

WRITING FOR BRAHMS

a Play for the Stage

by
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CHARACTER	AGE	GENDER
Maxwell Lohmann, a musical composer	45	M
Alicia Lohmann-Carr, his wife, a stage actress	33	F
Charles Bramer, a visitor	29	M
Louise Powell, a colleague of Alicia's	25	F

ACT ONE.

A drawing room of a Victorian house. All of the finishes and furniture look like they were expensive but their thread-bare condition suggest that they are past their best.

A set of double-doors in the middle of the back wall lead to a hall.

In the centre of the room is a wide sofa over-adorned with cushions. To the right side of it is a straight backed chair. Left of stage is a chaise-longue.

Upstage and to the left of the double-doors is a desk on which paper is haphazardly bundled or piled. The computer confirms the contemporary setting.

Behind it are bookshelves carefully and tidily arranged.

On the other side of the doors is a Monet landscape painting above a fireplace and mantel. On the side wall is a portrait of Johannes Brahms.

Beneath this, standing pride-of-place on its own table is a large stereo with record player and CD player.

Brahms music plays in the background.

Sitting at the desk, peering at the screen in puzzlement through a pair of half glasses is MAXWELL LOHMANN. He hums along to the music.

He sighs, removes his glasses and wipes the lenses on his cardigan and puts them back on. He sighs again.

MAXWELL

Oh for heaven's...

He removes and wipes his glasses again and then puts them on again. He tuts.

MAXWELL

Leesh!

He tuts again, stands and walks to the door of the room.

MAXWELL

Alicia!

He returns to the desk and sits down. He clicks the mouse a few times, each time harder and more pronounced than the last. He then picks up the wire of the mouse and pulls it towards him until it is revealed that the mouse is not plugged into the computer. Maxwell sighs and stands up again.

He moves around to look at the back of the computer, holding the end of the mouse cable in his hand. He looks at the back of the computer and then at the wire and then at the computer again.

MAXWELL

Alicia! Can you please come here and -

He stops as he tries to plug the end of the wire into the computer. When he is successful, he stands back to admire his achievement.

MAXWELL

Ah!

He returns to his chair and starts moving the mouse around. Again, he looks happy with himself, but then instantly irritated again.

MAXWELL

How does this bloody thing...

The door into the room opens and ALICIA, Maxwell's wife, breezes in. She looks beautiful (if slightly overdressed) in a flowing dress and high heels. She stands in the middle of the room, waiting for her husband to notice her. But he is oblivious to her presence as he continues to stare at the screen.

ALICIA

Well?

MAXWELL

Where were you? Did you not hear me calling you?

Alicia looks resigned but slightly irritated that her husband does not look at her.

ALICIA

Yeah, I heard you. I heard you shouting the house down. What's wrong with you?

MAXWELL

Well, nothing now. I couldn't get the computer to work. I was moving this -

(He holds up the mouse.)

- thing but nothing was happening.

ALICIA

Well what did you expect me to do about it? What do I know about computers? Anyway, you said you were going to get yourself a new one.

MAXWELL

I don't need a new computer. This thing - the...mouse was unplugged, that's all -

He looks up at Alicia and now does notice what she looks like.

MAXWELL

What on earth are you wearing?

Alicia does a slight curtsy.

ALICIA

You like?

Maxwell looks back at the screen.

MAXWELL

You really want to know?

Alicia looks at him for a second, her eyebrows raised in hope that he might surprise her with a compliment. Eventually she looks at him with an emotionless expression.

ALICIA

If you can't think of anything nice to say -

MAXWELL

I'll say nothing, then.

Alicia glares at her husband. He continues to look at the computer for a few seconds. Then he looks at Alicia again as something occurs to him.

MAXWELL

Wait a second, why are you dressed up? You didn't tell me we had plans tonight. I need to work -

ALICIA

Relax. We're not going anywhere.

Maxwell gestures again to what Alicia is wearing

MAXWELL

So?

ALICIA

I told you this morning.

Alicia moves to a chaise longue and gracefully sits down. She turns her head towards her husband.

ALICIA

My beautiful protege and new favourite person in the world is visiting this evening so I can give her some advice -

MAXWELL

Your beautiful and young protege, is it? Ah that explains the....

