

SHOULD'VE

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Synopsis

As "Should've" opens, Friedrich Wertheim, a German-born chemist, has taken his own life, blaming himself for putting an easy way to make a neurotoxin into the hands of terrorists. The circumstances and reasons for his death disturb profoundly the lives of three people connected to Wertheim – his daughter Katie (a scientist herself, a molecular biologist, but with very different ideas about the social responsibility of scientists), Katie's lover Stefan (a conceptual artist), and Wertheim's estranged second wife, Julia.

In 29 fast-moving scenes, these people's lives are fractured by the suicide. The motive for Wertheim's action aren't as simple as they seem; there emerges a remarkable set of circumstances about his parents' survival in Nazi Germany. The ethical conflict between Katie and her father is very, very deep. Questions arise on the responsibility of artists in society. And there is more than one skeleton in Stefan's closet.

A play about the social responsibility of scientists and artists on one level, "Should've" is also about three people trying to resist the transforming power of death. They are unable to do so, sundered as they are by the memories and a past that emerges from that death. And, eventually, the consequences shape a different bond among the three.

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Dramatis personæ

KATIE (Katia) **Wertheim**: around 40, a successful molecular biologist, the daughter of Friedrich Wertheim.

STEFAN Cardenas: around 50, a conceptual artist, Katie's friend, born in Argentina, long in the U.S.

JULIA Hollander : Friedrich Wertheim's estranged second wife, works in a university research office, also around 50.

Also mentioned in play

Friedrich Wertheim, a German-born chemist, born 1937, emigrated to US as a boy in 1948. Called Poppa by Katie.

Gertrud Wertheim, his wife, also an immigrant from Germany, died in 1980.

Hermann Wertheim, Friedrich's father, a German Jewish physician, came to US in 1948, died in 1970. Called Opa by Katie.

Liese Wertheim, Hermann's wife, a physician, died in 1973; called Oma by Katie.

Franz Schellenberg, a prominent German medical researcher in the '30s, Hermann and Liese Wertheim's teacher.

Setting: A contemporary US university town, perhaps Rutgers University in New Brunswick, NJ. All scenes through 18 take place within some days of each other. 19 is three months later. Last scene is a year later.

The scenes are set in Stefan's studio, in Friedrich Wertheim's office, Katie Wertheim's office, and on stage. Katie Wertheim's office is not essential; those scenes can be shifted to stage.

SCENE 1: *In Friedrich Wertheim's office. It's not a modern place; there is a computer there, but it is overshadowed by hundreds of books, many posters and paintings, including one in red (a portrait of a doctor, Friedrich's father), models of molecules hanging from the ceiling, the knick-knacks of a long career. A bit dusty, as if nothing changed in the office since the eighties. **KATIE, JULIA** and **STEFAN** are there, Katie pacing back and forth. Julia is older than Katie, but not old enough to be her mother.*

KATIE: When did they take him away?

JULIA: Just an hour ago. The ambulance came first, then the police, then a doctor, then another doctor.

KATIE: *(Impatient with Julia)* And they couldn't save him?

JULIA: He was cold when I got to him, Katie, red and cold. *(She shivers.)*

STEFAN: Red?

JULIA: Like that painting. *(She points.)* It was horrible. *(She holds her handkerchief up to her mouth.)*

KATIE: Were they red at Auschwitz?

STEFAN: What?

KATIE: The people who were gassed. With Zyklon B. Just a clever way to dispense hydrogen cyanide.

JULIA: He was red, I don't know about Auschwitz. But the doctor said it was cyanide. He took away the bottle. *(She points to the desk.)* It was there, lid neatly closed, next to it two pills lying on a piece of filter paper, a glass of water.

KATIE: Why two pills?

JULIA: Two pills more, over the ones he took. He must have been thinking – what if the first ones don't work. *(Pause)*

STEFAN: They worked.

KATIE: Why did you come here?

JULIA: Fred called me in the morning.

KATIE: He called you?

JULIA: Even though we weren't living together, he called me. He was upset.

KATIE: About what, Julia?

JULIA: About the news, from Uzbekistan. You know.

KATIE: I don't know.

JULIA: You don't know? It's been in the papers.

KATIE: I don't read them.

STEFAN: Do you mean about that mass murder?

KATIE: What murder?

STEFAN: Well, a clan chief in the south of the country, it's so difficult to keep the geography clear –

JULIA: Not to them.

STEFAN: – asked some Soviet, sorry, Russian, chemists make him a poison. Which they then used on a rival band.

JULIA: And their children, and their wives. They put it in a sweet, a kind of halvah. At a wedding.

STEFAN: Six hundred died. And those who didn't, are paralyzed.

KATIE: But what the hell does that have to do with Poppa?

JULIA: The first report wasn't clear. But then a French pathologist, curious about the poison, analyzed it. It was a saxitoxin derivative... One step away from the molecule for which Fred had worked out –

KATIE: Don't call him Fred. Poppa's name was Friedrich.

JULIA: He was Fred to me. He had worked out a...synthesis. A way of making the molecule in a lab. Any lab. Easily.

STEFAN: Making it? I didn't know chemists made –

KATIE: And why didn't he talk to me?

JULIA: He said you wouldn't understand.

LIGHTS OUT

END OF SCENE 1

SCENE 2: *A few minutes later. Light on **KATIE** and **STEFAN** standing down stage. Maybe they're on the way to their car; they have their jackets on.*

KATIE: (*Angry.*) But I'm the scientist! Why tell his...ex-wife? (*Bitterly.*)

STEFAN: You don't like her, I see.

KATIE: Why should I like her? She picked him up after my mother died, after I left home. Poppa needed a woman around. It was easy. And Julia got a life out of him, concerts, friends, money. (*Pause.*) Then she left him.

STEFAN: Maybe it wasn't that easy, I mean to live with your father.

KATIE: It wasn't. He was touchy, and he had these high ethical standards. Super high. We spent a year in Switzerland, you know. One day Poppa told us at dinner how he called in to the Swiss police the license of a driver he had seen run a stop sign on the back road to Winterthur. Poppa thought this was just the right thing to do.

STEFAN: Hmm. I remember one time I had this photo collage in one of my pieces...

KATIE: The one that looks like the Starn twins' work.

STEFAN: I did it first.

KATIE: Except they get big money for theirs, Stefan.

STEFAN: Anyway, I had these photos of a couple looking at each other, passing by, looking back.

KATIE: I remember – a moment, and you caught it.

STEFAN: Well, your father looked at it, looked again. Not his idea of art, I thought. But all he said eventually was, "I presume you had the permission of the people to use that photo."

KATIE: Did you?

STEFAN: No, Why should I – they were just people in a crowd. I used a telephoto lens. But...how was it for you, I mean to live with him?

KATIE: Mamma died young, very young, when I was in high school. So it was only me and Poppa. Thank God I was good in school.

LIGHTS OUT

END OF SCENE 2

SCENE 3: *Three days later, in **KATIE**'s office. This has the identical layout as her father's, except that the lab and the office are both more modern, the office tending to minimalism, though there are lots of computers around. **KATIE** is at her desk. Stefan enters.*

STEFAN: May I disturb Dr. Wertheim?

KATIE: Yes, of course. *(She gets up, gives Stefan a warm hug; there's more than just friendship in it.)*

STEFAN: I was just here at the Campus Store to pick up some paint, and thought I'd stop by. Are you OK, Katie?

KATIE: Working away. Working helps. I'm glad you did stop by, Stefan. Those relatives yesterday, at the funeral...

STEFAN: You did fine.

KATIE: And the rabbi! He didn't know a thing about Poppa. He made him out to be a good religious Jew.

STEFAN: And he wasn't?

KATIE: He was a good assimilated German Jew, who loved his *Schinken*. Anyway, it's over.

STEFAN: Can you take a day off? You need it.

KATIE: I need you. But not now...I have to finish this proposal.

STEFAN: I thought I was the only one to write proposals, like the ones to get money for my "Wardrobe."

KATIE: Wardrobe?

STEFAN: That's what I decided to call my piece. Come and see it, it's well along.

KATIE: *(Shakes her head.)* Tomorrow. I've got to get this proposal done. It's exciting; we have this duck killed by the 1918 flu.

STEFAN: The one that killed millions?

KATIE: And we're almost done with its DNA sequence.

STEFAN: The duck's?

KATIE: Yes.

STEFAN: Now I'm confused. Who cares about the duck?

KATIE: I do. I want the duck's genes.

