

Kinsky

by Tee Schneider

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Act 1, Scene 7

(1876. Alfred and Kinsky in the workroom. Nobel is examining this contraption.)

Kinsky: What is it?

Nobel: A telephone. Fascinating device.

Kinsky: What does it do?

Nobel: This one doesn't do much? It is merely a model I had constructed based on Mr. Bell's design.

Kinsky: And who is Mr. Bell?

Nobel: Scottish fellow. Emigrated to Canada some years back I think.

Kinsky: Canada. Why?

Nobel: Who knows.

Kinsky: And what does Mr. Bell's telephone do?

Nobel: It transmits intelligible human speech from one remote location to another.

Kinsky: How remote?

Nobel: Very remote. Ten miles at least.

Kinsky: Ten miles! You don't suppose it actually works do you?

Nobel: I assure you it does. It has very recently been publicly exhibited at the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia.

Kinsky: Really.

Nobel: I do wish I had attended.

Kinsky: All the way to America for that?

Nobel: Oh yes! This is no small thing.

Kinsky: Well it doesn't look like much to me. I look forward to the day when we're able to get past this mad obsession with engineering these ridiculous technologies and place our cares once again upon matters of importance.

Nobel: Such as?

Kinsky: Such as the Peace Congresses for one.

Nobel: I wouldn't hold my breath if I were you.

Kinsky: We can't stop killing each other and our greatest minds expend valuable energy trying to figure out how to speak to each other through these stupid contraptions. In the meantime, you, one of the great minds among the minds that are great, occupy yourself by building armaments to help speed up the killing.

Nobel: Dynamite is not an armament it is a tool of progress that is to be used with extreme care.

Kinsky: In your hands, perhaps, but do you suppose everyone will take the same care? You are planning on selling some of it aren't you?

Nobel: Either way it will serve progress. And so will the telephone.

Kinsky: If you say so.

Nobel: I do.

Kinsky: Well, good for you.

Nobel: Indeed.

Kinsky: (A little under her breath.) Less so for the rest of us.

Nobel: What's that?

Kinsky: Nothing.

Nobel: Not nothing, you said something.

Kinsky: Did I? I didn't remark.

Nobel: A likely story.

Kinsky: It must have just slipped out.

Nobel: Oops.

Kinsky: That's right. Oops.

Nobel: I could swear I heard you say something.

Kinsky: You're baiting.

Nobel: No I'm not. You said something. I'd like to know what it was.

Kinsky: You know full well what I said. You're a terrible actor. You're the worst actor I've ever met.

Nobel: Thank goodness. I don't associate with actors. Dangerous types.

Kinsky: Says the arms dealer.

Nobel: I am not an arms dealer!

Kinsky: What would you call it?

Nobel: Progress. Mutual deterrence. Simple. On the day that two army corps can mutually annihilate each other, all civilized nations will surely recoil with horror and disband their troops.

Kinsky: You underestimate man's predilection for blowing things up and overestimate the national civility. We're not so far out of the cave as you may think. You ought to know better. You, with your blasting oils and putties, powders and caps.

Nobel: Without my putties and powders we'll sit in those caves a good while longer. Industry is the way of the future Ms. Kinsky. Industry will bring upon us the very enlightenment you so crave. And as for the telephone, imagine what might come of things if our governments could actually speak to one another rather than interpreting, via translation, between the lines of a telegram. My factories will put an end to war much sooner than your congresses could ever hope to.

Kinsky: You can't really believe that.

Nobel: I do. Honestly. What is civility if not mutual respect? It's basic. Any good parent would tell you that preserving respect, even in children, calls for a modicum of fear.

Kinsky: You should stick to arguments you know something about. Besides, it's basic: the threat of mutual annihilation is a little more than a modicum.

Nobel: The consequences of a deterrent must be equal to or greater than the size of the threat if it is to be effective.

Kinsky: And where exactly do you find the civility in that? It's barbarous.

Nobel: Hardly barbarous.

Kinsky: Totally barbarous!

Nobel: What would you propose then?

Kinsky: Justice of course. Diplomacy. Arbitration. Nothing more, nothing less.

Nobel: Justice!

Kinsky: The same system upon which any civilized nation from the Golden Age of Greece to now has settled her disputes.

Nobel: You are dreaming my dear.

Kinsky: Don't patronize *Alfred*, it doesn't become you. Progress towards justice is not a dream, it is the law of civilization.

Nobel: I fail to understand the practical application of your thesis. Justice? To what higher court shall the nations submit? What higher court would ever be mighty enough to impose its will?

Kinsky: Arbitration doesn't demand imposition, merely submission to an impartial referee that's mutually agreed upon.

Nobel: Now it's you who underestimates man's predilection for blowing things up. You, yourself wouldn't submit to such an idea.

Kinsky: I most certainly would.

Nobel: Is that so?

Kinsky: It is.

Nobel: What is your sense of my nephew?

Kinsky: Emmanuel? He is thoughtful, kind, intelligent.