He allows his voice to fade but gestures towards his wife to indicate that he is referring to her outfit. Alicia tries to look shocked.

ALICIA

I'm sure I don't know what you mean. I just felt like wearing this. I haven't worn it -

MAXWELL

Since 1987?

Alicia looks at him in hurt surprise and then turns away and tries to pout.

MAXWELL

Okay, okay, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. You look beautiful. Of course you do.

Alicia looks happy again.

MAXWELL

I hope you're going to have your girl-chat in the conservatory. I need peace and quiet in here. I feel I'm finally going to be able to get back to the waltz tonight and -

ALICIA

Oh the waltz, it's always that damned waltz! You talk and you talk and...you know, you haven't been near that piano for as long as I can remember. And today's the first time you've sat at that desk for weeks. And you're just reading emails. What about the Brahms book, when was the last time you worked on that?

Maxwell looks up at the portrait on the wall. After a few seconds, he seems mesmerised.

MAXWELL

Joe's not speaking to me much these days. Maybe he doesn't like the thought of another hack telling a skewed version of his life story.

ALICIA

You're not some hack. You know more about that man than anyone.

She turns to look at him.

ALICIA

I've never seen you happier than when you were writing that. Apart from, you know...

Alicia looks embarrassed as she turns back in her seat.

MAXWELL

Maybe...maybe. Well, keep the company out of my face and I might look at it. I don't mind a quick Hello, you know, manners are manners, but that's it. Into the other room with you.

ALICIA

I didn't mean today! Think about it, it doesn't matter if we're in another room, another house or another...planet! You'll sit there and allow yourself to be distracted by the internet or the paper or...whatever, you'll not do any writing and then you'll feel guilty and stressed about it for a week. You're going to give yourself another heart attack the way you're going.

MAXWELL

Oh will you stop! I'm not going to get stressed because I'm not going to let myself get distracted by...

Maxwell fades off as he is distracted by something on the screen.

MAXWELL

What's this now? Another one of these... 'Maxwell Lohmann, open this email to make a lot of money.' How stupid do they think we are, really?

ALICIA

I have no idea what you're talking ab -

MAXWELL

Delete delete delete!

Maxwell clicks a few times on the mouse and looks momentarily satisfied. He then looks puzzled again.

MAXWELL

Do I know the former president of Rwanda?

Alicia moves at the bar and she pours herself a drink.

ALICIA

I wouldn't be at all surprised. You probably met him at one of those ridiculous parties you used to go to.

MAXWELL

Well he must be moving here. He needs our help transferring his money into the country. I'll just give him our account...Oh dear God, is that the time?

He opens a drawer and takes out an envelope. From the printer, he takes a sheet of paper, folds it and puts it in the envelope.

MAXWELL

We need a new printer too, I think. It took me three hours to print this letter to Giles.

Alicia moves back to a chaise longue and sits down. She leans back until she is relaxed and sips her drink.

ALICIA

Giles? Ah Maxwell, you promised me you wouldn't. After the last one -

MAXWELL

I'm just asking him to clarify his position.

ALICIA

His position is clear, darling. He is no longer your agent.

Maxwell seals the envelope and writes on it.

MAXWELL

Yes but he did not give sufficient reason as to why, did he? Well did he? Of course he didn't.

ALICIA

If you say so. Well if you're going out, would you mind picking up some groceries. I'm afraid this girl might be one of those ghastly people who takes milk in their tea.

MAXWELL

I'm not. There's a courier coming for it. I want Giles to know how important this is.

ALICIA (QUIETLY, SO HE CAN'T
HEAR)

Only to you, dear.

MAXWELL

The courier will be here any minute. So, you know, look busy or something

Alicia, who is very much lounging by now, raises her eyebrows at Maxwell.

ALICIA

She really is quite fabulous.

Maxwell looks at his watch and then at the clock on the mantel.

MAXWELL

What? Who?

ALICIA

My protege! Haven't you been listening to a word I've been saying? Her name is Louise. Beautiful girl.

MAXWELL

So you said.

ALICIA

And talented!

Maxwell looks at her, suddenly interested in the conversation.

MAXWELL

Talented?

ALICIA

Amazingly.

MAXWELL

You're saying she's talented? She must be the next Marilyn Monroe.

