

MUSTN'T
DO IT!
(WAT NIET MAG...)

*Jo M Van IJssel de
Schepper Becker*

*translated from the
Dutch by
Laurence Senelick*

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR & THE TRANSLATOR

Johanna Maria Van IJssel de Schepper Becker (1885-1973), a native of Rotterdam, began writing under the pseudonym of J M Goedhart-Beacker. She was a reviewer for the *New Rotterdam Courant* and a popular author of realistic novels throughout the 1930s and '40s. Her play *WAT NIET MAG...* was published in 1921 and the next year was staged in Rotterdam for two performances, before it was removed from the repertory as too progressive for its time. It provoked a lively discussion in the press, including the *Dutch Journal of Medical Science*. In 2006 it was revived by Het Volk, a four-man Monte-Pythonesque troupe in Haarlem, and toured successfully throughout the Netherlands.

Laurence Senelick is Fletcher Professor of Drama and Oratory at Tufts University and an Alt-Fellow of the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin. His published translations include *The Complete Plays of Anton Chekhov*, *Cabaret Performance: Europe 1890-1940*, *Russian Satiric Comedy*, *THE INSPECTOR GENERAL*, and *LOVE AND INTRIGUE* (the last two both published by Broadway Play Publishing Inc). He is the author of the award-winning books *The Chekhov Theater: A Century of the Plays in Performance*, *The Changing Room: Sex, Drag and Theater*, and *The Age and Stage of George L Fox*.

CHARACTERS & SETTING

THE FATHER, *Gerard*

THE MOTHER, *Marie*

THE SON, *Walter*

THE DAUGHTER, *Lisa*

THE DAUGHTER'S FIANCÉ, *Charles*

The play is set in a provincial town in the Netherlands in the early 1920s.

The action takes place in an ordinary room of a well-to-do middle-class home.

ACT ONE

(FATHER, MOTHER and SON are sitting at the table.

FATHER is reading a newspaper, MOTHER and SON are each reading a book. The piano is open, with sheet music on it.)

FATHER: (*Folding up the paper*) Well, there's not much news in the paper.

MOTHER: (*Absently*) Is that so?

FATHER: (*Rises and paces back and forth; to MOTHER*) Are you still planning to go out this afternoon?

MOTHER: (*Without looking up*) Me? No, dear.

FATHER: Nasty weather—you're right to stay indoors. Since I don't have to, I won't go out either. —What about you, Walt?

SON: What did you say?

FATHER: (*Mimicking good-naturedly*) What did you say? Bookworm! Play us a tune!

SON: Oh no.

FATHER: (*Sits down again, leafs through the paper, is clearly bored*) The Bolsheviks have been at it again! Have you two read about this?

MOTHER: (*Good-naturedly, but not interested*) Goodness! How awful!

FATHER: A nice little mess over in Russia! While *we're* sitting here in a bed of roses.

MOTHER: (*Laughing*) What do you want us to say, we're reading.

SON: Let us read in peace for once.

FATHER: Read in peace for once! That's all you ever do! Play the piano or read! When it comes to conversation, forget it!

MOTHER: Now, father! Live and let live.

FATHER: (*Grumbling*) You call that living? Where is Lisa?

MOTHER: With Charles.

FATHER: Charles was here—and went away without saying hello? That fellow must not like us much.

MOTHER: That occurred to *me* too. At first it was only natural that he'd come to see Lisa; but now that they're engaged, he almost never drops by.

FATHER: And then without much enthusiasm!

MOTHER: I wouldn't say that. And besides Lisa is never home. It's always: I'm going to Charles's house, or I'm meeting Charles somewhere, or Charles is going to pick me up, so I promised to be ready. —It might be more sociable if they both visited here for a change.

FATHER: Then ask them, for a change.

MOTHER: He's always so evasive. His mother is on her own, or else he's expecting a phone-call from the office...

FATHER: It's possible...

MOTHER: Yes, but it's always the same thing. It never used to be so hard for him to come by, he never used to have a problem dropping in...

FATHER: Strange... (*To SON*) Does it make any sense to *you*?

SON: (*Nervous, curt*) *Me?* No.

MOTHER: Well, you could help. Or is that too much for you?

SON: Too much for me? What's that supposed to mean?

