

## **Forgotten Souls**

BY DAVID PINSKI

TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY ISAAC GOLDBERG, PH.D.

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### PERSONS

FANNY SEGAL [*owner of a tailoring establishment*]. LIZZIE EHRLICH [*a pianist*], } [*Miss Segal's boarders*]. HINDES [*a teacher*], }

PLACE: *A Russian Provincial Town.* TIME: *1916.*

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### FORGOTTEN SOULS

A PLAY BY DAVID PINSKI

[SCENE: *Workroom at Fanny Segal's. A door to the left of the spectator, another in the back. A large table, covered with various materials; at each side of the table a sewing machine. On the wall to the right, a three-panelled mirror; in the corner, a large wardrobe. Not far from the wardrobe two dressmaker's forms, covered with cloaks. In the middle a broad armchair. Evening.*]

FANNY [*runs out through the rear door and soon returns with a letter in her hand. She tears it nervously open and is absorbed in reading. Suddenly she gives a scream of delight*]. Oh!--Oh! [*Passes her hand over her face and through her hair, looks at the letter, cries out anew, breathing with difficulty. Looks at the letter once more, and exclaims heavily.*] You! My love! My love! [*She is lost for a moment in thought, then calls.*] Lizzie! Lizzie! Lizzie!

LIZZIE [*enters, dressed up as if for a ball, sticking a pin in her hat. Mocks Fanny's tone.*] What's up? What's up? What's up?

FANNY. Read this! Quickly! It's from Berman!

LIZZIE [*takes the letter*]. Why see! We've just been talking about him. And they really accepted his drama?

[*Looks at the letter.*]

FANNY [*looks on, too, in great excitement*].

LIZZIE [*as she reads*]. That's fine! [*Turns over a page and continues reading.*] Why! This is an actual proposal of marriage, Fanny, my dear!

FANNY [*her breath short from delight*]. Did you understand it that way, too?

LIZZIE [*still looking at the letter*]. How can it be interpreted otherwise? [*About to read the letter aloud.*] Ahem! [*Reads with a certain solemnity.*] "My drama has been accepted and will be produced this very winter. The conditions of the contract are first-rate, and the director promises me a great success, and incidentally a great reputation." [*Reads over some passages in an indistinct nasal monotone, then continues.*] "My! You ought to see me now.--I've sung and danced so much that it'll be a wonder to me if I'm not asked to move. I feel so strong. And now to write, to create, to do things!" [*Reads again in a nasal monotone, and soon with greater solemnity than before, and a certain tenderness.*] "And now, I hope, better days are in store for us, happiness of such a nature that you cannot be indifferent to it." [*Stops reading.*] That's a bit veiled, but it's plain talk just the same. [*Gives Fanny the letter. Speaks lovingly.*] Lucky woman! My darling Fanny! [*Embraces her.*] You dear! [*Kisses her.*]

FANNY. So that's the way you understand it, too? [*Speaks in gasps, trembling all over.*] Oh! Oh!

*[Covers her face with the letter, takes it to her lips and breathes with difficulty. She takes from her right sleeve a handkerchief and wipes her eyes.]*

LIZZIE *[moved, embracing her with both arms]*. My dear Fanny! How happy I am! You dear, you! *[Dreamily.]* Now I know how I'll play at the Ginsbergs' to-night! I'll put my whole soul into the music, and it will be the merriest, cheeriest soul that ever lived in the world.

FANNY *[bends down and kisses her forehead]*. My faithful friend!

LIZZIE. At last! My dream's come true!

FANNY *[drops into the armchair]*. Your dream?

LIZZIE *[takes a piece of cloth from the table, spreads it out on the floor, and kneels before Fanny]*. Listen. I dreamed for you a hero before whom the world, even before seeing him, would bare its head. I dreamed for you a triumphal march of powerful harmonies, a genius, a superman, such as only you deserve.

FANNY. Sh! Sh! Don't talk like that!

LIZZIE. No, no. You can't take that away from me. As long as I shall live I'll never cease admiring you. There aren't many sisters in the world like you. Why, you never have given a thought to yourself, never a look, but have worked with might and main to make a somebody out of your sister. I'll tell you the truth. I've often had the most unfriendly feelings toward your sister Olga. She takes it so easy there in Petrograd, while you--

FANNY *[tenderly]*. You're a naughty girl.