ALICIA

Marilyn Monroe. Please. All lips and tits. Films. Anyone can do that.

MAXWELL

Well you've had dozens of proteges. What's so special about this one?

ALICIA

I don't know. She just has it.

MAXWELL

She has it, huh?

Alicia laughs. She then thinks for a moment. She laughs again, this time more forced.

ALICIA

Absolutely. She adores me. Always offering to help me, running lines, helping me to get the accents right. She has quite a gift with accents. In fact, I sometimes hear her reading my lines instead of her own.

MAXWELL (AMUSED)

Huh. Reading *your* lines? Has her eye on your part, does she?

ALICIA

What? Oh please. Of course not! She knows her place.

Alicia sits in silent contemplation and gets increasingly worried.

ALICIA

Well, she wouldn't...

Alicia sits up straight on the chaise longue. She sits in silence, thinking about what Maxwell has said. Her eyes flick back and forth as the panic takes hold.

ALICIA

But...but she's coming here today! She'll be here any minute! Why is she coming here? Maxwell, why?

Maxwell realises that what he has said is causing a panic attack. He moves to the chaise longue, sits beside Alicia and pulls her to him.

MAXWELL

Shhh, shhh, shhh. I'm only teasing.

ALICIA

No, but -

MAXWELL

I'm only teasing. Why did she say she was coming?

ALICIA

To ask for advice on her character. She says she needs motivation.

MAXWELL

Well then, that will be why she's coming. Nothing else.

ALICIA

Are you sure?

MAXWELL

Am I sure. Of course I'm sure.

He hugs her tight and they kiss. Alicia relaxes.

MAXWELL

Okay?

ALICIA

You're right. Of course you're right. She's a good girl. Honest to a fault. That's what I like about her.

They sit in silence for a moment, holding hands.

MAXWELL

You know, maybe we need a holiday. We've both been cooped up in this house for months now. Let's go to France or something

ALICIA

France? I can't go to France! We start the previews next week and then its two shows a day after that. You know that.

MAXWELL

I know, but maybe -

ALICIA

Besides, we can't afford it. Maybe if you had taken that teaching job -

Maxwell stands up.

MAXWELL

You're right, we can't afford -

The doorbell interrupts him. Alicia is immediately tense again.

ALICIA

Oh dear! That'll be her, won't it? She's here and, oh God, look at what I'm wearing! I must change!

MAXWELL

Relax, Alicia. It'll be the courier! No matter, you look beautiful. You do. Let me get the door. You just sit there and...you know, breathe.

Maxwell leaves the room. Alicia takes a deep breath and then another. She knocks back her drink and stands up. She wobbles slightly, perhaps from the drink but perhaps from the high-heels she is wearing.

ALICIA

Hello Louise, how are you?...No. Louise, darling, thank you so much for coming. No. Why am I saying 'thank you'?

Maxwell comes into the room and behind him is a young man, CHARLES, wearing a suit and red shirt. He looks confused.

MAXWELL

Now it's imperative that this letter gets to Mr. Rogers before the end of business today, you understand? I'd like it to spoil his weekend just a little bit.

Maxwell laughs at his own joke but stops when Charles does not join in. Maxwell looks at Alicia who is also confused, but only momentarily.

ALICIA

Maxwell, darling. This man is clearly not a courier.

MAXWELL

What? What do you mean?

Maxwell stops and looks at Charles.

ALICIA

Look at the way he's is dressed.

Maxwell looks Charles up and down.

MAXWELL (CONFUSED)

Oh.

MAXWELL (UNDERSTANDING)

Oh!

MAXWELL (CONCERNED)

Oh?

CHARLES

Mr. Lohmann, my name is Charles Bramer.

MAXWELL

I see. And what, may I ask, are you doing in my drawing room?

Charles looks at Alicia and then back at Maxwell.

CHARLES

Well, you invited me in, sir.

MAXWELL

That was because I thought that you were a courier. It now transpires that you are not. Is that correct?

CHARLES

That is correct, yes. That I am not a courier. I am something else, entirely.

MAXWELL

It is very rude to pretend to be a courier when one is not a courier.

ALICIA (TO MAXWELL)

Maxwell, please.

ALICIA

Well, Mister....Bramer, was it? Should we be calling the police right now? Although, if your intention is to rob us, telling us your name could definitely be considered your first mistake.

