want you to be here.

DOUGLAS. It's already been discussed. I'll do whatever she wants. But I won't watch her die. Not like this. *(He goes.)*

KATSEUS. Goodbye, Mr. Birch.

A moment later, Katseus takes a chair, crosses over to the device and sits beside it. He holds up one of the plastic tubes, presses a button, and studies his wristwatch to see how long it takes for the fluid in the second bottle to start flowing. He jots a note on a piece of paper, then gets a screwdriver and makes a small adjustment to the solenoid. As he does so his hand shakes. He holds the screwdriver in front of his eyes, watching it tremble, then catches it with his other hand as the lights slowly fade and Bach's Concerto No. 1 in F is heard. Blackout.)

END ACT 1

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—
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