STEFAN: But it's the flu that killed people. And even I know that it was a virus that did it.

KATIE: I want the duck's proteins.

STEFAN: Are you hungry?

KATIE: I'm serious.

STEFAN: Who cares? The duck quacked.

KATIE: It's not so simple. The virus mutated in the bird. That's when it became dangerous to people.

STEFAN: So?

KATIE: Something in the duck prompted that mutation. I have an idea a strange avian protein might have helped. I'm going to find out. And I have a duck.

STEFAN: A sick duck?

KATIE: A very sick duck.

STEFAN: Did you shoot it?

KATIE: (*Dreamily.*) No, it was sitting. Sitting peacefully in the basement of a Cornell building, where I went up to give a lecture. Not quite sitting. Swimming. Swimming in formaldehyde, that is. Actually... (*She goes back to reality.*) drowned. Anyway, I want to look at all the proteins in the duck.

STEFAN: I hear there's lots of them.

KATIE: I want every one of them. Nothing a hundred million dollars can't buy. I want to ask the question, how the flu was turned on. It came from birds. The next one might too.

LIGHTS OUT

END OF SCENE 3

SCENE 4: *A day later, Stefan's studio, toward evening; he's working getting a skeleton into the drawers of a wardrobe. There's a knock at the door. **STEFAN, JULIA, KATIE***

STEFAN: *(Opens door.)* Come in.

JULIA: *(Enters; perhaps she's wearing a designer outfit, conservative but well-cut.)* Good evening.

STEFAN: Julia!

JULIA: I would like to talk to you, Stefan. I should have called, but...it's something about Fred. And I'm not sure what to do, because it has to do with Katie too.

STEFAN: Wait, let me get some tea for us. *(He goes off to the side; Julia wanders around. She sees the wardrobe mockup, the cardinal's robe. She plays with it, until the bones fall with a clank.)*

JULIA: What's this, Stefan?

STEFAN: It's what I'm working on; I have a show in New York at a big Chelsea gallery, and this is one of the new pieces for it. Maybe the best one.

JULIA: I see a priest.

STEFAN: Look behind him. *(She sees Hitler's grim face and blanches.)*

JULIA: It's Hitler.

STEFAN: Yes, Adolf himself.

JULIA: The priest sees Hitler every time he puts on his robe?

STEFAN: Well, if you look carefully, he actually sees himself, one of the children cheering for Hitler, handing him some flowers. But the flowers turn into bones.

JULIA: I don't think my mother will like it.

STEFAN: Why?

JULIA: Well, she's a good Catholic. My uncle is a priest.

STEFAN: Art is meant to... ask questions, you know.

JULIA: Is it? It will hurt my mother.

STEFAN: She doesn't have to look at it.

JULIA: I think it will hurt her even to read about it.

STEFAN: Julia, art tells the truth. There were priests who worked with the Nazis. The Pope during the war never – *(At this point, a key turns in the door, and in comes Katie. She is obviously surprised to see Julia, Julia understands this.)*

JULIA: I was nearby, just stopped in to say hello.

KATIE: I see. *(Takes in Julia's dress.)* I got a letter.

STEFAN: From whom?

KATIE: From Poppa. *(Julia wants to say something, can't.)*

STEFAN: But –

KATIE: – He must have mailed it the morning he...died.

STEFAN: Does he explain?

JULIA: What did he write?

KATIE: *(Takes out letter, looks at Julia, hesitant to read it; finally opens it, reads in a strained voice.)*

Dear Katia, my baby, my scientist, just like me.

We've talked about dying, when your mother, Gertrud, left us. You were young, but you remember, we agreed, this is a thing a person must decide, everyone for themselves, as best as they can. I've decided.

By the time you get this I won't be with you, Katia. What I'm doing comes out of a great tragedy. I put that molecule, that weapon in the killers' hands. I can't live with that. Not with that, not with what happened in Germany. And, with what has come between me and Julia, there just isn't that much to live for.

I love you, Poppa.

JULIA: *(Plays with an envelope, then puts it back in her pocketbook.)*

LIGHTS OUT

END OF SCENE 4

SCENE 5: *A day later. Katie's office, evening. KATIE pours STEFAN a single malt from a bottle she has in a cabinet.*

STEFAN: You got the proposal off.

KATIE: *(Nods.)* We did. With an hour to spare. Everything goes in electronically these days. And the computer was balking at the illustrations; we had this incredibly large file with the genomes of ten related flu viruses.

STEFAN: *(Musing)* The poor duck.

KATIE: Why should he be poor?

STEFAN: He died. And you don't leave him in peace.

KATIE: I tell you, it's good he did it near Ithaca. They pickled him, virus and all. With a neat ink label: "Ruddy duck, Sept. 22, 1918." And in a scrawl, "one of ten that died in a field." That's what caught my attention.

STEFAN: But how do you know that Ruddy duck died of the flu?

KATIE: I didn't. At first. I had this hunch, I took a tissue sample, and saw the viral DNA in it. The same DNA, give or take a few bases, that was found in the dominant strain of the Spanish flu virus.

STEFAN: Aren't you afraid, Katie?

KATIE: Of what?

STEFAN: That flu was a killer.

KATIE: Forty million people world-wide.

STEFAN: I may be dumb, I know, but couldn't the virus revive? In your experiment?

KATIE: Stefan, it's pickled. That duck is dead almost 90 years, and his organs are awash in formaldehyde. The viral proteins are denatured *(She stops, to see if he understood. Decides he didn't.)*. Sorry, they're broken apart, tangled; they'll never get back into an infectious form.

STEFAN: Never?

KATIE: Never. But the DNA, that's another story. It's not a neat helix anymore, but we can read it, figure out where the instructions are for every enzyme, every molecule that gets that virus into a cell...We can put snippets of that DNA into a bacterium, have it make the viral proteins.

STEFAN: But why would you do that? Why put that virus back together? Let it stay pickled far above Cayuga's waters. And far away from us.

KATIE: (*Excited.*) You don't understand. We can find out exactly how that virus overcame the cell's defenses, and why ten other viruses didn't.

STEFAN: And you'll publish this?

KATIE: Of course, how else would people know?

STEFAN: That you did it.

KATIE: Yes. That I did it. And that now we all know how it was done.

STEFAN: That's exactly what I'm worried about. All those other people in your "we."

KATIE: No one is putting it back together.

STEFAN: Though someone could, couldn't they?

KATIE: Maybe. Actually (*she hesitates*), only one person.

STEFAN: Who?

KATIE: Me. No one else knows how to do it.

STEFAN: That's what the Americans said about the atom bomb.

LIGHTS OUT

END OF SCENE 5

SCENE 6: *A day later, Stefan's studio, STEFAN having tea. A knock on the door.*

STEFAN: *(Opens door to JULIA.)* Come in, it took you a while.

JULIA: I ran into traffic, Stefan. *(Launches right in.)* I didn't get to tell you what I came for last time.

STEFAN: I know, Katie's letter took over.

JULIA: Well, I got a letter, too.

STEFAN: From Friedrich?

JULIA: From Fred. I wanted to tell you about it privately, I don't know if I can tell Katie.

STEFAN: Why not?

JULIA: Here's what he wrote –

STEFAN: – Can I see it?

JULIA: *(Hesitates.)* No, it has personal things in it too. Things...that went wrong between us. Let me read the part I wanted you to hear:

(She reads.) Julia, I know Katia and you don't get along. Forgive her; she can't forget her mother.

I worry about Katia. She's a good molecular biologist, one of the best. Actually, she can be the best. But she's too... tough, too keyed in on what she has to do. I worry about her soul.

You can't help me there, Julia, I know. I'm just telling you.

STEFAN: Pretty rough on you.

JULIA: It's not about me.

STEFAN: Oh, yes he is. He's saying you can't help his daughter.

JULIA: I tried. Even now, I'm hoping that... after... the death, we can come closer.

STEFAN: *(Quietly.)* But he's right, about her.

JULIA: *(Startled.)* What do you mean?

STEFAN: She's one tough lady.

JULIA: Maybe she has to be, in her world.

STEFAN: Do you know what she wants to do?

JULIA: No.

STEFAN: With the help of 100 million dollars and a gleaming institute – a Renzo Piano design no doubt –she will figure out how the flu virus of 1918 got so lethal. And she wants to tell people about it. Everyone. Just like that!

JULIA: (*Looks over to the open wardrobe. Ratzinger's tiara and robe in sight.*) And you want to tell people there's is a Nazi in every priest.