CHARLES

I am not here to rob you, Mrs. Lohmann, I can promise you that. In fact -

ALICIA

Then I can only conclude that you are here to sell us something. A much worse prospect, by all accounts.

CHARLES

No, I'm not here to sell you something either. Quite the opposite, in fact.

MAXWELL

And what does that mean exactly? You're here to buy something?

CHARLES

I beg your forgiveness, no. I'm -

MAXWELL

Well get to the point, man!

ALICIA

Maxwell! Manners!

ALICIA (TO CHARLES)

But please, Mr. Bramer, get to the point.

CHARLES

I am here to see you, Mr. Lohmann. But, of course, to meet you Mrs. Lohmann is a great honour.

He steps forward and politely shakes her hand.

CHARLES

I saw you in Hamlet last year. I've never seen a more...convincing Ophelia. Absolute genius.

Alicia tries to look modest but it is clear that she is loving the compliment.

ALICIA

Well I don't know about genius, now. I am but a vessel, as they say. But, please, continue.

Charles looks embarrassed as he has nothing really more to say. There is a moment of awkward silence.

MAXWELL

You're here to see me, you say?

Embarrassed, Alicia sits back down on the chaise longue.

CHARLES

Well, yes sir. I don't know if you received any of my emails -

MAXWELL

Ah, I see. So you're the gentleman who has been emailing me. Well I'm sorry that you wasted your time, not to mention a very interesting font, but I think that you have been misinformed. As some sort of practical joke, I would imagine.

CHARLES

I assure you, Mr Lohmann, that I have not been misinformed. You are the person to help me. You are only person who can help me, in fact.

Maxwell immediately looks suspicious.

MAXWELL

Are you some kind of scam artist, Mr. Bramer?

CHARLES

No, of course not.

He thinks for a moment.

CHARLES

Well, not exactly.

MAXWELL

So you are some kind of scam artist then. I have no interest in dealing with someone like you, Mr. Bramer. I'd like you to leave.

Maxwell waves his arm towards the door.

CHARLES

Mr. Lohmann, please. If you could just give one minute to -

MAXWELL

Sir, I'm asking you politely. And if you don't leave immediately, you will leave me no choice but to ask you politely again.

Maxwell moves to the door and opens it.

CHARLES

Two days!

Maxwell looks confused.

MAXWELL

Excuse me?

CHARLES

Two days, Mr. Lohmann. In an interview in the May 2002 issue of Classical Music magazine, you said that you once composed a piano sonata in two days.

MAXWELL

Yes. What's that got to do with anything?

CHARLES

That's all I ask of you. Two days. To write a new sonata. For which I will pay you twenty-five thousand pounds.

Alicia, who has not really been listening, turns suddenly in her seat.

MAXWELL

What?

CHARLES

I'm serious. Twenty-five thousand.

Alicia stands up and walks towards Maxwell.

CHARLES

Just listen to what I have to say, please.

ALICIA

Perhaps...perhaps we should hear him out, dear.

MAXWELL

Well...how long is it going to take? I'm a busy -

The doorbell rings again.

ALICIA

Oh for heaven's sake. I'll get it.

She leaves the room. For a few seconds, there is awkward silence.

CHARLES

I do like your fireplace.

MAXWELL

Thank you. Solid marble, you know.

CHARLES

Oh yes, I can tell.

ALICIA (OFF STAGE)

...is a very important delivery.

Alicia enters.

ALICIA

Darling, where's that letter? Your courier is here.

A person wearing a leather jacket and a helmet enters behind Alicia.

MAXWELL

Ah.

He goes to the desk and picks up the letter. Both Alicia and Charles are looking at him. The biker takes off the helmet to reveal a very pretty girl, LOUISE. Maxwell looks at the envelope as he walks back to her.

MAXWELL

Now it's imperative that this letter gets to Mr. Rogers before the end of business today, you understand? I'd like it to spoil his weekend just a little -

Maxwell stops in surprise when he sees Louise. Seeing his expression, Alicia and Charles then turn to look at her.

ALICIA

Oh dear God!

LOUISE

Alicia, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to startle you.

MAXWELL

Alicia? You know the courier?

ALICIA

This is Louise!

