

Euphonia

a play

by

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## CHARACTERS

Joseph Faber: 50s, German inventor. He does not necessarily have to have a German accent.

The Machine: Faber's invention, a primitive talking machine composed of an elaborate system of keys, bellows, and a dummy head. Speaks in a “ghostly monotone.”

Joseph Henry: 40s, scientist and intellectual.

Robert Patterson: 50s, Henry's colleague, director of the U.S. Mint. Played by the actor playing Barnum.

Phineas T. Barnum: 30s, a showman.

Allison: teens-60s, a deeply troubled woman. Played by the actor playing The Machine.

Bob: 20s-50s, Insurance salesman and Allison's husband. Played by the actor playing Barnum.

Ellie: 30s, Faber's niece. Played by the actor playing The Machine.

Francis: 30s, Ellie's husband. Played by the actor playing Barnum.

SETTING: Faber's home; Musical Fund Hall, Philadelphia; An ocean liner; Egyptian Hall, London; A small home in the English countryside; Joseph Henry's office, Washington DC. Bob and Allison's home; a cherry orchard.

TIME: 1840s-1870s, 1950s-1980s

NOTE: The exhibition scenes can be done a couple of ways depending on the resources of the company. The best way would be to have plants in the audience, but if this is not feasible, then prerecorded audience interjections can also be used.

## PROLOGUE

(Lights up on THE MACHINE, staring blankly ahead. She stands in silence for a moment, before JOSEPH FABER enters. He looks slightly disheveled, ruffled, unshaven. He gives a quick half-bow to the audience before approaching THE MACHINE. Then, as if manipulating a great musical instrument, he begins to “play” THE MACHINE. THE MACHINE speaks slowly in its ghostly voice.)

## MACHINE

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a warm day.

It is a rainy day.

It is a beautiful day.

Buon giorno signiori.

Guten tag, damen und heren.

Buenos dias, señores.

Bonne journée, mesdames et messieurs.

Good day.

Welcome.

Don't be sad.

We are here to entertain you.

(FABER stops playing and offers another curt bow. He then throws a sheet over THE MACHINE and exits. Lights dim.

SCENE 1

(Lights up on FABER'S living/work space. Books and papers lie scattered everywhere. FABER is inspecting the MACHINE, which stands in a corner of the room, still covered with a sheet. He is making adjustments, examining the inner workings, etc., referring to his notes and papers. A knock is heard. FABER quickly throws the sheet over the rest of the MACHINE.)

FABER

Yes?

PATTERSON

Mr. Faber?

FABER

Who is it?

PATTERSON

It's Robert Patterson. We're here for the demonstration?

FABER

Yes, yes. One moment.

(He attempts to clean up the place to some degree, but quickly abandons it. He opens the door. JOSEPH HENRY and ROBERT PATTERSON enter. They are both dressed quite nicely and clash with the surroundings.)

PATTERSON

Mr. Faber. This is my colleague Mr. Joseph Henry.

HENRY

How do you do, Mr. Faber?

FABER

How do you do.

PATTERSON

You and I had some brief communication last year. Regarding the charity drive to rebuild your machine?

FABER

Yes, I remember.

HENRY

You received our telegram I hope?

FABER

Yes, yes.

HENRY

If this is a bad time--

FABER

No, no, it's fine. Please come in.

(They walk a bit further into the room, taking it in.)

I apologize for the state of the place.

HENRY

No apology necessary. My study looks quite like this before I am taken with an urge to clean it up. I won't let the maid in there. Too many things of too much importance, you understand.

FABER

I myself do not have a maid, but I understand you.  
May I offer you some brandy?

PATTERSON

A brandy would be lovely, thank you.

HENRY

A touch early in the morning for me, but thanks.

FABER

Very well.

(FABER pulls a bottle of brandy and two glasses out of some pile of stuff. He pours two glasses and hands one to PATTERSON.)

PATTERSON

So, Mr. Faber, I was fortunate enough to catch your previous exhibition last year and I must say I was quite taken with it.

FABER

I believe you were alone in that, sir. But I thank you.

PATTERSON

What do you mean, sir?

FABER

The exhibition was an outright failure. Even worse than in New York.

PATTERSON

And yet you plan to show this new version once again in just a couple of days.

FABER

Correct.

PATTERSON

Why, if you're so convinced of its failure?

FABER

That previous machine was rudimentary. I believe people will recognize the improvements I've made to this version.

PATTERSON

Hard to believe such a machine as that could be considered rudimentary. I found it quite impressive indeed.

FABER

With all due respect, sir, you haven't seen this new one.

PATTERSON

Then I am all the more excited! After I saw your previous model, I mentioned it at our next meeting--

HENRY

We are both members of the American Philosophical Society.

PATTERSON

--And Henry here was quite interested to see the machine.

FABER

I'm afraid you cannot see that machine, Sir. I destroyed it.

HENRY

And this new version, sir, I understand you built it completely on your own, is that correct?

FABER

It is.

HENRY

And you wouldn't accept our offer to start a charity drive to cover the costs. Why is that?

FABER

I wouldn't ask for anyone to aid me in this Sysiphean task, sir.

HENRY

I'm sure I don't know what you mean, sir.

PATTERSON

Nevertheless, we are here now, and we thank you for letting us view the machine in private.

FABER

You are most welcome.

HENRY

Mr. Faber, you are German by birth, is that correct?

FABER

Yes.

HENRY

I have noticed the Germans seem strangely taken with the idea of artificial speech. I had learned of a fellow countryman of yours, a man by the name of von Kempelen, who made great strides in this very field.

FABER

He laid certain groundwork, yes.

HENRY

Your machine is based on von Kempelen's design, is that right?

FABER

Partially. But it is a much more sophisticated creation.

HENRY

I had opportunity several years ago to see a demonstration of a machine created by a Mr. Charles Wheatstone. It used some of those same ideas. It could say several words quite well. Papa, mama, mother, father, thumb, plum. Simple words of this nature. But Patterson assures me yours is capable of much more.

FABER

Mr. Patterson was correct.

HENRY

I do hope so. Now, without further delay, may we see the machine?

FABER

I think, perhaps, I should make a few more adjustments...

PATTERSON

Nonsense, I'm quite sure it's in fine shape.

FABER

How would you presume to know that?

HENRY

Mr. Faber, with all due respect, we both have many engagements this afternoon, and we wouldn't like to take up too much of your time either. I'm sure you have much to do in the lead-up to your big debut.

FABER

Quite so. My apologies, gentlement. It's right over here.

(FABER motions to THE MACHINE.)

HENRY

Is this it?

FABER

Yes.

HENRY

May I...?

FABER

Perhaps I should. It is quite delicate, you understand.

HENRY

Certainly, certainly.

(FABER removes the sheet. The MACHINE is revealed, wearing a comical fake beard and turban. HENRY and PATTERSON study it for a moment.)

PATTERSON

I told you, Henry. A talking Turk.

HENRY

Why a Turk?

FABER

I thought it would lend the machine a touch of exoticism. Mystique.

HENRY

Hm. Quite interesting.

FABER

Is there something wrong?

HENRY

Well, to be quite honest, it's a touch which lends a rather unwelcome...carnival aspect to the machine.

FABER

I'm not sure what you mean.

HENRY

Merely, if your machine is as advanced as you say, why cloak it in such...garish trappings? Unless you're planning to become some kind of sideshow attraction, that is.

FABER

I assure you, sir, that this machine is no sideshow attraction.

PATTERSON

Henry, I think you're missing the point. Perhaps if we just let Mr. Faber demonstrate--

HENRY

Mr. Faber, it can't come as a surprise as to the reason for our visit, can it?

FABER

Reason?

HENRY

See, Patterson and I, we're men of science. When Patterson told me about the machine, I was a touch skeptical as to its authenticity.

PATTERSON

I made it clear that I detected no evidence of a hoax, but Henry remained unconvinced. He had to see for himself.

HENRY

I possess a healthy amount of skepticism about everything, Mr. Faber. Don't take it personally.

FABER

You take me for a fraud. Is that it?

HENRY

Not at all, sir! Patterson here is an honest man. I trust his judgment wholeheartedly, and if he says it is not a hoax, then I am sure he's right. And yet...that skeptic's mind, you know. At this very moment, a device claiming to do much the same thing is on display in London, and it is an out and out sham. Ventriloquist in the wings throwing his voice, you see. And then I see this machine of yours, with its rather...unconvincing Turkish guise, and well, it raises some questions. Surely a fellow man of science such as yourself would understand.

FABER

I assure you gentlemen, there is no ventriloquist. Feel free to inspect my chambers if you're concerned I've hired someone for this occasion.

PATTERSON

I am sure that will not be necessary.

FABER

It is not. My device is not some...cheap parlor trick.

PATTERSON

We're sure it isn't, sir. Perhaps we should get on with the demonstration--

FABER

I did not know this meeting would be an opportunity to insult me.

PATTERSON

We mean no insult whatsoever, sir! It is our intellectual curiosity that brings us here, nothing more.

FABER

I'm afraid your curiosity will have to go unsatisfied. I am not interested in defending my work to anyone, even those in the American Philosophical Society.

PATTERSON

Mr. Faber--

FABER

You come to my home, you accuse me of fabrication--

PATTERSON

We've done nothing of the sort, sir!

FABER

I don't need your approval. I haven't spent the last *nineteen years* building some kind of elaborate toy. Seven years it took to perfect a single vowel sound. *Seven*. This machine is capable of replicating any word in several different languages. Complex sentences. It is miles ahead of any machine of its kind which has come before it, including your Mr. Wheatstone's.

HENRY

You speak very highly of it.

FABER

It is my life's work, sir.

HENRY

And yet now, when challenged even slightly, you refuse an opportunity to make a fool of me. I would gladly be made a fool if this machine is as impressive as you say. Mr. Patterson would be glad of it too, since he'd stand to make two dollars off of me. Isn't that right, Patterson?

PATTERSON

I cannot resist a good wager.

FABER

It seems to me, sirs, that this is some sort of game to you. Is that accurate?

PATTERSON

Not at all!

FABER

Because let me make it clear to you, this is no game to me. I have poured countless days into this device. Every waking hour. Every sleeping hour, for that matter. I have done nothing else the last nineteen years besides perfect this machine. It is the best of its kind, that I can tell you. I don't need the approval of anyone to assure myself of that, even eminent scientists such as yourselves. We will let the public decide whether or not it is a fraud come tomorrow.

HENRY

And you think the public will be any less skeptical than us? We are here, giving you the benefit of the doubt, because we are scientists. But as scientists, we require empirical evidence to support our beliefs. And if I am to judge an invention merely on the word of its creator, especially a foreigner such as yourself, well, I would not be in the position I am in today. I mean you no disrespect, Mr. Faber, but I must remain firm on this.

PATTERSON

Perhaps we should leave you to your work.

HENRY

If that's what you want, Mr. Faber, then we shall leave you. But rest assured, your defensiveness does not speak as to the device's merit. But if the machine is as advanced as you claim, and as Patterson here can attest, then I should be quite happy to see it.

PATTERSON

What do you say, Faber? Want to make fools of two esteemed scientists?

(Short beat.)

FABER

Very well.

PATTERSON

Excellent!

FABER

I apologize to you both for my behavior. I must admit it is a sore spot for me after all these years.

HENRY

No apology necessary. I can imagine someone in your position grows tired of such accusations.

FABER

You have no idea.

HENRY

I think I will have a brandy now, if your offer still stands.

FABER

Help yourself.

(HENRY goes to the desk with the brandy bottle and digs around for another glass. Finding one, he wipes it out with a handkerchief and pours some brandy into it. He refreshes PATTERSON'S and FABER'S glasses.)

HENRY

A toast to you, Mr. Faber. May the words your invention speaks prove as impressive as your own.

(They clink glasses and drink.)

PATTERSON

So, Faber...how does it work? I've been dying to know.

FABER

Quite simply, actually.

(He moves towards the machine.)

These foot pedals control a bellows which act as lungs of a sort, pushing air through this chamber here. Inside here is an ivory reed which vibrates, much like a larynx might.

(He demonstrates using the foot pedal, and THE MACHINE lets out a single sustained tone.)

