

A SHORT MELODY TO THE END

A Play in Two Acts

by

Peter Francis

Copyright ©
2019, by Peter
Francis

336 Lynn Street
Harrington Park, NJ 07640
Phone: (201) 805 3690
E-Mail:
franpe02@gettysburg.edu

Cast of Characters

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| <u>Unice Jamison:</u> | (Malinda Trent) A woman in her late 60s. The Flemming's caretaker. |
| <u>Eric Flemming:</u> | (Langdon Summerfield) A 17-year-old boy. |
| <u>Dischord:</u> | The jeer. |
| <u>Players:</u> | Two piano players. |
| <u>Harmony:</u> | The violin. |
| <u>Announcers:</u> | On the radio. |
| <u>Verna Flemming:</u> | Eric's mother. |

Scene

A house just outside of Chicago.

Time

Friday, October 4, 1935.

ACT IScene 1

SETTING: The entryway of the FLEMMING house. A floor radio and a door are in the back. A small picture of a mother, father, and son sits next to the vase of dead flowers on the small table. The crooked clock that hangs next to the door reads 4:05 pm.

AT RISE: A loud train whistle sounds and the room shakes. The radio starts playing static in the lit entryway. UNICE slowly and austerely enters from the right. Scoffs, looks around, and chuckles as she realizes that, of course, she is alone. She breaks the air of decorum and stoops down.

UNICE

This piece of junk always . . .

(UNICE bangs the radio and fiddles with a knob. The last few calls of the 3rd game of the 1935 world series comes on. She pulls up a stool and listens. Looking around and starting quietly but getting louder)

Come on, now. Come on, now, French.

(Pause.)

Finish this, Larry.

(Pause.)

Laaaaaaarrrrrrrrryyyyyyyy!

(The last play gets announced. UNICE angrily turns the radio off.)

God da . . .

(UNICE clears her throat,
stands back up, pats off
her dress, and resumes
the formality. She looks
at the clock and reaches
up to straighten it out.)

That all wet train, bustling by every day, shaking us up
every which way, throwing everything off kilter, . . .

(UNICE does a double take
at the dead flowers.
Looks out to the audience
and does a short chuckle.
She keeps smiling at the
audience as she rummages
under the table and picks
up a watering can. She
tries to pour water but
realizes that there is no
water in it. She hides
the watering can and
becomes overly dramatic
and looks up to the sky.)

Oh, the train, throwing everything off kilter, sending in
billows

(UNICE coughs once
shortly.)

and billows of smoke

(UNICE coughs twice
shortly.)

that suffocate the flowers that I diligently tend to.

(UNICE breaks the drama,
fluffs the flowers and
muses to herself.)

Well, I've always liked dried flowers.

(Off, a phone rings.)

UNICE

Oh! I'm coming, Lucy.

(UNICE walks right and a stage
arm sticks out the phone and
receiver from the right wing.
UNICE takes the phone while

looking slightly puzzled. The arm stays outstretched, holding the receiver.)

UNICE

(Into the phone.)

I know: that Larry French, what a crumb.

(Pause.)

Lu. . . Lucy, Lucy! Pip or not, that man is going to lose the Cubs the series. And please, shout a little louder. I'm sure Charlie would like to hear you talking about Larry French like that in the middle of your living room.

(Pause.)

Oh I'm sorry to hear that, an extra shift? Well I suppose he's lucky that Wilbur's has a soft spot for vets.

(Pause.)

Will I catch you at Arthur's tomorrow? The bulletin said that a pounds of potatoes is only 2 cents and you know how Verna loves the Irish stew my mam used to make.

(Pause.)

Oh, well, love to Charlie and the kids.

(UNICE puts the phone back on the receiver and the arm draws back out of sight. UNICE looks off slightly confused.)

Thank you?