LIZZIE. I simply couldn't see how things went on,--how you were working yourself to death.

FANNY. But that was my happiness, and now I am amply repaid for it, to see Olga placed upon an independent footing, with a great future before her as a painter.

LIZZIE. That kind of happiness did not appeal very much to me. I wanted, for you, a different kind of happiness,--the happiness of being a wife, of being a mother, of loving and being loved.

FANNY [*in a reverie*]. I had already weaned my thoughts away from love and family life as the only happiness.

LIZZIE. You poor soul!

FANNY. When my mother died, my road was clearly mapped out for me: to be to my sister, who is eight years younger than I, both a father and a mother. That purpose was great and holy to me. I never thought of anything else. Only in the early twenties, between twenty-two and twenty-five, a longing for something else came to me. Not that my sister became a burden to me, God forbid, but I wanted something more, a full life, happiness and--love. At that time I used to cry very much, and wet my pillow with my tears, and I was very unhappy. And I was easily angered then, too, so you see I was far from an angel.

LIZZIE [*draws Fanny nearer, and kisses her*]. You darling, you!

FANNY. But later the longing left me, as if it had been charmed away. Olga grew older, and her talents began to ripen. Then I forgot myself altogether, and she became again my sole concern.

LIZZIE. And is that all?

FANNY. What else can there be? Of course, when my sister went to Petrograd she was no longer under my immediate care and I was left all alone. The old longing re-awoke in my bosom but I told myself that one of my years had no right to expect happiness and love? So I determined to tear out, to uproot from my heart every longing. I tried to convince myself that my goal in life had already been attained--that I had placed a helpless child securely upon her feet--

LIZZIE. But you loved Berman all the time, didn't you?

FANNY. Yes, I loved him all the time, but I fought my feelings. Life had taught me to restrain and to suppress my desires. I argued: He is too far above me--

LIZZIE. Too far above you?

FANNY [*continuing*]. And I am too worn-out for him. And furthermore, I tried to make myself believe that his daily visits here were accidental, that they were not intended for me at all, but for his friend and nephew Hindes, who happens to board with me.

LIZZIE. But how could you help perceiving that he was something more than indifference to you? You must have been able to read it in his eyes.

FANNY [*smiling*]. Well, you see how it is! And perhaps for the very reason that I had abandoned all ideas of love, and had sought to deceive myself into believing that I was a dried-up twig on the tree of live--

LIZZIE [*jumping up*]. My! How you sinned against yourself!

FANNY [*rising*]. But now the sap and the strength flow again within me,--now I am young once more.--Ah! Life, life!--To enjoy it, to drink it down in copious draughts, to feel it in every pulse-beat--Oh, Lizzie, play me a triumphal march, a song of joy, of jubilation....

LIZZIE. So that the very walls will dance and the heavens join in the chorus. [*Goes to the door at the left, singing.*] "Joy, thou goddess, fair, immortal, daughter of Elysium, Mad with rapture--" [*Suddenly stops.*] Sh! Hindes is coming!

[*Listens.*]

FANNY [*she has been standing as if entranced; her whole body trembles as she awakens to her surroundings. She puts her finger to her nose, warningly.*] Don't say a word to him about it.

LIZZIE. I will! He must know it, he must be happy over it, too. And if he truly loves you, he will be happy to learn it. And then, once for all he'll get rid of his notions about winning you.

FANNY. Don't be so inconsiderate.

LIZZIE. Leave it to me!... Hinder! Hinder!

FANNY. It's high time you left for the Ginsbergs'.

LIZZIE. I've a few minutes yet.... Hinder! Hinder!

HINDER [appears at the rear door. He wears spectacles; under his left arm a crutch, under his right arm books, and in his hands various bags of food].

FANNY [steals out through the door at the left].

HINDER. Good evening. What's the news?

LIZZIE. Come here! Quick! Fa--

HINDER. Won't you give me time to carry my parcels into my room?

LIZZIE. Not even a second! Fanny has--

HINDER [taking an apple from a bag]. Have an apple.