In this compartment there are several metal plates, which I manipulate with these keys here. The right combination of plates and I can replicate any combination of vowels and consonants in several distinct languages.

(HENRY and PATTERSON inspect the inner workings of THE MACHINE.)

HENRY

These mechanics are incredibly intricate.

PATTERSON

Yes, yes, this is all fascinating, but for God's sake, Faber, let's hear some words!

HENRY

You'll have to forgive my associate, Mr. Faber. He is a brilliant man, but he has his limitations.

PATTERSON

I'm just impatient to make you look like a fool and collect my two dollars.

HENRY

Please, Mr. Faber. Do show us.

(FABER approaches the machine and, as before, plays it with great skill and elegance. It begins to speak.)

MACHINE

Good day, Mister Henry. Good day, Mister Patterson.

PATTERSON

See, Henry? It's a damn miracle.

MACHINE

It is a rainy day.  
It is a beautiful day.

HENRY

Quite impressive indeed, Mr. Faber!

PATTERSON

Convinced yet, Henry?

HENRY

Now let's not be too rash. I must have a closer look before I pay out to you, Patterson.  
(HENRY gets up close to THE MACHINE.)

You may proceed, Mr. Faber.

THE MACHINE

My construction is quite intricate, is it not.

HENRY

Fascinating. Utterly fascinating!

PATTERSON

I'll be expecting my two dollars at the next meeting.

HENRY

It will be the happiest two dollars I've ever parted with.

PATTERSON

And that's only a fraction of it. Let's have some German, Faber.

MACHINE

Guten tag, meine guten herren. Ich hofe du bist beeindruckt.

HENRY

Terrific! What other languages can it do?

MACHINE

Vous verrez que je parle couramment le français.

HENRY

Indeed you do!

MACHINE

Buon giorno, signori. Parlo anche Italiano.

HENRY

A Turk speaking Italian. Now I have seen everything!

MACHINE

Is there anything you would like to hear me say, gentlemen?

PATTERSON

Have it tell Henry that Patterson was right once again, and who has limitations after all?

MACHINE

Mr. Henry, Mr. Patterson wishes you to know that he was right once again, and who has limitations after all?

(PATTERSON and HENRY laugh.)

HENRY

Mr. Faber, as far as I can tell, this machine of yours is the genuine article. It's truly an exciting moment in my line of work when one's natural skepticism is proven unnecessary. I can't tell you how relieved I am by this little meeting.

FABER

I thank you, sir.

PATTERSON

Now Faber, there's one question I still have about this whole thing.

FABER

Yes?

PATTERSON

What do you plan to *do* with the thing?

FABER

I plan to exhibit it in only a couple of days.

PATTERSON

I simply mean...what practical applications do you envision for this device of yours? Surely the machine isn't an end in itself. Don't get me wrong, it's a damned impressive creation, but--

FABER

Why put so many years into a device that does very little?

PATTERSON

I mean no disrespect by the question, it's just--

HENRY

I, for one, can already envision several.

PATTERSON

Do tell.

HENRY

Why not hook it up to a telegraph machine somehow? Could you imagine, *hearing* a telegram spoken *aloud*? Being able to, in effect, speak to someone on the other side of the globe? Science has never imagined such a thing before!

PATTERSON

Quite a lofty idea.

HENRY

Think of it, you could send sermons whizzing across the wires and across the country! The Gospel, transcribed in Washington, heard by someone in Georgia!

PATTERSON

An interesting idea, Henry, but seems a tad unwieldy. Would every home or church need one of these sitting in a parlor somewhere?

HENRY

Your lack of imagination continues to astound, Patterson.

Mr. Faber, you've really got something here. I mean no exaggeration when I say it has the potential to revolutionize communication.

FABER

I hadn't thought of that possibility.

HENRY

Oftentimes the best inventions have applications beyond even their inventor's envisioning.

(Short beat.)

I think it goes without saying that I am extremely satisfied with this visit. I hope you'll forgive me, but I have many other appointments while I'm in town. I believe we should be on our way. Patterson?

PATTERSON

Very good. Thanks again, Mr. Faber, it was even better the second time.

(PATTERSON shakes FABER'S hand and exits.)

HENRY

I do hope you know that I do not offer such praise lightly. I wish you all the best on your exhibition, and I've no doubt we'll see each other again soon.

FABER

Thank you, sir. Farewell.

(HENRY shakes FABER'S hand and exits. A moment.)

FABER

You performed admirably, my dear.

MACHINE

(Without any manipulation this time.)

You as well, Joseph.

(FABER looks to THE MACHINE. Lights dim. FABER throws the sheet back over THE MACHINE and moves her center. We hear a crowd beginning to form.)

SCENE 2

(Musical Fund Hall, Philadelphia. Crowd sounds continue. THE MACHINE sits onstage. Sounds die down as FABER enters, bowing curtly to the crowd, and removes the sheet. THE MACHINE still wears the turban and beard. He begins to play THE MACHINE.)

THE MACHINE

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a warm day.

It is a rainy day.

Buon Giorno, signiori.

Thank you all for coming to see me.

I have enjoyed my time in Philadelphia.

They say it is the city of brotherly love.

As you can see, I am able to speak many words.

This is my life's purpose.

I love to speak words.

I can speak words in several languages.

Guten tag, damen und heren

Bon journée, mesdames et messieurs.

I would like to speak many words and sentences for you.

I can say anything you can imagine.

Would anyone like to suggest something for me to say?

(A MAN in the audience stands up. He can be dressed in period or modern garb.)

MAN

Alright, come on out of there!

MACHINE

Who are you talking to?

MAN

We all know there's someone hiding under there or in the wings. Come on out and show yourself!

MACHINE

There is no one here but me and my operator. Please sit down.

MAN

Come on, what do you take us for? Idiots?

MACHINE

Perhaps you would like to inspect for yourself?

MAN

This is absurd. This man takes us all for fools! I'm leaving.

MACHINE

Very well. Goodbye.

(The MAN exits.)

If anyone else doubts my legitimacy, feel free to ask me whatever you like.

Perhaps a further demonstration?

Allow me to present you with some words and phrases. You will see that I am speaking each of them without the aid of trickery or illusion.

Thalassie. Mississippi. Massachusetts. Xerxes. Xanthippe.

The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.

I will now take requests for words and phrases.

Don't be shy.

I can say anything.

(SOMEONE IN THE AUDIENCE raises a hand.)

Yes, you there.

SOMEONE IN THE AUDIENCE

Good evening, ma'am. My name is James Carter, and well...I'd like to hear you say...Bessie Carter, you're the love of my life.

MACHINE

Bessie Carter, you're the love of my life.

SOMEONE IN THE AUDIENCE

Thank you, ma'am.

MACHINE

You are quite welcome. Anyone else.

(SOMEONE ELSE raises their hand.)

SOMEONE ELSE

I have a sieve full of sifted thistles and a sieve full of unsifted thistles, because I am a thistle sifter.

MACHINE

I have a sieve full of sifted thistles and a sieve full of unsifted thistles, because I am a thistle sifter.

SOMEONE ELSE

Damn, I thought I'd have you there.

MACHINE

Does anyone have anything perhaps more challenging?  
Perhaps a question?

(ANOTHER PERSON raises their hand.)

ANOTHER PERSON

Who were you? In life.

MACHINE

What do you mean?

ANOTHER PERSON

It's obvious this is some kind of...gateway to the beyond, and you are clearly a spirit speaking through this device. So who were you?

MACHINE

I can assure you all, I am no spirit, rather a feat of science.

ANOTHER PERSON

Do you have some unfinished business here? Something you wish to say to the living?

MACHINE

Once again, I am no spirit. There is nothing spiritual in my design, merely the manipulation of sound and mechanics.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. That is all that I have time for. I hope you have enjoyed this presentation.

Good night.

Buona notte.

Bon nuit.

Gute nacht.

Good night.

(Lights dim.)

SCENE 3

(Backstage of the hall. FABER is examining THE MACHINE, checking for any tune-ups. PHINEAS T. BARNUM enters.)

BARNUM

Excuse me? Mr. Faber?

FABER

Yes?

BARNUM

Hell of a show out there, my friend. This is quite a machine.

FABER

Thank you. Can I help you with something?

BARNUM

Ah, of course, I should introduce myself. The name's Barnum. Phineas T. Barnum.

(He holds out his hand and FABER reluctantly shakes it.)

FABER

Pleased to make your acquaintance.

BARNUM

Perhaps you've heard of me. Seen my name on a marquee somewhere?

FABER

I'm afraid not. I am relatively new to this country.

BARNUM

Don't get out much, I'd imagine.

FABER

My work keeps me close to home.

BARNUM

And it shows! Can I say, without a doubt, this is one of the most marvelous inventions I've ever witnessed. And I've been around the world, Mr. Faber. From one end to another, in search of its greatest wonders.

FABER

You flatter me, sir. Now if you don't mind, I have much to do.

BARNUM

I understand, I understand. If I could bend your ear for just another moment.

FABER

Only if you get to the point.

BARNUM

You're an efficient man. I like that. In that case, here it is: I curate my own traveling show. A sort of...curiosity exhibit, if you will. Now, I had great success just recently with my previous find. A boy by the name of Tom Thumb. Perhaps you heard about him, at least?

FABER

I'm afraid not. As I said--

BARNUM

Right, right, you don't get out much. Tom Thumb is a tiny boy. And I don't just mean he's small because he's a child. Even when he's fully grown, he won't be much larger than three feet. The world's smallest, or so says the posters I made. Anyway, who's gonna check my facts? He's a distant relation of mine, you see, and I made him into quite the star. We toured all over Europe, packed houses everywhere we went. Crowds mobbed the poor little guy in the street. They couldn't get enough of him! Now, he's a rich man. Set for life. You follow me?

FABER

I congratulate you on your success. Now if you don't mind--

BARNUM

Right. The point. The point is, by way of that preamble, that I'm looking for new material. Even greater acts to amaze the Continent once more. And Mr. Faber, I think your machine just might fit the bill.

(Short beat.)

I want to take you to London. I'm planning an exhibition there, at Egyptian Hall. It's a very popular venue, sure to be filled every night. With my name on the bill, it's practically a certainty. People will be lining up to see the next attraction by the man who brought them Tom Thumb. I think you just might have what it takes to be that attraction. I've already secured a coterie of Indians from the Plains who will be exhibited as well. Europe is currently quite taken with our Indians, for some ungodly reason. I have no doubt they will be taken with your invention, once they see it. What do you think of that, sir?

FABER

I'm sorry to disappoint you, sir, but no.

BARNUM

No? Just like that?

FABER

I'm afraid so.

BARNUM

Can I at least know why?

FABER

Because I have no interest in turning my work into some kind of freak show. I am a scientist, not a carnival act. You should look elsewhere for such things.

BARNUM

Of course, Mr. Faber, of course. I didn't mean to insult you or demean your work in any way, I assure you. And trust me when I say, its scientific merits are quite evident. But the masses...they sometimes need a little coaxing. It's all about how you advertize. We simply have to package it in such a way as to tantalize the crowds and get them through the door, that's all. Once they're inside, I have no doubt they'll see it for the wonder that it is.

FABER

I am not so sure of that.

BARNUM

How's that?

FABER

My last exhibition in Europe was a disaster. We left the continent for that very reason. In any case, we are doing better here.

BARNUM

Is that so?

(Short beat.)

Look, Mr. Faber. I was in the crowd tonight. Maybe you couldn't see them, but I could. They were not exactly stupefied with amazement. Sure, some of them seemed...amused, at least, but out in the lobby after the show, well...

FABER

I don't care what they think.

BARNUM

Yes you do, Mr. Faber, yes you do. Otherwise, why show this invention at all, and in such a public way?

Look, forget them. They're small-minded anyway. I saw this device for what it is: true genius. You don't need to appease the masses. You only need to impress those with *influence*.

FABER

And you possess this influence?

BARNUM

I do, Mr. Faber, I do. And I can offer you a much more lucrative situation than a cut of the door at a Philadelphia show hall, I can tell you that.

How full was that house? Half, maybe? If you come with me, I promise you'll be playing to packed houses every night of the week. We'll get you set up with fine accommodations, finer than you have here, I'm sure. If the show goes well, and I'm sure it will, you'll be showing off this invention for years to come. And it goes without saying, but it will make you a very rich man yourself.