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

Scene 2

SETTING: Inside the study, there is a long grand piano that opens to the back. Behind the piano is a tall expanse of bookshelves with various golden instruments occupying careful sections. A clock on the wall reads around 4:20pm. A red armchair is furthest from the entryway. The candles on the piano and the walls are not lit but the ornate chandelier that hangs above the piano emits a warm glow.

AT RISE: The study is dark except for the chandelier. ERIC enters from left holding a golden cup, humming a broken melody. He is dressed in a robe and has a short grey beard. He walks over to the end of the piano and pauses and turns slowly to the audience. He lets his eyes scan the crowd.

ERIC

Hello?

(Pause.)

What, exactly, are you all doing here?

(ERIC sets the cup on the table next to the armchair and walks toward the audience.)

Did Malinda let you in?

(Pause.)

I've told her so many times that I don't want my adoring fans just wandering into my study.

(ERIC walks shortly to the door and shouts through it.)

Malinda, did you let these people into my house?!

UNICE

(Off, shouting back.)

How many times have I told you not to call me that?

ERIC

(Continues shouting.)

It would do you well to remember who is the employer and who is the employee around here, Malinda.

(UNICE Enters from the right with a frying pan and tries to open the door but it is locked. She leans into the door.)

UNICE

(Shouting.)

I know clear as day that Verna hired me 12 years ago and since the crash she has been nice enough to let me stay here and help out.

(UNICE wiggles the handle viciously and lets it go, then starts walking back off stage right. She pauses, turns back, and shouts one last time with a mocking tone.)

It would do you well to remember who makes the food around here.

(UNICE exits muttering to herself.)

ERIC

(Chuckles slightly.)

Forgive me.

(ERIC turns back to the audience and tidies up his robe.)

Where are my manners?

(ERIC moves closer to the audience and looks at people in the front row.)

I am sure plenty of you recognize me, but for those of you who are new here, my name is Langdon Summerfield.

(ERIC waits for a response that never comes and leans forward.)

The very well known pianist? You have heard of me?

(ERIC moves forward a bit more.)

You all look very familiar.

(ERIC goes into the audience and up to someone sitting in the front row. He loses his formality as he gets further. He bends down and looks them up and down, then outstretches a hand to shake.)

What is your name?

(Waits for a response and keeps shaking the hand awkwardly.)

I had a cousin named {insert name}. Did you know that? You know, you look remarkably like {him/her/they}. Curious.

(ERIC looks up into the crowd and makes eye contact with someone else. He finally drops the first hand and climbs over people to get to them. ERIC moves awkwardly close to the new person and takes their hand. He doesn't break eye contact.)

You look like {insert name}'s {brother/sister/sibling}.

(Coughs.)

My cousin not

(Pause.)

uh

(ERIC scrunches his face and puts his other hand over his eyes. Makes a troubled intake sound and

then looks back at the
new person. He continues
a bit louder than
appropriate)

Do you know {him/her/they}?

(ERIC points back to the
first person and waits
for a response, still
squeezing thier hand)

DISCHORD

(Also sitting in the
audience, interjects very
obnoxiously.)

Oh, please spare us this turmoil. What are you talking
about, ERIC?

(ERIC looks over confused.)

DISCHORD

You are not making any sense. Can't you see how
uncomfortable you are making these people?

(DISCHORD looks around
and spots someone who
looks nervous.)

See {him/her/them} right there? {He/She/They} looks
terrified that you are going to climb over and interrogate
{him/her/them} with a death grip on {his/her/their} hand
too. This is too much, ``Langdon``.

ERIC

Hello?

(ERIC looks around, lets
the second person go, and
starts to move toward the
nervous person.)

Who are you?

DISCHORD

(Exasperatedly)

You know who I am, ERIC.

ERIC

(Changes course)

Where are you?

(ERIC starts to stumble
toward DISCORD.)

Why are you calling me ERIC?

DISCHORD

You just can't help yourself, can you? You always have to
be the center of attention.

(ERIC falls down and starts
to cough.)

ERIC

Stop it.

DISCHORD

Stop acting so dramatic and tortured!