MAXWELL

Louise?

LOUISE

Mr. Lohmann, I'm Louise, Louise Powell? I work with your...I work with Alicia?

MAXWELL

God-damn it. Isn't anyone around here a bloody courier?

LOUISE

I'm sorry. I should have taken my helmet off before I rang the bell. I was just so nervous being here, you know?

ALICIA

Why on earth would you be nervous?

LOUISE

I don't know really, I suppose. I just -

ALICIA

I'm sorry, darling, where are my manners? This is my husband, Maxwell Lohmann and this is -

Charles takes a step towards Louise.

CHARLES

Charles Bramer. Miss Powell, is it?

LOUISE

Yes. Louise Powell. Nice to meet you -

CHARLES

I didn't realise that I would be lucky enough to meet someone so beautiful on my visit.

Louise smiles politely but Charles remains standing close to her so she begins to look uncomfortable.

CHARLES

You ride a motorbike? They really are amazing, aren't they? Such power. Such danger.

LOUISE

It's a Vespa actually. But yes, I did nearly get killed once or twice on the M4. Maybe I should have stayed off the motorways.

Charles laughs, a bit too heartedly.

CHARLES

Wonderful.

LOUISE

Mr. Lohmann, another motorbike did follow me up from the village. I thought maybe I was finally going to get to use my pepper-spray. Bought it on eBay last year, is still in the bottom of my bag. But he did look like he was looking for a house.

Maxwell looks confused.

MAXWELL

That's...eh, very interesting.

They all look at Maxwell, waiting for the penny to drop.

MAXWELL

My courier! Yes. Well, it's about time.

Maxwell starts towards the door and then stops.

MAXWELL

Mr. Bramer, could you come with me, please?

Charles looks disappointed.

CHARLES

Oh.

MAXWELL

Don't worry, Mr. Bramer. I'm not throwing you out. I merely think we should talk in the conservatory. Give the ladies a chance to catch up.

Charles looks relieved.

CHARLES

Yes, of course.

Maxwell exits.

CHARLES (TO LOUISE)

Nice to meet you, Miss Powell. Maybe we'll see each other again.

LOUISE

Please, call me Louise.

Charles and Louise look at each other for a few seconds until she gets embarrassed and looks away.

MAXWELL (OFF STAGE)

Mr. Bramer?

Charles looks back at Louise as he leaves.

ALICIA

Yes. Tea. I don't think we have any milk, though. Do you take milk in your tea, dear?

Alicia watches Louise careful.

LOUISE

No tea for me, thanks.

Alicia looks disappointed, now not able to judge Louise based on how she takes her tea.

ALICIA

Oh. Okay. Something stronger then, maybe.

She moves towards the bar.

LOUISE

Just a glass of water would be perfect.

Alicia is again disappointed.

ALICIA

Water. Of course.

LOUISE

With ice, if you have some.

ALICIA

Why not. Let's go crazy.

Alicia pours water into a glass and adds ice.

A mobile phone rings and Louise takes it out of her pocket and answers it.

LOUISE

Hello.

She looks at Alicia, embarrassed.

LOUISE

Can I call you back? <Pause> Bye.

She hangs up. Alicia walks back to her and hands her the glass.

LOUISE

I just wanted to say how much I appreciate you inviting me here, Alicia. It really means so much that you would see me outside the theatre -

ALICIA

Yes. I wanted to ask you about that. Did I invite you to visit? To be honest, I was surprised when you called this morning.

LOUISE

Don't you remember? We were talking the other day after rehearsals. Lawrence was thanking you for the dinner party and I said that I was sure you had a lovely home. And you said that I should come and visit you some time, remember?

ALICIA

Ehm, not really dear...But that doesn't mean anything. I say a lot of things. Anyway, you're here now. And it is wonderful to see you.

LOUISE

Thanks. I promise you, I won't get under your feet. If you have things to do over the weekend, I'll stay out of your way. I might even be able to help. Maybe running your lines with you or -

ALICIA

You're....staying...for the weekend?

LOUISE

Well, yes. Isn't that what you meant when you said for me to visit?

Alicia looks away from Louise. She looks worried. She then fixes a smile and looks back at Louise.

