

GIRL WITH GUITAR

(Mid-1970s. SONYA sits in a wheelchair. JUDY enters)

JUDY: Good morning, grandma. How are you this morning?

SONYA: Is Harry coming?

JUDY: What would you like to do this morning?

SONYA: Is Harry coming?

JUDY: *(Smiles)* No, grandma, grandpa Harry isn't coming today.

SONYA: When is Harry coming?

JUDY: I don't know, grandma. I mean, he died five years ago. If he hasn't gotten here by now...

SONYA: He's coming today. He said he would. He always says what he does.

JUDY: Yep. That he did. But he's not coming today.

SONYA: We're going dancing. At the Y.

JUDY: At the Y? What Y? When did you ever go to a Y?

SONYA: Tasha, when is Harry coming?

JUDY: Judy, grandma. Don't start that again. Tasha is your other granddaughter, my sister. I'm -

SONYA: When is Harry coming? He said he'd come take me dancing.

JUDY: Well, if you say he's coming, I guess he's coming. I just don't know when. If you're going dancing, that probably wouldn't be until tonight.

SONYA: What dress should I wear?

JUDY: Umm, what dress?

SONYA: For dancing, what dress?

JUDY: Oh, um, I guess a ballroom gown if you're going dancing. *(Facetiously)* You have such a wide assortment to choose from.

(SONYA starts humming Korobushka)

JUDY: *(After listening for a while)* What is that? What are you singing?

(SONYA's humming gets more spirited. She occasionally claps)

JUDY: Wait, I know that. What is that? Damn, I know that.

(SONYA stops)

SONYA: When is Harry coming?

JUDY: What were you just singing, grandma?

SONYA: Harry is taking me dancing.

JUDY: Grandma, listen to me, what were you just singing? It's driving me crazy. *(JUDY tries humming it, but doesn't really know it)*

SONYA: What dress should I wear?

JUDY: Wait, maybe I can play it. ***(JUDY gets her guitar and starts to play, trying to figure out the chords for Korobushka. SONYA smiles upon seeing the guitar come out, but shakes her head when JUDY tries to play Korobushka)***

SONYA: No, no. *(Spoken) Dos Kelbl, Dos Kelbl.*

JUDY: What?

SONYA: *Dos Kelbl.*

JUDY: You know I don't speak Yiddish, grandma. And we're having a hard enough time communicating in English, just like always.

SONYA: *Dos Kelbl. Dos Kelbl.*

JUDY: Yeah, all right, forget it. *(JUDY puts guitar away)*

SONYA: Harry is coming to take me dancing.

JUDY: At the Y, right. I'm not sure how you can Watusi in a wheelchair, but I'm sure you guys will figure it out.

SONYA: What dress do I wear?

JUDY: We'll find you something, grandma, when grandpa comes.

SONYA: Harry.

JUDY: Right. Harry. My grandpa.

SONYA: Harry is coming, Tasha.

(1963. A studio. SONYA in a painter's smock. There is an easel and canvas. JUDY, 18, enters carrying a guitar)

SONYA: You're late.

JUDY: Mom said four o'clock.

SONYA: It's five after.

JUDY: It took you five minutes to answer the door.

SONYA: Why did you bring that?

JUDY: I'm going to the Village after we finish here. The Gaslight.

SONYA: The Gaslight?

JUDY: It's a coffee house. They let anyone sing tonight.

SONYA: What?

JUDY: They let anybody sing.

SONYA: Anybody? America goniff. You're going to listen to whatever no-talent bum comes in off the streets?

JUDY: I'm going to sing.

SONYA: Oh. You're going to sing. Okay. They let anybody sing. I got it. But / don't. So for now you put the guitar down.

JUDY: Am I dressed all right?

SONYA: How would I know? I don't go to those places.

JUDY: I mean am I dressed all right for the painting?

SONYA: Sure. I suppose so. Doesn't really matter.

JUDY: If it doesn't matter, why do I have to do this?

SONYA: Your mother wants me to do paintings of everybody, so I'm doing you. I did your cousins and Tasha, you're the only one left. Tasha wore that, what do you call it -

JUDY: I know what Tasha wore. I see that picture every day. It's the first thing you see when you come in the house.