(ERIC finally reaches DISCHORD
in the front row.)

ERIC

Why are you doing this in front of everyone?

DISCHORD

(Chuckling.)

You put me here,

(DISCHORD stands up.)

so you have to deal with it.

(ERIC backs up toward the
stage, frightened.

DISCHORD walks forward)

Now get on with this waste of time, you pathetic, tired,
``old man''.

(DISCHORD sits down while ERIC
gets back on stage, positions
himself, and readopts the formality.)

ERIC

(Nervously but slowly
regaining his
confidence.)

Well, what were we talking about?

(Pause.)

Ah yes, me. I am glad that all of you,

(ERIC stares at DISCORD)

most of you are here. Just moments before my entrance, I received some truly mortifying news, so I am glad for the company.

(ERIC walks to the arm
chair and sits down.)

However, I am afraid I must give bit of a background.

DISCHORD

(Disappointed.)

Not again!

ERIC

(Smiles, content with
himself.)

Like I said, I am a very well accomplished concert pianist

(ERIC gestures toward the
piano.)

I knew from a very young age that I was destined for something special. My mother told me that I...

LIFE STORY HERE

ERIC

And that brings us to today.

(ERIC looks off and picks up his cup and takes a drink. He stares at the piano lovingly and then his facial expression goes blank. He keeps staring and says nothing.)

(DISCHORD clears his throat.)

DISCHORD

Hello?

(Pause.)

ERIC?

(Pause.)

``Langdon?''

ERIC

(Annoyed.)

What?

DISCHORD

(Chuckles in disbelief.)

No. We aren't doing this. Keep going. You said you got some ``mortifying'' news?

ERIC

Ah yes, well. You see, the sickly cough that I had as a child. The same one that helped me live through the Civil War from the safety of my piano bench, became more serious in the past few months. A few hours before I entered, Dr. Schaulken informed me that it has turned to Tuberculosis.

DISCHORD

Ha!

ERIC

(Looks down at his cup.)

Other than getting some fresh air, there is nothing that can be done.

DISCHORD

That is ridiculous, ERIC. The Civil ended in 1865.

(Pause.)

ERIC, you said were born in 1879!

ERIC

(Ignoring DISCHORD.)

In the short amount of time since I found out, I have thought a lot about how the public will react to such tragic news.

(Pause.)

It's strange, you see, I always knew that I was going to die someday. Everyone must know that of themselves, and I feel the same as I did yesterday, but something has definitely changed.

(Pause.)

I suppose there is no use in fixating on the inevitable.

(ERIC takes a sip from
the cup.)

DISCHORD

But then why even mention it, ERIC? You can't play the sob story if you aren't at least going to walk us through reveling in the reality of your upcoming departure. I'm sure I can speak for all of us trapped in here: watching you break down over the thought of collapsing in a bloody coughing fit will make this all the more bearable.

(Pause.)

Think about that ``Langdon``: your final breath will be forced, sputtering by thick crimson slime, and will cut into your throat like a sword. Before you can even decide to give up, your weak body will choose for you.

ERIC

(Ignoring DISCHORD.)

There is something else that I would rather spend my last few days on:

(ERIC stands up and puts
the cup on the table.)

complete originality.

(ERIC moves toward the
piano bench and leans
against the piano.)

Perhaps you own my most famous record, the Handel Suites.

(ERIC looks out
optimistically and waits
for applause.)

DISCHORD

Move on.

ERIC

It truly is what I considered to be the masterpiece of a lifetime. I spent years mastering all of Handel's keyboard suites. Millions on millions of notes, perfectly ordered in my head. Of course, Handel could have only played on a harpsicord or organ for the majority of his life and these instruments do not allow for any dynamic change, but I read every piece of literature that I could find that Handel wrote.

(ERIC sits on the piano
bench.)

