

LIP takes his kids and three of PENNY's. HALCY and ROGER stay with PENNY.)

RY Look at the car drive away. It gets smaller and smaller and smaller . . .

another pool of light, PHILIP is crowded with kids.)

RP (To us.) I sit in the plane. Me with how many kids in my lap look out the window. I see these fingers pointing up into the sky? Is that our dig? A cloud passes and blocks my view. The cloud appears to be in the shape of my first wife. Another cloud in the shape of my university blocks the view. Another cloud in the shape of me prevents my seeing the earth. The kids complain about something—a draft? The attendant passes candy. Kids are sobbing. The coffin is in the hold with my son.

RR Look at that plane! Is that them!

RY (To us.) We dig in the trenches. We look up. A plane circles around us and then is lost in the sunset.

RP (To us.) I see Mount Etna spewing out its lava. The plane flies low over the volcano. I see the blazing red flames below melting stones into liquid. The pilot makes one circular passage around the crater, then lifts up and vanishes into the night.

Y Arethusa. Artemis. Diana. Icarus. Adonis . . .

lights begin to fade on PENNY and PHILIP each in a separate pool of light.)

MESSENGER (Sings.)

At the end of a perfect day

In Sicily

The servant brings a tray

A tray with a sprig of lavender

Put the sprig of lavender under your nose

The scent reminds you of a perfect day

Time has a perfume

At least in Sicily

At least in novels by Giuseppe Lampedusa

Time has a perfume

A servant brings a tray of lavender

MESSENGER draws a final curtain against the stage.)

John Guare

A. R. GURNEY, JR.

The Problem

CHARACTERS

THE HUSBAND *In his thirties.*

THE WIFE *Also in her thirties.*

SETTING

As simple a set as possible: the suggestion of a study. A leather chair with a matching footstool, a reading light behind it. A bookcase.

At curtain, the HUSBAND is sitting in the chair, feet up on the footstool, reading a book, smoking a pipe, taking notes into a notebook comfortably propped on his knee. After a moment, the WIFE comes in from the left, hugely pregnant. She stands looking at him. He continues to read.

WIFE Hey.

HUSBAND (*Not looking at her.*) I'm reading, dear.

WIFE (*Sticking out her stomach.*) I know. But look at me.

HUSBAND (*Still reading.*) I'm preparing for a class, dear.

WIFE I know, but just look. (*She crosses to him, stands by his chair, and sticks out her stomach.*) Just take a gander.

HUSBAND (*Turns his head and looks right into her stomach. He starts, takes off his glasses, looks again, and then looks up into her face.*) Well, well.

WIFE Yes.

HUSBAND Surprise, surprise.

WIFE Yes.

HUSBAND Merry Christmas.

WIFE Exactly. (*Pause.*)

HUSBAND Why have I never noticed before?
WIFE Because I wear loose-fitting clothes.
HUSBAND That's true.
WIFE Clothes without waists. Merri-mekkos. Sack dresses. Granny gowns.
HUSBAND That's true.
WIFE Large, shapeless flannel nightgowns.
HUSBAND True enough.
WIFE So only now, tonight, does it seem to show.
HUSBAND I see. *(Pause. They smile at each other. Then he looks at his watch.)* I've got to teach a class in an hour.
WIFE Oh, I know. And I've got to go out to a meeting on Open Housing.
HUSBAND So . . .
WIFE I just wanted you to know. *(Pause.)* So you could plan.
HUSBAND Yes. I will. I'll plan accordingly. *(Smiles at her again, puts on his glasses, and returns to his book. She starts off left, and then stops.)*
WIFE Oh, there's one thing, though.
HUSBAND *(Reading.)* Mmmmmmm?
WIFE One small problem.
HUSBAND *(Reading.)* Mmmmmmm. And what's that, dear?
WIFE I don't know whether you've thought about this, or not.
HUSBAND *(Looking up.)* State the problem. And I'll tell you whether I've thought about it.
WIFE It's a little tricky.
HUSBAND Well. We're married, after all.
WIFE Yes. That's why it's a little tricky.
HUSBAND Perhaps. But that's also why you should feel free to speak out.
WIFE All right. *(Pause.)* You see, I'm not absolutely sure that this . . . *(She looks down at her stomach.)* is yours. *(Pause. He marks his place in his book, puts it down carefully, takes off his glasses, and then looks up.)*
HUSBAND Ah. So that's the problem.
WIFE Yes. That's the problem.
HUSBAND I think I'll trust you on this one, dear.
WIFE That's sweet of you, darling. *(Pause.)* But do I trust myself?
HUSBAND I think you should. So there we are.
WIFE But . . .
HUSBAND But what?
WIFE The thing is . . . Now how do I put this?
HUSBAND Speak frankly now.
WIFE I'll try. The thing is . . . that you and I . . . haven't made love very much. . . . Recently.
HUSBAND Is that true?
WIFE I think it is. Not very much. Not recently.
HUSBAND Hmm. Define "recently."