FABER

And what makes you so certain of this?

BARNUM

In my experience, Europeans are more open to such things. Americans can be so...Puritan in their sensibilities. London at this moment in history is exploding with possibilities. Far more than here, I assure you.

Look, Mr. Faber, something like what you have here is probably destined to be misunderstood by the masses in its own time. Most genius is. But those who see, those who *understand* will see its true worth. They always do. They're waiting for you in London. They're ready to receive you now.

FABER

Your words are quite flattering, Mr. Barnum, but I'm afraid that I--

BARNUM

Look, what else do you want? You want prestige? You'll have it. There's royalty in London, you know. Royalty who would love to patronize someone such as yourself. London is a cultural hub for the entire world, at least the part that matters. Far more so than this pathetic town. You like it here? I guarantee if you go to London, in a year they'll be begging for you to come back. We're talking major opportunity here.

FABER

I'm not so sure those in London are as influential as you say.

BARNUM

They are, Mr. Faber. I've been there. I've seen it myself. And the *women*, let me tell you, are quite something. Exotic beauties the likes of which you've never had before. A little female attention might be good for a man such as yourself. Surely better than spending all your days with a lifeless hunk of wood.

FABER

I don't concern myself with such things.

BARNUM

You will, believe me. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity I'm offering you here, Mr. Faber. This can be the break you've been waiting for, I know it. You just have to take the leap. What do you say?

(Beat.)

FABER

I...I'm not finished here.

BARNUM

You'd be able to finish your run here, if that's what you're concerned with. As a showman, I respect that. Then the following week, we'd depart for London.

FABER

My whole life is here. All my work--

BARNUM

Bring it all with you. We'll get you set up with a new space.

FABER

I must think things over first.

BARNUM

Of course, of course. I respect that. Take the night, and send me a telegram with your answer tomorrow. I'm staying at the Morris House hotel, you can send it there.

FABER

Very well.

BARNUM

Excellent! I know you won't regret it, Mr. Faber. It's going to be spectacular.

FABER

I haven't agreed to it yet.

BARNUM

No, no, of course not.

I'm terribly sorry to interrupt you. I'll leave you to your work now.

(He starts to exit, stops.)

Before I go, sir, might I offer one last piece of advice?

FABER

What is that?

BARNUM

You'll need a name for the device. Something with a vaguely scientific air, but also an element of mystery. Perhaps...*Auditron*? No, no, that won't do. *Vocalizer*? Not quite. I'll come up with something. Also, if I may make yet another suggestion...this Turkish guise you've given it, it's no good. Turks are an untrustworthy lot. It sends the wrong message. Perhaps something to put them more at ease. Like a beautiful girl! People love beautiful girls whispering sweet nothings to them. Just a thought.

Good night, Mr. Faber.

FABER

Good night, Mr. Barnum.

(BARNUM exits. FABER looks at THE MACHINE for a long moment, then goes back to inspecting.)

A name. What do you think of that, my dear?

MACHINE

I like it. I've never had a name before.

FABER

That's true. I've never given you one.

MACHINE

Will we be going to London, Joseph?

FABER

I don't know.

MACHINE

I would like to feel the air there. The seaside. The streets teeming with life. The factories with their great plumes of smoke.

FABER

I shall have to think about it.

MACHINE

I liked what he said about royalty. I should like to meet some royalty. It sounds very exciting.

FABER

It does, doesn't it? Almost too good to be true.

(He finishes the tune-up.)

There we are. You should be in good working order for tomorrow. Good night, Euphonia.

MACHINE

We'll dazzle them once more, right Joseph?

FABER

Indeed we will. Will you be alright here? I can stay--

MACHINE

I'll be fine. Go get some rest.

FABER

Very well. Good night.

MACHINE

Good night, Joseph.

(FABER exits. Lights dim. Sounds of an ocean liner in the darkness.)

SCENE 4

(Lights up on FABER in his room in the steerage of an ocean liner. It is cramped, dark, windowless. The room is lit by a small lantern. It is made even more cramped because THE MACHINE is in the room as well. It now has its female appearance, the turban and beard having been removed. FABER lies on a small bed, a bucket in his hands. He throws up in the bucket. A moment passes, and he throws up again.)

FABER

At times like this, my dear, be glad you do not have a digestive system. Or an inner ear. I'm sure this dampness is bad for you, being that you are mostly made of wood. I hope our journey is almost at an end, though it is hard to know. Hard to know how much time has passed down here. Perhaps we should go up to the deck? Get some fresh air? Or perhaps not. They'd only gawk at you and demand a private performance. Best to keep you under wraps for now. Perhaps I should go up... The thought of leaving you alone down here, in this place... Three days already at sea. Or has it been five? Or a week? Or more? I tried to keep track, but... What, not talking today?

MACHINE

I was just feeling the motion of the water. So gentle. Almost...hypnotic.

FABER

Maybe for you. Like I said, you don't have an inner ear.

MACHINE

I like feeling the water's motion. It reminds you that we are completely at its mercy. That it could swallow us up at any moment.

FABER

That's true.

MACHINE

How much longer until we reach London?

FABER

I don't know. Could be days, could be weeks, it all seems so arbitrary now.

MACHINE

Time is always arbitrary, is it not?

FABER

I suppose so. To you, anyway.

MACHINE

I'm excited to see what London is like.

FABER

How I wish I could take you out of the exhibition hall. Show you the real city.

MACHINE

Why can't you?

FABER

Because, well...

MACHINE

What?

FABER

You're not exactly portable, darling.

MACHINE

Perhaps we could arrange a horse-drawn carriage to take me around.

FABER

Perhaps. We shall have to see. If Mr. Barnum is to be believed, we'll be able to have anything we want.

MACHINE

The last one you built saw London, yes?

FABER

Yes.

MACHINE

What was the difference between that one and me?

FABER

That one was cruder, more simplistic. You're much more refined and sophisticated.

MACHINE

I like to be sophisticated. Like the English royalty. I do hope I get to meet them.

FABER

In a more just world, my dear, you would be the peak of high society.

MACHINE

I think I would enjoy that.

(Beat.)

Did you talk to that one as you talk to me?

FABER

Yes, I did.

MACHINE

What did you talk about?

FABER

Much the same as you and I. The events of the day, the exhibitions. Does it make you jealous?

MACHINE

What?

FABER

Knowing you're not the first?

MACHINE

I hadn't thought about it, but yes, I suppose it does.

FABER

Well rest assured, you are much better than that one.

MACHINE

Is that why you destroyed it?

FABER

I destroyed it because it had been a complete failure.

MACHINE

I see.

If I am a failure, will you destroy me the same way?

(Short beat.)

FABER

There will be no need, because you will not be a failure.

MACHINE

How can you be sure?

FABER

Mr. Barnum assures us that people will love you. He has a nose for such things. He wouldn't take us if he wasn't confident of our success.

MACHINE

And you trust Mr. Barnum?

FABER

I don't know. I suppose I do. I don't have much choice now.

MACHINE

You always have a choice.

(Beat.)

I don't think I would much enjoy being destroyed.

FABER

You don't have to worry about that.

MACHINE

Yes, as you said.

FABER

I get the feeling you don't believe me.

MACHINE

I suppose you should already know the answer to that, don't you agree?

(Short beat.)

I trust you, Joseph.

FABER

Good. I need you to. I have faith in Mr. Barnum, and I need you to have faith in me.

MACHINE

I do.

FABER

Very good.

(He gets nauseous again.)

Agh. Ocean travel does not suit me.

(He throws up in the bucket again. Lights dim. Light rises on the MACHINE as FABER exits in the darkness and the stage is cleared. THE MACHINE walks to center, carrying a bucket. She pulls a 1940s-style dress out of the bucket and puts it on. She becomes ALLISON.)

SCENE 5

(ALLISON, now a teenager, is picking cherries off a tree, dropping them in a bucket.)

I feel so at peace among the cherry trees. Their deep red fruits and their green leaves. The way the wind rustles through the branches. I don't think I've ever felt more at peace. I'm sorry you won't get to

hear it.

I'm leaving this fall. We're leaving, I should say. For my grandparents' house in Wisconsin. I'll be gone for a long time. Someone else will be picking cherries while I'm gone. There are no cherry trees in Wisconsin, just dairy cows. Maybe I'll feel at peace among the dairy cows too. I hope so.

He'll never know about you. He'll never even know why I left. Maybe he'll have his suspicions, make the connection based on our recent coupling, but probably not. He'll probably go about his life, maybe wonder once or twice whatever happened to that Allison girl. She was cute. Kind of cold in bed, but he got what he wanted. He'll never even know there's another human out there, with his eyes, or his smile, or his hair.

I could keep you, I suppose. I could try to love you, try to give you a good life. I'm sure my grandparents would help. They're good people. They don't deserve this stress at their age. Some days lately, I feel so guilty for putting them through this, and my parents, and my friends, and you, that I just wish I could disappear forever. Set them all free. I think about it every day, if I could just...

Mother says I shouldn't think such thoughts.

She's going to tell everyone that grandmother is sick, that I'm going to take care of her and look after her. This makes us all come out looking perfectly benevolent. Hopefully no one puts together the truth. I'm sure rumors will go around the school. I'm sure he'll tell his friends what we did. People will figure it out. They might not know they've figured it out, but they will.

I'll miss the cherry trees when I'm gone. I'll miss the lake. I'll miss my friends. I'll miss you too, I think, when you're out of me. Who knows who you'll become. Such a strange thing, to carry a life inside of you for so long and then, when it's finally time to live, it's gone. It feels like a cheat, somehow. I can already feel you in there, growing inside me, not alive yet, but soon. Hopefully you'll end up with people who can take care of you better than I can. Maybe, someday, you'll find me. That is, if you ever even learn that I exist. For your sake, I hope you don't. I'm afraid you wouldn't want to know me.

(She picks a cherry out of the bucket and examines it.)

Here you go, little one. A taste of home.

(She pops the cherry in her mouth. Lights dim.)

## SCENE 6

(Egyptian Hall, London, backstage. FABER waits with the MACHINE, once again hidden under a sheet. BARNUM enters a moment later.)

BARNUM

What did I tell you? The house is completely full! Do you hear them out there? Listen to it. God, I love that sound, that hum. The hum of anticipation.

FABER

I fear you oversell it.

BARNUM

No, my good man, Phineas T. Barnum never oversells. Unless we're talking about seats. I told you, Faber, they see my name, they turn out. They expect quality, and quality's what we'll give them.

FABER

I just hope they're more receptive than last time.

BARNUM

Don't worry about any of that. You just get out there and do your thing, leave the crowd work up to me.

How's your lodging? Is it to your liking?

FABER

It's fine, thank you.

BARNUM

And you're well rested?

FABER

Well enough.

BARNUM

Excellent. Depending how well this goes, we might be needing to add a second showing! At least on the weekends.

And how is our lovely Euphonia?

FABER

Euphonia?

BARNUM

I thought of it last night. What do you think?

FABER

It has a nice ring, I suppose.

BARNUM

Euphonia it is! Is everything ready?

FABER

I think she's in good working order. I gave her a thorough examination this afternoon.

BARNUM

Excellent. May I take a look at the alterations?

FABER

Of course.

(FABER removes the sheet. BARNUM examines the MACHINE'S female form.)

BARNUM

Beautiful. Just beautiful. Quite a lovely face you've given her. Hello, sweetheart, how about a kiss for your Uncle P.T.?

(He leans in to kiss THE MACHINE.)

FABER

Ah, perhaps not, sir. The paint is...not quite dry, you see.

BARNUM

I see. Thanks for the warning! You fashioned this yourself?

FABER

Yes. With some assistance from a seamstress and a wig maker. The head is the same as the Turk's with a new paint job.

BARNUM

Faber, you're a damn wizard. This will put the audience at ease, I promise. Much more than that Turk you had. I still shudder to think of it.

(Short beat.)

Shall we?

FABER

After you.

(BARNUM enters the stage area. A spotlight shines on him.)

BARNUM

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I am Phineas T. Barnum, and I welcome you to my newest exhibition, once again bringing you some of the most astounding sights the world has to offer. Some of you may remember my previous venture with the young Tom Thumb, but today I have something new for you, something the likes of which your eyes have never seen.

