

HORNS

CHARLOTTE: Even when I was a little child, no one wanted phonographs. Everyone said to me, "It's so old-fashioned!" They all wanted radios. But what did I want with a radio? To hear Hinner babble? No, thank you! That is the reason that, even today, I don't have a radio or a television.

For me, gramophones, Polyphones, Pianolas—I must truly say—these machines gave me so much pleasure in my childhood. If I hadn't had them, I'm not sure I would've survived. Things were so ghastly with my father—everything my mother and I went through.

But the music would pour through the horn and make things better.

(And it carries her away, into some distant corner of her own mind.)

ACT TWO

(In the darkness, the rollicking sound of an old Pianola. Unexpectedly, it ends with the loud slam of a prison door.

Lights rise on ALFRED KIRSCHNER, lying on the floor of his prison cell, striated by light. He looks a bit like a cockroach that's been flapped on its back, helplessly.

ALFRED'S prison uniform hangs on his thin bones like sails on a mast. His glasses are thick, distorting his eyes. His cap is woollen and patched. He has a caustic wit.

Slowly, he rises to a sitting position and addresses

CHARLOTTE as if she were the audience.

Stuck

A LETTER FROM PRISON

ALFRED:

The 17th of April, 1972.

Dear Charlotte,

I was dining at lunch, a scrumptious vegetable stew with mashed potatoes—

(He bellows down the prison corridor to some unseen cook):

Truly exquisite!

(Then he turns back to CHARLOTTE and resumes.)

—when your note arrived. Today's the day I put aside to answer letters, and I thought, Well, if I don't get any mail today I'll just stop writing altogether. Then I'll die, lost and forgotten by the world. So it came in the nick of time. You urged me, "Don't give up! You're not forgotten! You never had hordes of friends, but so what? You always gave a little joy to people, and that's enough." What sweet sentiments, Charlotte. For your sake, I won't give up, and I'll live patiently for the day I'll be set free.

At night, I wrap myself in blankets. I still have headaches and dizzy spells, but I don't think it's the fault of prison conditions. I think it's just age. I've gone so blind I can barely read. I just wander from one doctor to the next. They zap you with electricity, record it on paper and—voilà—an electrocardiogram. The dentist here is a real dictator. He plans to pull another one of my teeth. By the time you get this letter, I'll probably be nothing but gums. Alfred sans teeth is not a pretty sight!

(ALFRED curls his lips over his gums to appear toothless, and grinnaces to illustrate his point.)

Please give your family my warm regards. Tell them I'm still the same old Alfred—

(To a prison guard, somewhere in the darkness):

—and I won't be beaten down!

(Again, back to CHARLOTTE.)

When I'm released, I know exactly what I'll do. I'll play my favorite old waltz on the piano. Strauss, probably. Then I'll put "*Fritzingstinder*" on the Polyphone and play that, too.

With a calliopic and symphonic farewell,
Your Alfred

(ALFRED removes his glasses and becomes DOUG. DOUG stares at the glasses, considering them for a moment.)

ERASURE

End

DOUG:
Charlotte,

I'm afraid—for me—your ~~Stasi~~ file is an exercise in frustration.