WIFE Well, I mean . . . five years, more or less . . . give or take a month or two.
HUSBAND Is that true?
WIFE I think it is. *(Pause.)*
HUSBAND *(Lighting his pipe.)* My gosh, has it been that long?
WIFE Oh, yes.
HUSBAND Well, well. And so . . .
WIFE And so . . .
HUSBAND And so you mind, obviously.
WIFE Mind?
HUSBAND Mind that we haven't. Much. Recently.
WIFE Oh, no. Oh, no, no. I don't mind. Why should I mind?
HUSBAND Well, then . . .
WIFE *(Pointing to her stomach.)* I'm just thinking of this, that's all.
HUSBAND Oh, I see!
WIFE *(Smiling.)* You see?
HUSBAND Of course. I see the connection! *(He slaps his head.)* Forgive me. I was thinking about my class.
WIFE Oh, heavens. I forgive you. You love your work.
HUSBAND Yes, but I'm with you now. I'm on your wavelength now.
WIFE Oh, good.
HUSBAND Yes, yes. I understand now. What you're really saying is . . . now stop me if I'm wrong . . . but what you're really saying is that you think someone else might have impregnated you.
WIFE More or less. Yes.
HUSBAND I see, I see, I see.
WIFE It's possible, after all.
HUSBAND Yes. It's possible.
WIFE On these evenings that you have to go teach.
HUSBAND Yes. When you go out to your meetings.
WIFE Yes. Exactly.
HUSBAND So we do have a problem there, don't we?
WIFE Yes. We really do.

(Pause; he looks at her, looks at her stomach, scratches his head, taps his teeth with a pencil, lights his pipe, twirls his glasses.)
HUSBAND You know, darling . . . it occurs to me . . . that I should have made love to you more.
WIFE Oh, no, no. . . .
HUSBAND I'm kicking myself now.
WIFE Oh, don't, don't. . . .
HUSBAND I am. Things would have been much simpler.
WIFE Oh, sweetheart, stop punishing yourself.

HUSBAND But why didn't I? Darn it! Darn it all!
WIFE Darling, you have your work.
HUSBAND Oh, sure, but . . .
WIFE You have your intellectual life . . .
HUSBAND That's all very well, but . . .
WIFE You had your book to get out . . .
HUSBAND Yes, yes, but, darling, that doesn't really answer the question. The question is, why haven't I made love to you in the past five years? That's the question. *(Pause.)*
WIFE Well. You used to laugh too much, maybe.
HUSBAND Laugh?
WIFE Yes. In the old days. Whenever we started to make love, you'd start to chuckle.
HUSBAND I did, didn't I? I remember now. *(He chuckles.)*
WIFE Yes. You'd chuckle.
HUSBAND *(Chuckling.)* Because the whole thing struck me as being slightly absurd. *(Chuckling.)* When you think about it. *(Chuckling.)* I should learn to control myself. *(He chuckles louder; controls himself stoically; then bursts into loud laughter; then forces himself to subside; looks at her.)* I'm sorry.
WIFE Oh, don't be sorry. I was just as bad.
HUSBAND Did you chuckle?
WIFE No. Actually I'd cry.
HUSBAND I don't remember your crying.
WIFE Well, I'd whimper.
HUSBAND Yes, yes! You would. You'd whimper. *(Chuckles.)*
WIFE Well, I felt so sad! Making love. While all these horrible things are going on in the world.
HUSBAND Yes. So you'd whimper. I remember now.
WIFE Vietnam . . . Urban blight . . . all that. . . I felt so guilty!
HUSBAND And I felt so absurd.
WIFE Yes. You chuckling, me whimpering. . . .
HUSBAND Yes. Oh, yes.
WIFE And so it wasn't very conducive.
HUSBAND Right. So we gave it up. That answers that. *(Pause; picks up his book and starts to read.)*
WIFE But now there's this. *(Indicates her stomach.)*
HUSBAND *(Reading; taking notes.)* Keep it.
WIFE What?
HUSBAND Keep it. Bear it. Bring it home.
WIFE Oh, darling. . . .
HUSBAND Give it my name. Consider me its father.
WIFE Oh, sweetheart.