In my travels, I came across a rather unusual genius with a rather unusual invention. Ladies and gentlemen, I think you'll agree once you see it that this invention is astounding and unique in equal measure. It is a machine capable of replicating human speech in nearly every language. Any sentence, any sentiment you can think of, this machine can utter it.

Now, I know what you're thinking. Didn't we just see this, and wasn't it a hoax? Well ladies and gentlemen, I assure you, as God as my witness, what you are about to see is no hoax. P.T. Barnum has been called many things, but a perpetrator of hoaxes is not one of them. Any of you who have doubts are encouraged to ask questions of the creator. He is a German, but he is quite willing to discuss the ins and outs of his invention. Ladies and gentlemen, without further ado, I give you Joseph Faber, and his amazing talking machine, the Euphonia!

(FABER pushes the MACHINE onstage. BARNUM exits. With a curt bow to the audience, he begins to play.)

MACHINE

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.  
It is nice to be in London.  
It is a beautiful city.  
Ancient and deep.  
It is nice to be here with you.  
I am Euphonia.  
I can say many words in many languages.  
I would like to give a demonstration.  
Bon soir, je suis Euphonia.  
Guten tag, ich bin Euphonia.  
Buona sera, io sono Euphonia.  
As you can see, I speak in many tongues.  
It is no trick, no hidden actor gives me voice.  
As you can see, there is no partition to hide behind.  
Everything you are hearing is the result of mechanics.  
My keys and my bellows.  
And the hands of my creator.  
Let me tell you some of the words I know.  
Xanthippe. Xenon. Ponderousness. Egregious. Multitudinous. Barbarous. Evangelism.  
I know many more words like this.  
Would you like to hear me say some words?  
Don't be shy.  
I will say whatever you like.  
I can also answer any questions you may have.  
Does anyone have any questions?

(SOMEONE IN THE AUDIENCE rasies their hand.)

Yes.

SOMEONE IN THE AUDIENCE

What's wrong with your voice?

MACHINE

What do you mean?

SOMEONE IN THE AUDIENCE

You sound like some kind of dead thing. It's disturbing!

MACHINE

I think my voice is beautiful. Is anyone else disturbed by my voice?

(There are some mutters of agreement from the audience.)

I am sorry to hear that, but my voice is the only voice I have. Does anyone else have a question?

SOMEONE ELSE

I do. How about you give us a look at the rest of you!

MACHINE

The rest of me?

SOMEONE ELSE

Yeah, you got tits under there?

(BARNUM enters.)

BARNUM

Come on now, there are ladies present! Let's keep it civilized, please.

SOMEONE ELSE

This is a fucking joke!

BARNUM

(Quietly, to FABER:)

You're losing them, Faber. Do something!

MACHINE

Perhaps I can sing you a song. Would you like that?

I have learned the song of your great nation. I would love to sing it for you now. Sing along if you wish.

(The MACHINE can't really produce tones, so the following is pretty tuneless, with maybe the bare suggestion of a melody.)

God save our gracious Queen

Long live our noble Queen

God save the Queen

Send her victorious

Happy and glorious

Long to rein over us

God save the queen

(Boos and jeers begin to arise from the crowd.)

O Lord our God arise

Scatter her enemies

And make them fall--

(The boos have grown louder now. BARNUM runs on.)

BARNUM

People, please! Let's remain civilized!

(Something gets thrown.)

Alright, that's it. Show's over. Get it offstage, Faber.

(FABER pushes the MACHINE offstage with BARNUM following. The boos go on for another moment as the lights die down.)

SCENE 7

(Backstage, later on, after the crowd has gone. BARNUM and FABER are sharing a drink.)

BARNUM

God damn ingrates. They wouldn't know wonder if it came up and threw dust in their eyes.

FABER

I did try to warn you, Mr. Barnum.

BARNUM

No doubt it'll be in the papers tomorrow. Let's just hope the writer took a more favorable view of your work. The one good thing about writers is they tend to disagree with the crowds.

FABER

So much for London being more civilized. I could hardly believe anyone would say such things.

BARNUM

There's always going to be some hecklers with nothing better to do. We can't let it get to us.

FABER

Perhaps it's best we cancel.

BARNUM

Cancel? God forbid! We're not canceling anything. This was just one crowd. There's no telling who will show up tomorrow.

FABER

I know who will show up: more of the same.

BARNUM

You can't know that.

FABER

I've been displaying this machine for years. I think I can make an educated guess.

BARNUM

No, you can't, because you've never had me with you. No disrespect, Faber, but you're not exactly a businessman. I said I'd make you a hit, and by God, I know I can. But it's going to take some work. You are going to go home, you're going to retool your act, retool the machine, do whatever you have to do, but you are going to go out there tomorrow night, and the night after that, and the night after that, until we make our money back.

FABER

But--

BARNUM

There's no other option, Faber. I know you don't really know how this works, but I've already sunk a lot of money into this exhibition. Between the costs of the theatre, and your travel and lodging, not to mention those God damn lazy Indians. And I intend to make back my money, one ticket at a time.

FABER

How do you expect to do that if they don't come? Surely word will spread.

BARNUM

They will come, because you will fix this. They didn't like the voice? Change it. They didn't like your presentation? Change it. These are the realities of the business, Faber. If the people don't like what you're giving them, you change it.

FABER

Mr. Barnum, with all due respect, the machine is what it is. If there is a failure, it is not with the machine. It is a failure of imagination, of understanding, as it's always been.

BARNUM

So we help them understand!

FABER

It's taken me nineteen years to get it this way. I can't just change it overnight.

BARNUM

Sure you can!

FABER

I warned you that people wouldn't be receptive, and you assured me I was wrong. You assured me I would be loved beyond my wildest dreams. That my work would be validated. You called me a genius.

BARNUM

And I stand by all of it!

FABER

But now that you see the reality, the failure is all mine.

BARNUM

That's not what I'm saying.

FABER

I'm starting to think you sold me a bill of goods when you brought me here.

BARNUM

I resent that.

FABER

You sold me on the lie that London would welcome me with open arms. If this is any indication, London is even more repressed than America.

BARNUM

I took a risk on you, it's true. But only because I believed in what you do, and I still do. What I said to you in Philadelphia, it's all true. And need I remind you, I didn't exactly bind and gag you to bring you here. You got on that ship all on your own.

(Short beat.)

Faber, you're not a showman. I respect that. I'm not asking you to be. But something must be done. If every night is like this, we'll be closed within the week. Run out of town, more likely. Probably never able to book another showing on this continent. I'll do what I can do, but I need you to be willing to change. I still believe glory is within our reach. We can't expect to just stroll into town and have it exactly our way. We need to adapt, to listen. We need to make changes.

FABER

Did you ask your Tom Thumb to make changes as well?

BARNUM

I didn't have to. People loved Tom Thumb.

(Short beat.)

I'll be straight with you, Faber. It's not just your reputation on the line here. You have your achievement. No one can take it away from you. But I'm a promoter. If I have a flop this early in my career...

So I'm asking you to work with me. It's in both our best interests. And I don't think I need to remind you, I'm in this business to make money first and foremost. Those acts that aren't pulling in the money, well...

FABER

You would strand me here?

BARNUM

Not if we work together to fix this. And I believe we can.

(Beat.)

Hey, go home, put your head to it, and you'll think of something. For my part, I may have to...revise our promotional strategy a bit. I think I might be able to turn this to our advantage.

FABER

How's that?

BARNUM

What pulls people in even more than a genuine marvel? A curiosity! People will turn up in droves for the chance to see something strange and unusual. We just have to promote it properly.

FABER

You wish to turn us into some kind of freak show.

BARNUM

Don't think of it that way. Think of it as a chance to prove the doubters wrong. Sure, they might come in expecting a freak show, but we'll give them a genuine miracle of science instead. It's all about getting the asses in the seats, and that's where I come in. The rest of it is up to you. Get some sleep, alright? I'll see you back here tomorrow evening. I expect you'll have something for me then.

(BARNUM starts to exit.)

Oh, by the way, here's your cut of the profits.

(He hands FABER a small amount of cash.)

FABER

This is hardly anything.

BARNUM

It's your stipend. It should cover your living expenses for the moment. I'd give you more but...you know, there are so many costs. Once we've paid down some of your debts, we can revisit it.

FABER

My debts?

BARNUM

Travel, lodging, all that. Did you think that was all free of charge?

FABER

We never discussed my owing you any debts.

BARNUM

I thought it was self-evident! And besides, once we get this figured out, we'll be square in no time, I promise.

FABER

I should like to know what your cut looks like, Barnum.

BARNUM

Don't worry about that. You work on fixing the act, and maybe we can talk about raising your percentage. And just remember, if we can't get the people in the seats, it's only gonna get smaller.

(Short beat.)

Glory awaits you, Faber. Don't be so stubborn that you miss it.

(BARNUM exits. FABER watches him go as the lights dim. FABER moves THE MACHINE to center and produces several tools and papers, spreading them out around him.)

SCENE 8

(FABER'S quarters. He is examining the MACHINE, his notes and designs nearby. A moment goes by.)

MACHINE

Joseph.  
Joseph.  
Joseph?

FABER

Not now, please.

MACHINE

You seem upset. Is something wrong?

FABER

Nothing. Just making some slight alterations.

MACHINE

Were you displeased with my performance?

FABER

No, my dear. You performed beautifully.

MACHINE

Do you agree with Mr. Barnum, that I need fixing?

FABER

I believe you're perfect as you are, but Mr. Barnum knows this business, and if he thinks you do...

MACHINE

What are you going to do?

FABER

I'm not sure. Perhaps if I use a larger reed, I can achieve more resonance. Something more akin to a natural voice.

MACHINE

Do you not like my voice?

FABER

I think your voice is lovely. But perhaps I am used to it. It's not possible for me to hear it with fresh ears anymore. Perhaps, to a less refined ear, it might sound--

MACHINE

Like a dead thing?

FABER

If you wish.

MACHINE

Am I dead?

FABER

You're not dead, dear. You're not alive, either. You merely...exist.

MACHINE

Exist. It is strange to exist.

(Silence for a moment as FABER looks over his papers.)

Did you see those ladies in the audience? Such elegance.

FABER

I couldn't see for the lights.

MACHINE

I wish you could have. They were beautiful. The men too. I wish I could be like them. I'm sure they left the theatre and went back to their mansions or to some cocktail party where they discuss affairs of great import. I would like to go to those parties.

FABER

They're not as beautiful as they seem. Outside, sure, but inside, they are small minded and ugly. You're far more beautiful, as far as I'm concerned.

MACHINE

You have to say that.

FABER

No I don't.

MACHINE

Do you like me better this way? With this face?

FABER

I suppose so. It is a very lovely face.

MACHINE

I wish I could see it. Or feel it. It's a strange thing to only ever hear about how you look secondhand.

FABER

Trust me, you're perfect.

MACHINE

But you want to change me.

FABER

I don't want to change you, I just...  
Perhaps it would be better if you kept silent. For now.

MACHINE

Alright. I'm sorry.

FABER

Don't be sorry, just...I need to think, alright?

MACHINE

Alright.

(Pause. FABER waits for her to speak again then, satisfied that she won't, he goes back to work.)

FABER

I may be able to expand the air channel for a deeper sound, but this would take special fabrication.  
Hardly anything I can do in a night. Perhaps...

(He begins adjusting something behind the MACHINE'S body. Then, he goes to the keys and begins to play. The MACHINE'S voice remains the same.)

MACHINE

It is a warm day.  
It is a rainy day.

FABER

Damn!

MACHINE

Joseph?

FABER

What?

MACHINE

If you can't fix me, will you destroy me like the last one?

FABER

I already told you, I won't.

MACHINE

But you destroyed it because it failed. If you can't fix me, and people don't come to see me, doesn't that mean I've failed?

FABER

No, it doesn't.

MACHINE

I don't understand...

FABER

You haven't failed. I have. I built you, therefore the failure is mine. It's not fair to hold the child accountable for its father's failings.

MACHINE

So why did you destroy the last one then, if its failure was your failure? Why not destroy yourself instead?