LIGHTS OUT

END OF SCENE 6

SCENE 7: *Three days later, in Friedrich's office. KATIE and STEFAN are looking through the files.*

STEFAN: I'm worried about you. You've been here for three days.

KATIE: They're his papers.

STEFAN: Someone else could go through them.

KATIE: No one else can understand them.

STEFAN: What's the hurry? It could wait.

KATIE: It can't.

STEFAN: *(Looks at her.)* It's only a week after the funeral.

KATIE: There might be a hint why he –

STEFAN: – But you got his letter; isn't that enough?

KATIE: No, it's not.

[They work for a while, opening drawers, sorting through files.]

KATIE: *(Smiles.)* Amazing. Here's a letter I wrote to him: "Dear Poppa. Can you get me a microscope? Mamma says I could see a flea." It's all in capitals, with a nice drawing of a flea. *(She shows it to Stefan.)* Note the right number of legs.

STEFAN: Did you get the microscope?

KATIE: Yes.

STEFAN: Probably the start of your career.

[They look some more.]

KATIE: What's this?

STEFAN: A circular slide rule! I used to have one. Today they'd call it an early analog computing device. I can teach you how to use it.

KATIE: There are some manuscripts he didn't finish...

STEFAN: *(Picking through a file.)* Look, an envelope, thick, sealed.

KATIE: Let me see it. (*She examines it.*) Sept. 1949, it says. (*She thinks.*) Not long after they came to America. (*She tears it open, Stefan startled by her decisiveness.*)

[**KATIE** begins to read. *Stefan, impatient, walks around to look over her shoulder.*]

STEFAN: They're in German.

KATIE: Yes...

STEFAN: (*Walks around impatiently.*) Can you read them?

KATIE: (*Looks up coldly.*) Of course, we spoke it at home.

STEFAN: I didn't know that.

KATIE: They're from a Professor Schellenberg, to...I think, my grandfather.

STEFAN: Friedrich's father.

KATIE: Yes. His name was Hermann, Hermann Wertheim. His picture is up there (*she points to a large photo of a distinguished, yet harried-looking man*). Let's see, in 1949 Poppa was 12, and Hermann, Opa – he must have been in his early forties. A good doctor, too.

STEFAN: You seem to have a run of them in the family.

KATIE: I may be the last one. (*She reads on.*) It's not a scientific letter. Herr Prof. Dr. Schellenberg is asking Hermann to send some money to a Dr. Eisinger in (*She looks at Stefan.*) ...Argentina. A place you know, Stefan.

STEFAN: A place I would like to forget.

KATIE: (*Not taking notice of what Stefan says.*) He seems to be very particular on how this money is to be sent, to a bank in Cordoba, to a certain account.

STEFAN: Why would those letters be here?

KATIE: I don't know. Poppa must have gotten them somehow. Maybe when my grandfather died. Anyway, Opa says he can't do it.

STEFAN: How do you know? Are his letters there too?

KATIE: No, they're not (*She looks up.*) only Schellenberg's. But Schellenberg is obviously trying to override something Hermann said, something in a previous letter. He tells Hermann that he must do it (*She stumbles, as if translation is difficult.*), it's not clear, but it's because of what... Schellenberg did for Opa's family. During the war.

STEFAN: Where were they, during the war?

KATIE: They were in Germany. On false papers, near Erlangen. Hermann had a job in a veterinary clinic in the country; this great doctor, now inoculating cattle.

STEFAN: They survived.

KATIE: They survived. And now I know how they did it. I always wondered where they got those papers.

STEFAN: Why didn't you ask your grandfather?

KATIE: He died when I was eight. Poppa would talk of playing in bombed out buildings in Erlangen, of the black marketeers hiding in his school. But not how his parents, how he survived. When I asked him, he just said, "On papers. Don't ask."

STEFAN: So Schellenberg helped your grandfather.

KATIE: (*She looks at the papers.*) Yes. And in 1949, Schellenberg is calling in the debt. (*She reads on.*) Opa doesn't want to do it.

STEFAN: Maybe he didn't have the money.

KATIE: He did, oh, Opa was smart – he sent some money over here before the war.

STEFAN: So why doesn't he want to do what Schellenberg asks him to do? And why does Schellenberg ask him, in the first place?

KATIE: I don't know. But I'm going to find out.

LIGHTS OUT

END OF SCENE 7

SCENE 8: *In Wertheim's office, next day. Light on **KATIE** and **JULIA**.*

KATIE: Thanks for coming, Julia. There's so many papers here.

JULIA: I'm glad to help, I know this room well. (*Beat.*) Katie, I actually wanted to talk to you. The things here are yours (*She points around the office.*). But there is one I would like to have.

KATIE: You already took some when you left.

JULIA: I did, from the house. They were things we bought together. But there's a painting here that means a lot to me.

KATIE: Which one?

JULIA: (*Points to a small marine painting.*)

KATIE: The seascape; I know it (*She walks over to it.*) Clouds, a storm that drove a ship on the rocks.

JULIA: A terrible, terrible storm.

KATIE: It's signed J.C. Dahl.

JULIA: Johan Christian Clausen Dahl.

KATIE: I'm amazed you know him!

JULIA: A Norwegian friend of Caspar David Friedrich, the great romantic painter.

KATIE: Oma and Opa brought the painting with them from Germany, they could take out a couple of small ones. But why this one? What does it mean to you?

JULIA: I looked at it over the years. At first I thought it was just a genre painting. But then it grew on me; it began to tell me something about Fred. He looked at it all the time.

KATIE: I'm sorry, Julia, you can't have it.

JULIA: I'll pay you for it.

KATIE: No.

JULIA: But you paid no attention to it, Katie. I can feel it! What does it mean to you?

KATIE: I saw it, but it didn't register. (*Beat*) I didn't see that it was about my own work.

JULIA: Your work?

KATIE: The proteins I'm studying, the rogue ones I think went to work in my duck: they're cytokines. They set off a storm.

JULIA: How can proteins cause a storm? They're part of us.

KATIE: These are used for signaling. When an organism is threatened in some way, cytokines are released, turning on the immune system. And making more cytokines. So we can respond quickly, massively. The system is normally self-limiting. But once in a while something goes amiss. In the Spanish flu, in Avian flu today, in that recent fatal drug trial – there's a cytokine storm. And the better your immune system, the more it's turned against you. So it was that many young people, strong ones, died in the Spanish flu.

JULIA: Something has to be wrong, very wrong, to set off a storm like that.

LIGHTS OUT

END OF SCENE 8

SCENE 9: *A day later. In STEFAN's studio, KATIE wandering around, picks up one painting, puts it down.*

STEFAN: I'm glad you came over, you need a break.

KATIE: *(Takes up an image of a very pregnant Mary, an angel touching her.)* Nice angel. But what is he doing? She's almost due.

STEFAN: What do you think?

KATIE: I think he's feeling her up.

STEFAN: *(Bitter.)* Not quite your typical Annunciation, as you can see.

KATIE: I see. You really have it in for the Church, don't you?

STEFAN: Maybe I do. And maybe the Church has it in for the world, especially women.

KATIE: But what has *Una Ecclesia Dei Apostolica* done to you?

STEFAN: My grandmother told me never to trust a priest. And not only once. She kept saying it.

KATIE: Your grandmother? In Argentina? But –

STEFAN: – Let's drop it.

KATIE: If you want.

STEFAN: *(Not dropping it.)* She had good reasons. She knew the priests first hand.

KATIE: What reasons? *(She looks at the pregnant Mary, back at Stefan.)*

STEFAN: My mother had a friend; they were both seventeen. The friend went to see a priest... who liked her. *(Pause)* You can imagine the rest. They're all alike.

KATIE: Not from what I read. Some like boys.

STEFAN: *(Violently.)* Who seduced her. Who told her *(bitterly)* she had to have the child.

(Some moments of silence.)

KATIE: *(Looks again at Mary, at Stefan, at Mary.)* Stefan, I don't think it was your mother's friend.

STEFAN: *(Nods, after a while.)*

KATIE: And do you know who he was? Your father?

STEFAN: She wouldn't tell me... except...

KATIE: Yes?

STEFAN: Except to say that he loved her. And that he was German.

LIGHTS OUT

END OF SCENE 9

SCENE 10: *A couple of days later, in Friedrich Wertheim's office:* **KATIE, JULIA, STEFAN**

KATIE: *(Jumps in.)* So I looked up Eisinger and Schellenberg. Schellenberg was a great German biochemist.