HUSBAND I've let you down. Now I'll make it up. Keep it.
WIFE But I'm partly to blame.
HUSBAND But I'm the man.
WIFE You certainly are! You certainly are the man!
HUSBAND And now I'm afraid that I must prepare for my class.
WIFE Yes. And I've got to go to my meeting.
(They smile at each other; then she starts out left; then she stops, and stands reflectively. After a moment, he looks at her.)
HUSBAND But you're not satisfied.
WIFE Oh, I am, I am.
HUSBAND Darling, we've been married ten years. You are not satisfied.
WIFE You've got a class.
HUSBAND My wife comes first. Come on. What's the problem now?
WIFE I'm embarrassed even to bring it up.
HUSBAND *(Tenderly.)* Come on. Out with it. Tell Daddy.
WIFE All right. *(Pause.)* What if this . . . *(She looks at her stomach.)* turns out to be black? *(Pause.)*
HUSBAND Black?
WIFE Black. Or at least mulatto. Depending on how the chromosomes line up.
HUSBAND *(Pause. Lights his pipe again.)* Mmmmm.
WIFE You see? You see the problem?
HUSBAND *(Nodding.)* Mmmmm.
WIFE I mean, can you still act as its father if it's black?
HUSBAND *(Puffing away.)* Mmmmmmm. *(Looks at her wryly.)* Yes, well, that puts a different complexion on things.
WIFE *(Giggling.)* Funny.
HUSBAND *(Chuckling.)* That's a horse of a different color.
WIFE *(Laughing.)* Now cut it out. You're awful. *(Stops laughing.)* Try to be serious.
HUSBAND *(Pause. Settles down.)* Black, eh?
WIFE I should have told you before.
HUSBAND No, no. I should have assumed it.
WIFE It just slipped my mind, I guess.
HUSBAND I'm glad it did. That says something for America these days.
WIFE Yes. But it's still a problem.
HUSBAND In this case, yes. I'd say so. *(Pause.)* So you must let me think it out.
WIFE But your class . . .
HUSBAND I'll just be less prepared than I like to be. Which may be good. Which may be very good. Which may make things more lively and spontaneous. So let me think about this other problem. *(Puffs on his pipe; she stands watching him.)* I could still adopt it.

WIFE How?

HUSBAND We could tell the world that you had a blue baby. Which died. And then we could bring home the black one. Which we say we adopted.

WIFE That sounds awfully complicated.

HUSBAND I know it.

WIFE Awfully baroque.

HUSBAND I know it.

WIFE Besides, the real father might object. He might take pride in it himself.

HUSBAND Need he know?

WIFE Oh, yes. Because he'll see it, after all.

HUSBAND You mean, he'll continue to come around.

WIFE Oh, yes. After I'm home from the hospital. And capable of sexual intercourse again.

HUSBAND I see.

WIFE So that pretty well puts a damper on the adopting idea.

HUSBAND Yes, it does. *(He thinks.)*

WIFE But you have your class . . .

HUSBAND No, no. Now wait a minute. . . . *(He thinks carefully, then suddenly pounds his fist on the arm of his chair.)* Sweetheart, I'm going to be honest with you. *(Points to the footstool.)* Sit down.

WIFE *(Looking at the footstool.)* I can't sit down. Your feet are there.

HUSBAND I'll remove my feet. *(He does.)* Now sit down.

WIFE All right. I'll sit down. *(Sits on the footstool in front of him.)*

HUSBAND Now don't look at me. Face forward. Because this is going to be hard for me to tell, and hard for you to hear.

WIFE All right. I won't look at you.

HUSBAND And if I'm inarticulate about this, you must try to understand that this is a difficult thing for a man to tell his wife. I'm only doing it—I'm only telling you—because it seems to be the only way to solve this problem.

WIFE *(Smoothing her skirt over her stomach.)* Yes. This problem.

HUSBAND Now try not to interrupt, darling, unless you have to. Unless you're unclear about anything. Save your remarks and comments for the end. All right?

WIFE I'll try.

HUSBAND All right. *(He takes a deep breath.)* Now. To begin with, I've been lying to you this evening.

WIFE Lying?

HUSBAND Sshhhh. Lying. I don't have a class tonight. I've never had a class at night. I don't believe in evening classes. All these years I've been lying. The class that I've told you meets at night actually meets on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays at ten A.M.

WIFE I see.