FATHER: Walter isn't unfriendly to him.

SON: What are you getting at? There's nothing going on.

MOTHER: I get the impression that Charles is avoiding you.

SON: (*Forced laughter*) You're imagining things!

MOTHER: Well, I may be wrong.

SON: What are you reading?

MOTHER: The book about Beethoven you thought was so beautiful.

SON: Good grief, you're reading that? How do you like it?

MOTHER: (*Hesitating*) Well, I can't figure out what you think is so good about it.

SON: (*Enthusiastic*) You really can't? It's wonderful. As soon as I read it, mother, I understood his music so much better. The awful life that Beethoven led, why, he led a miserable existence. —And the section (*Takes the book*) from this page to this one, didn't you find it gripping?

MOTHER: (*As before*) Yes...yes I did...I'll read it again.

SON: Tomorrow I'll play for you what he was composing at that time...and then you'll hear...you'll feel what he was going through...

MOTHER: Yes, dear. That'll be nice.

FATHER: (*Having watched his wife in amusement, good-naturedly*) You're going to get just as highbrow as the boy. What are you doing with a Beethoven book! A chimp reading the Bible!

SON: Just because you can't see anything in it! Nobody else can enjoy it!

FATHER: Go ahead and enjoy it. There's no accounting for taste. The things I enjoy are very different.

SON: (*Mildly contemptuous*) Very!

MOTHER: (*Warning*) Walt!

FATHER: (*Bitterly*) He thinks his stupid Dad doesn't know any better.

MOTHER: (*Soothing*) There, there. —You certainly don't think that, do you?

FATHER: What a bunch of couch potatoes we have here! What do you say we three play a game of cards?

SON: Oh Jesus, cards!

MOTHER: Oh, if I know you, Walt, you'll do it to please your father.

SON: All right, go ahead then.

FATHER: Is it such a sacrifice for you? I don't get it. There's nothing wrong with a little diversion.

MOTHER: Yes—but he doesn't care for it.

FATHER: Does the kid have to waste all his free time reading and playing the piano? All right, I know he's good at it. Go on, play us something. But something entertaining; not a funeral march.

SON: (*Not at once*) I don't know anything entertaining.

FATHER: It's beneath the gentleman's dignity! Wherever I go these days I hear lively dance tunes, stuff like that; and I have to have a son who can play piano, does it a treat, and damned if I ever get to hear anything upbeat. Nothing but that highbrow music, I'm surprised you don't get sick of it!

SON: (*Coolly*) I don't get sick of it.

FATHER: Neither does your mother. She didn't always swim in such a highfalutin atmosphere.

MOTHER: What's more wonderful than to share your children's lives?

FATHER: Oh really, share their lives! We all live all together, don't we? But you used to live differently from what you do nowadays.

MOTHER: I did indeed, dear. It's through the children that I began to take an interest in art and... and the human soul, which is what creates art. Isn't that right... Walt?

SON: Yes, of course. If mother had only had more education! Because she really is like us.

FATHER: Like us? What do you mean by that?

SON: Like Lisa and I. How can I put it? Caring for something besides superficial small-talk and eating and drinking and banal amusements.

FATHER: (*Hurt, displeased*) Oh, right.

MOTHER: Come on, don't be silly. I wouldn't talk like that, Walt: it isn't nice. I'm sure there's not such a difference between us, us three—and your father— (*To FATHER*) We get on just the same as we ever did, don't we? What do you say, my old dear? I don't see any reason I should apologize for spending time with the children. (*More seriously*) You see, you could often do so much more for your fellow man if you had a deeper understanding of things....

FATHER: (*Who at first had nodded, satisfied and reassured, again a bit maliciously*) All right, but try and understand *me* for a change.

MOTHER: Don't we?

SON: (*Surprised*) Do you feel that we *don't* understand you?

FATHER: (*Peevish*) I know it. You talk a lot of bull. I am what I am, is that what you think? You don't suppose that there's anything special to understand.

MOTHER: (*Laughing, tips SON the wink, and at last he grins too; to her husband*) Now, let me get you another cup of tea.

FATHER: (*Laughing good-naturedly*) All right. (*Still seated, tapping his fingers on the table*)

SON: (*After a moment*) Hey, Father, will you please stop that tapping? It gets on my nerves.