In fact, at one time, I was the leading scholar on Handel's expressionist technique. From the countless copies and variations of music sheets that I studied I deduced every bit of intended expression possible. On my record, I not only give the original suites on the harpsicord but also the most historically accurate interpretation of the suites on the piano, that have ever been recorded.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

(END OF ACT)

ACT IIScene 1

SETTING: Back in the study, the chair is now only a folding chair and all of the golden instruments on the shelves are gone. The chandelier is dilapidated.

AT RISE: ERIC sits at the piano with his head down to his hands.

ERIC

(Still a bit choked up and sniffing.)

I apologize for the outburst.

(Pause.)

I just . . .

(Pause.)

I don't know why . . .

DISCHORD

Why you just had a tantrum like a child? It's because you are just a child, ERIC.

(Pause and DISCHORD stands up.)

Give up.

(DISCHORD walks slowly to toward ERIC.)

Just let it go al--

ERIC

(Cutting off DISCHORD.)

I have been very clear.

(Pause. ERIC continues in almost a whisper.)

My name is not ERIC.

(ERIC picks up his head and looks at DISCHORD.)

ERIC

Sit down

(Pause.)

or leave.

(DISCHORD turns around and puts his hands up in acceptance. He sits down and rolls his eyes.)

ERIC

If it is okay with all of you, I would like to share with you the story that my mother used to tell me when I was upset as a child.

DISCHORD

You know you are going to do it no matter what we say.

ERIC

(Ignoring DISCHORD.)

It is from *The Year that Everyone Forgot*, the first book that my mother bought me as a child. Before I could read, we would sit at the piano and she would read from it while playing. I later learned that she was playing Debussy's 'Petite Suite'.

(ERIC stands up and walks over to the chair. He picks it up and moves it closer to the piano. As he does this, two PLAYERS dressed in black enter from stage left and sit at the piano.)

I can still see how lightly her fingers danced on the keys.

(ERIC walks to the bookshelf behind. He looks for a short while to find the book. When he takes it, every other book on the shelf disappears. After dusting it off, he sits down and the PLAYERS begin playing Debussy's Petite Suite. ERIC waits and begins reading the story.)

ERIC

The Trade.

(Pause.)

In the year that everyone forgot, there were two distinct villages, separated by a fast-flowing river that started high on a mountain in the north, and slipped all the way down to the ocean in the south. The banks of the river were matted with brown slimy grass and moss and the water was moving so quickly, that mist coming off it was like a thick cloud hanging low on the ground.

(Pause.)

In the eastern village, lived a community of tree dwellers who called themselves Abers. These Abers avoided the slopes of the river by making huts far above the ground, connected by bridges and intricate rope work. With a pipeline from the river supplying fresh water, the Abers lived happily, feeding off the plentiful birds called Bashtiks who also nested in the trees. After living with the Bashtiks, the Abers developed the appropriate bark-made wardrobe, adorned with the colorful feathers of the Bashtik, to deal with the notorious ear-nipping nature of the birds.

(Pause.)

The lofty homes also served the purpose of protecting the Abers from the ground dwelling Chiselgawks who derived great pleasure from tunneling under-ground and snapping at the ankles of any unsuspecting victims. The Chiselgawks could not climb, so the Abers felt safe.

(Pause.)

In the Western village, lived a community of cave dwellers, who called themselves the Dridori. The Bashtik birds could fly over the river and pestered the Dridori, so to escape the ear-bititng Birds, they decided to live in caves and tunnels, with beautiful maps painted on the walls and fresh water piped in from the river. After a while of hunting the Chiselgawks that tunneled under the river, they found a certain rock that when crushed, its powder deterred the Chiselgawks from coming close. The caves were damp, but wearing coats made from the always plentiful supply of Chiselgawk hide, they were able to stay dry and warm.

(Pause.)

And so, the Abers and the Dridori lived separate lives, until one day when river ran extremely dry. Both communities' pipes stopped supplying water. The Abers decided to send their fastest runner to the ground to check the pipeline and hopefully avoid. At about the same time, the Dridori decided to do the same.

(Pause.)

