

The MAN WHO MISTOOK HIS WIFE FOR A HAT

One Act Chamber Opera

Adapted from the case study by Oliver SACKS (1933-2015)

Libretto by Christopher Rawlence, Michael Morris, & Michael Nyman

Music by Michael NYMAN (b.1944)

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CHARACTERS

Dr. S.	tenor, <i>the neurologist</i>
Dr. P.	bass, <i>a singer and music professor</i>
Mrs. P	soprano, <i>his wife</i>

SETTING: Original case study printed 1985
Time and place can be any time late 20th century onward

PROLOGUE

The office of Dr. S.

DR. S: *(DR. S., a neurologist, comes to a lectern to address the audience. The atmosphere is that of a talk to medical students.)*

(spoken)

Neurology's favorite term is **deficit**.
The word denotes impairment
Or incapacity of neurological function,
Loss of language, memory, vision,
Dexterity, identity, and a myriad
Of other lacks and losses
Of specific functions.

For all these dysfunctions —

Another favorite term —

We have privative words of every sort:

Aphonia, Aphemia, Aphasia,
Alexia, Apraxia, Agnosia,
Amnesia, Ataxia.

A word for every specific
Neural or mental function
Of which patients
May find themselves deprived.

Deficit. Loss.

Everything that patients aren't
And nothing that they are.

Such language tells us nothing
About an individual's history.
It conveys nothing of the person
And the reality
Of facing disease
And struggling to survive it.

(DR. P. and MRS. P. come into view. She carefully lays out washing and shaving equipment. He is seen talking to a music stand.)

To restore the human subject
At the center ...
The suffering, afflicted, fighting ...
Human subject
We must deepen the case history
To a narrative or tale.
Only then do we have a WHO ...
As well as a WHAT —
A patient in relation to disease —
A real person.

Dr. P. was a musician of distinction —
Well-known for many years as a singer —
And then, at the local school of music,
As a teacher.
It was here, in relation to his students,
That certain strange problems
Were first observed.

(A student approaches DR. P. who does not recognize him until he speaks.)

Sometimes a student would present himself,
And Dr. P. would not recognize him,
Or, specifically,
Would not recognize his face.
The moment the student spoke,
He would be recognized by his voice.
Such incidents multiplied,
Causing embarrassment,
Perplexity, fear
And sometimes comedy,
For not only
Did Dr. P. increasingly fail to see faces,
But he saw faces
Where there were no faces to see.

Scene 1 – THE FIRST EXAMINATION

The examination room of Dr. S.

(DR. S. exits. DR. P. and MRS. P. appear in DR. S.'s clinic. DR. P. hangs his hat up and is captivated by the traffic sounds he hears through an open window.)

DR. P: Traffic. Street sounds.
Distant trains.
A noise symphony.

(DR. S. enters.)

MRS. P: The music of the city.
DR. S: The urban forest.
DR. P: More Cage than Schumann.
DR. S: Ah, Schumann.
What a tooting and screeching
And blaring of horns!
DR. P: “Da tanzt wohl den Hochzeitsreigen
Die Herzallerliebste mein ...”
DR. S: Now then, what is the matter?
DR. P: Nothing that I know of.
Still performing.
Voice still perfect ...
MRS. P: He’s absolutely healthy.
He’s as fit as a fiddle.
He’s always in demand.
He’s perfectly normal.
DR. S: Then why are we here?
DR. P: That’s what I asked them.
Why send me here
When nothing is the matter ...
MRS. P: Yes. Why Send him here?
They tested his eyes.
DR. P: ... and they said nothing’s wrong.

MRS. P: He sees perfectly well ...

DR. P: It's just that,
It's just that,

MRS. P: But with diabetes ...

DR. P: It's just that ...

MRS. P: High blood pressure ...

DR. P: They thought that ...

MRS. P: ... could damage ...

DR. P: ... my eyesight.

MRS. P: ... but you can see there's
Nothing wrong.

DR. S: Then why are we here?

DR. P: Well, they said nothing's wrong with my eyes...
A small problem with the visual parts of my brain ...
Should see a neurologist.

MRS. P: Last week he sang a lovely *Dichterliebe* at Carnegie Hall —
Endless curtain calls. Glowing reviews.
And starting next week a world tour —
La Scala, Bayreuth, the Garden, the Met ...
And then he goes into the studio to record.