SONYA: But I don't care what you wear.

JUDY: Okay, fine. I don't care either.

SONYA: Just make sure it's the same thing each time you come.

JUDY: Well, this is pretty much all I ever wear. Where do I go?

SONYA: We'll have to figure that out. Sit on that thing for now (*indicating a chair*).

JUDY: (*Beat*) That's where Tasha sat.

SONYA: (*Irritated*) Right. And you'll probably be breathing some of the air she breathed. I don't think it's going to kill you. (*Mumbled*) Might do you some good.

JUDY: I don't want my picture to look like Tasha's.

SONYA: I said for now. We'll find something.

JUDY: How about this bench?

SONYA: You like the bench? Fine. Sit on the bench. (*As JUDY moves the bench and is about to sit on it*) (*Facetiously*) Not on that part of it! That's where Tasha put her coat.

JUDY: I don't get it. You don't want to do this any more than I want to. Why are we doing it?

SONYA: Are you wearing make-up?

JUDY: Just around the eyes. Is that a problem?

SONYA: I probably won't get that far today. No make-up from now on.

JUDY: Tasha wore make-up.

SONYA: On her it looks good. It's not for you. *(Beat as she prepares easel and paints)*. What do you hear from her?

JUDY: She's doing fine.

SONYA: Is she going pre-med?

JUDY: I think so.

SONYA: Always I thought she'd be a doctor. Good. Very good.

JUDY: Yeah. I'm sure she'll cure cancer by the end of the term.

SONYA: Listen Miss Smartypants. Even if she saves one life, that's one more life than you'll ever save with your guitar. Only, she could have done this at Columbia. She didn't need to go traipsing all the way to Cornell.

JUDY: She wanted to get away, grandma. I think she made that clear.

SONYA: Not a good time. Not a good time.

(SONYA continues to prepare in silence)

JUDY: I saw grandpa this afternoon. *(Beat)* He kind of smiled when he saw me, I think. He was in that room they all sit in, watching TV, or actually not watching TV. The lady there saw I had my guitar and asked if I would play something for the - she called them clients. I think that's weird. I mean, they're patients, aren't they?

SONYA: Not to her.

JUDY: So I took out my guitar and played and sang some songs for them. I sang for almost 45 minutes, and they were really enjoying it, you know, some of them. Even singing along. They weren't singing the same song I was singing, but they were singing along. I'm not sure about grandpa. But the lady asked if I could come back sometime, so I think I'm going to do that. I really liked it, you know. *(Beat)* I'm not sure if I saved any lives, though.

SONYA: Try with your hands in your lap, just looking straight.

(JUDY poses like that)

JUDY: I feel stupid.

SONYA: Doesn't look good, okay. Maybe if you were holding something, like a book.

(JUDY takes out the guitar and holds it)

SONYA: That's what you want?

JUDY: I don't really want to do this at all, we've been over that.

(After a while JUDY starts softly playing. SONYA starts painting)

(Mid-1970s; a continuation of the previous 1970s scene)

JUDY: I'm moving out of your old apartment, grandma. Remember, I moved in there when they moved you here, what's that, like three years ago?

SONYA: Three. I was three.

JUDY: Yeah, I'm sure you were, although it was always hard to imagine you as a kid. Anyway, I was packing stuff up and I found some wonderful pictures. Look, here's one of you and grandpa and mom and Uncle Nate.

SONYA: Nathan is in France.

JUDY: I guess so. They never found his body but that's where the plane was shot down.

SONYA: I was in France.

JUDY: Yeah? Are you sure?

SONYA: I was in France. I was in France.

JUDY: If you say so. I think you came straight here from Russia, or Poland, or whatever it was at the time.

SONYA: I painted France.

JUDY: Oh. Well, it needs another coat. Anyway, thanks for the apartment but it's time to go. Larry wants me to move in with him. It's actually not all that great. First of all, it's a walk-up. Second, most of my nursing home gigs are up here. Third, I'm not crazy about the neighborhood. To tell the truth, I'm not all that crazy about Larry so I don't know why I'm doing it.

SONYA: Nate's in France.

JUDY: Yeah.

SONYA: Harry's in France.