ALICIA

Well, of course, you're welcome to stay for as long as you like. But I'm sure you have better things to be doing than hanging out in a dusty old house with us. Don't you have friends to be meeting with in the city?

Louise looks embarrassed.

LOUISE

I don't really have many friends in London, to be honest.

ALICIA

Oh. Well, what about the play? We're starting on Wednesday, you know. You must have lines to practise? Don't you want to get into character?

LOUISE

Well I have all my lines learned. I don't have many. You know, since that last rewrite.

ALICIA

Yes, the rewrite. A necessary exercise, wouldn't you agree?

LOUISE

Of course, Alicia. Of course. But, to be honest, that's kind of why I'm here. Now that Charlotte says so little in the play, I'm not really sure why she would kill her sister. One minute, she's a timid southern belle, and next thing she's hacking Eliza's head off.

It was okay before, you know, when Eliza had stolen Charlotte's brooch that her Momma gave her and then poisoned their Daddy so she got the plantation to herself. But, now that that part of the story has been taken out, I am, I have to admit, confused.

ALICIA

I'm delighted to hear that.

LOUISE

You're delighted to hear that I am confused? I'm confused...

ALICIA

Oh my dear, you still have so much to learn. You don't want to be spoon-feeding the audience every little morsel. You want to leave some things for them to work out by themselves. They will thank you for it. And if you, as the actor, are not quite sure what's happening, then the audience will be completely lost. Which is exactly what they want.

LOUISE

It is?

ALICIA

Trust me. I've been doing this a long time.

Louise smiles and takes a sip from her glass.

LOUISE

Well that is true.

The smile disappears from Alicia's face.

ALICIA

Excuse me?

LOUISE

It's true. That you've been doing this a long time.

ALICIA

What, exactly, are you insinuating?

LOUISE

No, nothing. Just what you said. You have much more experience. That I have a lot to learn from you.

ALICIA

Or that maybe I've been doing it a long time and it's time for the younger, prettier, perkier model to take over, is that it?

LOUISE

No of course not! I could never fill your shoes, Alicia. Nobody could!

ALICIA

Really? Well tell me this. How many of my lines do you know?

LOUISE

I'm sorry?

ALICIA

How many?

LOUISE

Some of them, of course. They used to be mine, remember?

ALICIA

How many?!

Louise stands up suddenly.

LOUISE

All of them! Okay? Every word!

ALICIA

I knew it!

LOUISE

You're right, I do know every word. But not just of this play. Of every play you've ever been in! I've learned them all. It sounds crazy, right? But that's what a person does when they have an idol. They go a little bit crazy. You are my idol. And so of course I've learned off every word of every part you've ever played!

Louise stops and takes a deep breath. Alicia is staring at her, not sure if she should be worried about her or scared for herself. She glances at the door.

ALICIA

Okay. So maybe we should just relax.

LOUISE

Sorry. I'm sorry about that. It's just -

ALICIA (UNSURE)

It's okay.

She sits down gingerly beside Louise.

LOUISE

I'm sorry. I shouldn't have come here. I should go.

She stands up and starts towards the door.

ALICIA

No, Louise, wait. There's no need to -

A door slams off-stage.

MAXWELL (OFF STAGE)

(Shouting) Lies!

Maxwell storms in. He is clearly angry.

MAXWELL

I want that man out of this house!

Alicia stands up and goes to Maxwell.

ALICIA

Darling, what is the matter? What's going on?

MAXWELL

Lies, all lies!

ALICIA

What is? What's lies?

Charles enters.

MAXWELL

Everything that comes out of this heathen's mouth, that's what!

CHARLES

You know it's true.

MAXWELL

I know no such thing, sir. And for you to come into my home and spout such slander. It beggars belief!

LOUISE

I should go.

She picks up her jacket.

MAXWELL

No, please stay, young lady! I want you to hear the lies. I want you both to hear them. Please proceed, Mr. Bramer, if that is even your real name. Tell them what you just told me. If for no other reason, so I know I'm not going mad!

Charles stands, fixed to the spot, and stares at the three people who stare right back.

CHARLES

Okay, fine. If this is the way it has to go, then so be it. But let me explain it to you in full. At least grant me that before you throw me out.

Maxwell throws his arms in the air in submission.