LIZZIE [refusing it]. Let me speak, won't you! Fa--

HINDER. May I at least sit down?

LIZZIE [loudly]. Fanny has received a letter from Berman!

HINDER [taking a seat]. Saying that his drama has been accepted. I, too, have received a letter from Berman.

LIZZIE. That's nothing. The point is that he is seeking to make a match with her. He has practically proposed to her.

HINDER [astonished]. Practically proposed? To Fanny?

LIZZIE. Yes, and when Fanny comes back you just see to it that you wish her a right friendly congratulation, and that you make no--[Stops suddenly.] Hm! I came near saying something silly.--Oh, I'm so

happy, and I'd just have the whole world happy with me. Do you hear? You must help her celebrate, do you hear? And now, good night to you, for I must run along to the Ginsbergs'.

*[Turns to the door at the left singing: "Joy, thou goddess, fair, immortal...."]*

HINDES *[calling after her]*. But--the devil. Miss Ehrlich!

LIZZIE *[at the door]*. I haven't a single moment to spare for the devil.

*[She disappears.]*

HINDES *[grunts angrily, throws his crutch to the ground, places his books and his packages on a chair, and mumbles]*. What mockery is this!

*[Takes out a letter from his inside pocket and reads it over several times. Grunts again. Rests his head heavily upon his hands, and looks vacantly forward, as if deeply puzzled.]*

FANNY *[enters, embarrassed]*. Good evening, Hindes!

HINDES *[mumbles, without changing his position]*. Good evening!

FANNY *[looks at him in embarrassment, and begins to busy herself with the cloaks on the forms.]*

HINDES *[still in the same position. He taps his foot nervously. He soon ceases this, and speaks without looking at Fanny]*. Miss Segal, will you permit me to see Berman's letter?

FANNY *[with a nervous laugh]*. That's a bit indiscreet--not at all like a cavalier.

HINDES *[same position and same tone]*. Will you permit me to see Berman's letter?

FANNY *[with a laugh of embarrassment, throws him the letter, which she has been holding in her sleeve]*. Read it, if that's how you feel.

HINDES [*bends slowly down, gets the letter, commences to read it, and then to grumble*]. H'm! So! [*He lets the letter fall to his knee, and stares vacantly before him. He shakes his foot nervously and mumbles as if to himself.*] To be such an idiot!

FANNY [*regards him with astonishment*].

HINDES [*somewhat more softly*]. To be such an idiot!

FANNY [*laughing, still embarrassed*]. Who?

HINDES. Not I.

[*Picks up his crutch, the books and the parcels, arises, and gives the letter to Fanny.*]

FANNY [*beseechingly*]. Hindes, don't take it so badly. You make me very sad.

HINDES. I'm going to my room, so you won't see me.

FANNY [*as before*]. Don't speak to me like that, Hindes. Be my good friend, as you always were. [*In a lower tone, embarrassed.*] And be good to Berman. For you know, between us, between you and me, there could never have been anything more than friendship.

HINDES. There is no need of your telling me that. I know what I know and have no fault to find with you.

FANNY. Then why are you so upset, and why do you reproach yourself?

HINDES. Because....

FANNY. Because what?

HINDES [*after an inner struggle, stormily*]. Because I am in a rage! To think of a chap writing such a veiled, ambiguous, absolutely botched sentence, and cooking up such a mess!



FANNY. What do you mean by all this?

HINDES. You know, Miss Segal, what my feelings are toward you, and you know that I wish you all happiness. I assure you that I would bury deep within me all my grief and all my longing, and would rejoice with a full heart--if things were as you understood them from Berman's letter.

FANNY. As I understood them from Berman's letter?

HINDES. --And what rouses my anger and makes me hesitate is that it should have had to happen to you and that I must be the surgeon to cut the cataract from your eye.

FANNY [*astounded*]. Drop your rhetorical figures. End your work. Cut away, since you've begun the cutting.

HINDES [*without looking at her, deeply stirred*]. Berman did not mean you.

FANNY. Not me?

HINDES. Not you, but your sister.

FANNY [*with an outcry*]. Oh!--

HINDES. He writes me that his first meeting with her was as if the splendor of God had suddenly shone down upon him,--that gradually he was inflamed by a fiery passion, and that he hopes his love is returned, that....