DR. P: Now and then people say I make silly mistakes.

MRS. P: There's nothing odd in that.
Who doesn't make mistakes

On occasion.

DR. P: That's why I'm here.

DR. S: No cause to worry.

(*to MRS. P.*)
Excuse us a few minutes ...
Just a routine test.

(*DR. S. gives DR. P. a routine neurological examination — reflexes,
visual field, muscle tone, tuning fork, etc. — as MRS. P. addresses the
audience.*)

MRS. P: His silly mistakes —
More like practical jokes —
Always up to stunts with his students,
Pretending this one was that one
And one the other.

DR. S: Palpitations. Cranial Nerves.
Visual field. Pupil response.

MRS. P: (*to audience*)
While dressing last month for a concert,
I found him chatting with the carved knob
Of his favorite chair,
Feigning anger when it wouldn't reply.

DR. S: Sensation. Vibratory sense.
Lower extremities.

MRS. P: Late for a concert ...
Got lost on the way ...
Doesn't read maps ...
Asked directions of a parking meter.
Meter was silent so he

Put his arm round the
Shoulder of a pillar box.

*(DR. S. returns to DR. P. who appears to think he has finished dressing.
DR. S. notices that DR. P. has not replaced his left shoe.)*

DR. S: Babinski reflex.

DR. S: Can I help?

MRS. P: Did it live locally?
Like classical music?
Did it know the way?
But it didn't,
Just stood there gaping ...

DR. P: Help? Help what?
Help whom?

DR. S: Help you put on your shoe.

*(DR. S. has completed the examination. He indicates to DR. P. to get
dressed, then summarizes his conclusions so far to MRS. P. DR. P. gets
dressed slowly and methodically.)*

DR. P: Ah, have I forgotten the shoe?
The shoe? The shoe? The shoe?

DR. S: Well, his visual acuity's good.

DR. S: Over here to the left ...
Pick it up. Put it on.

MRS. P: ... and after the concert ...

DR. P: But where? What?
But this is my shoe?
Yes. My eyes. Yes.
This is my shoe.

DR. S: No problem with spotting a pin ...

DR. S: No, this is your foot.

MRS. P: ... my Klaus shook the hand
Of a music stand ...

MRS. P/: What did he say?
DR. S: What did he see?

DR. S: ... except when placed to the left.

DR. S: That **there** is your shoe.

MRS. P: ... as though thanking Schumann in person.

DR. P: Ah, I thought **that** was my foot.

DR. S: Reflexes, too, pretty good.
But again, on the left,
Just a little ...

MRS. P/: Is he mad?
DR. S: Is he blind?

MRS. P: But there's nothing the matter.

MRS. P: This is one of his silly mistakes.

DR. S: It's the way he looks out.
His gaze to the left.
Just a trifle abnormal.

DR. S: Is this one of his silly mistakes?

DR. P: *(joking ambiguously)*

One shoe off,
And the other shoe on.
One shoe off,
And the other on.

MRS. P: It's just one of his jokes.

(MRS. P. helps DR. P. on with his left shoe, as DR. S. reflects on what he has seen.)

DR. S: And yet ... and yet ...
There was something strange —
No trace of dementia,
But there was something off.

MRS. P: I'm glad it's not serious,
Perhaps we should leave now.
Can't be late for his master class;
It's a noon appointment.

DR. S: He faced me as he spoke,
Ye he looked at me with his ears,
Not with his eyes.
His eyes made sudden sharp fixations.
The nose ... the right ear ...
My chin ... my left eye ...
He saw me, no, he scanned me,
Blips on his radar screen.
Sought the detail,
As if not seeing my whole face,
But only separate components.

MRS. P: His whole life is music —
Performing and teaching —
Retirement would kill him.
He must go on working.

(DR. S. turns back to DR. P.)

DR. S: You can see very clearly,
But **what** do you see?
That interests me.

(DR. S. hands DR. P. a copy of the National Geographic, opening it to various pages. Three images are projected for the audience to see.

First projection: The Manhattan Skyline)

DR. P: I see a jagged, edge, castellations.

MRS. P: He offered to resign.

DR. P: I see a forest, fierce teeth,
Dark blades of grass,
A graveyard.