JUDY: Yeah, he was. Cartier sent him to Paris for a while before they shipped him over here.

SONYA: I met Harry in France.

JUDY: Well, unless there's a France somewhere on the Lower East Side, I don't think you met grandpa there. Oh well. But anyway, look at this one. This is you at your easel and it looks like you're painting mom. It's hard to tell from the photo. I vaguely remember there was a painting of mom, but I don't know what happened to it.

SONYA: When is Harry coming?

JUDY: Is there any chance you'd know where it is?

SONYA: When is Harry coming?

JUDY: Tasha probably has it.

SONYA: When is Tasha coming?

JUDY: Comes the revolution.

SONYA: Harry is taking me dancing. I need to dress.

JUDY: Well, you should probably get dressed in something. I have to wheel you downstairs soon anyway. I'm supposed to sing at ten. I guess I need to call Tasha to find out about the painting. Let's see: is it worth it to listen to her lecture me for a half hour on how screwed up I am and how successful she is just so I can find out that she has the painting in storage somewhere? Or lost track of it.

SONYA: When is Tasha coming?

JUDY: She doesn't even hang the one you did of *her*. I guess she thinks it would clash next to the Kandinskys, Miros and Klees. I'll bet if you tried painting her right now it would fit right in.

SONYA: I like to paint.

JUDY: Yeah, grandma. But every time we try you start sucking the brushes. So let me go see what I can find for you to wear.

(SONYA's studio, 1963; a few weeks following previous studio scene. SONYA at easel.

JUDY enters from bathroom, shaking her hands)

JUDY: You have no towels in there.

SONYA: What are you talking about? Of course there's a towel in there.

JUDY: I couldn't find it.

SONYA: Use your pants.

JUDY: Don't you have to dry your hands or your brushes? Why don't you have any towels?

SONYA: Sit. We don't have much time today.

JUDY: Why not?

SONYA: Take out your guitar.

JUDY: My hands are still wet. Why don't we have time? Although I'm not complaining.

SONYA: I'm going to Washington.

JUDY: To the demonstration? With mom and dad?

SONYA: Yes.

JUDY: They didn't mention that to me. I thought you didn't like Martin Luther King.

SONYA: When did I say that?

JUDY: You said he couldn't hold a candle to Ben Davis or Paul Robeson.

SONYA: What do you know about Ben Davis?

JUDY: Only what you and mom told me.

SONYA: Get the guitar.

(JUDY gets guitar and poses. SONYA paints)

SONYA: Is that the right shirt?

JUDY: It's the shirt that I always wear. What's wrong with it?

SONYA: Nothing.

JUDY: Malcolm X called the demonstration the “farce on Washington.”

SONYA: Now you like Malcolm X?

JUDY: I thought *you* did.

SONYA: Talk about what you know. You don’t know anything about this. You drop out of college. You never read a book.

JUDY: Why do you think I don’t know anything about this? I know who Malcolm X is. And I sing a song that Paul Robeson sang. And they don’t teach anything about either one of those guys at Hunter.

SONYA: How would you know? You were there for three months. *(Beat)* What Robeson song do you sing?

JUDY: *Joe Hill*. Wanna hear it?

SONYA: No. It’ll just make me wish I was listening to Robeson instead. *(Beat)* But that’s a good song.

JUDY: Thanks...I think.

SONYA: Grandpa loved it. He was an organizer for a while, you know.

JUDY: I know. Until he killed that scab and he had to hide from the police and you hid him at your house.

SONYA: How do you know about that?

JUDY: He told me the whole story.

SONYA: When did he tell you that?

JUDY: Years ago. I mean, before his stroke, obviously. One of those Sundays when he took me to the park.

SONYA: He told you he killed a scab?

JUDY: Um, maybe he didn’t say that.

SONYA: He didn’t kill anybody. But he did hit that guy pretty good with a bottle.

JUDY: And you hid him in your apartment?

SONYA: Well, it wasn't *my* apartment. I was living with my parents, your great grandparents. They weren't too keen on him staying there. Those were hard times for the Left. But I insisted and they let him stay.

JUDY: But you weren't married yet, right?

SONYA: No. That was later.

JUDY: Where did he sleep?

SONYA: None of your business.