HUSBAND You may well ask, therefore, where I go on these nights when I say

I have classes. *(Pause.)* And that is what is so difficult to tell you. *(Pause.)* The fact is, I don't leave this house. Not really. Oh, I leave by the front door, all right. But I immediately circle around in back and go down into the cellar by means of the bulkhead.

WIFE I see.

HUSBAND Now. What do I do in the cellar? You are probably asking yourself that. What do I do in the cellar? . . . Don't look at me, darling! *(Pause; then grimly.)* Here's what I do in the cellar. I make my way to a small space behind the furnace. And in that small space, I have hidden . . . certain things. *(Pause.)* What have I hidden? I'll tell you. *(He counts them off on his fingers.)* Some black theatrical makeup. A woolly wig. A complete change of clothes. And a small mirror. That's what I have hidden in the cellar.

WIFE I see. . . .

HUSBAND Yes. You see, my darling, or you're beginning to. When I go into the cellar, I set the mirror up on an adjacent water pipe. I strip myself to the buff. I daub myself from head to toe with that dusky makeup. I glue on that curly wig. I don those makeshift clothes. I leave the cellar. Go to the front door. Ring the bell. And reappear to you. So you see, my poor darling, I am your Negro visitor, and have been all along.

WIFE You.

HUSBAND Me.

WIFE But—

HUSBAND Oh, I know it sounds implausible. But remember how you always lower the lights. Remember, too, that I played Othello in high school. Somehow I was able to pass. I have deceived you for these past years. Deceived my own wife! Disguising myself as a Negro and capitalizing on the sympathies you naturally feel for that unhappy race!

WIFE But . . . why?

HUSBAND Because I wanted to make love to you. And somehow this seemed to be the only way I could do it. You'll have to admit it worked.

WIFE *(Looking at her stomach.)* Oh, yes. It worked.

HUSBAND So out of all this depravity, at least a child will be born. And I was its father, after all.

WIFE I'm somewhat . . . stunned . . . by all this.

HUSBAND I know you are, darling. *(Gets up.)* Try to assimilate it while I'm gone.

WIFE Gone?

HUSBAND I'm going down to the cellar now.

WIFE To put on your costume?

HUSBAND No. To burn it.

WIFE Burn it?

HUSBAND Yes. It's all over now. Because you know. The mask is off. Any

attempt to wear it again would be foolish. I'd be nothing but a self-conscious amateur. Our love life would be as absurd as it was before I found this way around it. So I'm going to destroy my role. (*Pause; he looks at her.*) And when I come back, I want you gone.

WIFE Gone?

HUSBAND You must leave me now.

WIFE No.

HUSBAND You must. Oh, my darling, this urge to love you is still in me. I don't know what . . . oblique form . . . it will take next. Take the child and go.

WIFE Never.

HUSBAND Please. Listen: I don't know what I'll think of next, in the cellar. I've got Genet down there. And a complete de Sade. I'll reread them both, looking for increasingly complicated arabesques of sexual perversion. I may reappear with a whip. Wearing riding boots. Or dressed as a woman. Get out, darling. Run to the suburbs. Give my child a normal home. Go!

WIFE Normal? Normal? (*She laughs uneasily.*) What is normal?

HUSBAND You're normal, my love.

WIFE Me? Oh, my God, how little do you know! (*Grimly.*) Sit down. I have a tale to tell-o.

HUSBAND Nothing you could say . . .

WIFE Sit down.

HUSBAND Nothing . . .

WIFE I've known all along you were my dark lover!

HUSBAND (*Sits down.*) You've known?

WIFE From the beginning.

HUSBAND But . . . how?

WIFE Five years ago, when you announced to me that you had scheduled some evening classes, I became suspicious. And so when you left for the first class, I . . . followed you.

HUSBAND Followed me?

WIFE Yes. I followed my own husband. Followed you to that tacky little theater-supply shop downtown where you bought your disguise. Followed you back here. Followed you into the cellar, hid behind the hot-water heater, watched you change into your poor, pathetic imitation of a Negro.

HUSBAND You spied on me. . . .

WIFE Yes, I spied on you, my darling. Furtively, suspiciously, like some aging matron. But when I saw what you were doing, when I understood that you were doing it for me, my heart went out to you. With a great rush of longing, I dashed back upstairs, eager to receive you, but at the same time terrified that you would see that I recognized you. Frantically, I dimmed the lights, to make things easier for both of us.

HUSBAND I thought it was because you were romantic.

WIFE I know you did, darling. And I let you think that. But no: it was simply so I wouldn't give myself away.