DR. S: Fails to see the whole.
Only detail.

MRS. P: But his students still need him.

DR. P: *(referring to the Empire State Building)*
I see a rocket or
Is it a syringe or a baton,
Or ... a tombstone?

DR. S: He's drawn to a brightness,
A color, a shape.

(Second projections: Ferris wheel)

DR. P: I see a snowflake, a sunflower,
Map of Dresden.

MRS. P: Only his work

Sustains him.

DR. P: No, a dinosaur.

DR. S: No sense of landscape,
Only daring detail.

(Third projection: A deserted landscape)

DR. S: What do you see now?

DR. P: I see a river
And a little guest house.
It has a terrace
By the water.
People are dining out
Shaded beneath their parasols.
It's heavenly.
But there are clouds ...
Calm before the storm.
Form is emptiness,
Emptiness form.

MRS. P: Nothing much the matter.

DR. P: Is that it then?
Session finished?
We thank you
And await diagnosis.
Where's my hat?

(MRS. P. guides DR. P. towards the hat stand. He reaches out for her head, mistaking it for his hat.)

Oh, my hat. My hat.
Mistake?
That fooled you all.

MRS. P: Where was his hat?
In his hand?
In his mind's eye?

(DR. and MRS. P. leave)

DR. S: He's mistaken his wife for a hat!
I was baffled, astonished, aghast,
Yet he thought
He'd done rather well.
Took his leave
With a hint of a smile.
Did he know?
Were they playing
An elaborate joke?
Who was examining whom?

(DR. S. whilst reflecting on what he has observed, prepares to visit DR. P. at home, putting various objects in his briefcase: a series of platonic solids, a computer chess game, a bunch of red roses, the score of Schumann's Dichterliebe, and several caricatures.)

I could make no sense
Of what I'd seen
In terms of conventional neurology.
How could a professional musician,
A practicing teacher,
Mistake his wife for a mat?

(Meanwhile, DR. and MRS. P. are seen in their apartment. MRS. P. is methodically laying out a "trail" of DR. P.'s clothes. DR. P. follows the "trail" and dresses himself, singing along with MRS. P.)

How does he learn his operatic roles?
Can he still read music?
What sense does he make of
The chains of black blobs
Strung up on five lines?

Is he suffering from
Musical alexia?

He did not make sense,
On the one hand,
Perfectly preserved,
On the other hand,
Incomprehensibility shattered.

There were no textbook answers,
I had to see him again
On his own ground,
Not as a patient
In a clinic.
I needed to watch him
Cope with the everyday
Workings of life,
Observe the man
In his natural habitat.

Scene 2 – THE HOUSE CALL

The home of Dr. and Mrs. P.

(DR. S. arrives at the apartment and presents MRS. P. with a bouquet of roses, which she puts alongside family photography and composers' busts on the bösendorfer piano that dominates the room.)

DR. S: Bösendorfer!

DR. P: I know that voice.

DR. S: Magnificent instrument.

DR. P: The one thing we saved from Vienna.

(DR. S. takes out the Dichterliebe.)

MRS. P: *Dichterliebe!*

DR. S: How I'd love ...
Would you mind?
Will you play and sing?

MRS. P: My husband will sing.

DR. P: If you'd play.

DR. S: I'm a bit rusty.

MRS. P: It's his rheumatic hands/

DR. P: I no longer play.

DR. S: My sightreading's poor ...

MRS. P: The damp —
It stiffens his fingers.

DR. P: I no longer read.

DR. S: ... not in your league.

MRS. P: A little shortsighted ...

DR. P: Will not ... cannot read.

MRS. P: So I'll play the piano
For my husband.

DR. P: No longer read music.

(MRS. P. sits down at the piano and accompanies DR. P. in "Ich grolle nicht" from Dichterliebe. Towards the end of the song DR. P. motions to DR. S. to join him at the line "Und sab die Schlong.")

"Ich grolle nicht,

Und wenn das Herz auch bricht,
Ewig verlor' nes Lieb!
Ich grolle nicht.
Wie du auch strahlst
In Diamantenpracht.
Es fällt kein Strahl
In deines Herzens Nacht.
Das Weiss ich längst.

Ich grolle nicht
Und wenn das Herz auch bricht.
Ich sah dich ja im Traume.
Und sah die Nacht
In deines Herzens Raume.