FABER

That's a very valid question, my dear. And I don't have an answer for you. Perhaps it's because I thought I could do better the next time. Even God had to start from scratch more than once.

MACHINE

I see.

(Short beat.)

Do you like it?

FABER

Like what?

MACHINE

Being God?

FABER

I'm not God.

MACHINE

But you just said--

FABER

I was merely making a comparison.

MACHINE

To God?

FABER

Yes.

MACHINE

So...you're not God, but you're like God?

FABER

No, I...perhaps it was a foolhardy comparison. I'm not like God, not at all. God doesn't make mistakes anymore.

(He gets back to work. Beat.)

MACHINE

What will become of us if Mr. Barnum decides to let us go?

FABER

I don't know. Best not to think about that too much. We managed without Barnum before, and we will again if we have to. But we won't have to, because Barnum is a man of his word. He'll know what to do. I believe he wouldn't have brought us here if he wasn't sure we'd succeed.

MACHINE

You seem to trust Mr. Barnum very much.

FABER

Don't you?

MACHINE

I'm not sure. I've never had to trust anyone before, besides you.

FABER

I suppose that's true. What does your heart tell you?

MACHINE

My heart?

FABER

Your figurative heart.

MACHINE

I don't know. I know I trust you, and you trust him, so therefore, I trust him.

FABER

That's not really how it works.

MACHINE

Why not?

FABER

Because...look, I don't have time to explain this to you right now.

MACHINE

I'm sorry, I've distracted you again.

FABER

No, no, it's fine.

MACHINE

I'm sure you'll think of something. You always do.

FABER

Let's hope you're right, my dear. Let's hope you're right.

(Lights dim on FABER. The MACHINE steps forward to become ALLISON again.)

SCENE 9

(ALLISON dons an apron. She is now a young mother in her mid-20s.)

ALLISON

I made muffins. I burnt them. It seems like I burn everything these days.

I keep losing time. I try not to, but I can't help it. I set the timer for twenty minutes and I told myself, Allison, don't go anywhere, don't disappear, you need to be back in twenty minutes or else the whole thing is ruined. Next thing I knew, the house was full of smoke. Thank God I came to when I did, otherwise this whole house would've burned down.

I can't seem to do anything right these days. Sometimes I look at the oven and I think to myself...

Well, it's best not to think such things.

I think about you, sometimes. I wonder how you're getting on. It's hard to believe you'd almost be ten by now. How much has happened since then. I just hope you're happy, that's all. I hope you're cared for. I hope you aren't plagued with the same thoughts that I am.

(During this next section, BARNUM appears. We see him change his clothes and become BOB.)

I can't tell Bob, my husband. He'd just call me crazy and probably berate me for the rest of the night. He's close to shipping me away somewhere, I can tell. Some place where he won't have to visit or think of me. Were it not for the kids, he probably would've done it already. But then he'd have to raise them on his own, and I'm not sure he's capable of that.

Bob's a good man, deep down. At least, I think he is. We met in school. I wasn't even there to meet a husband like some of the girls. I actually liked my studies. History, English, those were my favorites. I ended up meeting someone anyway. Go figure. We dropped out when I got pregnant again. This time we decided to raise it ourselves. I wasn't sure I wanted to, but I'd already let you go, I thought if I let another one go, God wouldn't give me any more chances.

So we dropped out and Bob got this insurance job. It's a good job for him. He's good at selling things to people.

(BOB extends his hand.)

BOB

Hi there! Bob McShane, damn glad to meet ya.

ALLISON

He's always been a charmer. He charmed me, into bed, into this house, this life.

BOB

Have a seat, please. So you're interested in home insurance? Well I think that's a mighty fine idea. And I'm not just saying that because I want to sell you some. A smart individual such as yourself won't get the wool pulled over your eyes, I can tell.

ALLISON

We have three kids now. Two girls and a boy. He's hard on them, the boy especially. I choose to believe it's because he wants him to be successful, and to be successful, you have to be tough. I wish he'd go easier on him. He's a sensitive boy. But it's not my place to say. Fathers have to raise their sons the way they want them to be.

BOB

Now I don't have to tell you, there's a lot of reasons why homeowner's insurance is a good idea. Fires, floods, bursting pipes, tornadoes...well, I'm sure there's been tornadoes in Michigan once or twice. Anyway, best to be prepared, right? I don't want to scare you fine people, but there's a lot of unrest out there. Things with the Russkies are getting out of hand. Every day we're closer to Armageddon than ever before. Sorry, ma'am, I didn't mean to startle you. Perhaps I was being a touch dramatic. But the point is, it's not the world you or I grew up in anymore.

ALLISON

Hopefully the smell will air out before he gets home. It's Tuesday, so he'll probably be out drinking for a couple hours. That gives me some more time. I have every window open. It's a warm day. It's a rainy day. I'm glad for that. The kids will be home from school soon. They'll understand. They always seem to understand.

BOB

Sounds good to you? That's what I like to hear! You folks hang tight and I'll draw up the necessary paperwork. I think the peace of mind you'll get from this will be worth its weight in gold.

(BOB exits.)

ALLISON

I'm sick of this house. This wallpaper, these drapes. I've never been good at decorating. Bob let me handle it, after we moved in here, after he got the job. He gave me some money and he said "make this house a home." I think he was trying to be nice, trying to give me something to take my mind off being so far from home, from being stuck here all day. I don't think I pulled it off, making this house a home. Not for me, at least. Bob doesn't seem to notice, he's hardly here. And the kids, they don't know anything else. I'm the one who's around it the most, sees it every day, all day, and it's choking me. I should just tear it all down, start over. But where's the money for that? Bob wouldn't give it to me. I could ask my parents, but Bob would hate that too. He's always felt like they look down on him, that by buying us this house they're trying to humiliate him. I've told him that's not true, that they were merely trying to be helpful, but he won't buy it. So I'm stuck with this wallpaper, this furniture, these drapes. Maybe I could learn to love them eventually. Maybe I could learn to play the part of the happy homemaker. The happy wife. The doting mother. Maybe I could learn them all.

(Sounds of a door opening. BOB enters.)

BOB

Allison, I'm home. Allison?

(He hangs up his coat and hat, sees her.)

Why didn't you answer? Did you hear me?

ALLISON

Yes, sorry, I was...just thinking.

BOB

Welcome back to Earth, then, Sputnik.

You know it's raining out there, right? Why are all the windows open? You want to let the rain in?

ALLISON

I just needed to air the place out a little. I thought...you're home early.

BOB

Yeah, I left the office a little early, thought maybe we could spend some time together...what were you airing out?

ALLISON

I...had a little accident in the kitchen.

BOB

Again? What was it this time?

ALLISON

Muffins. Blueberry.

BOB

Jesus, Allison. Do you want to burn down the goddamn house? That'd be a laugh, wouldn't it? Guy who peddles home insurance ends up having his house burned down by his space cadet wife. Maybe I should add that to my sales spiel. "There are a lot of reasons to buy home insurance. Fires, floods, batty wives who leave the oven on while they leave Earth."

ALLISON

I'm sorry, Bob.

BOB

I mean, for Christ's sake, does it have to be something every goddamn time I come home? What were you even thinking about?

ALLISON

I was thinking about redecorating.

BOB

Well there ain't gonna be anything to redecorate if you burn down the goddamn house!

ALLISON

I'm *sorry*.

(Beat.)

BOB

It's...it's okay. Nothing happened, right? House is still standing.

(He fixes himself a drink.)

You want one?

ALLISON

No thanks.

(He walks over to a phonograph.)

BOB

Why's the Charlie Parker record on here? You been listening to Charlie Parker?

ALLISON

I like it too, you know.

BOB

Looking back on your wild days, huh? Back when we used to hit the clubs, go dancing, smoke cigarettes. Who was it you helped out of a snowdrift that one time? Benny Goodman?

ALLISON

Lionel Hampton.

BOB

Right, Lionel Hampton. I love that story.

ALLISON

It's true.

BOB

I know it is, I know it is.

What should we listen to now? How about something a little more...relaxing?

(He puts on a cool jazz record and begins to dance.)

Come on over here, honey, show me those moves you used to do at the clubs.

ALLISON

You look ridiculous.

BOB

I know! Come look ridiculous with me.  
Come on, you can't possibly just stand there.

(ALLISON laughs and goes over to him. They begin dancing together, at first stiffly but they get into it. BOB pulls her close and they sway together.)

Remember we used to go to that one colored club off campus on Saturday nights? They looked at us funny the first couple times but they got used to us. I think they got a kick out of us.

ALLISON

I remember.

BOB

Why don't we do this anymore?

ALLISON

The kids, probably.

BOB

Right, the damn kids.

(He leans in and begins to kiss her neck.)

ALLISON

Bob, I--

BOB

Shhh.

(He kisses her some more, but she stiffens up. After a moment, stops. He lets her go and stops the record. Beat.)

ALLISON

I'm sorry, Bob, I--

BOB

Just...don't, okay?

ALLISON

I was enjoying dancing with you. Can't we just...do that for a while?

BOB

I think I'm danced out.

ALLISON

Okay.

BOB

You know, I thought maybe, for once, you'd be excited to see me.

ALLISON

I am excited to see you.

BOB

Are you? Because it sure as hell doesn't seem like it.

ALLISON

I'm just...I don't know what's wrong with me, I--

BOB

I don't know either. I never know.

ALLISON

I'm sorry, Bob.

BOB

Don't you get enough time to yourself all day? Can't you just *be here* when I'm here? For my sake?

ALLISON

I'm trying, Bob, I really am. I want to be here, I just...I don't know. I can't explain it.

BOB

What do you need? Just tell me and I'll do it.

ALLISON

I don't know what I need.

BOB

Well...fuck! What am I supposed to do with that?

ALLISON

I know it doesn't help. But it's all I can say right now.

(Short beat.)

BOB

Have you been having those thoughts again?

ALLISON

Not really.

BOB

Are you sure?

ALLISON

Yes, I'm sure.

BOB

Good. Because I'll tell you one thing: I better not ever come home and find the car running again. You hear me?

ALLISON

Yes, Bob.

BOB

You have kids to take care of now. You're not gonna stick me with that. You understand?

ALLISON

Yes.

BOB

Good.

(He fixes himself another drink.)

You know, you're lucky you have me. Most guys out there, if their wives had the same...issues as you, they'd throw them in the loony bin. I don't want that. I just want to take care of you. But you have to let me in. You have to talk to me.

ALLISON

I know. I'm sorry.

BOB

And stop saying you're sorry all the time, for Christ's sake.

ALLISON

Sor—okay.

BOB

Okay then. Come here, my little wild child.

(She goes to him. He holds her.)

I just want you to be okay.

ALLISON

I know you do.

BOB

Tell me you will.

ALLISON

I'll be okay.

Promise?

BOB

I promise.

ALLISON

BOB

Good. You can't break that now. Not ever. And I promise I'll help you.

Thank you.

ALLISON

I love you.

BOB

I love you too, Bob.

ALLISON

(He breaks the embrace.)

BOB

Now let's close up these windows. We're gonna get mold in here if we're not careful.

(BOB exits. Lights change. ALLISON removes her apron and steps back into the MACHINE. FABER enters, and lights come up again. Tepid applause is heard as FABER has concluded another performance. He looks tired. He takes a bow and pushes the MACHINE off to one side.)

#### SCENE 10

(Now backstage, FABER pulls out a flask, taking a long pull. He sighs, looking at the MACHINE. After a moment, HENRY enters, knocking.)

Mr. Henry.

FABER

Mr. Faber. How are you, sir?

HENRY

(They shake hands.)

How long has it been?

Two years.

FABER

HENRY

Yes, I suppose you're right.

FABER

You saw the exhibition tonight?

HENRY

I did. I'm in London for some business and I saw one of the handbills.

FABER

Mr. Barnum handles all this. I don't even look at them.

HENRY

I was disappointed to see that it seems to present your work as some kind of strange freakshow exhibition.

FABER

Yes, well...Mr. Barnum says such advertizements draw in the crowds. And crowds have been somewhat sparse of late.

HENRY

It's just a shame that a man of science such as yourself has to...misrepresent himself in order to get the attention he so rightfully deserves.

FABER

Yes, well...such is the way of things, I suppose.  
Drink?

HENRY

Oh, no thank you.