FANNY [*falls upon a chair, her face turned toward the table. She breaks into moaning*]. She has taken from me everything!

[*In deepest despair, with cries from her innermost being, she tears at her hair.*]

HINDES [*drops his books and packages to the floor. Limpes over to Fanny, and removes her hands from her head*]. You have good reason to weep, but not to harm yourself.

FANNY [*hysterically*]. She has taken from me everything! My ambition to study, my youth, my fondest hopes, and now....

HINDES. And now?--Nothing. As you see, Berman never loved you. If it hadn't been for that unfortunate, ambiguous, absolutely botched, simply idiotic sentence....

FANNY [*softly*]. Hindes, I feel that I no longer care to live.

HINDES. Folly!

FANNY. I feel as if my heart had been torn in two. My soul is empty, desolate ... as if an abyss had opened before me.... What have I now in life for? I can live no longer!

HINDES. Folly! Nonsense!

FANNY. I have already lived my life....

HINDES. Absurd!

FANNY [*resolutely*]. I know what I'm talking about, and I know what to do.

[*Silence.*]

HINDES [*regarding her closely. With blunt emphasis*]. You're thinking now over what death you shall choose.

FANNY [*motionless*].

HINDES [*taking a seat*]. Let me tell you a story. There was once upon a time a man who--not through doubt and misfortune, but rather through good times and pleasures, came to the conclusion that life wasn't worth living. So he went off to buy a revolver. On his way a great clamor arose in the street. A house had caught fire and in a

moment was in flames. Suddenly, at one of the windows in the top story there appeared a woman. The firemen had placed their highest ladders against the building and a man began to climb up. That man was none other than our candidate for suicide. He took the woman out of the window, gave her to the firemen who had followed him up, and then went through the window into the house. The surrounding crowd trembled with fear lest the house should cave in at the very last moment. Flames already appeared at the window, and people were sure that the hero had been burned to death inside. But he had not been burned; he soon appeared on the roof, with a small child in his arms. The ladders could not reach to this height, so the firemen threw him a rope. He tied the rope about the child and lowered it to the firemen. But he himself was beyond rescue. He folded his hands over his heart, and tears trickled from his eyes. He, who but a moment before had sought death, now desired not to die. No, he wanted to live, for in that moment he had found a purpose: to live and to do good.

FANNY [*angrily*]. To do good! I'm tired of doing good!

HINDES. Don't sin against yourself, Fanny!

FANNY. Do good! I have done good; I have lived for others, not myself; and now you can see for yourself that I have not fulfilled my life. I feel as wretched as the most miserable, as the most wicked, and I long for death even as the most unhappy!

HINDES [*looking at her from under his spectacles*]. Does Olga know of your feelings toward Berman?

FANNY [*angrily*]. I don't know what she knows.

HINDES. Can't you give me any better reply than that?

FANNY. What can I know? I used to write her letters just full of Berman.

HINDES. Could Olga have gathered from them that you were not indifferently disposed toward him?

FANNY. What do you mean by this cross-examination?

HINDES. I have a notion that if you were to do what you have in your mind at present,--a thing I cannot bring myself to name,--then Olga would not accept Berman's love. Rather she would take her own life, since she would look upon herself as the cause of your death.

FANNY. What's this you've thought up?

HINDES. Just what you heard.

FANNY. And you mean--?

HINDES. --That you know your sister and ought to realize what she's liable to do.

FANNY [*in a fit of anger*]. First she takes away my life, and now she will not let me die!

[*Her head sinks to the table.*]

HINDES. There spoke the true Fanny, the Fanny of yore.

FANNY [*weeps bitterly*].

HINDES. Well may you weep. Weep, Fanny, weep until the tears come no more. But when that is over, then dry your eyes and never weep again. Dry forever the source of all your tears. That's exactly what I did, do you understand? Such people as you and I, robbed of personal happiness, must either weep forever, or never weep at all. I chose the latter course. Harden yourself, Fanny, and then fold your arms on your breast and look fearlessly forward into life, fulfilling it as your heart dictates.

FANNY [*continues weeping*].