CHARLES

Thank you. As I've told you, my name is Charles Bramer. I am 29 years of age and a graduate of The Royal College of Music in London where I earned an Honours Bachelor of Music. Ever since I was...well, very young, I had a very strong affinity to music, especially the piano, and I began composing when I was fourteen. But since graduation, things have not exactly gone according to my plan. That's life, right? Not for me. Normally everything goes according to my plan. Now don't get me wrong, there were no shortage of job offers. Tours, residencies, even university tenures. All of which I flatly turned down because I knew that I would be a world-class composer. But, out in the real world, I was not a world-class anything. My music was deemed to be pedestrian at best. So, despite spending the last eight years living the comfortable life that a trust fund has afforded me, I have been completely dissatisfied. I want to be a composer! But a successful one. Not just a crazy person who sits at home and writes piece after piece that nobody ever hears. That's all I've ever wanted. And something one of my tutors told has always stuck - 'Write one masterpiece, my boy, and the world will be yours'. But the one masterpiece is, it would seem, eludes me.

ALICIA

So, what is this? You want to cheat instead? You want my husband to write something that you can plagiarize and pretend is your own?

CHARLES

Well you're half right, Mrs. Lohmann. But it's not plagiarism if he agrees to it. People, celebrities, politicians, whatever, employ ghostwriters all the time. How is this any different?

MAXWELL

Never mind all that, get to the other part!

Charles sighs.

CHARLES

What your husband is referring to, Mrs. Lohmann, is that.... The name Bramer only came to be in 1939 when my grandfather moved to England, Brighton to be exact, from Hamburg and changed it. Prior to that, my family's name was Brahms.

ALICIA

What are you saying?

Alicia points at the portrait of Brahms on the wall.

ALICIA

As in Brahms Brahms?

CHARLES

The same.

ALICIA

You are telling us that you are somehow related to -

CHARLES

Not just related to. I am a direct descendant of Johannes Brahms. He is my great-great-great-great grandfather, to be precise.

There is a few seconds' pause and then Alicia laughs.

ALICIA

I'm sorry, Mr. Bramer. I hate to rain on your parade, but that's impossible. It is a well known fact that -

CHARLES

That Brahms never married and never had any children?

ALICIA

Precisely.

CHARLES

You're right, that is a well known fact. But isn't it also a well-known fact that Brahms was close friends with Robert Schumann?

ALICIA

Well, yes, but what's that got to do with any -

CHARLES

And that he was, in fact, in love with Schumann's wife, Clara, and remained by her side after Schumann committed himself to an asylum and then, you know, died?

Alicia looks shocked.

ALICIA

Wait a minute. You're not seriously trying to convince me that Brahms and Clara Schumann -

MAXWELL

That's exactly what he's trying to convince us. But he's failing. Brahms would never have done such a dishonourable thing. It's preposterous. In fact -

He walks to Charles and takes his arm.

MAXWELL

- I'm not listening to this nonsense anymore. Please leave.

CHARLES

Wait! Let me just -

MAXWELL

Out!

Maxwell pulls Charles out of the room. Alicia and Louise stand in awkward silence for a few seconds. They both jump as a door slams off-stage.

LOUISE

I do like your fireplace.

ALICIA

Thank you. It's solid marble, you know.

LOUISE

Oh yes, I can tell.

Maxwell storms back into the room and stands in the middle of the floor looking furious.

MAXWELL

The young man will not be returning.

Alicia looks at him nervously.

ALICIA (TO LOUISE)

Would you like that tea now dear?

Louise is staring at Maxwell. She looks scared.

ALICIA

Louise? Some tea?

LOUISE

Tea! Yes. I'd love some tea! Let's have some tea.

Maxwell is quietly fuming. Alicia and Louise tentatively step around Maxwell and leave the room.

Maxwell stands staring into space. Eventually his gaze wanders to a portrait of Brahms hanging on the wall. He stares at it in silence for a few seconds.

MAXWELL

No. No way! Absolutely not.

He continues to stare at the portrait.

MAXWELL

Of course you loved her. She was a talented and beautiful woman. You were kindred spirits. But...

He allows his gaze to wander as he contemplates. He then looks at Brahms again.

MAXWELL

The man was dying! And he was your friend, you would have never done such a...

He stares for a few moments longer and then buries his head in his hands.

MAXWELL

Oh God.