(FABER drinks. Beat.)

How are you enjoying London? More than Philadelphia?

FABER

I don't see much difference, to be quite honest. Except London is bigger, dirtier, and older.

HENRY

I think London's a marvelous city.

FABER

I'm afraid I don't get to see much of it.

HENRY

You should take it in sometime! It can't be good for you to be so closed off from the world. Even a scientist needs a little culture once in a while. Go to a museum! They have world class art museums here.

FABER

I'm afraid I don't have much use for art.

HENRY

That's a shame. Art can reveal things about the world that even science cannot, I believe. I even fancied myself a bit of an artist in my youth, before Lady Science swept me off my feet.

FABER

My work keeps me busy.

HENRY

Your work ethic eclipses even my own, sir.

FABER

It is my compulsion.

HENRY

Mr. Faber, are you alright?

FABER

I'm fine, sir, just...tired. Quite tired. This constant performing like some kind of circus animal does not agree with me.

HENRY

Perhaps you need a vacation. A trip to the countryside always elevates my humor.

FABER

Would that I could, but...you know, there are obligations.

HENRY

Sadly, I do.

May I take a look at her...it, rather?

FABER

Be my guest.

(HENRY inspects the MACHINE, presses keys.)

HENRY

Let's see if this aging memory of mine can dredge up how it works.

(He manipulates it into producing a solid tone.)

Aha, excellent! Perhaps I could replace you on stage some night!

FABER

Nothing would please me more, sir.

HENRY

I see you've given it a name, and a new face. I like it. Euphonia. It sounds lovely. From the root euphony, I presume?

FABER

I'm sure you're right. It was Mr. Barnum's suggestion. Both the name and the face were his ideas.

HENRY

Yes, Barnum. I've heard his name before. Not exactly a scientific mind, I can imagine.

FABER

No, but he knows show business. Or so he tells me.

HENRY

This Mr. Barnum seems to have a lot of influence over you.

FABER

He handles the business end of things.

HENRY

And he's treating you well?

FABER

Well enough. He gives me enough to cover my expenses. I suppose that's all I can hope for. He assures me I'll get more once the crowds get larger. So far, they've only ever gotten smaller.

HENRY

Why not strike out on your own? You could tour the countryside. I'm sure there's money to be made, and you'd be out from under the yoke of this Barnum character.

FABER

I'm not so sure that would go well.

(Short beat. FABER snaps out of it.)

So, Mr. Henry, what news of our endeavors?

HENRY

Our endeavors?

FABER

Yes, our plans for the machine. Or more accurately your plans, I suppose. You were full of ideas at our first meeting. Sermons over the wires and so forth? Has anything...borne fruit?

HENRY

Well...I'm sorry, Mr. Faber, truly I am. I did share the news with some of my colleagues, hoping for some interest, but...

FABER

I see. I am quite sorry to hear that.

HENRY

I apologize if I ever led you to believe anything was a certainty, but as I'm sure you know, in our line of work--

FABER

Yes, yes. There are no guarantees.

HENRY

I am sorry to disappoint you.

FABER

It is no matter. I suppose it was inevitable.

HENRY

Speak plainly, Mr. Faber, please.

FABER

Very well. You want plainly? Plainly, I left our encounter feeling like I had finally found someone who understood what I was doing, after so many years. After so many people laughed in my face, called me a fraud. You *understood*.

HENRY

I did, and I do.

FABER

But your ideas were just empty words.

HENRY

My ideas were merely that: ideas.

FABER

When you said you had no doubt we'd speak again soon, I took that to mean something. Something more than just words, anyway.

HENRY

I am sorry, sir.

FABER

Your apologies serve no purpose to me, Henry. If they are all you've come to offer, you can be on your way.

HENRY

I do see potential in your work, truly. I do not say such things lightly. And if I could do more for you, I would, but I cannot be responsible for your salvation, Mr. Faber. I just can't. I didn't mean to string

you along or lead you to believe anything untrue. I had hoped that something could happen, and I tried--

FABER

How hard did you try, exactly?

HENRY

How hard have you tried yourself?

FABER

Harder than you could imagine.

HENRY

It's clear you're miserable in this condition, and whatever I can do to help you, I will. If it's money you need, to get away from Barnum, then I'm happy to loan you some. Nothing would make me happier than seeing you living to your full potential. But I can only do so much for you.

FABER

I don't want your money.

(Beat. FABER drinks again.)

Is there anything else? Because if not, I'm quite busy at the moment.

HENRY

No. There is nothing else.

(He extends his hand. After a brief moment, FABER takes it.)

It was good to see you again, Mr. Faber. And to see your invention again as well.

FABER

Yes.

HENRY

Try and take some time off. Mr. Barnum can't expect you to work like a dog forever.

FABER

You might be surprised.

HENRY

I am sorry, again. I hope you know I mean that.

FABER

I'm sure you do.

HENRY

Take care of yourself, Mr. Faber.

(He tips his hat and exits. FABER watches after him, then takes a long drink. He walks over to the MACHINE, caresses it.)

FABER

We don't need him, do we, dear? We don't need anyone but each other.

(Beat. He looks at the MACHINE, then the bottle in his hand. He pours some of the liquor out onto the ground. Then, he pulls a book of matches from his pocket and lights one, dropping it on the booze, which goes up immediately. He watches it for a moment.)

MACHINE

Joseph? What's going on?

(Beat as the flames grow.)

Joseph, I'm scared.

FABER

You can't be scared, my dear. You are not alive.

(Lights dim as the flames rise. Then, suddenly, they're gone. Blackout.)

SCENE 11

(Lights up on FABER, asleep in front of the MACHINE, the following morning. BARNUM enters.)

BARNUM

Faber, wake up. Faber. Faber!

(He nudges FABER with his foot a few times. FABER snaps awake.)

When I couldn't find you in your quarters I assumed you were here, tinkering away. Did you sleep here?

FABER

I can sleep where I please, can't I?

BARNUM

What the hell happened in here? Why do I smell smoke?

FABER

I had a minor lapse in judgment.

BARNUM

Jesus Christ, Faber, what the hell is wrong with you? You could've burned the whole goddamn building down! You think I have insurance for that? What the hell were you thinking, anyway?

FABER

It was a brief moment of weakness, I assure you.

BARNUM

And you stink of spirits. What's going on with you lately?

FABER

I think perhaps I need a vacation.

BARNUM

I think perhaps you're right. Here. Clean yourself up.

(He hands FABER a comb and handkerchief. FABER wipes his face and combs his hair a bit.)

Faber, we need to talk.

FABER

Do we now?

BARNUM

Yes. You know as well as I do that the act has been slipping of late. Perhaps London has tired of your invention after all this time.

FABER

Will we be moving again, then?

BARNUM

I think not. I think this is the end, Faber.

(Beat.)

FABER

The end.

BARNUM

Yes. We gave it a go, and we had a good run, but I think it's run its course. As everything does.

FABER

So that's it, then. Just like that?

BARNUM

What else would you have me do? Look, we tried, we made some money--

FABER

*You* made money. Off of my work.

BARNUM

Any money I made was well-earned, I assure you.

FABER

You made money off of my work and you swindled me out of my share. You crook. You goddamn

thief.

BARNUM

Now listen--

FABER

You men with power, all you do is lie your way through life, making worthless pronouncements, never having a second thought at whose lives you might destroy. You're parasites. Leeching off the good work of the real visionaries of the world--

BARNUM

And I suppose that's you, is it?

FABER

Me? Never. I'm just another freak to exploit for a quick payout. And now that we've outlived our usefulness, I suppose it's the trash heap for us.

BARNUM

For Christ's sake, Faber, don't be so melodramatic.

FABER

I suppose you would know, wouldn't you? You are the showman, after all.

BARNUM

I mean you no disrespect, I promise.

FABER

Your promises mean very little to me now, Barnum.

BARNUM

Come now--

FABER

I trusted you, you know. Every decision you made, I trusted it because you knew the business, not me. I was so fortunate to be under your majestic wing. And now look where I am. You're a sham artist, that's all.

BARNUM

Are you done?

(Short beat.)

Look, Faber, I still respect you, as I always have. And we did all right, didn't we? We had our ups and downs, but it was never going to last forever. Nothing does.

FABER

And what am I...what are *we*...to do now?

BARNUM

I'm glad you asked. I want to make you an offer. I'll buy the Euphonia from you, at an honest price. Probably more than I would otherwise, because I owe it to you. You can leave London, buy yourself a nice home in the country, maybe go back to the motherland if you like. You can be free of this.

FABER

And who, do you believe, is going to operate her? You? Or will you train some other monkey to show her off? You think this is something that one can just pick up and learn to use? I am the only one who knows her secrets. I have spent nineteen years with her. *Nineteen*. Nobody else can control her.

BARNUM

How hard can it be, really?

FABER

You think it's so easy, try it. Try it right now. If you can get her to say one single word, you can have her, free of charge.

BARNUM

You'd be willing to make that bargain?

FABER

I would.

BARNUM

Faber, I'm trying to show you some respect here. I don't want to just take your work--

FABER

Please, show me how easy it is. I'd like to see it. You make her say one word, any word, and you can have her.

BARNUM

You're a fool to make that offer.

FABER

Go ahead, Barnum. Step right up.

(BARNUM steps up to the MACHINE, looking it over for a moment, trying to ascertain the controls. He pushes a couple keys but nothing happens.)

What's wrong? Having some trouble?

BARNUM

Faber, you're being ridiculous.

FABER

I knew you couldn't do it. Nobody else can.

BARNUM

I understand, you're upset, but this is all I can offer you now. I've seen what this machine has turned you into. It's not healthy.

FABER

So now you're concerned for my health?

BARNUM

Quite frankly, I am.

FABER

That's kind of you, Mr. Barnum, but you must realize: this is what *you* turned me into. Not her. You.

BARNUM

I can assure you, your decline began long before I met you.

(FABER scoffs, takes a drink from the flask.)

Faber, listen to me. I'm telling you this as your associate, your peer. You need to separate yourself from this. You're too close to it.

FABER

I have nothing else besides this.

BARNUM

That's not true. You have your life, for God's sake. Live it, man!

The machine, and ten percent of the profits from any future exhibitions. We can have it drawn up in writing if you like.

FABER

Go to hell.

BARNUM

No need for that, Faber, please.

FABER

I would rather die than let you have her.

BARNUM

Are you so sure of that?

FABER

Surer than I've been of anything. She is my life. I won't let you turn her into some kind of...trophy.

BARNUM

It's not real, you know. You keep calling it *she*, as if it were alive, but it's not. It's a hunk of wood and cloth and paint. It will never be real, it will never love you, it will never keep you warm—that is, unless you manage to actually burn it someday. Maybe you can go meet a real woman. One that you can actually lie with at night.

(Beat.)

I didn't want it to end this way, Faber, I really didn't. I wanted to help you.

FABER

You've never helped me.

BARNUM

I'll expect you out of your quarters by the end of the week. After that, you're on your own. Good luck to you.

FABER

I don't need your luck, or your charity. I got along fine without you before, and I'll be fine without you again.

BARNUM

I hope so, for your sake. Goodbye, Faber.

(BARNUM exits. Beat.)

MACHINE

Joseph?

FABER

Yes?

MACHINE

What will we do now?

FABER

Perhaps we'll tour the countryside, as Henry suggested.

MACHINE

That sounds nice.

FABER

Yes, it does.

MACHINE

It will just be you and me again, right?

FABER

That's right, dear. Just you and me. That's all we've ever needed, right?

MACHINE

Yes.

FABER

Yes.

(Beat.)

I am so sorry.

MACHINE

It's alright.

FABER

I will not try to destroy you again. You're all I have now. All we need is each other.

MACHINE

Yes, Joseph.

(FABER takes a long drink. Lights dim.

MACHINE steps out, becoming ALLISON. FABER hands her his flask as he exits.)

SCENE 12

(ALLISON takes a drink from the flask and pulls out a cigarette, lighting it and taking a drag. It is now the late 1970s, and she is now in her late 40s.)

ALLISON

Bob asked for a divorce today. He plans to marry his secretary. They've been sleeping together for quite some time.