JULIA: Yes, he worked on chemical carcinogens in the thirties.

KATIE: How do you know that?

JULIA: A long time ago, I was a chemist, you know. And Fred got me interested in that period, around the war.

KATIE: *(Looks at her.)* A great chemist, Prof. Dr. Dr. *honoris causa* Franz Schellenberg. But during the war, he worked with the Nazis. An opportunist, and an operator. Worse. The Auschwitz camp doctors were his students and friends. Mengele. And Eisinger. They reported to him what they did. Schellenberg... used their "research."

STEFAN: Did he tell them what to do?

KATIE: We don't know that. After the war the French carted away some sealed papers; now they say they are lost. Schellenberg kept his hands clean, but he was... not a clean man.

JULIA: But why then did he protect your grandfather?

KATIE: You know that?

STEFAN: *(To Katie.)* Did you show her the letters?

JULIA: What letters?

STEFAN: *(Looks at Julia, then Katie.)* Did you show her the letters?

KATIE: Stefan is talking about some letters we found...

STEFAN: I found.

KATIE: In Friedrich's files. They're letters from Schellenberg to Opa, to my grandfather, asking him to send some money to Eisinger.

JULIA: *(Slowly.)* I know those letters.

STEFAN: You do?

JULIA: I mean, I didn't see them, but Fred told me about them.

KATIE: But he didn't tell me.

JULIA: He didn't think you'd understand.

KATIE: That too. He didn't think his daughter...

STEFAN: But why would Schellenberg ask Hermann Wertheim to send this Auschwitz doctor money?

JULIA: Because Schellenberg saved Katie's grandfather and grandmother. (*Pause, turns to Katie.*) And so saved your father. By getting Hermann a job in a veterinary clinic. By not reporting him to the Gestapo.

STEFAN: But why? Why would Schellenberg – a Nazi sympathizer – help a Jew?

JULIA: That's what Fred couldn't figure out. It ate at him all his life -- ever since he found these letters after his father died. You know how he worried about what is right and wrong. Along with everything else.

KATIE: He worried too much, Poppa. About things he shouldn't have given a second thought. And I don't mean Eisinger.

JULIA: Who are you to say?

KATIE: Too much. Just too much. I think he would have been better off to see a psychiatrist. (*Ironically.*) Right and wrong, people using his synthesis to make a more potent neurotoxin. Crazy.

STEFAN: Maybe that wasn't the reason he killed himself.

KATIE: What?

STEFAN: Maybe he found out why Schellenberg saved his parents.

LIGHTS OUT

END OF SCENE 10

SCENE 11: *A day later, in **STEFAN**'s studio. We come in in the middle of a pretty heated conversation, about **KATIE**'s work.*

JULIA: Fred was right, you need to worry about the way others use your work, Katie.

KATIE: No, you don't. In what I do, we just ask how the virus finds its way into the cell, disguising itself, changing. It's something we don't know. It's good to know.

JULIA: When that knowledge is used by some clan chief to kill 600 people?

KATIE: What are you talking about? The Spanish flu virus has nothing to do –

JULIA: – I mean knowledge in general. If you know, you can do things. Someone used your father's synthesis –

STEFAN: – You don't have to go there. What good is knowledge, when it's hidden by a company in New Guinea, not telling people that it spilled barrels of toxin into a stream? When it's used to sell outdated drugs?

KATIE: Wait, wait. That's not science, that's just some people misusing what we found out. *(Pause.)* Knowledge is good, and so are most of its applications – it led us to penicillin, to the smallpox vaccine. Have you ever walked through a 19th century graveyard and seen all the graves of young children?

STEFAN: Somehow I haven't heard you talk before about all the good science does.

KATIE: We do things that are useful, and... we just do things, because they can be done, for fun. Look, I see a way to make a synthetic enzyme that's better than the natural one. At the magic that enzyme pulls off. Why not make that enzyme? Why not see what it does?

STEFAN: Because what you do is... you said it, unnatural.

KATIE: Oh my God, are we going to get into that again? Is your sculpture natural?

STEFAN: Yes.

KATIE: You mean it grows in some tree? A sculpture tree?

STEFAN: I made it. It's human.

KATIE: So, I made that piece of DNA. You're going to tell me I'm not human?

STEFAN: Eh, at least we're not arrogant, always thinking you can do better than nature. Think what you said – a synthetic enzyme “better” than a natural one.

KATIE: So? What the hell is your sculpture? It's not a rock, it's not a tree. It's manmade, synthetic, unnatural. It's better. It's art. Your sculpture is also an “improvement” on nature.

STEFAN: The problem with you is that you just don't worry about whether what you do will hurt people.

KATIE: Why should I?

STEFAN: If not you, then who?

JULIA: (*Trying unsuccessfully to cool things off.*) I think you're quoting somebody...

KATIE: (*Ignores Julia.*) I can't predict what some kook is going to do with my science.

STEFAN: Do you even try? Just to imagine it?

KATIE: Sure. (*Hesitates.*) No, not really. But why should I? Is Einstein responsible for the atomic bomb? Or Lise Meitner for Chernobyl?

JULIA: Legally, no, not at all. Morally –

KATIE: – not at all.

JULIA: Maybe a little, maybe a lot, maybe not at all.

STEFAN: At least you should ask the question, Katie.

KATIE: I do. (*She's still very angry.*) But Stefan, do you worry about that, about hurting people?

STEFAN: Why should I? What do I do that hurts people?

JULIA: (*Points to the photo of the priest and the young people saluting Hitler.*) Do you worry about how your art hurts Catholics?

KATIE: (*Now trying to come to Stefan's defense.*) Julia, you're too hard on him. Not every Catholic.

STEFAN: No, just those who like a damn conservative Pope like the present one. Stupid people. Anyway, it's art.

JULIA: And art is just plain good. Always good (*smiles at Katie, and at Stefan too*), like science, right?

STEFAN: (*Quickly*) No, not like science. Science can hurt people (*He looks at Katie, who looks at him, looks away.*) Sometimes, at least. (*Takes a deep breath.*) Art asks deep questions, of existence, of the world. Art serves people.

JULIA: (*Sarcastically but gently.*) I didn't know you were a proletarian artist, Stefan.

STEFAN: I understand people.

KATIE: You don't seem to understand me.

JULIA: (*Ignoring Katie.*) You say art asks questions –

STEFAN: – Why do you think the Nazis drove the good artists out of Germany? Why did the Taliban forbid art and music?

KATIE: (*Doesn't let go.*) So art is always good, it can never hurt people.

STEFAN: No, it can't. Not in the hands of a good artist.

JULIA: (*Quietly.*) Immanuel Kant would have liked you, the beautiful always good.

KATIE: (*Icily.*) What a nice profession, you have, Stefan. It doesn't pay much, I agree, but morally – you just can't do wrong, can you? People can, or should, only love you for that. And you, not only do you do good art, you've found the only true intelligence test in the world – the people who are hurt by what you do, they're...stupid.

LIGHTS OUT
END OF SCENE 11

SCENE 12: Next day. Downstage right, **JULIA** and **KATIE**

KATIE: I'm still angry, Julia.

JULIA: At me?

KATIE: At all of you. As if we scientists were responsible for what's wrong with the world. As if we created suicide bombers and... the concentration camps.

JULIA: You didn't, I know that. But you gave them plastic explosives and that Zyklon gas for the death camps.

KATIE: And steel, as in a knife or a plow. And morphine, for pain and to get addicted to. To be used, to be misused. We can't be blamed for what crazy people do with what we invent.

JULIA: You can't. I tell you, what bothers me about scientists is that when something is good, you take the credit for it. "We gave you the transistor! Now you can listen to that Beethoven quartet anywhere!" But when something goes amiss, when it's used to kill, you just wash your hands of it. "That's a misuse." You say, "None of my business."

KATIE: So what should I do?

JULIA: Stefan said it: At least ask the question. Of whether it might hurt people.

KATIE: Do you see what asking that question did to my father?

JULIA: No, I don't see what it did to him. He agreed with me, when we talked about it. That one should worry. He just worried too much.

KATIE: Of course he agreed with you. Now I'm beginning to understand why Poppa married you. You told him he should care, as you're telling me now, as you're telling Stefan. That's exactly what he wanted to hear – poor Poppa, the man who already cared too much. He was sick, Julia. And instead of helping him, you fed his delusion.