FATHER: (*Stops, shaking his head, almost in despair*)..

MOTHER: (*Passing the tea, pacifying*) Let's play some cards. Hey? Walt? Since your father has his heart set on it.

SON: (*At a look from his mother; accommodating*) Well, go ahead then. I don't mind.

MOTHER: Say, Gerard, shall we...play some cards?

FATHER: Fine. Great. A hand of gin?

(*SON gets the cards. MOTHER puts aside the books and the paper.*)

(*Enter the DAUGHTER.*)

DAUGHTER: (*In hat and cloak; cheery*) Hello, father. Hello, mother dear. Hello, Walt.

FATHER: So. Right on cue. Want to join in? We can play something else. Bridge.

DAUGHTER: No. I'm staying just a second, you see. Any tea left, Mom? I just came to say that I have to go to Lucie's for a while.

MOTHER: Oh, why must you, Lisa? You're always in a hurry and never at home.

DAUGHTER: Don't exaggerate!

MOTHER: No, it's true!

FATHER: Lucie won't run away, will she! You stay and keep company with the old folks at home.

DAUGHTER: No, please, not this evening. (*Goes and sits on the arm-rest of her father's chair*) I think it's a shame. You're such a stick-in-the-mud with your card-playing, you old (*Kisses him on the head*) ...grouch! (*Kisses him again. Leaping up*) Now please, I have to go to Lucie's.

MOTHER: Any special reason?

DAUGHTER: (*Hesitant and looking at SON*) Oh, I don't know....

MOTHER: (*To SON*) Didn't you and Lucie have something on today? Didn't you go out for a walk this afternoon?

SON: With Lucie? Certainly not.

MOTHER: (*Reproachfully*) Come now, Lisa, why do you have to be so mysterious?

DAUGHTER: Well, you know...I'll only be out for a minute.

MOTHER: And afterwards?

DAUGHTER: For heaven's sake, mummy, why do you keep asking all these boring questions? I can't tell you. And I don't know anyway, so there. But don't worry about my going out.

FATHER: Oho, listen, that won't do! Is that a way to talk to your mother? You ought to have more respect, missie. If I'd behaved like that when I was your age! Yes, yes—you're always up to some foolishness!.. You want *me* to tell you what? If you and your mysteries can't stand the light of day, then you can stay home and that's that.

DAUGHTER: (*Rebelliously*) And I tell you again that I don't know why myself. *If there's a mystery, then it's hers, not mine.*

FATHER: (*Regarding it as craziness*) My, my—the girl's getting touchy!

MOTHER: Oh, Gerard, let it go. Girls are like that...you mustn't be too hard on her. Let her go now...

FATHER: (*Shrugging it off*) Well, go on then.

(*The telephone rings downstairs*)

DAUGHTER: The phone. Shall I see who it is?

FATHER: No, I suppose it's for your brother. It's rather late. (*Exits*)

DAUGHTER: Lucie's been crying.

MOTHER: Crying?

DAUGHTER: She wouldn't admit it or let me see, but I kept at her and when she looked at me, I could tell clearly: she'd been crying.

MOTHER: What about?

DAUGHTER: (*Shrugging her shoulders*) She wouldn't say. She tried to insist it was nothing. That's why I want to go to her now.

MOTHER: Dear, is that the right thing to do? Maybe she'd rather not have company. Or would she?

DAUGHTER: Yes, I think she'll be glad I came.

MOTHER: Well, all right, then you may go. (*To SON*) Do you suppose there's anything wrong? You talked to her this afternoon.

SON: (*Surly*) Hm!

DAUGHTER: Did she seem normal to you?

SON: I dunno.

MOTHER: Hey, what do you mean! You know very well.

SON: All right, I know very well. I...we had...ah, I can't tell you.

MOTHER: (*Laughing*) Goodness, Walt, I noticed a long time ago that Lucie had a thing for you, but are you just a little bit... in love with Lucie?

SON: (*Surly*) Absolutely not.

MOTHER: (*Dismayed*) Well—it wouldn't be a mortal sin.

SON: No, I know that. But I've told you already: I'll never get married.

MOTHER: People who talk like that are first to do it.