Nobel: You trust him then?

Kinsky: Implicitly.

Nobel: So then you would describe him as a reasonable fellow? *Just* even?

Kinsky: I can predict this train of argument, which would have him cast in the role of arbiter, but you ignore one crucial factor.

Nobel: What factor is that?

Kinsky: That he is bound to you by blood and therefore could never be truly impartial in settling a dispute between the two of us.

Nobel: He could if we didn't reveal which side was yours and which was mine.

Kinsky: Possibly.

Nobel: You concede then?

Kinsky: To what?

Nobel: This matter?

Kinsky: Which matter?

Nobel: This matter, this matter! That deterrence is a more effective means to peace than arbitration!

Kinsky: Of course not!

Nobel: Then shall we bring Emmanuel in as an arbiter to decide the outcome of our battle... to end our little war?

Kinsky: Absolutely.

Nobel: Good.

Kinsky: Excellent.

Nobel: Only one more thing.

Kinsky: Yes?

Nobel: Should my nephew decide, without any foreknowledge of which point I argue, that the path to peace is better achieved through deterrence, will you submit? Will you? He is just and kind and by your own admission, worthy of your implicit trust. Will you submit and trade in your Peace Congresses for conferences on industry? Will you rally behind my putties and pastes or will you continue in your fight, with every fiber of your being against what you believe to be fundamentally and morally wrong? Will you lay down your arms Ms. Kinsky or will you fight because you

know that you fight on the side that is right? (Pause.) What? I can't hear you Ms. Kinsky. Nothing to add? Right, as I thought. How do we stop ourselves from fighting for what we believe in? We can't. It can't be done!

Kinsky: (Beat.) Don't be so proud of yourself. I concede only that I haven't described my position adequately for now.

Nobel: But we have closed the gap by a millimeter. We shall be closer yet, before it's all said and done.

(Pause.)

Kinsky: I'm afraid it's just the opposite. We shall be very far apart, very soon.

Nobel: Far apart?

Kinsky: I've received word from the Baron. He's asked me to return to Vienna...and to marry him.

Nobel: To marry him? But you've only just arrived!

Kinsky: I know.

Nobel: What about the... (Motioning about the room.) What about... (Motioning to her and then to himself.)

Kinsky: Alfred, I'm not a mushy kind of woman-

-Nobel: You don't say-

Kinsky: Let me finish. You've become very dear to me in this short while-

Nobel: The feeling is-

Kinsky: Shush! You gave me a job when I needed one and I'm very grateful for that.

Nobel: It wasn't an act of charity. I needed you. I still need you.

Kinsky: Not as badly as I needed the job I assure you. More importantly, you've become a trusted friend.

Nobel: I was aiming for better.

Kinsky: I'm sorry Alfred. When I came to work for you all hope with the Baron was lost. His family opposed our union vehemently.

Nobel: I oppose it vehemently.

Kinsky: I love the Baron. I'm in love with him, Alfred. And I truly hope you'll find it in yourself to be just a little bit happy for me, as my friend.

Nobel: As your friend, I wish you all the happiness in the world but as a man I can't help feeling a little more selfish. I strongly oppose this decision. He's much too young for you.

Kinsky: And yet, I'm going forth.

Nobel: I don't suppose you'd submit to an arbiter in this matter?

Kinsky: I've recently been enlightened to the possibility that arbiters may not be entirely effective in matters of the heart so, no, I don't suppose I will Alfred.

Nobel: What fool would disseminate such nonsense?

Kinsky: Of the smartest fools I know.

Nobel: He should learn to keep his mouth shut.

Kinsky: Doubtful that it should come to fruition.

Nobel: I suppose I'll have to refer to you as Baroness now? I'll do it in French, it'll have a better ring to it.

Kinsky: I hope you'll still refer to me as friend. Will you write?

Nobel: At least until my telephone arrives.

Kinsky: Not that again.

Nobel: *Chère Baronne et Amie.*

Kinsky: *Chère Monsieur et Ami.*

Nobel: On the subject of writing... I've been working on something that I don't suppose you would...well...

(Producing from his desk something that looks like a very long letter but is rather the one-hundred page poem he has written for her.)

For you. A token of my whimsy. Proof of my artist's soul. I had planned to continue my work on it but it seems I've run out of time.

Kinsky: (Pause.) I'm touched. I'll cherish every word.

Nobel: You'll have many to cherish.

Kinsky: When have you had the time?

Nobel: I have some difficulty with the concept of sleep.

Kinsky: If it leads to this, I'm compelled to wish you many more sleepless nights... to dream.

Nobel: You haven't read it yet. You may want to reserve judgment. When do you leave?

Kinsky: Tomorrow.

Nobel: Tomorrow!

Kinsky: I'm afraid so.

Nobel: (Pause.) One night then.

Kinsky: One night.

Nobel: Share a meal with me. Some idle chatter. No more talk of war today. I am utterly disarmed.

(Nobel exits. Kinsky is left alone.)