DR. P/: Und sah Schlang'.
DR. S Die dir am Herzen frisst,
Ich sah, mein Lieb,
Wie sehr du elend bist.
Ich grolle nicht."

MRS. P/: He still has a perfect ear!
DR. S His memory's unimpaired.
Perfect tonal
And rhythmic discrimination
And expression —

DR. S: A wonderful musical cortex,
Temporal lobes intact.

MRS. P: (*vocalizes*)

DR. S: But what of the parietal regions,
The fibers, nerves, neurons,
The synapses of occipital zones?
What of the cytoarchitectonic,
The structure of visual processing?
How? What?

Does he see?
(*to DR. P.*)
No problem with your voice
Or your ear.
Now it's time for your eyes.

(*DR. S. starts taking the platonic solids from his briefcase.*)

MRS. P: (*who has begun a game of patience*)
Four of Spades
On five of Hearts.

DR. S: (*holding a tetrahedron*)
What is this?

DR. P: It's a te-, te-, te-, te-, te-,
Tetrahedron.
It's a te-, te-, te-, te-, te-,
Tetrahedron.

MRS. P: Nine of Hearts
On ten of Clubs.

DR. S: (*holding an octahedron*)
And now this?

DR. P: It's an octa-, octa-, octa-,
Octahedron.
It's an octa-, octa-, octa-,
Octahedron.

DR. S: (*holding a dodecahedron*)
And this?

MRS. P: Black queen
To red king.

DR. P: And this is a do-
Dodecahedron.

A do-, dodeca, do-
Dodecahedron.

MRS. P: Black two
On red three.

DR. P: And there's no need of the rest.
I'll get the eikosihedron as well.

DR. S: *(to himself)*
No problem
With abstract shapes

MRS. P: Ten of Diamonds
On Jack of Spades.

DR. S: But does he see abstract images?

DR. P: Jack of Spades ...
King of Clubs ...
Queen of Spades ...

DR. S: Does he see faces,
Or stylized representation?

DR. P: Who's the Jo-, Jo-, Jo-, Jo-,
Joker?
Who's the Jo-, Jo-, Jo-, Jo-,
Joker?

(DR. S. takes a sequence of caricatures from his briefcase.)

DR. S: Who do you see?

DR. P: It's that funny nose ...
Schnozzle Durante

MRS. P: The memory ...

DR. S: And who do you see now?

DR. P: I know that one.
It's really easy.
The angle, Havana.
It's Winston Churchill's cigar.

MRS. P: The conflict ...

DR. S: Who do you ...
What ...
What do you see?

DR. P: Black
Toothbrush moustache.

MRS. P: The darkness ...

DR. S: A darkness ...
Learned shapes ...
Known landmarks ...

DR. P: Adolf Hitler!
I know him,
The hair, the eyebrows,
Albert Einstein.

MRS. P: God does not play dice.

(MRS. P. switches on the TV. We see a close-up of Michael Nyman at the piano.)

DR. S: Does he see people
Or simply schematic
Cued memories?
Patterns etched in his mind
And retrieved?

How does he read expression?
Configuration of feeling
In motion?

(DR. P. looks at the screen.)

DR. P: That's Nyman.
Can't mistake his body rhythm.

(DR. S. switches channels/ A torrid Bette Davis film is playing. DR. P. continues to watch.)

What's the time?
Now this must be the news.
Let us listen to the headlines.

MRS. P: Dear Klaus rarely watches.

DR. P: No, it's a commercial
For body lotions
For use on beaches.
Don't know that music.

MRS. P: He doesn't approve ...
Waste of time, always busy.

DR. P: Or is it?
Well is it?
I'm not really sure, but is it
A sport of some kind?

MRS. P: We watch only arts
Programs.

DR. P: Are they wrestling?
No, no it's boxing.
Who's fighting?
Who's hitting whom?

I don't follow.
No, no it's a dreadful quiz show.

DR. S: Think of stars.

DR. P: Men from Mars
Or maybe
It's those men on the mon.
No, don't tell me.
"One big step for mankind."
Am I warm?

DR. S: Very cold.
Try movie stars.

MRS. P: It's Bette Davis;
You remember.