(FATHER *re-enters*.)

FATHER: (*In a hat, dressed to go out, in the doorway, to his wife*) I have to go out, it seems. Be back soon.

MOTHER: (*Following him*) Wait, dear, put on your coat. It'll be dark soon.

(SON *and* DAUGHTER *are left alone*.)

DAUGHTER: (*Goes to sit confidentially by SON*) So, Walt, can you tell me now?

SON: No, I can't.

DAUGHTER: Why not? You can trust *me*, can't you?

SON: Yes, but not about this.

DAUGHTER: You've been so grumpy lately. What's wrong with you? Is it to do with Lucie?

SON: No. —There's nothing wrong with me.

DAUGHTER: Yes there is. I've noticed it for a long time now. You'd better tell me, Walt. (*Silence*) —It's because you proposed to Lucie...

SON: Certainly not. Out of the question. Hey, don't you go thinking that too. It's too embarrassing for me.

DAUGHTER: Then are you...maybe...is there someone else?

SON: Not that either. —Definitely not!

DAUGHTER: Then what happened between you and Lucie? Was that why she was crying?

SON: I...I expect so.

DAUGHTER: She loves you.

(SON *is silent.*)

DAUGHTER: Does that make you uncomfortable?

(SON *nods yes.*)

DAUGHTER: Have you told her?

SON: No...or yes. I did tell her.

DAUGHTER: (*After a silence*) How awful for her, Walt, to have to hear that.

(SON *is silent.*)

DAUGHTER: Don't you feel anything for her? Or for the time being you...you could easily...

SON: No. I already told you: I'll never get married. She knows that.

DAUGHTER: Don't be stupid! Why not?

SON: Just because.

DAUGHTER: Do you have a special reason for it?

SON: Yes.

DAUGHTER: Then she knows...or thinks it's hopeless.

SON: She knows.

DAUGHTER: So you've told her the reason?

SON: Yes. I believe she has a right to that. Don't be cross with her because I can't tell you about it. It's nothing to do with marriage—

(DAUGHTER *shrugs.*)

SON: Ah, Lisa, if only you knew...I am so unhappy.
(*Hides his face in his hands*)

DAUGHTER: (*Alarmed*) My God, Walt! You'd better tell me about it. Won't you?

SON: (*Shaking his head; jumps up*) I can't and I—I mustn't.

DAUGHTER: Mustn't?

SON: No—

DAUGHTER: Why not?

SON: A feeling I have. There are things I can't talk about to you, a girl.

(*Silence*)

DAUGHTER: But...but what if you told Charles?

(*SON laughs bitterly.*)

DAUGHTER: I don't understand. What dreadful thing all of a sudden... (*Hesitating*) I can ask Charles...

SON: (*Harshly*) Charles wants nothing to do with me.

DAUGHTER: But in the past...?

(*SON is silent, shrugging.*)

DAUGHTER: Did something happen between you and Charles...?

SON: No...

DAUGHTER: But in the past the two of you were inseparable.

SON: (*Entreating*) Please, Lisa...

DAUGHTER: I didn't say anything wrong, did I?

SON: (*Sighing*) Oh no. —Let's drop the subject.

DAUGHTER: That's what Charles says when I talk to him about it.

SON: Then *stop* asking.

(*Silence*)

DAUGHTER: All right—but I'm going over to Lucie's.

SON: Say, Lisa, would you do me a favor?

(*As DAUGHTER stares at him quizzically*)

SON: Don't ask Lucie the reason why...you know, what we were talking about.

DAUGHTER: (*Shrugging*) Fine.

SON: And don't bring it up again, hear.

DAUGHTER: I think it's too mean, all these secrets—

SON: Anyhow there are some confidences you and I can share... Tell me, do you...love Charles, hm?

DAUGHTER: (*Surprised*) What a question! Of course!

SON: What about him?

DAUGHTER: You mean: does he love me?

SON: Yes?

DAUGHTER: That goes without saying.

SON: So, you never had any doubts.

DAUGHTER: (*Hesitant*) No... Hey, Walt, don't be snide!...

SON: Lisa—honestly?!

DAUGHTER: I...I don't know. It's such a strange question. —Do you know something?