HUSBAND You were acting? The whole time?

WIFE Yes. Wasn't I good? Pretending that you were someone new and strange? I, I, who am no actress, improvising like a professional during that whole scene!

HUSBAND (*Shaking his head.*) It's hard to believe. . . . You seemed so . . . excited!

WIFE I was! I was terribly excited. I'll admit it. That strange, sly courtship, the banter, the give-and-take, with all those peculiar racial overtones. I threw myself into it with a vengeance. But then . . . when you carried me into the bedroom . . . everything changed.

HUSBAND What do you mean? I was a tiger!

WIFE You were, darling. You were a tiger. But I wasn't.

HUSBAND You said you loved me.

WIFE I was only pretending. I really hated you.

HUSBAND Hated me?

WIFE Hated myself. It was awful. I felt so guilty. All my old sexual agonies were magnified, as it were, by a gallery of mirrors. I wanted at least to whimper, as I did normally, with you, when you were white, but now you were black, I had to stifle my own sighs. Worse: I had to pretend, to play, to *fake* the most authentic experience a woman can have! And all the time, I felt like a thing, an object, a creature without a soul, a poor, pathetic concubine in the arms of an Ethiopian potentate. And when you left—finally left—I just lay on the bed, arms folded across my breast, like a stone carving on my own tomb. It took every ounce of energy I could muster to rise and greet you at the door when you returned from your supposed class. (*Pause.*)

HUSBAND So. For the past five years you have been through hell.

WIFE No. After that first ghastly evening, I suffered nothing.

HUSBAND You mean, you grew accustomed . . .

WIFE I mean, I wasn't there.

HUSBAND You weren't there?

WIFE No. I left the house right after you went into the cellar.

HUSBAND But then who . . . was here . . . with me?

WIFE I got a substitute.

HUSBAND I see.

WIFE Oh, darling, try to understand. I simply could not endure another evening like that. The sham, the pretense—it revolted me. And yet I knew how much it meant to you! All the next day, I racked my brain, trying to figure out something which would satisfy us both. I took a long walk. I wandered all over town. Finally, about an hour before I was due home,

I saw a woman. Who looked a little like me. Same hair, same height . . . roughly the same age. It was at least a chance. Before I really knew what I was doing, I approached her and asked her whether she'd like to sleep with a Negro. Naturally she said she would. And so now, for the past five years, this good woman has come here while you were in the cellar changing your clothes, and in the dim light, she has pretended to be me.

HUSBAND I see.

WIFE Do you hate me very much?

HUSBAND No. I don't hate you. But I must say I'm somewhat . . . surprised.

WIFE I suspected you would be.

HUSBAND But what about that? (*Points to her stomach.*)

WIFE (*Clutching her stomach.*) Ah, this . . .

HUSBAND Yes. That. Whose is that?

WIFE Now bear with me, darling. On these nights while you're in the cellar, and while this good woman is preparing herself for your return, I go off with a real Negro. There it is. In a nutshell. His Cadillac pulls up quietly in front. He flashes his lights. And I sneak out and drive off with him into the black ghetto. There, on an old mattress infested with lice, nibbled at by rats, we make love. Love which for the first time in my life I can give myself up to, since I feel that with him I am expiating not only my own guilt but the guilt of all America.

HUSBAND I see. And so he is the father of that.

WIFE No.

HUSBAND No?

WIFE Somehow, even that relationship wasn't enough. Somehow, in the ghetto, with all that soul music pulsing around me, all that frustration, all that anger, I still felt as if I were not playing my part. So I betrayed my lover for his friend. And his friend for another. And so on and so forth, with Puerto Ricans, Mexican-Americans, and Indians on relief. Oh, darling, for the past five years, I've been offering myself as an ecstatic white sacrifice to anyone with an income of less than five thousand.

HUSBAND And so the father is . . .

WIFE Social Injustice, on a large and general scale.

HUSBAND I see.

WIFE And now you'll leave me, won't you?

HUSBAND Me? Leave you now? (*Laughs peculiarly.*) I want to stay more than ever. (*Cleans his pipe carefully.*) What would you say . . . if I said . . . that everything you've told me . . . excites me?

WIFE Excites you?

HUSBAND Sets my blood boiling. Gives me strange, wild frissons of desire. . . . What would you say if I said that your ghetto experiences have lit a lurid light in my own loins?

WIFE Really?