The two champions ventured out of their homes and for the first time, saw each other. The Aber saw a Bashtik coming for the Dridori and tossed her his bark helmet and it stopped its gnashing beak so the brave Dridori girl just swatted the dopey bird away. A Chiselgawk came for the Aber champion but the girl just reached into a pouch and through a handful of the rock dust and the the beast just passed just as soon as it got close enough to his ankles.

(Pause.)

Both of the champions were amazed with what the other had brought with them but they were wary of the stranger they had just met. Upon return to their villages with news of the dry river, the champions also shared their stories of how the mysterious people across the river were able to deal with the beasts that they so dreadfully feared.

(Pause.)

In time, a passage was found on the mountain to cross the river and thus a trade route established. At first, the Bashtik feathers and tree bark that were so plentiful among the Abers were considered a valuable commodity to the Dridori while they had almost no value for the Abers who had almost an endless supply. Similarly, the Chiselgawk fur and repellent rocks were commonplace and ordinary in the Dridori community but were prized possessions among the Abers.

(Pause.)

It remained like this for a short while: the richest of the communities were able to afford the nicest and most valuable things from across the river. Soon, however, the less wealthy citizens of both communities, who were paid by the rich to facilitate the trade, saved enough money to afford the merchandise they were carrying, and so it was no longer as much of a status symbol to adorn the prizes of the beasts on the far side of the river.

(Pause.)

Soon, with the separation of class closing, some decided to explore the other sides of the river. In time, the Abers and Dridori started living together and, with their new protection from all the beasts in the land, were able to finally live on the surface, once again.

(Pause.)

The new Dridori-Aber households on the surface became accustomed to eating both of the beasts on the land, having

the necessary protection, but because the Chiselgawks no longer had a safe home on the Eastern side of the river, their population started to decrease. Similarly, the Bashtik birds that were able to escape the Abers by flying to the Western side of the river no longer could, so their population started to decrease as well.

(Pause.)

The Aber diet had consisted of only Bashtik Birds, so they started to get sick when eating the Chiselgawk meat. Unknowingly, the water coming through the rock pipes picked up a mineral necessary to neutralize a toxin in the Chiselgawk meat. The Dridori diet had consisted of only Chiselgawk, so they started to get sick when eating the Bashtik meat. Unknowingly, the water coming through the wooden pipes absorbed a sap that made the meat non-poisonous.

(Pause.)

This development led to the families living on the western (and formerly Dridori side) to go back underground to be close to the mineral water that they needed to survive. The families on the eastern (and formerly Aber side) resumed a life in the trees, so they could get the water from the sap lined pipes that were built and would make their food safe.

(Pause.)

Once the people were once again separated and off the ground, the Chiselgawks and the Bashtik populations were no longer in danger, for the westerners no longer hunted the Bashtiks and the Easterners no longer hunted the Chiselgawks.

(The PLAYERS finish the suite,
stand up, and walk behind ERIC.
They gently touch his shoulder
as they pass and exit stage
left. ERIC reads the last
sentence of the story.)

ERIC

The once valuable relics of the other side faded away with lack of use and soon, the trade route overgrew and the river began flowing harder once again.

(ERIC closes the book and stands.
He walks and put the book back

on the shelf but as it touches
the shelf and he turns around,
the book vanishes. He walks
to the piano, sits down, and
stares off and down.)

DISCHORD

(Slow claps and stands
up.)

Touching

(Pause.)

Really touching

(DISCHORD slow claps and
turns toward the
audience.)

Show of hands: who actually understood what that meant?

(*If anyone raises their
hand, DISCHORD acts very
surprised and walks over
to them intimidatingly.)

*Really? What did it mean?

(Pause.)

Exactly.

(DISCHORD turns back
toward Eric.)

It didn't mean anything.

(Pause.)

You know that, ERIC. You can try to tell yourself this
little story to try distract yourself, but I won't let you
get away so easily.

(DISCHORD walks toward
ERIC.)