SON: No—

DAUGHTER: Then why do you ask?

SON: No reason. —Because...because of something I've noticed in you. If you... have doubts, Lisa, you'd better send him packing.

DAUGHTER: Walt! Are you crazy! (*Silence*) Charles loves me. I'm sure of it...I...I'm sure of it... (*Begins to weep*)

SON: (*Putting his arm around her shoulder*) Lisa, come on...

DAUGHTER: What is it—what have you...what do you know? Or what does Charles know? ...Why are you both so evasive?

(*MOTHER stands in the doorway. DAUGHTER exits quickly.*)

MOTHER: Walt, what is it now? —What's the meaning of *this* now?

(*SON is silent.*)

MOTHER: Walt, can't you answer?

SON: I...I don't know.

MOTHER: That's all we ever hear nowadays. You've got to stop being so dodgy, you hear. I insist on an honest answer. I'm your mother: don't I have a right to my children's trust?— All right, I know there are things you would rather keep for others, so I'm no closer to an answer. But enough is enough and now I want to know what's going on. (*Silence, gently*) Well, Walt?

SON: Oh dear, Mother, I can't tell you.

MOTHER: (*Simply*) Not your own mother? Is there *anything* you can't tell your mother? Haven't I done my very best to keep up with you, educate myself and try not to lag too far behind you? I never had the education you had. When I read books, I have no... no way to discriminate; I can't understand why you find some things so beautiful. But you know, Walt, I'm always willing to talk it over with you and often when I have things explained to me, I understand and find them beautiful too. —I have become better educated through you.

SON: Because it was latent in you.

MOTHER: That may well be. —But my intention was not to lose you, to behave so that you could always

sit and talk to your mother about whatever was going on with you, your interests. —Especially when I saw, Walt, that you had a feeling for the arts. And as soon as I realized that, I talked your father into letting you take up music. There was a time when I wouldn't have done that; I would have sided with your father and said: learn a trade, art's a waste of time.

But I've grown closer to you, I keep trying to move forward with you and I have begun to understand so much more. It hasn't been easy... But that's not what I meant to say, Walt, because you know all about that: I live entirely in you and through you and for you as well...so do things have to be like this now? Am I now to be shoved aside and shut out, just like that?

SON: No, Mother, that's not what I mean, you mustn't take it like that. Lisa and I know perfectly well how you—well, how can I put it? how different you are from Father.

MOTHER: (*Mildly reproachful*) Your father loves you so much!

SON: Well yes, but he never understood you.

MOTHER: I know very well what you mean, my dear. —Anyway, let's not discuss it.

SON: And it's not that we don't trust you.

MOTHER: Then what?

SON: It's too hard to explain. I can't easily account for it myself.

MOTHER: Is it something to do with Lisa? Why was she crying?

SON: Because I... mentioned Charles.

MOTHER: What did you say about Charles?

SON: I asked if she was sure that he loved her.

MOTHER: You think he doesn't?

SON: (*After some hesitation*) Yes.

MOTHER: Why?

SON: Because... (*Falls silent*)

MOTHER: Now, Walt, you can trust me. Tell me everything.

SON: (*In doubt*) Everything? What if you don't understand? I don't entirely understand myself.

MOTHER: I will understand all right, dear—or else I'll learn to understand.

SON: You remember what Charles and I used to be like?

MOTHER: What do you mean? —Yes, something about your friendship did give me pause, something intense... Is that what you mean?

SON: Yes, you and I had lot of talks about it.

MOTHER: Yes, I couldn't help it. I think that sort of friendship, where you can't be without one another for a minute, is something, something...

SON: Unnatural.

MOTHER: Well, yes—that's it...

SON: You said so at the time and you remember how angry it made me?

MOTHER: Yes. I understand that too. You had no... impure intentions.

SON: No, not at the time. At least...

MOTHER: Walt! Why... (*Whispering*) what then?

SON: (*Weeping*) Mother, I'm too ashamed. You don't know what this does to me. And I am...I am not guilty....

MOTHER: How...do you mean that?

SON: It's not my fault. It was born in me.

MOTHER: (*Incredulous and indignant*) Born in you!

SON: I don't know how to put it. The fault is nature's. It is a curse hanging over me.