DR. P: The great tone is inaudible.
The great image has no form.
(MRS. P. switches off the TV.)
It's gone, gone,
Gone with the wind!
(MRS. P. guides DR. P. in a waltz.)

DR. S: Visually, computerlike
Cannot judge
How things relate
To each other, to himself.
(DR. S. hands DR. P. a framed family photograph, taken from the piano.)
What is this?

DR. P: *(feeling the wooden frame)*
It's a square.

MRS. P: But which one?

DR. P: It's so flat and so hard.

MRS. P: We'd just fallen in love.

DR. S: Please don't tell him.

DR. P: It's a picture.

DR. S: Of what and whom?

DR. P: A picture.

DR. S: *(to himself)*
He is blind
To expression.

MRS. P: It's St. Stefansplatz.

DR. P: We had just fallen in love
In Vienna.

DR. S: Does not recognize ...
Who do you see?

MRS. P: So recently married ...

DR. P: *(not looking, rather knowing the memory)*
It's myself and my wife.

MRS. P: On our honeymoon.

(DR. S. hands DR. P. another photo.)

DR. S: So who's this?

DR. P: Why that's Paul.

MRS. P: His brother ...

DR. P: Those big teeth,
Mole on cheek,
Know him anywhere.

DR. S: *(to himself)*
He picks up obvious markers.
Identi-kit features.
(hands DR. P. a photo of his mother)
And this?
Quite a likeness.

DR. P: Bit faded.
Can't remember.

MRS. P: *(The full extent of her husband's problems begins to dawn on her. She begins to render consciously what somehow she'd known all along.)*

My God.
It's his mother.

DR. P: It might be my mother;
They all look the same.

(MRS. P. hands DR. P. a photo of herself. DR. P. pauses, looking at it, blankly.)

MRS. P: Don't you recognize me?
You took it yourself.
You bought me that dress
With the pattern.

DR. P: That pattern.
The crisscross,
Of course,
How could I?

(DR. P. is handed a photograph of himself.)

DR. S: And this?
(DR. S hands DR. P. a mirror.)
Blank motionless faces
Without personality.
No one there looking out.
No person within.
In the absence of obvious markers.
He was utterly, tragically,
Lost.
(DR. S. take a rose from the vase and shows it to DR. P.)
What is this?

DR. P: Six inches in length.
Convoluting red form.

DR. S: But what do you think it is?

DR. P: With a linear green attachment.

DR. S: *(to himself)*
He dwells within schema;
He's lost touch with the concrete world.

DR. P: Not easy to say ...
No simple geometry.

DR. S: *(to himself)*
Robotic description.
Picks out the salient,
Computerlike ...

DR. P: I think this might be
Divine geometry.

DR. S: Might be.

DR. P: Inflorescence ...
A flower ...

Could it be?

DR. S: Smell it.

DR. P: Olfactory, algebra,
Mathematical odors.
Whiffs of the infinite rose.
Heaven in a wild flower.
(bums along with MRS. P, while DR. S. replaces the caricatures in his briefcase)

MRS. P: "O rose thou art sick.
The invisible worm
That flies in the night
In the howling storm
Has found out thy bed
Of crimson joy,
And his dark secret love
Does thy life destroy."

(DR. S. picks up a glove and hands it to DR. P. MRS. P. begins to prepare tea.)

DR. S: Now what is this?

DR. P: A continuous surface ...
A continuous surface ...
That is softly enfolded ...
That is softly enfolded ...
On it —, on itself.

DR. S: You are merely describing it.

DR. P: One, two, three, four, five
Outpouchings.

DR. S: I want to know what it is.

DR. P: A container ...

DR. S: Containing what?

DR. P: Its contents ...

DR. S: Which are what?

DR. P: The pot's effectiveness
Lies in its nothingness.

DR. S: Would you put something in it?

DR. P: Coins of five different sizes.
It's a purse, a special purse.

DR. S: Lifeless abstractions.

DR. P: The pigskin case
Of some precious device
For the probing
Of my brain?

DR. S: Does part of your body
Feel drawn to explore?

DR. P: To put in? To insert?
To put on?

(DR. P. fiddles with the glove.)

MRS. P/: Any child would know
DR. S: A glove as a glove,
As going with a hand,
But he's lost in a maze
Of inanimate schemata.
Has he no visual sense?
Has he no visual self?