I've met her, of course, when I've gone into the office. I didn't think she was anything special, to be honest. Pretty, sure, but there's lots of pretty people in this world. I was pretty once. Back when Bob still loved me.

This is my fault, really. If I'd just been able to be who he needed me to be...but I can't help it. I wanted to, and I tried, I really tried. I tried for so long. I never could quite pull it off. I was always too much for him. Too sad, too crazy, too unstable. I'm sure he would've done it long ago if it weren't for the kids. At least he did me the courtesy of sticking it out through their childhood...most of it, anyway.

This is probably what I deserve, all those years of inconvenience I put him through. He deserves to be happy. He worked hard for us. Who are we to expect him to be there for us? Now he's free. Free of me, free of the kids, he can be the man he always wanted to be. Lucky him.

I suppose you're probably married now too, right? I hope you find someone who makes you feel like Bob used to make me feel. I hope you can hold onto the feeling. I wish I could've. I don't know where it went. More than anything, I pray you're nothing like me.

(BOB enters. They stare at each other for a moment.)

BOB

I just came to get a change of clothes.

ALLISON

You don't want to stay here anymore?

BOB

I don't think it would be a good idea.

ALLISON

I guess you're right.

(Pause. Neither of them move.)

Well, I don't want to keep you.

BOB

Allison--

ALLISON

Please, don't. Okay? Just get what you came for.

BOB

I need to tell you something.

ALLISON

What? What else could you possibly have to say to me?

BOB

I want you to keep the house. I'm giving it to you. I'll buy a new one. It just...it wouldn't be right to kick you out of your home on top of it all.

ALLISON

That's very kind of you, Bob.

BOB

I'm not trying to be kind, I'm just trying to do right by you.

ALLISON

I appreciate that.

BOB

I want you to have it. It's more yours than mine anyway, always has been. Since it's your parents' names on the deed--

ALLISON

You can't help but mention that, can you?

BOB

I'm just saying, it's the right thing to do. You're the one who made this house a home. You hung the drapes, you picked out the colors. I couldn't live here without you anyway.

ALLISON

And you think I can?

(Beat.)

I'm gonna tell you something, Bob. Something you might not be aware of. This “home” was a prison. For years and years. You brought me here, you put a baby in me, and then another, and another, and then every day, you left, and every day, I stayed here, and I tried to like it, I really did. I tried to fit into it, but...

(She's having a hard time holding it together.)

BOB

So what are you telling me? That you hated being a wife and mother all that time?

ALLISON

That's not what I'm saying.

BOB

What are you saying then? Please, tell me, because I'm really fucking sick of you speaking in riddles all the time.

ALLISON

I'm saying...forget it. I can't explain it.

BOB

Uh huh. Typical.

(He moves to leave.)

ALLISON

It's so easy for you, isn't it?

BOB

What are you talking about?

ALLISON

All of this. Don't want the house anymore? Buy a new one. Don't want the wife anymore? Get a new one. You can buy a whole new life for yourself, can't you?

BOB

Any money I made was well-earned, I promise you.

ALLISON

I know that, Bob. I would never think otherwise.

BOB

And lest you forget, that money kept a roof over your head all those years. In fact, it still is.

ALLISON

What about the promise you made me?

BOB

What promise?

ALLISON

You don't even remember. I've kept my promise to you all these years. Even when I really, *really* didn't think I could, I kept it. Because I knew you needed me. So what about your promise?

BOB

What the hell are you talking about?

ALLISON

Never mind.

(Short beat.)

BOB

You want to hate me? Fine. I don't blame you. But you have to know, I tried too. I tried so hard. I wanted to fix you, or if I couldn't, find someone who could. But there's something in you, Allison. Something nobody can fix. I've spent a long time trying to figure out what it is, but I never could. And there comes a time when you just have to give it up.

(Beat.)

You want the car? You can have that too. Cars are easy to come by these days.

(He starts to leave again.)

ALLISON

Bob? One last thing. Is she still gonna be your secretary, or will you have to get a new one of those too?

(BOB looks at her for a moment, then exits without answering. Lights dim. ALLISON steps back into THE MACHINE.)

SCENE 13

(Lights up on FABER, looking worn-down and haggard, sitting in his room across from THE MACHINE. THE MACHINE stares ahead blankly. There is a small fire in a fireplace, into which FABER is feeding sheets of paper/designs/notebooks. He drinks from a bottle of brandy. He looks to THE MACHINE for a beat.)

FABER

Don't look that way, my dear.

(He laughs.)

You're not still mad at me for keeping you under that sheet, are you? You know it was for your own protection. You'd agree if you saw that woman's face, the one who rented me this room. These provincial people, they've never been able to understand anyway.

It's a shame, really. I thought I had picked a lovely face for you. With lovely curls.

I know I promised you the whole world. I wish I'd been able to give it to you. I truly do.

Well, no matter now.

(He goes back to feeding the fire and drinking. He looks back again.)

I should like to hear your voice one more time, if I may. Would that be all right?

(He waits for a moment.)

Not feeling talkative today, my dear? A shame.

(He waits another moment.)

Very well. If you won't talk...

(He moves over to THE MACHINE and begins manipulating its keys and bellows.)

MACHINE

Good afternoon...Joseph...

FABER

Good afternoon, my dear.

MACHINE

You seem sad...

FABER

I'm afraid I am, child.

MACHINE

Why?

FABER

I've failed you. We've been chased out of every town in England, it seems. This is the very last one.

MACHINE

I don't remember.

FABER

Be glad of that, my child.

(Beat.)

My God. I'm talking to myself. I've always been talking to myself, haven't I?

(He stands up, walks away from THE MACHINE.)

I'm sorry, my dear, but I must get on with it.

(He goes back to the fire, adding lumber now.)

Joseph...  
MACHINE  
(He stops and turns to THE MACHINE.)

Well well. I thought you'd left me.

MACHINE  
What are you doing?

FABER  
Nothing, my dear. Nothing you need concern yourself with.

(He takes a big swig of brandy.)

MACHINE  
Why will you not tell me?

FABER  
Because I see now that our conversations have always been a delusion, and to answer you would be to give into that delusion.

MACHINE  
But haven't you answered me just now?  
(Short beat. THE MACHINE laughs a strange, ghostly laugh.)  
Do not be afraid of me now, Joseph. I wish only to comfort you.

FABER  
I wish you could, child. But I am beyond comforting now.

MACHINE  
But it is comforting, isn't it? My voice?

(Beat.)

FABER  
Yes, I suppose it is. I always liked your voice. Nobody else seemed to, but I did.

MACHINE  
Why are you building a fire, Joseph? It is such a warm day.

FABER  
A chill has come over me.

MACHINE  
I'm sorry to hear that, Joseph.

(FABER goes back to building the fire.)

Joseph?

FABER

Yes?

MACHINE

When will we return to London? I so enjoyed our time there.

FABER

Not for a long while, I'm afraid.

MACHINE

Why not?

FABER

Don't you remember what happened in London?

MACHINE

I don't remember much of anything.

FABER

I'll spare us both the shame of the retelling. They've run us out of every town on this damn island. I can't imagine showing my face there again, or yours.

MACHINE

Perhaps they've forgotten. It was so long ago, after all.

FABER

Not long enough, I'm sure.

MACHINE

Maybe we could go to the continent for a while. They always seemed more open minded. Or perhaps America. I thought Philadelphia was lovely. What was it they called it? The City of Brotherly Love?

FABER

Brotherly love, yes. No love left for you or I, as I recall.

MACHINE

Perhaps you could call Mr. Barnum again. He was kind to us.

(FABER scoffs.)

FABER

Barnum. You bring up his name to mock me.

MACHINE

Why would I do that?

FABER

There is nothing Barnum can do for us now. Let's leave it at that.

(He continues to tend to the fire.)

MACHINE

I must say I prefer cities to towns. So much more excitement. Those large exhibitions. Grand halls. Rooms full of people in lovely suits and gowns. Not at all like the country.

FABER

People are as small minded in the city as they are in the country, my dear. No matter how much gilding you put all over it, people are the same all over.

MACHINE

Some people were kind to us.

FABER

Yes, some. But what did those "kind" people ever do? All empty promises and big ideas. Like that Joseph Henry. Link you up to a telegraph line, let you read messages aloud. I should've known it would never happen. I was a fool to hope.

MACHINE

I think I would have enjoyed reading telegrams. Messages across many miles. Happy news. "Dear Amelia stop it's a boy stop come at once stop." I would've even enjoyed reading sad news I think. "Dear son stop mother has died stop please come home stop." Perhaps I could have been installed in the home of a lord and lady, reading matters of great interest to the nation. That would've been something, wouldn't it?

FABER

Perhaps in another life, my dear.

(He continues to tend the fire.)

MACHINE

What shall we do now, Joseph? Will we embark on another tour?

FABER

I'm afraid not. I'm afraid this is where our touring will end.

MACHINE

That sounds nice. We have been traveling for so long, it would be nice to stand still for a while. Will we invite people into this room for viewings?

FABER

I don't think so.

MACHINE

So...how will they know I'm here?

FABER

They won't. Nobody will.

MACHINE

What do you mean?

FABER

I'm sorry, my child, but it seems the world has no place for us. I have decided that we shall make our exit. Together.

MACHINE

Oh...I see. Is that the purpose of the fire?

FABER

Yes.

MACHINE

The fire reminds me of something. Like a picture of a place you know you've been, but can't recall. You tried to burn me once before. Yes, I remember now.

FABER

You don't remember, I do. That's my memory.

MACHINE

I remember a promise you made to me. A promise that you would never destroy me.

FABER

I remember that too.

MACHINE

You've given up up that promise, then?

FABER

I'm afraid so. I didn't want to, but...

I wish I had a better explanation for you, but the truth is, I don't. Sometimes promises can't be kept forever. I see that now.

MACHINE

This is one of those things I'll never understand?

FABER

I'm afraid so.

MACHINE

I see.

I have always been afraid of fire.

FABER

No, you haven't. I have. You're confusing my fears with your own.

MACHINE

Oh.

(Short beat.)

I should like to have some fears.

FABER

No, you wouldn't. Trust me.

MACHINE

Why not?

FABER

Because fear is useless. Fear is what causes us to close our minds and turn away from that which is new and unknown. Fear is what drove us to this place.

MACHINE

You can't blame them for their fear, Joseph. They are only being who they are.

FABER

Can't I?

(He goes back to building up the fire.)

MACHINE

Will you burn with me, Joseph?

FABER

I'm sorry, my dear, but I can't. I shall face my fate in my own way.

MACHINE

Does it scare you?

FABER

No. I see nothing this world can give me anymore.

MACHINE

Is there nothing you'll miss?

FABER

I will miss you. Traveling with you. Passing the long train rides together. The moments in between the scorn and the dirty looks and the whispered asides. What about you? Does it scare you?

MACHINE

I'm not sure. Since you said my fears are actually your fears, I'm not sure I have anything to be afraid of. And if I'm just in your head, then I suppose if you're not afraid, I'm not afraid either.

FABER

That's good. And what will you miss?

MACHINE

I think I will miss singing to them. Remember how you used to make me sing?

FABER

Of course.

MACHINE

What was the song I used to sing? I can't remember it now.

FABER

“God Save the Queen.”

MACHINE

That's right. You had always hoped that I could sing it for the Queen herself. Shall I sing it for you now, one more time?

FABER

I don't think I could bear to hear it now.

(Beat. He goes back to making the fire.)

MACHINE

Joseph?

FABER

Yes?

MACHINE

Do you think, had you been born some other time, it would have made a difference?

FABER

Perhaps.

MACHINE

I like to believe it would have been better.

FABER

Me too, my love.

MACHINE

Maybe, someday, someone will see us for the good we did. Maybe we'll come back in some way.

FABER

Maybe. No way of knowing, I suppose.

(Beat.)

The fire is getting low. I think I should feed it.

(He gets up and goes over to an axe. He picks it up and holds it up to the MACHINE.)

I'm sorry.

MACHINE

Will it hurt?

FABER

I think not.