MOTHER: But Walter, my dear, I don't understand... how did you come to have such thoughts?

SON: Thoughts? —They *aren't* thoughts.

MOTHER: But you're not... Walt—you haven't...done things...

SON: (*Forcefully*) No. Don't think that about me.

MOTHER: But you said yourself: they aren't thoughts.

SON: No, they're not thoughts. They are...nature...or rather, unnature. But it's something that doesn't just inhere in thoughts or in actions either; it's something that fills my whole being, that lives inside me on its own and has lived in me from the day I was born.

MOTHER: (*Incredulous*) My dear! What nonsense!

SON: Mother, it's something I can do nothing about; something you must never reproach me for.

MOTHER: Of course I won't!

SON: No, that's not true. That's not what I mean. You don't have the right to reproach me...

MOTHER: In the first place, I have never done so...

SON: Not in the past, and that made me watchful and reticent. I started analyzing myself; I looked for the cause and—and I began to feel ashamed too. Oh, it's awful when you feel ashamed for something that's not your fault.

MOTHER: But for heaven's sake, Walt! When you became aware that you were going wrong...

SON: I didn't go wrong; I'm not going wrong. There's nothing else I can do.

MOTHER: But I don't understand, I still can't understand....

SON: I feel I...belong to another species.

MOTHER: Another spe... But Walt, you should be ashamed.... That's utter nonsense.

SON: Don't be so quick to say something is nonsense just because you don't understand it.

MOTHER: Shut your mouth!

SON: No, you wanted to hear this. This is the truth. Now I'll tell you. I've been beating around the bush and keeping silent too long. I really am glad you forced me to speak.

MOTHER: Oh! How horrible!

SON: But *not* wicked, mother, not wicked.

MOTHER: I...don't know that.

SON: I tell you it's born in one. It lives inside one.

MOTHER: Oh no it doesn't! How can that be! You must fight against it.

SON: I can't oppose my whole nature. You can't oppose the fact that you are a woman and feel and think like a woman.

MOTHER: My God, that is something entirely different.

SON: After all I got it from you and Father.

MOTHER: What are you saying...? For shame! How dare you!

SON: Because I was born of the two of you.

MOTHER: Yes, but... But that's no reason to shift the blame on us for everything you've done wrong.

SON: I've done nothing wrong and I don't shift *blame* on you.

MOTHER: Oh, God, Walt! I don't know what to say about all this. It's so taken me by surprise—but I find it—yes, I cannot help it, my dear, but I find it disgusting, abhorrent.

SON: It is that too.

MOTHER: Can't you do something about it, since you admit it yourself?

SON: If you only knew how I've tried! How I've fought against it! But it's nothing...wicked, nothing I can change. Nothing that I can discard and reform, because it's part and parcel of my soul. Yes, I don't know how I can explain it, but you might just as well say to me: breathing is bad for you; you must resist it.

MOTHER: No, no, that's where you're wrong. I'm afraid that you are being too easy on yourself. It is *always* painful to admit to bad habits and resist them. Everyone is quick to beg off, to say: I can't do anything about it, it's just a part of me.

SON: That's true, but believe me now, this really is too much a part of my being. So I can't do anything about it.

MOTHER: Oh, Walter! Now that you know how horrible I find it. I don't understand...don't understand.

SON: It is a curse, a crime against me.

MOTHER: Be quiet.

SON: Ha! Why?

MOTHER: You mustn't say such things.

SON: Then you should sing praises to Providence!

MOTHER: (*Sternly*) Walt, be quiet! I won't listen to that kind of talk.

SON: But if you only realized how it torments me! Then you yourself would rise up in rebellion. Faced with

such...monstrous creations how can you still praise a righteous God!

MOTHER: (*Broken*) How bitter you are, my dear.
—Wretched boy!

SON: Wretched, yes, that's the right word.

MOTHER: If only I could help—but I—I don't know what advice to give, I don't know any solution. I don't understand it. God, how can so many dreadful things come crashing down all at once? Just a moment ago we were still so happy.

SON: You were—I wasn't.

MOTHER: Oh, my boy... (*Pause*) I don't know about these things, Walt. —Maybe it's terribly stupid of your mother. I have never, even in my imagination, heard of such things. —But every so often these days you read about it in the papers. What's it called...?