LIGHTS OUT

END OF SCENE 12

SCENE 13: *Next day, in Stefan's studio, KATIE and STEFAN*

STEFAN: I thought I had lost you.

KATIE: Maybe you did, you bastard.

STEFAN: Why?

KATIE: Because you jumped on me. On what I do. Which is me. I'm nothing without my science.

STEFAN: Yes, you are. And your science is... the way it is, because of you. You can change the way you do it.

KATIE: I can't. I don't want to.

STEFAN: Why can't you respect nature?

KATIE: *(She makes a motion to leave.)* You just can't stop, can you?

STEFAN: And now that you know what happened back then, you can understand.

KATIE: With my grandfather? What does that –

STEFAN: – No, I mean with me, with my mother *(Points to pregnant Mary.)*, back in Argentina.

KATIE: That's where Eisinger went, Argentina.

STEFAN: That wasn't the priest's name.

KATIE: Are you sure?

STEFAN: I'm sure.

KATIE: I understand a little, Stefan, about how it affected you. But you are alive, you're an artist. You're Stefan. Let the past be.

STEFAN: I can't. *(Pause.)* Or I'm trying to. *(He switches.)* Katie, you can help me.

KATIE: How?

STEFAN: (*Excited*) I have this show coming up, at the Meyerdorf Gallery in Chelsea.

KATIE: Is it a good one?

STEFAN: The best. It always gets reviews. I'll put the Cardinal in it, and pregnant Mary. But last night I sketched out another piece, a big one. And you can help me with it.

KATIE: How, Stefan?

STEFAN: I need a woman for it. It's a performance piece.

KATIE: (*Pause*) Do I have to shit and piss in public?

STEFAN: No, that's been done.

KATIE: (*She smiles.*) Do I need to be smeared with ink, and roll naked on rice paper?

STEFAN: You've been reading art reviews.

KATIE: So... what's the piece about?

STEFAN: Terror.

KATIE: Whose terror?

STEFAN: The priests, of course. I'm going to build an iconostasis, like in a Russian Orthodox church, covering one whole wall of the gallery. The back icons in gold frames, live candles, the front a see-through curtain. You'll go behind it, put on a priest's robes.

KATIE: I... they're men, not women.

STEFAN: That's the idea. You transgress. To them women always do. You'll put on this embroidered cassock, hide your hair under your hat. You'll pick up a censer. And as you pass between the walls of the iconostasis, the icons will come alive, swipe and pick at you, try to look under your robe, undress you. You'll get away, but your clothes will be ripped. (*Pause.*) We'll do this three times a day.

KATIE: (*Pause.*) You're crazy.

STEFAN: I'm serious. Like you and your duck.

KATIE: Let go, Stefan. Why worry about those damn priests?

STEFAN: They have money. They hate women. Opus Dei has these assassins...

KATIE: Stefan, that's just in a book! And such an awful one, too.

STEFAN: Not just in the book. Believe me, I know them.

KATIE: You're assuming I have the time.

STEFAN: I'm asking. I waited 'til your proposal was done. I know it's soon after your father's death. But you seem to have gotten past that.

KATIE: Have I?

STEFAN: This will help; it's a spell in another world. (*Pause*) Will you do it, walk down that row of icons?

KATIE: (*Frightened, hesitant.*) I'll do it. For you.

LIGHTS OUT

END OF SCENE 13

SCENE 14: Next day, *Katie's office*, **JULIA** and **KATIE**.

KATIE: But why didn't he talk to me?

JULIA: Because... you were so different – these things that he agonized about just didn't bother you. (*Pause*) Katie, please, let's stop fighting. I still would like that painting, with its storm clouds. (*She smiles.*) But... I came over because I have something interesting to tell you about the Wertheim/Schellenberg story.

KATIE: (*Cold still.*) Tell me.

JULIA: The last few months Fred became obsessed with the almost Nazi Schellenberg, and the Wertheim family he protected. He read everything he could on Schellenberg – I expect you'll find the notes he took on neat index cards on his desk. He had a historian in Germany go through Schellenberg's papers...

KATIE: Why didn't he do this himself, go there?

JULIA: You should know why.

KATIE: (*Thinks*) He hated Germans. He never accepted an invitation to lecture there, always found an excuse.

JULIA: So he sent me.

KATIE: Where? What are you talking about?

JULIA: He sent me to Germany to read some letters that the historian turned up. In a private collection.

KATIE: Couldn't they copy them, send them over?

JULIA: The owner, a private guy, was odd; the letters were in good shape, but he didn't want them photocopied.

KATIE: So you read them?

JULIA: Yes. And —

KATIE: What do they say?

JULIA: They're to Schellenberg, from a woman. Each letter is signed with a different name, but the same postmark, the same handwriting. Something about that made the historian who saw them think he should show them to me. And the way the woman with her many names writes, even when she tries to hide it, sounds like... a good German intellectual trapped in the country. Chekhov in some bad Bavarian resort. She's good, she's funny. (*Pause.*) In one letter she mentions her son, Friedrich.

KATIE: It's Oma, writing to Schellenberg.

JULIA: Love letters, writing love letters.

LIGHTS OUT

END OF SCENE 14

SCENE 15: Next day, Wertheim office, **KATIE, STEFAN, JULIA**

KATIE: (*"I still can't believe it," tone of voice*): Oma Liese and Franz Schellenberg.

JULIA: What do you remember of her?

KATIE: Nothing. A little. A small woman. Gray hair in a bun. She gave me an Advent calendar once.

STEFAN: That doesn't sound very Jewish.

KATIE: They were Germans more than Jews. For them the Nazis were the ultimate betrayal. That the people of Schiller and Beethoven could kill them... Anyway, they found an Advent calendar, even in New York. She died when I was... seven or eight. I don't remember; a sparkle in her eye, even when she was so old. Happier than Opa. Much happier. But Oma, in love with a Nazi?

STEFAN: Maybe she wasn't in love, Katie.

KATIE: How –

STEFAN: – People did... things to save themselves.

JULIA: I don't think so.

KATIE: Why... What do you know?

JULIA: I don't know, for sure. But I read the letters. I read them as a woman. She was in love.

KATIE: And what did Friedrich say? When he heard what was in the letters?

JULIA: (*Hesitates.*) Not much. He sighed, closed his eyes, sat there for a while, his hands shaking.

KATIE: And that's all that he said, to the letters that explained why his parents survived, why Schellenberg protected them? Why his father had to send money to a Nazi.

JULIA: (*Uncomfortable.*) Yes, that's all. No, wait. (*Long pause.*) He did do something else. There's this bathroom. (*She points to it.*) He went in there. It was quiet, for a long time. He didn't close the door (*beat*), so I went in to see what was wrong and...he was just standing there, looking in the mirror.

KATIE: (*Quietly.*) When did you tell him this?

JULIA: The day before...

STEFAN: ... he killed himself.

LIGHTS OUT
END OF SCENE 15

SCENE 16. *Same day. On stage, light on JULIA and KATIE.*

KATIE: Is there any reason I should like you, Julia?

JULIA: Oh, Katie, please. I was good to your father; I gave him a new life.

KATIE: In the end, it didn't seem that way.

JULIA: Yes, but there were good years before that, please give me some credit for that. I remember that Bach festival in Montreal I got him to go to. We went to Glimmerglass, to the opera. I listened patiently to all those guilt feelings, day in, day out. I talked to him. When no one else did.

KATIE: (*Sarcastic.*) In that gentle voice of yours, all reason. I'm sure you did.

JULIA: But, you also feel he was obsessed. And you couldn't reason with him.

KATIE: (*Bursts out.*) I hate the way you and Stefan point out what's irrational in what I say.

JULIA: (*Firmly.*) Well, it's easy

KATIE: You know, I actually have a feeling that under that logical and gentle façade, that reasonable woman who sees life from all sides, you're also.... reaching after control. Is that what went wrong between you and my father? That he didn't want to do what you wanted him to do? That he got tired of you telling him what concert to go to, what shirt to buy?

JULIA: No...not really. I did want him to do things.

KATIE: What things?

JULIA: To see a psychiatrist, I told you that. He wouldn't.

KATIE: Was that all?

JULIA: I wanted to travel.

KATIE: Well, he sent you to Germany.

JULIA: I wanted to travel with him. It's different by yourself. And...

KATIE: Yes?

JULIA: (*Pause*) I wanted us to have a child.

KATIE: (*Long pause.*) But Poppa was an old man, Julia. And you're... not young.