HUSBAND (*Still cleaning his pipe; not looking at her.*) What would you say . . . if I said . . . that I suddenly want to exercise—how shall I put it?—a *droit de seigneur* on you? That I want to steal you from the peasants and carry you into my bedroom and ravage you with the reading lights going full blaze? (*Looks at her carefully.*) What would you say if I said that? (*Pause; she looks at him coyly.*)

WIFE I'd say . . . do it.

HUSBAND Mmmm.

WIFE (*Hastily.*) And let me add this: Let me add that a woman, too, is capable of weird desires. This is hard to say, but looking at you now, slouched in that chair, surrounded by your books and papers, I suddenly have the strange urge to experience the stale comforts of bourgeois married love. They say that Americans in Paris, surfeited by the rich food, yearn for the simple hamburger. So it is with me. For you. Tonight.

HUSBAND (*Getting up slowly.*) Then . . .

WIFE (*Backing away from him.*) But there's still this! (*Indicating her stomach.*) This problem!

HUSBAND (*Moving toward her.*) That's no problem.

WIFE No problem?

HUSBAND That's just the premise to the problem. Now we've solved the problem, we no longer need the premise.

WIFE I fail to follow.

HUSBAND That's just the starting mechanism. Now the motor's going, we no longer need the starter.

WIFE (*Looking down at her stomach.*) Oh.

HUSBAND (*Stalking her.*) That's not really a baby you have in there.

WIFE (*Backing away.*) Not really a baby?

HUSBAND No. That's a balloon you have in there.

WIFE A balloon?

HUSBAND A balloon. Or a bladder. Or an old beach ball.

WIFE It's a baby. I'm practically positive.

HUSBAND No, no. Look. I'll show you. (*Takes the pointed metal prong of his pipe cleaner and gives her a quick, neat jab in the stomach.*) Touché! (*There is a pop, and then a hissing sound. She slowly deflates. They both watch.*) You see? The problem was simply academic. (*Pause.*)

WIFE (*Looking at him sheepishly.*) Aren't we awful?

HUSBAND (*Going to his chair, closing his book, carefully marking the place.*) You started it.

WIFE I know. It was my turn. You started the last one.

HUSBAND (*Neatening his books and papers.*) Well, it's fun.

WIFE Shouldn't we see a psychiatrist?

HUSBAND (*Tapping out his pipe; putting his glasses in his glasses case.*) Why? We're happy. (*Turns off his light. The stage is now lit only from a light off left.*)

WIFE But we're so depraved! (*He looks at her, then throws back his head and gives a long Tarzan-like whoop; then he pounds his chest like a gorilla; she giggles.*) Quiet! You'll wake the children! (*He picks her up in his arms; she pummels him melodramatically; speaks in an English accent.*) No, Tarzan! White men do not take women by force! No, Tarzan! White men court their women! They are civilized, Tarzan. It's very complicated. Do you understand what I am saying? Com-pli-ca-ted. . . . Com-pli- . . . (*She giggles and kicks as he carries her off left.*)

Curtain.

DAVID HARE

The Bay at Nice

CHARACTERS

VALENTINA NROVKA
SOPHIA YEPILEVA
ASSISTANT CURATOR
PETER LINITSKY

A large room with a gilt ceiling and a beautiful parquet floor. At the back hangs Guérin's huge oil painting of Iris and Morpheus, a triumphant nude sitting on a cloud over the body of the King of Sleep. The room is airy and decaying. It is almost empty but for some tables pushed to the back and some gilt and red plush hard chairs. Sitting on one of these is VALENTINA NROVKA. She is a lively woman, probably in her sixties, but it's hard to tell. She is dressed in black. Her daughter SOPHIA is standing right at the far end of the room, looking out of the main door. She is in her early thirties, much more plainly dressed in a coat and pullover and plain skirt.

VALENTINA You don't want to leave an old woman.

SOPHIA You're not old. (*VALENTINA looks around disapprovingly.*)

VALENTINA This graveyard! I'm not going to speak to all those old idiots.

SOPHIA They expect it.

VALENTINA Nonsense! I'll sit by myself. (*SOPHIA is still looking anxiously out of the door.*)

SOPHIA I'm afraid we've offended the curator.

VALENTINA Don't say *we*. I offended him. He was shabbily dressed.

SOPHIA He wanted you to see the new extension.

VALENTINA What for? He insults the walls by hanging them with all that socialist realism. Whirlpools of mud. I'd rather look at bare walls. At least they are cleanly painted. I'm tired of looking anyway. "Look, look . . ." (*She smiles, anticipating her own story.*) Picasso lived in a house so ugly—

/ 153