JUDY: I really used to love those Sundays with him in the park. I remember this one time, he got into a screaming match with a Jehovah's Witness. He became like a legend to all the kids in the neighborhood after that. I miss him. I mean, I still visit him, but I miss the real him so much. I'm sorry. Do you have any tissues?

SONYA: No.

JUDY: No tissues, no towels. This is like a drip-dry studio? I don't think I can wipe my eyes on my pants.

SONYA: You're crying 'cause you miss grandpa? (*SONYA shakes her head in disapproving disbelief*)

JUDY: Can I go with you?

SONYA: What?

JUDY: To Washington. Aren't you driving down?

SONYA: Now you wanna go to this demonstration that your friend Malcolm X calls a farce?

JUDY: Can I?

SONYA: There's no room.

JUDY: There's just three of you. The Bonneville can seat five.

SONYA: We already have five. Tasha and Bernie make five.

JUDY: (*Incredulously*) Tasha's not going.

SONYA: Of course she's going. This is a big demonstration.

JUDY: Who told you she's going? When did she ever go to a demonstration? And Bernie's in love with Goldwater, he's certainly not going.

SONYA: Where do you get all these bubbameisses? *(Beat)* Your mother said Tasha was thinking of going. There are buses if you want to go.

JUDY: Yeah, that's what I planned to do. I just thought...

SONYA: And if you must know, when he stayed with us, grandpa slept with me. But we were careful. *(Sternly)* We didn't ever need an abortion.

JUDY: I miscarried, I didn't get an abortion. That's why I can't ride down with you, 'cause I got pregnant?

SONYA: I'm not driving. Ask your father. You're going to bring the guitar?

JUDY: Of course.

SONYA: You think you'll bring equality to the negroes by playing your guitar?

(JUDY starts to play Joe Hill and sing softly)

JUDY: *I dreamed I saw Joe Hill last night*

Alive as you and me...

SONYA: All right. I think that's enough for today. I have to wash these *(the brushes)* and then I'll go.

(SONYA leaves for bathroom. JUDY plays a little longer, and then stops sadly and puts guitar away. She gets up to look at the painting. She reacts and looks down at her arms)

JUDY: Oh god, I forgot to roll down my sleeves. Oh grandma, why didn't you tell me. You spent all this time repainting my arms? Oh fuck me. *(Calling to SONYA)* Grandma.

SONYA: *(From off)* What, Tasha?

JUDY: Tasha? It's Judy, grandma, not Tasha.

SONYA: *(Entering, shaking wet brushes)* What are you hollering? And what did you do with the towel?

JUDY: You called me Tasha.

SONYA: *Vey iz mir.* You're imagining things. All that marijuana you take.

JUDY: Are you okay, grandma?

SONYA: *(More vigorously shaking brushes)* I'd be fine if you hadn't taken my towel.

JUDY: It's about the painting.

SONYA: I said we were through painting today. I'm going to be late. You know how your father gets. Come on, hurry. I have to lock up.

(Mid-1970s; a continuation of the previous 1970s scene)

(JUDY is showing SONYA a dress. SONYA is vigorously shaking her head)

SONYA: No, no. Dancing, I'm going dancing with Harry.

JUDY: Well, that's about it. You can go downstairs in that robe, if you want. Nobody seems to care.

SONYA: I need to dress.

JUDY: Yeah.

(SONYA gets very sullen, although she does not cry)

JUDY: I remember that face. That's how you looked at my painting each day before you'd start. I could never get that. If it was making you so sad, why were you doing it. But I guess nothing is ever that cut and dried, is it. I think your senility really started back then too. You did some strange things. And you were so mean to me. Dr. Delvecchio says it's Alzheimer's - I think that's what he said. I don't know what the difference is. But I think it started then.

SONYA: When is Harry coming?

JUDY: Yeah. Maybe it was grandpa. Maybe you wanted to join him in some way.

(SONYA picks up photo)

SONYA: Dancing at the Y.

JUDY: I don't know what Y you're talking about and honestly I can't remember you ever going dancing with grandpa. You're like not the dancing type, unless it's like Martha Graham or Isadora Duncan. Yeah, I can see you with the scarves, dancing over - **(JUDY has taken the photo from SONYA and now looks at it)** what did you find here? That's definitely grandpa but I don't know these other people.