JULIA: I was younger, then, when we started talking about it. I needed a child.

KATIE: You needed a child. And what did my father say?

JULIA: Fred...couldn't imagine it.

KATIE: Neither can I.

JULIA: He would have loved a baby, once it came. (*Her voice breaks.*) I needed...

KATIE: (*Turns away.*) Your need. Stefan's priests. My virus.

LIGHTS OUT

END OF SCENE 16

SCENE 17. *Same day. Wertheim Office, KATIE, STEFAN, JULIA.*

KATIE: Sometimes, I think I begin to understand. But this obsession of his with that Uzbek killing. He made saxitoxin, that's all!

STEFAN: When he made it, was it known to be toxic?

KATIE: That's why he made it!

STEFAN: I don't get that. Why is that a reason?

KATIE: The molecule was famous. Or notorious. Have you heard of red tides?

STEFAN: Sure, I remember one, when I was a kid, in Mar del Plata. They closed all the beaches.

KATIE: They're dinoflagellates. (*Slight pause, as others are puzzled.*) No, not related to dinosaurs. They're algae. Once in a while they just explode in number, no one knows why.

STEFAN: Until the sea is red with them, I saw that.

JULIA: In a perfect red storm.

KATIE: Saxitoxin is what the algae make. Each a little, very little. And that little is very, very toxic. Half a milligram, the tiniest crystal you can see, will kill you. Two thousand times more toxic than cyanide.

STEFAN: So why would anyone want to make it? In the lab, I mean?

KATIE: Because it's frightening. It's deadly. So it's sexy...

STEFAN: Wait, wait. Are there horror chemists? Who make things just to frighten us?

KATIE: No, Stefan. Poppa was not Bela Lugosi. And I know what you're going to say next --- not Dr. Victor Frankenstein, either. He was just showing off.

JULIA: Was he the first? I mean to make it in the lab?

KATIE: No. But the way he made it was simple, so simple that you could kick yourself in the ass for not having seen how to do it earlier. It was pretty.

STEFAN: Pretty. And scary, no matter what you say. And when he made it, did he think it could be used by some terrorists?

KATIE: I don't know. *(Pause.)* But he wasn't like me. *(She smiles.)* Probably he gave it a passing thought. You know, maybe Poppa even imagined synthetic saxitoxin would be beneficial. With large quantities in hand, you can study what might stop red tides. Or turn it into something useful. Where would dermatologists be without botox?

JULIA: Katie, do you remember you mentioned Zyklon B?

KATIE: I did. The chemical used to kill people in the extermination camps. Just liquid hydrogen cyanide, bound on a kind of sand.

JULIA: Do you know who made it? And why?

KATIE: No, I don't. And what does that have to do with Poppa?

JULIA: Fred told me it was done in the labs of Fritz Haber, the German Jewish chemist – who opened the first tank of poison gas in World War I.

KATIE: *(Flashes in anger again.)* Who opened the way to make nitrogen fertilizers. From air. To feed twice as many people as could live on earth before. I know what Haber did, Julia. Both sides of him. *(Takes a breath.)* But I didn't know he made Zyklon B.

JULIA: He did, in 1920. He thought this way of releasing cyanide would let people kill vermin more easily. And it did, there was a market for it.

KATIE: A market. *(She muses.)* Haber died in... 1934.

JULIA: Ten years later Zyklon B was used to kill his people.

LIGHTS OUT

END OF SCENE 17

SCENE 18: *Same day, moments later. STEFAN and JULIA, onstage, light on them.*

STEFAN: Why are we still talking?

JULIA: You and I?

STEFAN: That too, but I mean all of us.

JULIA: Because Fred and Friedrich were... part of us. A very important part.

STEFAN: Not me.

JULIA: But Katie was his daughter.

STEFAN: That she was. You're right, Julia, what happened, his death, did something to us.

JULIA: To you and Katie?

STEFAN: Oh... For sure. *(Beat.)* But why are we still talking, when we're all at each other's throats?

JULIA: Because we want to find a reason. For his death.

STEFAN: Because we're afraid.

JULIA: Of what?

STEFAN: Of death, itself.

JULIA: Especially of death without a reason. A ship sinks and people die. But why did Friedrich Wertheim, a survivor already, kill himself? There has to be a reason.

STEFAN: He told us why.

JULIA: Somehow, it doesn't fit, it's like his death... wears a different coat for all of us. We can't let go. *(Pause.)* But there is something strange.

STEFAN: What?

JULIA: Not one of us cries.

LIGHTS OUT
END OF SCENE 18

SCENE 19: *Three months later. Stage, light on KATIE and JULIA.*

JULIA: It's almost four months. Still angry?

KATIE: No... Yes... No, I'll get over it, Julia. Right now I'm... scared.

JULIA: Of what?

KATIE: I agreed to be in Stefan's piece. To make up, maybe. To help.
(*Beat*) There's a reason for his lashing out at the priests.

JULIA (*Nods.*). He told me.

KATIE: (*Amazed.*) He told you? For two years we've been together, and it's only after Poppa's death that he talked about his mother. And even then, not directly.

JULIA: Men tell me things. Because I listen.

KATIE: (*Not listening.*) He has me walking between a curtain and these icons. Except they're alive, they lash out at me.

JULIA: How does he do it? How do the icons attack you?

KATIE: A few he's rigged up with gears set off by sensors. Stefan's very good at this. I come near, a face lunges at me, like in a chamber of horrors at a fair. But with others he couldn't get the effects he wants, so he works them himself, from the back of the iconostasis.

JULIA: Like God.

KATIE: Like an artist.

JULIA: Like a scientist.

KATIE: As I go by one icon, four hands come out, two are his. They rip my skirt. In another, he is St. Sebastian. He pulls out one of the arrows lodged in his neck. And stabs at me with it.

JULIA: That's pretty funny.

KATIE: It would be, if it were played for that. But something strange comes over Stefan when he's in the icons. He's angry at them – the saints, the priests. But he's also angry at the woman.

JULIA: (*Pause.*) At his mother?

KATIE: At me. I'm scared...

JULIA: Of what?

KATIE: Those arrows are sharp.

LIGHTS OUT

END OF SCENE 19

SCENE 20: *The next day, in Katie's office:* **KATIE, JULIA, STEFAN**

KATIE: (*Disappointed and angry.*) I had a great proposal, all the technology lined up to sequence the proteins, a new NMR way to look at protein-DNA interactions.

JULIA: So, did they tell you why you didn't get it?

KATIE: They said there was no evidence for proteins that prompt mutations to virulence.

JULIA: And are there?

KATIE: You sound like them, the bastards.

JULIA: I don't know anything, Katie, I'm just asking.

KATIE: There are hints. And I have an idea on where in the cell such rogue proteins could be. And how to find them. That's what proposals are supposed to be about, something you don't know. But oh, they're so logical, those reviewers, shitheads, you can't tell them something is unless they know it's there.

STEFAN: That wouldn't get them far in art. It better be new.

KATIE: (*Ignoring him.*) They said something else. That my project didn't fit the "mission statement" for the program.

STEFAN: Which is?

KATIE: Vaccines -- as if they didn't get enough money from Gates -- New therapies, always. Diagnostics for autism, sure.

JULIA: Those sound worthwhile.

KATIE: They are, they are. But you don't make a new drug these days by trying the next thing off the shelf. You can't do it without understanding!

STEFAN: And if they don't push you to do what's useful, will you do it?

KATIE: (*Impatient.*) I will, one day. After I understand. Or someone else will, using my work. I just want the freedom to do what I do well.

JULIA: Not that different, you and Stefan. The government turns off your virus-protein money spigot. The city council wants to shut Stefan's show down. And both of you just want to be free to do what you want to do. With our money.

STEFAN: If it's good.

KATIE: It is good.

JULIA: Listen to yourself, for God's sake. "I will do this, I'll make a molecule, a painting". It's all that "I this, I that". Meanwhile what you make – a better virus, a poem, a painting – just goes out there and changes people's lives. And you keep on talking about what it means to you!

STEFAN: I talk to other artists.

KATIE: There's a lot of back and forth at my scientific meetings.

JULIA: Bah, preaching to the choir. How about this, you apostles of freedom: we'll set artists to decide what scientists work on, and scientists to judge art projects.

STEFAN: No. A few know what's good. But you can see how they fall for Escher...

JULIA: A way in to conceptual art, our Escher. You should be happy.