You aren't special. You aren't any better than anyone else.
In the end, you will die the same as everyone, exactly as
you lived your life, alone.

(Pause.)

You know, you didn't cough once during that pathetic
monologue. Did you forget that you are supposed to be dying
of Tuberculosis?

ERIC

(Softly looks up and
out.)

In the end . . .

DISCHORD

Well I have reached my limit. I can no longer participate
in this trainwreck.

(DISCHORD pauses and
turns to the audience.)

Anyone who wishes to join me, can leave and be rid of this
misery.

(DISCHORD turns toward
the general exit and
starts to leave.)

ERIC

Please.

(ERIC stands up.)

Don't leave now!

(Pause.)

I can't handle how empty it will be.

DISCHORD

(Turns around.)

Interesting. Now, you want me to stay?

(Pause.)

And ``empty''? How insulting to all of these people who
have suffered through this for you.

(DISCHORD leaves.)

ERIC

(ERIC sits back down at
the piano and looks back
out to the audience.)

He's right, you know, there is no way avoid isolation. One
way or another, we all end up alone.

(Pause.)

We all will die and as we discussed before, only original
creation can be immortal.

(Pause.)

The deduction is clear. My melody will die with me.

(Cough.)

You know I envy all of you. You can watch me die and you'll just keep sitting there as you are right now. The moments after, suspended in nothing, will be lost to me, but you can exhale.

(Pause.)

The thought of not knowing is just crippling.

(ERIC gets more agitated.)

I know none of you care. You sit there smug and comfortable. I was comfortable too. I thought I was fine. None of you know the cancers and diseases lying in you dormant, waiting to come out. What faults of your biology will be exploited to bring about your demise, and what tune will you hum as you venture off as I do now into the unknown? Is it original? I thought mine was original.

(Pause.)

I know mine is original. The way I hear it in my head is not of the way anyone could hear it through the air. To bring it out distorts it, ruins it, makes it a copy and a lie. I know it is unique, never before heard, but only in my mind does it have that label. If you could hear it as I do you would recognize this as fact. To write it down would only be to make it conform with arbitrary symbols and frequencies, everything unoriginal and already constructed. But in my head it is completely free from abstract or physical constraints.

(Pause.)

But don't you see this is the problem? Anything that is constructed in a way that has already been established completely violates the thought of originality. But this also means that anything or even idea that is constructed using words or matter or other abstractions also violate originality.

(Now more quiet.)

Simply, the act of being

(Pause.)

is unoriginal.

(Pause.)

I believe now, that I was wrong. I cannot envy you. Now you must continue to live with the haunting notion that everything you do can be derived in some way from the parents of the practice and any thought that you have is

just the interplay of neurons. You have to settle with that, or you could join me.

(Pause.)

I suppose if we are all doomed to be ungentle and fictitious I should attempt to give you a shadow of my melody as a parting thank you, and as I was recently told, I will die as I lived my life, a performer.

(ERIC begins playing the piano part of the 'The Short Melody' and HARMONY emerges from the back of the stage wearing a red dress and playing the violin part of 'The Short Melody'. ERIC doesn't seem to be surprised. Then the piano begins to rotate so the back of the piano is facing out. ERIC coughs and keeps playing but ducks his head lower. The music slowly becomes more noisy and static-y. As the piano turns the rest of the way, the sound completely transitions to be coming from the radio. ERIC is no longer at the piano and HARMONY stops playing and exits stage left. The radio gets louder and as the song finishes.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

Scene 2

SETTING: We are back in the entryway. The flowers are now alive. The clock on the wall reads about 5:30

AT RISE: UNICE walks out from stage right and listens. Over the air, an announcement comes.

ANNOUNCER 1

And that was 'The Short Melody,' in memory of the great Langdon Summerfield.

ANNOUNCER 2

Unfortunately, we just received word from the Upper Chicago hospital that Summerfield just moments ago, succumbed to Tuberculosis at age 65.