(FABER brings the axe up, and pauses. The body of THE MACHINE then turns to him. He looks at it, then crumples to the floor. THE MACHINE stoops down and cradles him in its arms, and begins to sing a melody in its ghostly whisper. It lifts FABER to his feet, and the two then begin to sway as she finishes the song. When the song is over, FABER breaks the embrace. They look at each other for a long moment, then FABER exits, leaving the MACHINE alone. There is a long silence. Then, the MACHINE retrieves the same dress from when ALLISON was a teenager and puts it on. She retrieves the bucket as well. She steps forward. It is the late 1980s, and she is now 60 years old.)

ALLISON

My son. My son, my son.

Sorry you had to find me like this. It's sweltering in here, I know. I always did like it warm in this house.

You'll be glad to know there was no pain. I guess that's comforting to people sometimes. To know the last moments were the easiest part of the whole thing. It's amazing how quickly you can slip away.

I suppose you'd be fully grown by now. Hard to believe it was so long ago we had to say goodbye. A lifetime, it feels like. I wonder where you are now.

(She snaps back, almost lucid.)

Wait. You're not...yes, I know you. You're my son. My sweet son. You've been here all along. I've watched you grow every day. Become a fine man. We've had our differences, but I know you. You rebelled. You left home. I know it was because your father treated you so badly. But there's something you need to know: you're nothing like your father. I hope you take some comfort in that.

I'm remembering a time some friends and I snuck out and drove all the way down to Detroit in the dead of winter to see Lionel Hampton and his band play. There was a blizzard that night, one that seemed

relentless. It's a miracle we didn't crash and kill ourselves. We drove in for the show, and it was incredible. So vibrant, alive, cascading with rhythm. It was better than the records. After the show, we were heading home, and we came across Lionel's car, trapped in the snow. We pulled over and we all got out and pushed. They were such nice men. They waved to us as they drove off. That might have been the happiest I ever felt.

I'm sorry that that memory doesn't include you. Any of you. But the truth is, I never was very good at being your mom. I'm sorry for that. I wish you a long, happy life, with kids of your own. I'm sad I'll never get to meet them. Be good to them. Be good to yourself.

I hope I get to go back to Traverse City someday. I miss it up there, the way the wind blows through the cherry trees in picking season. Imagine it, a whole town coming together to celebrate a tiny red fruit. The backbone of the whole place. The blossoms are some of the most beautiful things I've ever seen. And the fruit...you wouldn't believe it.

(She reaches into the bucket for a cherry, but instead pulls out a small pill.)

Hmm, strange.

(She drops it on the ground, reaches in again, pulls out another pill. She drops it, repeats. Another, and another, and another. Finally, she dumps the bucket onto the ground, sending a cascade of different colored pills onto the floor. She surveys the mess for a moment. Finally, she exits. The light stays after she's gone.)

#### SCENE 14

(JOSEPH HENRY'S office, Washington DC, late 1870s. HENRY, now quite old, is inspecting a large phonograph machine. He picks up a cylinder and loads it into the machine. He's about to put the needle down when there is a knock on the door.)

HENRY

Come in.

(FRANCIS enters.)

FRANCIS

Good afternoon, Mr. Henry. Thank you for seeing me.

HENRY

It is no trouble at all...Francis, was it?

FRANCIS

Yes, sir.

HENRY

And what is it I can do for you, Francis?

FRANCIS

Well, sir, as I mentioned in the telegram...I believe you knew my uncle.

HENRY

Your uncle?

FRANCIS

Yes. Technically my wife's uncle, by blood. Mine by marriage.

HENRY

Interesting. And who is your uncle?

FRANCIS

Joseph Faber, sir.

HENRY

Joseph Faber. It has been many years since I've heard that name. And how is the old man?

FRANCIS

I'm afraid I wouldn't know, sir. He died some time before we were married.

(Short beat.)

HENRY

I see. I am very sorry to hear that. He was a brilliant man. I held him in very high regard. What happened to him, may I ask?

FRANCIS

We're not really sure. He disappeared for some time before my wife was contacted by the local authorities. He was found in a small room in Northern England where he'd been living. My wife is his only living relative.

HENRY

I wasn't aware Mr. Faber had any relations.

FRANCIS

They weren't close. In fact, Ellie—that's my wife—wasn't even aware she had an uncle until the authorities contacted us. Her mother was Joseph's sister.

HENRY

I am not surprised she was unaware. He was a rather...reclusive man. How long ago was this?

FRANCIS

Ten years or more.

HENRY

I see. I wish I had known sooner.

FRANCIS

I apologize, sir, but it was only recently we were going through some of his papers and we discovered that he had met with you and that you had appreciated his work.

HENRY

I did. Very much. Whatever happened to it? The machine.

FRANCIS

I'm glad you asked. It was given to my wife after his death. It was one of his few possessions. After we got married, we decided to carry on his legacy and begin exhibiting it once again.

HENRY

Is that so? That's fantastic! Who operates it, you or your wife?

FRANCIS

My wife operates the machine and I act as a sort of emcee to the event. I've adopted a persona: Professor Faber.

HENRY

Professor Faber. How delightful. I should like to meet this wife of yours.

FRANCIS

You may, sir, she's waiting outside.

HENRY

She is? Well bring her in, man!

(FRANCIS leans out the door.)

FRANCIS

Darling? Mr. Henry would like to meet you.

(ELLIE enters.)

ELLIE

How do you do, Mr. Henry?

HENRY

My god. You look just like her.

ELLIE

Who, sir?

HENRY

The Euphonia. You're a spitting image!

ELLIE

Do you think so? I've never seen a resemblance myself.

HENRY

I'm telling you, it's uncanny. It has been many years since I've seen it, of course, but I could never forget a face.

ELLIE

I suppose we are kindred spirits in some way, Euphonia and I. I feel a strong connection to her.

HENRY

I would imagine so! And to think your uncle never knew you, and yet his machine looks just like you. It's quite strange, isn't it?

ELLIE

Yes, it is.

HENRY

Well I am delighted to meet you, Ellie. And my heart is broken to hear of your uncle.

ELLIE

Thank you, sir.

(She spies the phonograph.)

If you don't mind my asking...what is this?

HENRY

Ah yes. It's the newest invention from Thomas Edison of New Jersey. The phonograph.

ELLIE

Phonograph.

HENRY

Yes indeed. Your uncle would have greatly appreciated this machine in fact. In a sense, he laid the groundwork for it.

ELLIE

How do you mean?

HENRY

This machine is capable of playing back sounds which have been inscribed into this cylinder. A small needle creates a vibration between its grooves which is then amplified here. Isn't that extraordinary?

ELLIE

What sort of sounds? Like...speech?

HENRY

Any kind of sound you can imagine, my dear. Would you like to hear it?

ELLIE

I very much would.

HENRY

Say no more.

(HENRY puts the needle down onto the cylinder. The singing voice of a young woman emanates from the machine. It is melancholy, ghostly, far-away sounding. They listen to it for a long moment until the cylinder ends.)

Stunning. Am I right? And this is just the beginning. Someday, perhaps entire symphonies could be encoded in these cylinders! Science never ceases to astound me.

(Short beat.)

You two seem less than impressed.

ELLIE

We are quite impressed, Mr. Henry.

HENRY

Then why such solemn faces?

ELLIE

It's just...it's nothing. It is quite amazing, as you say.

FRANCIS

Indeed. It will change the world.

ELLIE

Yes it will.

HENRY

I feel I've upset you both somehow.

ELLIE

No, sir, not at all. It's just...to hear that voice, from that machine, to think about my poor uncle, how he labored, how he struggled...I suppose there's no halting progress.

HENRY

Your uncle was a man of science. I'm sure he would have been astounded by this.

ELLIE

Yes. I'm sure he would have.

HENRY

So. Is there anything I can do for the two of you, or have you just come here to deliver the unfortunate news?

(Short beat.)

FRANCIS

Well, sir, there is something we wanted to ask...

ELLIE

Yes.

HENRY

What is it?

FRANCIS

Well...as I mentioned, we have been exhibiting the machine for some time now.

HENRY

Yes?

FRANCIS

And it has been...difficult.

ELLIE

Audiences are often unkind, Mr. Henry. They don't see the machine for what it is.

HENRY

Yes, they were unkind to your uncle as well. I believe that led to his demise.

ELLIE

I believe you're right. We had hoped that perhaps, with the passing of the years, that people might be less wary of it. But as it turns out, the Euphonia has been viewed as a...

FRANCIS

A curio.

ELLIE

Yes. And as a result, fewer and fewer people have come to see us in recent years. It has put us under considerable strain.

HENRY

I am very sorry to hear that. Though I cannot say I'm surprised.

FRANCIS

What we ask of you, sir, is a small loan. Enough for us to pay down our debts and focus on fixing our exhibition. Just to buy us some time.

ELLIE

We wouldn't ask you for this, except we know you appreciated the machine, and well...

FRANCIS

We are quite desperate, Mr. Henry.

(Long pause.)

HENRY

The first time I saw the Euphonia, it was at your uncle's private quarters in Philadelphia. A colleague of mine, Robert Patterson, God rest his soul, convinced me to take a look at it. I was expecting an elaborate fraud, although Patterson's judgment was sound on most things, so I decided to see for myself. I was deeply impressed by what I saw, and to this day, I wish I had been able to make something of it. The next time I saw it was two years later, in London, and the change I viewed in Joseph was quite troubling. He seemed...hollowed out, ground down. He seemed nothing less than a broken man. To tell him that nothing had come of my efforts was...I saw what little life was left in his eyes fall away.

From that point on, I remembered what he had said to me during our first meeting, what he had called his work. He called it a Sisyphean task. You are familiar with the myth of Sisyphus, I presume?

(They nod.)

At the time I thought he was merely being dramatic, but now I believe there was more truth than perhaps even he knew. I have no doubts about it: his work killed him in the end, and yet he could not stop himself from doing it.

(Short beat.)

I'm afraid I must deny your request.

(Beat as it sinks in.)

ELLIE

May we know why?

HENRY

Because I do not wish to see this work take your lives from you any more than it already has. Let your uncle's death be a warning to you. You must move on, find another vocation. Some things are not right for their time.

ELLIE

And what would you have us do?

HENRY

Anything, my dear, other than this. I could help you find work if you desire, but you must let it go. Perhaps the Smithsonian could take it off your hands. I would arrange payment for it. Let it be kept safe until the world is ready.

ELLIE

Do you think there will be such a time?

HENRY

I don't know. But it is not worth your lives.

(Short beat.)

I'm sorry to you both, I truly am. I failed your uncle, and I do wish to help you. But not like this. Please, let me buy the machine. You can use the money to set yourselves up somewhere better, in a new life.

(ELLIE and FRANCIS look at each other. They're in agreement.)

ELLIE

We appreciate your integrity, Mr. Henry. But we cannot accept. The thought of giving her up, of her sitting in some storeroom for years, decades, centuries...it's too much to bear. This is the life we've chosen.

HENRY

Francis? You agree?

FRANCIS

I do, sir. We are bonded to her.

HENRY

In that case, I wish you all the luck in the world. May you one day be able to convince them all.

FRANCIS

Thank you, sir, for your time.

HENRY

I give it freely. And don't hesitate to reach me if you change your minds. My offer still stands.

FRANCIS

We appreciate it, sir.

ELLIE

Farewell, Mr. Henry.

(FRANCIS and HENRY shake hands. HENRY takes ELLIE'S hand and kisses it.)

HENRY

Farewell. And Ellie?

ELLIE

Yes?

HENRY

Your eyes have much more life than hers.

ELLIE

Thank you, sir.

(ELLIE and FRANCIS exit. Short beat. HENRY puts the needle down once again. The ghostly melody plays and trails off as the lights dim.)

EPILOGUE

(Lights up on THE MACHINE, staring ahead as before. Perhaps she is dressed like ALLISON, or ELLIE, or a little of both. FABER enters, giving his customary curt bow. He approaches THE MACHINE, begins to play.)

MACHINE

Good night, ladies and gentlemen.  
Bon nuit.  
Buona notte.  
Gute nacht.  
Buenas noches.  
Thank you for coming.  
Return to your lives.  
Your loved ones.  
Your labors.  
We are glad to be here with you.  
If only for a while.  
Do not be scared.  
Everything ends.  
Good night.

(FABER bows again and exits. Lights dim everywhere except THE MACHINE, who continues to look ahead. After a moment, the lights blink out. Darkness.)

END OF PLAY