SON: Homosexuality.

MOTHER: Yes, it's come to be considered a crime. Every day there are trials, criminal cases. It ends up in prison.

SON: It used to be considered a crime. But it is *not* a crime. It is something that demands the right to exist.

MOTHER: (*Hastily*) No. What is the world coming to if morals stand on such shaky ground? Everybody feels a natural antipathy to this sort of thing— (*Silence*) Walter, when I think of what you were like as a little child, cheerful, healthy, a little quiet perhaps, how cheerful and happy you always were, at home how you'd get wrapped up in your music and sing and play the piano. And to think that something so horrible could destroy that. I still can't imagine it: I can't get my head around it. Either it can't be true... (*Hopeful*) ...or else it will turn out to be a wicked fancy of yours.

SON: No, no—

MOTHER: How long have you known about it?

SON: Actually from the time I was twelve.

MOTHER: So long and you never spoke of it?

SON: I would never have been able to. Only now I understand that it was living inside me then; that I was different from other boys. I was not a boy.

MOTHER: (*Raising her hand to ward it off*) God, Walt, that sounds so unnatural, don't say things like that.

(SON *shrugs and is silent.*)

MOTHER: How can I begin to understand all this? Who can I talk it to about it? ...I don't know, I don't know.

SON: I don't know much about it myself; I wish I could find someone, an educated person you could talk to... Maybe Pastor Bruinsma.

MOTHER: No. Oh no!

SON: Why not? It is not sinful.

MOTHER: Maybe not—but I don't feel I can talk to Pastor Bruinsma about such things. A doctor instead—

SON: Do that then.

MOTHER: Maybe...

SON: So long as you don't talk to Father about it. Promise me that.

MOTHER: No, all right. Or actually—I don't know, Walt, whether I can do that. I'm obliged to inform your father.

SON: Oh, Mother, please, don't do it. That would be unbearable.

MOTHER: I'll see—I'll see about it. Let me think it over.

SON: Oh, no, I have to know....

MOTHER: Goodness, Walt, I'll do it so that your Father... God, I don't know how, but trust me.

SON: Father can be too rough.

MOTHER: He doesn't mean to be.

SON: No—but in this case I won't be able to bear it.

MOTHER: I can understand that. I won't talk about it the same...the same way I do with you. After all I'm still too unfamiliar with the subject myself. (*Falls silent*) Is that the reason, Walt, why Charles is avoiding you?

SON: I think so—

MOTHER: Then he knows...?

SON: He will understand.

MOTHER: (*Hesitantly*) Should I...talk it over with Charles some time?

SON: Oh no, no. Definitely not.

MOTHER: Why do you think he doesn't love Lisa?
(*A silence*)

SON: Doesn't love her is not what I said.

MOTHER: Don't split hairs.

SON: Because... (*Shrugs and is silent*)

MOTHER: Well?

SON: I don't believe he proposed to Lisa because he loves her.

MOTHER: Why else? (*Since SON keeps silent.*) She has no money...

SON: Oh, no.

MOTHER: Does it have anything to do with...that?

SON: Yes—

MOTHER: How so? I don't understand....

SON: It's just a supposition. I may have noticed, earlier, that he...is just like me...perhaps, to a lesser degree.

MOTHER: (*More and more appalled*) Walter! No! That's horrible, what you just said. —Do you know it for a fact?

SON: No, I only fear it's so.

MOTHER: Then why should he want to marry Lisa?

SON: (*Shrugging*) To protect himself from himself, perhaps—or from the world...

MOTHER: (*Stammering*) Oh, no. Oh, no.

SON: I don't *know* it for a fact.

(*While MOTHER sits with her head in her hands, we hear FATHER come home, whistling.*)

MOTHER: (*Startled*) There is Father. What should I do? God, God, what should I do? I can't look him in the face right now. Or Lisa either. I have to recover first. —Tell him that I had a headache and went to bed. Good night, Walt! (*Strokes his hair*)

SON: (*Holding up his face*) Good night, Mother!

(*MOTHER gives SON a hesitant kiss. —She exits. —He looks after her, deeply hurt. —FATHER comes in whistling.*)

(*Curtain*)

END OF ACT ONE