SONYA: Dancing.

JUDY: Huh, yeah, this could have been taken at some hall somewhere and I think there's a band back there. Oh, wait. I remember this. Mom said it was some lefty place, wait, I'm getting there, some league. Young Communists League, this is a meeting - ha, YCL. This is the Y dance. Out of sight, grandma, you found this to show me. I know I'm making that up but still. Now I know what you want to wear. Just wait right there - like you're about to go someplace - I'll be right back.

(SONYA's studio, 1963; a few weeks after the previous studio scene. SONYA is painting, JUDY is playing softly)

JUDY: I learned a beautiful new song. I thought the people at the nursing home would like it 'cause it's a Yiddish song, and they always sing along when I sing Tumbalalaika. It's really pretty. I don't know the Yiddish. But you probably do and maybe you could teach it to me. I'm sure you know this. But I only know it in English.

(JUDY starts to play and sing Donna Donna)

JUDY: *On a wagon bound for market*

There's a calf with a mournful eye

High above him there's a swallow

Winging swiftly through the sky..

(SONYA doesn't look up from her painting during this)

JUDY: You don't know this, grandma? Really? It's supposed to be so famous.

SONYA: Maybe in Greenwich Village it's famous. Keep your left hand up, I'm doing that now.

JUDY: Shit.

SONYA; What?

JUDY: I said shit. I'm disappointed. I worked so hard to learn that. I thought for sure you'd like it.

SONYA: Such a mouth on you. Where you got that from, God only knows

JUDY: Where I got that from? You should hear yourself every time something goes wrong on that painting.

SONYA: You learned the song. You'll sing it for the *alter kockers*. They'll all smile like they know what's going on. Half of them will probably think you're *their* granddaughter. Rothstein will pay you your ten dollars. Nothing to be disappointed about.

JUDY: No, nothing to be disappointed about.

SONYA: What? Don't mumble.

JUDY: Grandpa likes when I sing.

SONYA: How do you know what he likes? He smiles at everything.

JUDY: He's my grandpa. I know what he likes.

SONYA: *Oy gott. (Sarcastically)* You know what he likes.

JUDY: And I know he likes to sing. He tries to sing along with some of the songs.

SONYA: Keep your hand up.

JUDY: He told me he used to sing at a synagogue.

SONYA: 'cause they paid him. He would never step foot in there otherwise.

JUDY: And at the Greek Orthodox church.

SONYA: He told you that?

JUDY: He did. He said some friend of his saw him coming out of the church and asked him how come he was singing in church and he said: "You can't make a living from just one god."

(SONYA stifles and tries to hide a chuckle)

JUDY: So I think he misses singing. And you could help, if you could teach me songs that he might like to sing.

SONYA: You want to help him now? You should have thought of that before you dropped out of school.

JUDY: Wait, what does that –

SONYA: Or got yourself arrested for the drugs.

JUDY: I got arrested for shoplifting and they –

SONYA: Or got yourself pregnant.

JUDY: Mom says that's the only reason you married grandpa, 'cause you got yourself pregnant with Nathan. And you were at most two years older than I was. And you dropped out of City College to paint. And I know you know that song, you ...

SONYA: He was so disappointed in you, so worried. That's why he had that stroke. (*Sarcastically*) You want to help him.

JUDY: That is a terrible thing to say. Grandpa loved me. He wanted to help me.

SONYA: (*Crying*) You took him from me. You took my Harry.

JUDY: You take that back.

SONYA: Take that back? You can't take it back. He'll never come back.

JUDY: No, he won't. And I'm sorry, grandma. And I know you won't believe this, that you don't want to believe it, but I'm feeling just as much pain as you are. And the one good thing that I thought could happen by coming here so you could paint me was that maybe we could take care of each other. I don't know why I thought that. Maybe you're right, maybe I have been smoking too much grass.

SONYA: It's not the drugs, it's you. You live in a dreamworld. With your singing and your guitar. You're a *luftmensch*, an airhead your mother calls you. Not down to earth like Tasha, who worked so hard –

JUDY: Stop throwing Tasha in my face. I get enough of that from mom. She won't give me a fucking break. And something I learned from coming here, I think the reason she's so hard on me is because of how hard you always were on her. And just so you know, the reason Tasha worked so hard was to get mom off her back. And the reason she went to Cornell and not Columbia is so she could get away from her.