DR. P: *(He succeeds finally in putting the glove on his hand.)*

My God.
It's a glove.
(bums)

DR. S: Well done.
Now let's see how you recall
Visual schema.

DR. P: Yes, let's play chess,
Though I can no longer
Distinguish the pieces.

(They play chess; DR. P. does not look at the chess board or chess pieces, but rather plays a mental chess game, while DR. S. moves all the pieces on the chess board.)

DR. P: Pawn to King 4

DR. S: Pawn to King 4

DR. P: Knight to Queen Bishop 3

DR. S: Knight to Queen Bishop 3

DR. P: Pawn to Bishop 4

DR. S: Pawn takes Pawn

DR. P: Pawn to Queen 4

DR. S: Queen to Rook 5
Check

DR. P: King to King 2

DR. S: Pawn to Queen 4
DR. P: Pawn takes Pawn
DR. S: Bishop to Knight 5
Check
DR. P: Knight to Bishop 3
DR. S: Castle
DR. P: Pawn takes Knight
DR. S: Bishop to Queen Bishop 4
DR. P: Pawn takes Pawn
Check
DR. S: King to Knight 1
DR. P: Knight to Knight 5
DR. S: Knight to Bishop 3
DR. P: King to Queen 3
DR. S: Queen to Rook 4
DR. P: King to Bishop 3
DR. S: Bishop takes Pawn
Check
DR. P: Queen's Knight takes Bishop
DR. S: Queen to Bishop 4
Check

DR. P: King to Knight 3
DR. S: Queen to Knight 3
Check
DR. P: Bishop to Knight 5
DR. S: Bishop takes Knight
DR. P: Queen takes Bishop
DR. S: Rook takes Knight
DR. P: Queen to Bishop 6
DR. S: Queen to Rook 4
DR. P: Pawn to Bishop 3
DR. S: Rook to Queen 3
DR. P: Queen to Bishop 4
DR. S: Pawn to Knight 4
DR. P: King to Bishop 2
DR. S: You win. I resign.
DR. P: The Steinitz Gambit!
Do you know it?
MRS. P/: *(to the audience)*
DR. S: What are we to make of a man
So strangely unable to judge
A glove as a glove,
Yet a master of mental chess?

DR. S: His visualization
Of faces, narrative
And drama
Is impaired.
Visualization
Of schemata
Is completely unimpaired.
Bud what of descriptive memory?
How do you recall
The texture, the color, the detail
Of the city we live in?
SO talk me down
Hope Street.
It's a street we both know.

(DR. P. recalls the street, but can visualize only the right side. MRS. P. prompts him with details of the left side of the street.)

DR. P: From our end,
High up there,
The family that argues ...

MRS. P: Those stone steps ...

DR. P: ... from that open window
Wafts Mozart.

DR. S: But, what do you see?

DR. P: The awning, the doorman ...

MRS. P: Busts of composers ...

DR. P: ... red-brick mansion block ...

MRS. P: Those columns and porticos ...

DR. P: ... Chicken Tikka, The Bombay ...

Hello, Mr. Singh ...
Flapping washing high up ...
Chimney pot battlements ...

MRS. P: Parking meters ...

DR. P: A row of town houses ...

MRS. P: Traffic lights ...

DR. P: ... embalmed in wisteria ...
Psychoanalysts' clinics ...
All coming and going ...
Front gate squeaking ...
Cars starting up ...

DR. S: Where are they,
These cars?

DR. P: *(turning around)*
Oh my,
If I turn to my,
If I turn ...
On my right ...
There are those traffic lights
And the parking meters ...

MRS. P: The clinic ...

DR. P: And the screeching of tires
And the slamming of doors ...

DR. S: What do you
See?

MRS. P: Wisteria ...

DR. P: The columns

And the porticos ...

DR. S: *(to the audience)*
He sees
Only the right side ...
The restaurant, the doorman,
The washing are no longer there.
No leftness ...

MRS. P: Chimney pot ...
The Bombay ...
Redbrick block ...

DR. P: Busts of Bach, Chopin,
Beethoven and Liszt ...
Stone steps, revolving doors ...
And they're late.
Late again for my class.

DR. S: ... just darkness,
A lopsided memory,
Bisected mind's eye ...