KATIE: No, I wouldn't want artists to judge my science. They'll fall for any claptrap about the natural you give them. Alchemy and horoscopes, and...

JULIA: So you want control. Both of you. And money. *(She cools off.)* There is a difference, I'll grant you: the scientists have money. I work in the research grants office, so I see what goes on. We get 400 million dollars a year in from the government. 380 million is for science and engineering, 19.5 million for the social sciences, half a million for the arts and humanities.

KATIE: The work we do is expensive, for God's sake, that's all.

STEFAN: *(Sarcastic.)* Sure, we can do without telephone calls, computers and fax machines.

JULIA: I'm with you there. But there's another difference. Even if you had all those toys, Stefan, you still wouldn't be happy, unless... people were upset by your art.

LIGHTS OUT

END OF SCENE 20

SCENE 21. *Next day, on stage, light on STEFAN, KATIE*

KATIE: I need to talk to you. About my part in your installation.

STEFAN: Oh, it works. That iconostasis – you'll see, it's just the kind of thing they pick up in a review.

KATIE: But I'm scared, Stefan.

STEFAN: Of what?

KATIE: Of my part. Of you.

STEFAN: What is there to be scared of?

KATIE: When the icons grab at me, when you are behind them (*She shivers.*) you become someone else.

STEFAN: So, I'm an actor too. I become the saint, I become the apostle. I hate that woman.

KATIE: I can feel it. But I'm scared that... the transformation is too real. I'm not a psychiatrist, but I'm scared that you –

STEFAN: – Yes –

KATIE: become the priest who you think hurt your mother. And that you will hurt me.

STEFAN: Just a minute. You said “ who you think hurt your mother”.

KATIE: Yes.

STEFAN: What greater hurt can there be?

KATIE: None greater than yours. But... maybe not your mother's.

STEFAN: She lost a life she could have lived.

KATIE: She didn't, Stefan. She had you.

STEFAN: How can you say that? You didn't get pregnant at 17. You didn't have to carry the child. To give birth to it in shame. Not give that child a father! Argentina is not the US.

KATIE: Listen to me. When you told me the story for the first time you said “he loved her”.

STEFAN: That’s what she said, my mother.

KATIE: Maybe it was true. Maybe it was true.

LIGHTS DOWN

END OF SCENE 21

SCENE 22. *Same day, later. KATIE, JULIA, in Katie's office.*

JULIA: I see you now have that Dahl painting in your office.

KATIE: I do. And I know you wanted it.

JULIA: (*Smiles.*) It's OK, you can let me have a reproduction.

KATIE: I showed it to Stefan a few weeks ago. You can imagine what he said.

JULIA: "A marine painting, a wrecked ship in a storm. Just what the world needs, another marine painting. Typical romantic claptrap..."

KATIE: And then some choice words about those Norwegian merchants just loving it.

JULIA: (*Smiles.*) And why do you like it?

KATIE: I told you, it's the storm, like those cytokines.

JULIA: But you had looked at it for years in your father's office, Katie. And you never made the connection before?

KATIE: It took another storm. (*Pause*) And... maybe you wanting it.

JULIA: When your father looked at it, I thought it was the shipwreck, what happened to his parents' life in Germany.

KATIE: "Thought?" Have you changed your mind?

JULIA: Well, I see something else. Yes, the ship foundered. But the sailors salvaged something. Look at those barrels piled up neatly. And there's a break in the sky, a little half-sunlight on the sea.

KATIE: A lull. The storm could begin again.

LIGHTS OUT

END OF SCENE 22

SCENE 23. *Same day, later, on stage, light on **JULIA** and **STEFAN**.*

STEFAN: Do you think Hermann Wertheim was aware of what went on between his wife and Schellenberg?

JULIA: I don't know. If he wasn't, then he must have wondered all his life why Schellenberg saved him.

STEFAN: Maybe that good German Jew thought – here is the one good German, Prof. Schellenberg. *(Pause.)* All German Jews, Katie's father, wanted there to be one.

JULIA: *(Pause.)* And where is your good German, Stefan?

STEFAN: I gave up looking for him, a long time ago.

JULIA: Maybe there's a place you haven't looked.

STEFAN: Where?

JULIA: *(Points to his heart.)*

LIGHT OUT

END OF SCENE 23

SCENE 24. *Next day, Katie's office. KATIE and STEFAN.*

STEFAN: *(Reading a newspaper.)* Listen to what he writes: "Stefan Cardenas' breakthrough piece, Iconostasis, was the highlight of this strong show. Not since Max Beckmann has terror and misogyny been so aptly distilled in art. When the young woman –

KATIE: *(Covers her eyes.)* – Young woman –

STEFAN: *(Continues reading.)* – walks between the icons – “

KATIE: – She's frightened. Period.

STEFAN: *(Putting down his newspaper.)* I know. *(Pause.)* And I know what did it. All the death in the air.

KATIE: You mean Poppa's? Yes.

STEFAN: Makes you think about... things.

KATIE: Worse, it drives a wedge into your heart.

STEFAN: What does?

KATIE: Everything. The priests' arrows, what was in Schellenberg's letters. I was afraid. Of many things. Of finding out why Poppa killed himself, yes... And why...you and I were fighting. *(Points to both of them.)*

STEFAN: And now?

KATIE: It's over. *(Pause.)* You and I were fighting for good reasons. It took a death to make us see it, but it's OK, Stefan, it's over.

STEFAN: *(Doesn't know whether to push on, decides to change direction.)* Do you think your grandfather knew? About the letters?

KATIE: *(Shrugs.)*

STEFAN: And if he did know?

KATIE: *(With impatience.)* Opa would have lived with it, that's all.

STEFAN: But Friedrich couldn't take it, knowing – it killed him.

KATIE: My father... Even though I don't really like Julia – just like her to show him those love letters! -- I don't think that pushed him over the edge.

STEFAN: So what did? The news from Uzbekistan?

KATIE: No, that was just an excuse. You could just as well say I killed him. A week before, we had this drawn out battle: I told him about my project—

STEFAN: And he came up with the same moral objections I had.

KATIE: Had?

STEFAN: Have.

KATIE: (*Smiles.*) But you're right. Same objections. And then some. It was a father and daughter fight, but worse. Because we are – were – both scientists. And we differed, so much. (*Beat.*) I don't know what killed him, Stefan – his obsessions, Julia feeding them, Uzbekistan, Oma and Schellenberg, my work, the way I don't think about consequences. I just don't know. (*Pause*) I need to let go of this. So do you. (*Pause.*) Let me show you something.

(On a screen is projected an image of a protein. This projection will be supplied.)

Look at this. I know that as art it's primitive, the false color scheme straight out of a '30s Astounding Science Fiction Magazine. But just look at it!

STEFAN: I like it. The palette isn't as bad as you make it out to be. There are these helices, and they're stressed, held together when I feel they would like to be apart.

KATIE: You got it. There's a zinc holding them together. (*She points.*)

STEFAN: I see it, but what I like is the feeling the molecule gives me, of being tensed for some action.

KATIE: Oh, it is. These zinc fingers are the way a protein recognizes DNA. Touching. Caressing, on and off. Holding tight eventually. Each 30

residue unit is folded; see the antiparallel β hairpin, followed by a turn and then an α -helix –

STEFAN: *(Reacting in a friendly way to the jargon.)* Sssh...

KATIE: Sorry.

STEFAN: You've never explained it to me, not this way.

KATIE: *(Suddenly flares up.)* Shit.... it certainly didn't impress those reviewers.

STEFAN: Forget them, Katie. Let's talk about how it worked for me. You've told me the story before. But you just started with genetic alphabet soup. You didn't relax, show me that image, without lecturing at me about what I was supposed to see. Today, I felt it, or began to feel it – and I'm not talking about the caressing. The molecule itself told me a story. Its story.

LIGHTS OUT

END OF SCENE 24

SCENE 25. *Same day, some hours later.* **JULIA, KATIE** on stage.

JULIA: I think Fred couldn't help blaming himself.

KATIE: Why not?

JULIA: Do you remember the story of Oedipus? His father, the King, threatened by a prophecy, has Oedipus put out to die. The child survives, grows up. As a young man, he kills a man he doesn't know in a fight, in self-defense. At a place where three roads meet.

KATIE: At a place where three roads meet...

JULIA: The man turns out to be his father, King Laius. Oedipus goes on to marry Laius' wife.

KATIE: Poppa didn't kill his father. He killed himself.