SONYA: That's nonsense. Where do you get this from?

JUDY: And from you.

SONYA: *Meshuggina.*

JUDY: And I stayed around, largely because of grandpa, but also because of how much shit I knew mom and you were going through. And I'm the one that you guys take out all your frustrations on.

SONYA: You're starting in again with that psychiatry mumbo-jumbo?

JUDY: And as for your picture, I don't know who you think you're painting, but it's not me.

SONYA: You don't like it. Here.

(SONYA takes a brush and starts making broad strokes over the painting)

JUDY: Great. Let me help.

(JUDY comes to easel, take brush out of SONYA's hand and makes her own strokes over the painting)

JUDY: Now it looks more like me.

(SONYA makes her way, somewhat uncertainly, to a chair. JUDY tries to help but SONYA angrily shoves her arm aside. JUDY stares at her for a beat and then gets her guitar and puts it in the case and, after stopping for one last look at the ruined painting, leaves)

(Mid-1970s; a continuation of the previous 1970s scene. SONYA is now dressed in a peasant blouse and skirt. She looks very happy)

JUDY: Okay, grandma, we figured it out.

SONYA: Harry is taking me dancing.

JUDY: And you are all dressed up and ready to go. And I better tune my guitar before we go down, 'cause it's way too noisy down there.

(JUDY gets her guitar)

SONYA: *Dos Kelbl.*

JUDY: I wish I knew what you were talking about. Is that a song?

SONYA: *Dos Kelbl. Donna Donna.*

JUDY: Donna Donna? You little *mamzer*.

(JUDY starts playing Donna Donna. SONYA smiles and starts to sing:)

SONYA: *Oyfn vogn ligt a kelbl*

Ligt gebundn mit a shtrik

Oyfn himl flit a foygl

Flit un dreyt zikh hin un tsurik.

Lakht der vint in korn

Lakh un lakht un lakht

Lakht er on a tog a gantse

Un a halbe nakht, hey!

Donna, donna, donna...

JUDY: *(While SONYA is singing)* I knew you knew it. You just wouldn't give me the satisfaction of letting me do something nice for you. So hard. What a beating you must have taken from *your* mom. Or just from life, I guess. And look what it took to get you to open up to me. *(As chorus ends)* Good, grandma. That was really lovely. Did you like it? *(JUDY starts tuning)* Oh, I have a surprise for you. I'm going to bring Aaron to see you this weekend. Aaron? Do you remember who Aaron is?

SONYA: Tasha.

JUDY: Right, Tasha's boy.

SONYA: Tasha.

JUDY: Yeah. But Tasha's not coming, just Aaron. Sweet kid. So far, anyway. I can't believe Tasha trusts me with him. Probably just feeling particularly guilty this week. I guess she figures entrusting him to me is still preferable to coming here herself.

SONYA: *(Rummaging through photos. Picking up one and showing it to JUDY)* Tasha.

JUDY: *(JUDY glances at photo)* That's mom. That's your daughter. *(Beat)* I'm still not sure if I want to have kids.

SONYA: Sophie.

JUDY: Wow, you got one right. Good, grandma, that's Sophie. Larry certainly doesn't want kids, but I'm not going to marry Larry. Marry Larry. I wouldn't marry him just so I could avoid having to say marry Larry. Although I guess you had to say marry Harry, didn't you. *(Beat)* What do you think, grandma? Was it worth it? Would you do it all over again?

SONYA: I'm going to take Sophie dancing.

(SONYA starts humming Korobushka, occasionally clapping)

JUDY: Don't start with that – oh, wait, that's a dance. I remember it now. I mean I can't remember the name, but I'm pretty sure I used to dance it.

(JUDY starts humming along)

JUDY: Are you and grandpa going to dance that dance tonight, grandma? Let me see if you remember it. Let me see if I remember it.

(JUDY manages to do a simple version of Korobushka with SONYA in her wheelchair. They both shout "hey" at the appropriate spots)

The lights fade