ANNOUNCER 1

Here at 97.2 we would like to send our prayers to the Summerfield Family in their--

(The door handle begins to wiggle and UNICE turns the radio off. VERNA comes through the door, dressed in a tidy uniform.)

VERNA

(Puts down her bag and hugs UNICE.)

Whatever you are cooking smells superb!

UNICE

Don't tell me you can't recognize the smell of my mother's Irish stew?

VERNA

It's been so long, but now that you mention it, I'm getting flashbacks to

(Pause.)

was it Charlie and Lucy's anniversary when you made it last?

UNICE

Yes, I believe so! I know it is your favorite and Arthur's was having such a great sale on potatoes. Keeping that in mind, and considering . . . I didn't think you would be too opposed to having the Irish stew a little more frequently in the upcoming days.

VERNA

Oh, UNICE, you remind me every day why I love having you here.

UNICE

Well, thank you, Mrs. Flemming.

VERNA

UNICE, you know we are practically the same age. For all reasons other than biological you are my sister. It's
VERNA.

UNICE

I know, you made that clear years ago.

(Pause.)

You also forgot to take your name tag off at work.

(VERNA grabs the name tag by
surprise.)

VERNA

Oh Arnold always gets mad when we do that. I'm not sure why. I guess he just likes having something to complain about other than money.

UNICE

(Hushed.)

Did you hear the news about Langdon Summerfield?

VERNA

(A bit louder and faster
than UNICE would like.)

Oh, is he performing again? ERIC would love to see him.

UNICE

(Still hushed.)

Quite the opposite: he died of at UCH of Tuberculosis just a little while ago.

VERNA

Oh that is really too bad, a local celebrity, and ERIC will be so disappointed that he never got to hear him live. You know he just loves the Summerfield records that you got him for Christmas last year. I don't think I have seen that boy that happy since before Bill left us.

(Pause.)

I think alimony is the only good thing that came out of that marriage.

UNICE

And ERIC, I hope you just forgot to mention.

VERNA

(Kind of embarrassed.)

Yes, of course.

(Pause.)

How did he take the news?

UNICE

There is no way that he could have heard. He's been in his room all day. I only just heard now on the radio. He has been talking and shouting to himself again and he seemed pretty aggressive earlier, so I thought it best not to tell him.

(Pause.)

I know that this is a sore spot for you, and that you love him very much, but I feel as though you are losing him. I heard that there are new--

VERNA

(Interrupting.)

UNICE, you know I respect you very much, but this conversation convinced my husband that I wasn't worth sticking around for our son. I do not want to go down that road again, especially with you. I know there are new pharmaceuticals being developed, but I know my son and I can't imagine that putting chemicals in his body will make any of this better.

(VERNA gets a bit emotional.)

UNICE

My apologies. I know it's not my place. Please, let's eat. Why don't you settle in and I'll go fetch ERIC.

(VERNA touches UNICE's shoulder as she exits stage right. UNICE walks to the study door and knocks.)

UNICE

ERIC, your mother is home. Come wash up for dinner.

(UNCIE listens for a reply but none comes. Then she moves center stage looking down at her feet. When she gets there, she looks up and at the seat that DISCHORD was in. She tilts her head as if in confusion. She then takes a step back and looks out into the audience for a few seconds.)

UNICE

I am sorry if he made you uncomfortable, but I suppose it is fair to suggest that you all did the same to him.

(UNICE turns to leave but catches herself and faces the audience again.)

If perhaps you didn't care much for his music or what he had to say, I ask that you consider the following.

(UNICE takes a small piece of paper out from a pocket and holds it up to read.)

Maybe zero, is one in five, is one.

(UNICE clears her throat.)

The baker might think the banker a snob, and the banker, the baker, a fool, but the baker must sell and the banker must eat, so they don't .

(UNICE puts the paper back in her pocket.)

Now if you excuse me, Mrs. Flemming will be wanting her tea.

(UNICE exists right.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

(END OF ACT)