JULIA: He shouldn't have. But like Oedipus, Fred was faced with evil. With an arrow pointing to his beautiful chemical child, pointing to him, in his innocent ignorance,

KATIE: And another arrow, back to Germany, to the war.

JULIA: To his parents and Schellenberg. *(Pause.)* And to Zyklon B, and Haber, too.

KATIE: Yes, Poppa's world fell apart. His work...his mother.

JULIA: He couldn't think it through...

KATIE: He felt responsible. *(Pause)* I remember something I read about Abraham Lincoln. During the Civil War he went off for months to a cottage near the Soldiers' Home on the outskirts of Washington. A place where soldiers came in, to heal. Or were brought to be buried in the cemetery nearby. The soldiers he had sent, for the best of reasons, to be killed. Lincoln saw them, every day. He lived with that tragic responsibility.

(Pause.)

Poppa was not Lincoln.

LIGHTS DOWN
END OF SCENE 25

SCENE 26. *Moments later. Stage.* **STEFAN, KATIE**

STEFAN: Do you think your father was Schellenberg's son?

KATIE: How should I know?

STEFAN: Can't you get a DNA test?

KATIE: Maybe. Actually... I don't want to know.

STEFAN: Oof. That doesn't sound very scientific.

KATIE: I don't want to know because it doesn't matter.

STEFAN: But your father, I'm thinking of him finding out.

KATIE: Oh, if he had only told me the story of the letters, of Oma and Schellenberg...

STEFAN: What could you have done?

KATIE: I would have said, "What's important is that you and your family survived." And "You are Friedrich Wertheim. You are my Poppa." And given him a hug. (*She collects herself.*) And... maybe... I would have said, quietly, "Schellenberg must have loved your mother."

STEFAN: You can't know that.

KATIE: I feel it. He kept the letters. And he saved Oma and Opa, Stefan, he saved them.

LIGHTS OUT

END OF SCENE 26

SCENE 27. Next day. **JULIA** and **STEFAN** stage right, **KATIE** walks in during the scene, with a small suitcase in hand..

STEFAN: I'm going away.

JULIA: I know. Congratulations on the Guggenheim. Where will you take it?

STEFAN: In Amsterdam, a lot of conceptual art there. Good video too. But I am going to try something new.

JULIA: What will it be?

STEFAN: You'll see. Will you come to visit me?

JULIA: Maybe. (*She smiles.*) I'm going away, too. In another direction, very far away. To the Phillipines. To visit a friend.

STEFAN: Do you think we understand?

(*KATIE walks in quietly backstage; STEFAN and JULIA don't see her. KATIE listens.*)

JULIA: Why Fred died?

STEFAN: I think that will remain a mystery. Let him keep it. I was thinking of something else: How did Katie and her father take such different ways? Why did he agonize all the time -- about his science, about what others did? And why Katie didn't?

JULIA: (*Quietly, but firmly.*) I have an idea about him.

STEFAN: Why he was the way he was?

JULIA: (*Nods.*) They lived through the war -- he was only 8 when it was over. They weren't hiding. Or they were, inside themselves, pretending to be good Germans. Hearing all around them terrible things about the Jews. Worse than hiding. I wonder... I wonder if this little Jewish boy -- like a child in a divorce -- thought it was his fault. Then. And always. (*Pause.*) But I don't know about Katie.

STEFAN: I have an idea about Katie.

JULIA: Tell me.

STEFAN: She once told me that after graduate school she wanted to have a family, children.

JULIA: So what happened?

STEFAN: I don't know, that she wouldn't say. The right man didn't show up. Or maybe he did, and left.

JULIA: So, she has her science. She's so good at it. It's her family. Like her father. Like his father.

STEFAN: No, if she had children, I think Katie would have been different. She'd worry. About them getting into trouble. About her getting the world messed up, her kids' world. Through what might come out of her science,

JULIA: Stefan, that's typical male stuff. A woman driven by her hormones, transformed by wanting to have children.

KATIE: (*Enters.*) Except he's right.

LIGHTS OUT

END OF SCENE 27

SCENE 28. *Same day, moments later. Stage right, **JULIA AND KATIE.**
KATIE is carrying a small suitcase.*

JULIA: I'm going away, Katie.

KATIE: With a man?

JULIA: No, I have a friend in the Philippines; she always wanted me to come and visit her family, in this mountain village. Now I'll do it. Maybe I'll stay a while, teach English. No chemistry, no grant proposals. I'm free.

KATIE: I wish I could do that, go to the Philippines.

JULIA: You can't. Your life is here, in your lab.

KATIE: *(Looks at her.)*

JULIA: I mean that. Some of us just flit from one thing to another. It may be a man, it may be a book. You – you have a passion for the way...life works things out. Stay with it. Teach us.

KATIE: *(Reflecting)* Life works things out. But not just in molecules.
(She's quiet.)

JULIA: Are you going away? *(She points at the suitcase.)*

KATIE: No. Just something I wanted to show you.

JULIA: Me?

KATIE: Yes, you. I've been cleaning out his apartment. A place you know.
(She smiles.) This was way back in a closet.

JULIA: *(Looks at the suitcase which Katie puts down.)* A boy's suitcase, with some German hotel and steamship labels on it. Did you open it?

KATIE: Yes *(She opens it, they both kneel down to look at the contents.);*
I'll show you.

(They go over things in the suitcase.)

JULIA: Some old school things, one of those pencil cases with a sliding cover.

KATIE: Look at this. (*She hands Julia a sheet of paper.*)

JULIA: It's a map, drawn by him. There's Bremerhaven where they got on the ship. There's the ship, and New York.

KATIE: (*She takes out a flat metal box.*) Some watercolors, Caran d'Ache. Every European child got one.

JULIA: What's in that bag?

KATIE: Open it.

JULIA: (*Pulls the drawstring open, and takes out a small white teddy bear.*)

KATIE: It has the Steiff button in its ear. (*Her voice breaks.*)

JULIA: I've never seen a white teddy bear.

KATIE: (*Now crying.*) I played with it. But I didn't like it. So Poppa put it away.

JULIA: (*Breaking down.*) Back in his suitcase. The one he came to America with.

KATIE: He put it away, for another child.

JULIA: Or grandchild. (*They hug, cry.*)

LIGHTS OUT

END OF SCENE 28

SCENE 29. *A year later, **STEFAN, KATIE, JULIA**, in a café perhaps, with a glass of wine. Projection overhead, drifting, or coming in as scene progresses, of some of Stefan's new artwork.*

KATIE: He wanted a Jewish burial, that Germanophile. It's time, a year has passed -- to put up a headstone, a *mezeivah*. Help me think what to put on it.

JULIA: *(With no irony at all)* Thank you for asking me, Katie – you didn't have to.

KATIE: But I want you here.

STEFAN: *(To Katie)* I haven't seen you in months. Not even an e-mail.

KATIE: Well, it's not like you're next door. And I've been busy. That proposal had to be rewritten, some research done to make it real. I decided to shift it in a new direction. Maybe to take the first steps on a vaccine for that flu. *(She looks at Julia.)* Before the storm breaks.

STEFAN: Going where the money is?

KATIE: No, *(Smiling.)* in the end, where I want to go.

JULIA: *(Smiling.)* So the ducks might live.

KATIE: *(Raising a glass.)* To the ducks!

ALL: *(Clinking glasses.)* The ducks!

KATIE: And maybe people too.

JULIA: To people too! *(They toast again.)*

KATIE *(She turns to Stefan.)* And I've read, Stefan, reviews of your new show. It looks like you're going somewhere else too.

STEFAN: I don't think so, to me it's all on a line.

KATIE: One critic says that you are no longer an apostle of... the death of painting. And, boy, he doesn't like it *(She smiles.)*

STEFAN: An asshole.

JULIA: But people like it, your art I mean. *(Beat, smiling.)* No, not my mother. To my mother! *(They toast a third time.)*

(Quiet moment)

KATIE: He's gone. A year. And... something has changed. We've changed.

JULIA: Even I?

STEFAN: You have, Julia. *(He smiles.)* You're not calling us to rights.

(Music begins inconspicuously here, perhaps the Greek dance, Misirlou.)

JULIA: Well, maybe the rights are wrongs. Or...not quite rights. Maybe...it's only the dance that matters. That we are here. That there is music. That we may dance.

(Music rises.)

KATIE: Maybe... that's what we should put on his stone.

(Music loud)

LIGHTS OUT

END OF SCENE 29

END OF PLAY