

## JACK & ANGEL – The wise spirit

JACK

*He looks at the blank music paper for a while. Stares at the torn-up lease. Looks at the blank paper for a while longer. Looks at the torn-up contract. Looks at the blank paper again, suddenly looking twice his age, probably because he just made the biggest decision of his life. Looks around. Notices Dom's second champagne glass. Takes the glass. Taps it with his fingernail. Listens to the sound. Pours the glass full of Champagne.*

Come out!

*Angel climbs out of the wardrobe, which, for some reason, is glowing from the inside. She is eternally young, and ancient, and radiant, and wise, and she is finally wearing the dress that was on the rack in the first act.*

ANGEL

Why me?

JACK

I like duets more than arias.

*He offers her the glass. They drink.*

And I wanted to say I'm sorry, because however horrid I was today to Bella and Dom, the worst thing I've done in my life was to you. I promised you a song, and I didn't write it. Now there is one fewer song in the world.

ANGEL

You can still write it.

JACK

I can write a song, but that one – the one that an Italian lad of twenty-three promised to his half-naked soprano – that song won't ever be written, and I'm sadder about that than about anything else.

*Pause.*

But I am glad to see you. Perhaps I am finally asleep. Are you still singing? Married? Alive?

ANGEL

How would I know if I'm alive? You tell me.

JACK

*Shrugs.*

I don't even remember your name. But I want you here, with me, now. Because I need to set one more thing on fire.

*Jack looks down. Angel follows his glance. He is looking at the blank music paper.*

ANGEL

No. No!

JACK

I am done.

ANGEL

You love music!

JACK

I love food. Doesn't mean I have to be a chef. Least of all I want to be a roast.

ANGEL

You want to – unbutton me again? Remember how easy it was? Or remember how your lips felt on my skin? You'll think of a transcendent melody at the first touch, I promise. Or should I sing for you? I don't sing for everyone, but I will sing for you, I would hit all the notes, even the ones that have not been written yet, and they would all be for you!

JACK

I am done. You know what I will do? I will lock myself in the kitchen. And I will light the stove. And I will put a frying pan on the stove. And in this pan, I will toast a slice of a baguette. Then I'll fry a fillet mignon, three and a quarter minutes per side in half butter, half olive oil, and I will place it on top. Then I'll cover it with a slab of foie gras, at least a finger thick. Sauce: Madeira and truffles. I plan to eat one of these at least twice a week for the next thirty years.

ANGEL

This is not you.

JACK

This is me. I'm not saying it will be easy. I'm sure I will cry at some point.

ANGEL

You can still write! You can write whatever you want! Music is an ideal art, it can evolve forever!

JACK

It did you good, thirteen years in the wardrobe. Music might be infinite, but human life isn't. What was that story, about Hercules, I think, how he traveled to the place beyond which there was no other place? And then he stuck his oar into the ground, and looked around, and maybe sighed, and went back down into the green valley, because he was tired.

ANGEL

Ulysses, not Hercules.

JACK

Of course. I'm tired, darling. And there's London breathing at my heels. I stopped it today, twice. But one day I won't be so lucky.

ANGEL

You have immortality within the grasp of your hand.

JACK

I'm eminently practical, and immortality is impossible.

ANGEL

Figaro will live forever.

JACK

That is easy for those who do not exist.

ANGEL

William Tell existed.

JACK

And now he is a myth. He has no life outside of his story. The moment the curtain descends, he dies. But I – I exist. And now I am done.

*He picks up the blank sheet of music paper and tears it in two.*

*She steps away from him – and then is struck with a new thought.*

ANGEL

Bella! Go, run, chase her! If you will not write, you can go with her, you can bring her back!

JACK

No.

ANGEL

Don't you love her?

JACK

I love her. And I want to keep loving her. And that's why I let her go.

*Pause.*

ANGEL

You could have been a great composer.

*Pause.*

JACK

It sure is a singular sight, this portrait gallery of great composers. All of them made of their own material. There's Bach with his granite facade; Mozart, bright as a crystal, edges sharp enough to draw blood; and my friend Beethoven with his cumulonimbus hair. And next to them, is this funny-looking man with fat cheeks, a pointy nose, and a head shaped like a potato – only the greatest composer in the history of the universe, imagine that.

ANGEL

And so very modest.

JACK

What – me? – why me? – since when is this in any way about me? – were you even listening in your wardrobe?! I'm talking about Handel!

ANGEL

Why Handel?

JACK

Because he did go to London. And even in London, he was able to write – transcendent music. I'm not that. I'm – Jack, thumbing my nose at London from the safety of Paris; still funny; still afraid of being boring and of nothing else; still – and always, for now and ever! – in love with Bella.

*Pause.*

Who said to hold eternity in the palm of your hand?

ANGEL

Blake. Infinity, not eternity.

JACK

Call it what you will. I hold it. And I know it's light – like dandelion fluff, like the high A on an oboe. And I blow at it – gently, like I used to blow on Bella's cheek when she fell asleep. And it floats, for a moment. And then it's gone. Because it's not mine to keep, and never was. I'm the only one who knows this, no one else. Unless Mozart also knew it, when he drank himself to death at thirty-five. But then again, everything all of us ever do, we borrow from Mozart.

*From outside the room, comes the distant “Trioumphe!” of the operatic chorus.*

There’s the crescendo – and now I’m waking up. Art is a tool, my sweet ghost. It does things. Usually, to the artist.

*Opens the wardrobe.*

Time to face the curtain.

*Angel kisses him on the forehead and disappears inside. Jack closes the wardrobe. Looks around the room. Tidies up the torn papers. When he is ready to go, he opens the door –*

*– and then we hear it: “Liberty, Descending from the Skies”, the finale of his last opera ever. It is exactly as it was described – the seven-note tune, first three ascending, last four a climactic turn – and it grows, acquiring instruments and voices, wandering across distant tonalities, building up – and up – and up, while Gioachino Rossini is slowly sliding down the side of the door, his face covered with his hands, because the time when he cries is not in the future, it is now, it is right now, as the music builds into the crescendo, thunderous and perfect.*

*The voices stop before the instruments do. On the final line of the music he stands up, wipes off his tears, straightens his costume, and steps into the void.*

*There is no applause.*