HINDES [*noticing Berman's letter on the table, takes it up and throws it down angrily*]. Such a botched, idiotic sentence! And he's a poet!

FANNY [*raising her head*]. If things are as you say, then Olga will in any case reject Berman. She will imagine that she is taking him away from me, and such a thing she would never do.

HINDES. Perhaps. [*Suddenly, bluntly.*] And what will be the effect of all this upon you?

FANNY [*brokenly*]. Who's thinking of self? I mean that I want her to have him.

HINDES. There's the old Fanny again!

FANNY. Ah! Enough of that! Better help me with some suggestion.

HINDES. Some suggestion? Be her matchmaker.

FANNY. And suppose she should turn the tables and want to be my matchmaker?

HINDES. We've got to think that over.

[*Silence.*]

FANNY [*brokenly*]. Hindes!

HINDES. What?

FANNY. I have an idea.

HINDES. Good.

FANNY. But I need your aid.

HINDES. Count on me, if I'm able.

FANNY. Do you promise?

HINDES. Blindly?

FANNY. Blindly.

HINDES [*looks at her*]. Why must I promise you blindly? If I'm able, you may be sure I'll help.

FANNY [*brokenly, yet in embarrassment*]. Take me.... Marry me.

HINDES [*for a moment he looks at her, then picks up his crutch, his books and the packages*].

FANNY [*beseechingly*]. Hindes! If I should marry, Olga wouldn't have any obstacle in her way.

HINDES. Miss Segal, I have loved you, and still do. But I refuse to be the altar upon which you shall sacrifice yourself.

FANNY. But a moment ago you dissuaded me from death. Will you now drive me back to it?

HINDES. Your sister will be able to find happiness without Berman.

FANNY. But if she loves him?--

HINDES. Then she'll suffer, just as we do.

FANNY. No! Olga must not suffer! Do you hear! I'll not have it!

HINDES. That is very nice of you.

FANNY [*through her tears*]. Hindes, I no longer know you.

HINDES [*turns toward the door*]. Good night.

FANNY [*is overcome by sobbing*].

HINDES [*limps to the door, then stops. Looks downwards, then raises his eyes toward Fanny*]. Miss Segal, why is it that during all the time that I have boarded with you I have made no declaration of love, that I have never proposed marriage?

FANNY [*weeps*].

HINDES. I'll tell you. Wasn't it because I knew that you didn't love me, and because I wanted your love, not merely your respect?

FANNY [*firmly*]. No. You didn't do it simply because you knew that I would refuse you.

HINDES. And suppose I expected "Yes" from you?

FANNY. Then you would have proposed.

HINDES. And married you without your love?

FANNY. Yes.

HINDES. But then I didn't know that you loved another.

FANNY [*brokenly*]. The other no longer exists for me.

HINDES [*looks again at the floor. Silence*].

FANNY. Hindes!

HINDES. Yes?

FANNY. Come nearer to me.

HINDES. I am lame.

FANNY. Put all your bundles aside.

HINDES [*hesitates for a moment, then puts down his books and packages*].

FANNY [*as if in embarrassment*]. Everything.... Everything....

HINDES [*bluntly*]. Don't be ashamed. Say just what you mean: Lay aside the crutch, too.

[*He lays aside the crutch.*]

FANNY [*arises, takes his hand*]. Hinde, you know my attitude toward you. You know how highly I esteem you, how happy I've always been to possess in you a good, true friend.... [*Nestles her head against him, coyly.*] Embrace me, and give me a kiss, a hot, passionate kiss. Put into it your whole love, make it express your whole true soul. [*Brokenly, and in tears.*] I tell you, our life will be--happy. We souls, forgotten by happiness, will yet find it--in our own way--as best we can. [*Less tearfully.*] You'll see how it'll soon be. Lizzie will come home and she'll play us a march of jubilation, a march of joy.... [*Brokenly.*] She owes it to me!... I'll dance, I tell you; I'll dance for two. You'll see. And I'll sing. I'll turn things upside down. Hinde, kiss me, hotly, hotly.

HINDE [*passionately, through tears*]. You.... You....

[*He gives her a long kiss, as if entranced.*]

[*Slow Curtain.*]