(MRS. P. has completed preparations for tea. DR. S. notices a number of paintings in the apartment.)

Your husband's a painter, I see.

MRS. P: Had a show every year
At the college where he teaches.
He was very highly regarded.

DR. P: Nothing exceptional,
An amateur dauber.

MRS. P: Gifted painter as well as a gifted singer ...

DR. P: Was a painter.

Still a singer.

DR. S: *(to the audience)*
I looked at them —
Curiously peered at the early work,
Dated and signed.
Finely detailed and concrete —
A refugee family ...
Mother and child.

(DR. P. begins to hum as he eats.)

MRS. P: He started painting
When we lived in Vienna.

DR. S: Displaced Europeans,
Uprooted, tragically exiled ...

MRS. P: When we were
Forced to flee to this city
He continued to paint.

DR. S: The grief of survivors ...
The weeping and sobbing ...

MRS. P: Seeking the faces
Of those we had lost.

DR. S: *(looks at another painting and then out to the audience)*
Years later
This vividness waned.
Faces fractured,
Natural curves became
Angular, almost cubist.

MRS. P: The anguish of way ...
Severed loves ...

	Torn lives ... Shattered dreams ...		
DR. S:	<i>(looks at another painting)</i> Then less and less Concrete images More abstract expressionist.	MRS. P:	You're an ignorant, arrogant man. He progressed to the abstract ... Pure painful, Painted emotion ... Feeling embodied in Measured brushstrokes.
MRS. P:	But the feeling ... Still passionate memories Arrested in space.	DR. S:	Perhaps she was partly right. Might not the condition Of his eyes Condition his sight, Stripping it down To see through The gross texture Of things To their essence? Perhaps his growth as an artist Went hand in hand With his illness, Creating original form.
DR. S:	<i>(looks at another painting)</i> But in the most recent paintings — I hardly dare to say it — Painted gesture Has degenerated into mere marks, Lines without meaning, Empty shapes.		No that wasn't it. In these last works I sense only chaos ... Agnosia ... The realm of neurology. Not art.
MRS. P:	No, you've got it all wrong. You know nothing of modern art.		
DR. S:	<i>(to the audience)</i> Random blotches ...		
MRS. P:	Do you not see development?		
DR. S:	The work of a child.	MRS. P:	Philistine!
MRS. P:	Rejection? Reduction? Refinement?		<i>(The outburst freezes DR. P. into silence and immobility. He is revived by the smell of the cup of tea that MRS. P. hastily offers him.)</i>
DR. S:	I see the advancing pathology Making no sense Of the world out here.	DR. P:	Ah! Tea from China, Lovely fragrance ...
		DR. S:	<i>(to MRS. P.)</i>

Tell me,
How does he manage?
How can he get dressed
Or take a bath
Or tie a shoelace?
How does he manage?

MRS. P: Listen now,
Hear him eating,
Hungrily, hummily,
How he sings to himself
All the time —
Dressing songs,
Bathing songs,
Eating songs.

I lay everything out —
Each thing in its place
To a pattern we both know.

DR. S: But how do **you** manage?

MRS. P: Then we'll dress,
Then we'll bathe,
Then we'll dine,
As if programmed by
His dressing songs,
Bathing songs,
Eating songs.

But when interrupted
He loses his thread,
Disintegrates,
Grinds to a halt,
Complete stop.

DR. P: Well doctor,

You find me
An interesting case.
Can you tell me
What's wrong?
What is it
I should do?

DR. S: I cannot tell you
What is wrong.
But I know what is right.
You are a wonderful singer.
A lifelong musician.
You have centered your whole life
Around music.
And now you use music to
Organize your life.
My only prescription
Is more music!
More music!

EPILOGUE

The office of Dr. S.

DR. S: *(DR. S. leaves the apartment. Lights fade on the motionless seated figure of DR. P., while DR. S. speaks from the lectern.)*

This was some time ago,
And often, since then,
I've found myself wondering
How he comprehended the world.
Put myself in his shoes,
Wore his hat, so to speak,
Imagined his vision,
That strange loss of image,
Yet preserved musicality.
I think that music, for him,
Took the place of the image.
He had no body image,

He had body music.
And to this inner soundtrack,
He moved and he acted
Fluently cogently.
But ... when the music ...
Stopped, so did he ...