

AMALIA
WHERE'S MY SHOE?

GEORG
YOU'RE GOING NOWHERE BUT

AMALIA
MY RIGHT SHOE?

GEORG
BACK TO BED!

(GEORG picks AMALIA up and dumps her on the bed. The minute SHE hits the pillow, she collapses into hysterical weeping. Meanwhile, GEORG straightens the room. Then HE gets the brown paper bag and sits on the edge of AMALIA'S bed)

GEORG
I brought you something.

AMALIA
(Through the tears)
What?

GEORG
See for yourself.

(AMALIA sits up. SHE takes the brown bag and looks into it)

AMALIA
What is it?

GEORG
Vanilla ice cream. It's the best thing in the world when you're sick.

AMALIA
(SHE takes the container and a wooden spoon out of the bag)
It's from Lindner's. My mother works at Lindner's. She may have waited on you.

(AMALIA starts eating the ice cream)

GEORG
A small, stout woman?

AMALIA
Oh, no. The image of me — everyone says — only much younger looking.
(SHE stops eating)
There's something wrong with this ice cream.

GEORG

There is?

AMALIA

So much salt —

GEORG

Are you surprised? All those tears falling into it.

AMALIA

Oh. I'd better cry in the other direction.

GEORG

Why cry at all?

AMALIA

How little you understand, Mr. Nowack. I'm like a rag doll, and somebody's kicked out the stuffing.

GEORG

You'll soon fill up again — good as new.

AMALIA

(Shaking her head again)

You're looking at a very disillusioned girl, Mr. Nowack.

GEORG

You know, Miss Balash — I'll never forgive myself for last night at the café. I must have been drunk...

AMALIA

But — strangely enough — you were right, Mr. Nowack! — when you guessed I'd never met the man I was waiting for. He was just someone who'd been writing letters to me — such glorious letters.

GEORG

And he never showed up.

AMALIA

I waited 'til closing.

GEORG

I feel very responsible.

AMALIA

Oh, no — it wasn't just you, Mr. Nowack. There could have been so many reasons. But — if he cared at all — he would have explained — he would have written — a letter, a note, two words — something!

(AMALIA'S tears flow forth again. GEORG watches sadly for a minute)

GEORG

(Impulsively)

Miss Balash, he *will* write!

AMALIA

I don't think so.

GEORG

He will! I'm not just guessing! I know it definitely!

AMALIA.

How?

GEORG

He told me himself!

AMALIA

He — himself?

GEORG

Yes — of course! Dear Friend! No one else!

AMALIA

(Ecstatic)

Dear Friend?! When? How? Oh — tell me, Mr. Nowack. Tell me!!

GEORG

Well —

(Madly improvising)

Let's see now — You know — when I left the café last night, I had the oddest feeling that someone was following me. And I kept looking back — and there *was*

AMALIA

(Eagerly)

A young man?

GEORG

A *man* — and when I was almost home — he came up and started asking questions about you and me.

AMALIA

What sort of questions?

GEORG

Oh — just what you'd expect...

AMALIA

But I want to know the *words* he said.

GEORG

I'm not very good at remembering exact words...

AMALIA

Try — please?

GEORG

Well — let's see. I think the first thing he said was: "Excuse me, but I'd like to ask you a question." Or something like that. And then he said: "Did you just leave the Café Imperiale?" You want to know what *I* said, too?

AMALIA

Of course!

GEORG

All right. I said: "Yes."

AMALIA

(Eagerly)

And then —

GEORG

He said: "Tell me — that girl you were sitting with. Is she a special friend of yours?" Those were his exact words: "Special friend." And I said: "No. We just work at the same shop. As a matter of fact, she has an appointment with someone else tonight." I'm remembering very clearly now. And I remember he suddenly looked quite sad.

AMALIA

(Rapturous)

He looked sad?

GEORG

Quite sad. And then he said: "I *know* she has an appointment. It's with *me*. But I've got to take the next train out of town on urgent business."

AMALIA

Urgent business? Is he a — manufacturer — do you think? Or a shop-owner...?

GEORG

It's hard to say. He certainly looked well-fed...

AMALIA

Well-fed?

GEORG

To judge by appearances... Of course, that's not so unusual in a man his age.

(Gets up and looks at AMALIA'S little shelf of books)

You have some wonderful books here, Miss Balash.

(AMALIA'S thoughts seem to be elsewhere. GEORG picks up one book)

"The Red and the Black." I've been so anxious to read this. I wonder — could I borrow it sometime?

AMALIA

(The one-track mind)

What did you mean — a man his age?

GEORG

I beg your pardon?

AMALIA

You said, "It's not so unusual in a man his age." How old is he?

GEORG

Well — of course — you realize it was a dark night...

(AMALIA nods)

And he'd had an exhausting day. Emotionally, at any rate. I'd guess his age at — you know, it's hard to tell. Very. Possibly if he had some hair...

(Shrugs his shoulders)

Have you read "The Magic Mountain?"

AMALIA

What?

GEORG

"The Magic Mountain." I bought it for myself — for my birthday. If you like — I'd lend it to you...

AMALIA

Is he — completely bald?

GEORG

Does that matter? I thought you were in love with him...?

AMALIA

I *am* in love with him, Mr. Nowack. I *am*. It's just — you know — I thought — I hoped...

(Pulls herself together)

I'm so ashamed of myself! As if appearances made a difference!! The important thing is the letters. Just look at all the immortal works of art — the rapturous love stories — that were written by elderly men, bald men, fat men — with indigestion and terrible tempers — but somewhere deep inside — they had the magic... and that's a glory beyond estimation!

GEORG

You put it very well, Miss Balash.

AMALIA

I feel very well! I feel marvelous!! Oh — thank you, Mr. Nowack! Thank you for coming here today! Thank you for my life!!

(AMALIA kisses GEORG quite impulsively. For her it is a little kiss — but it rocks GEORG. SHE runs around the room, pulling up the window shades. Sun pours in)

I'm going to write to him — this very minute. So he'll have a letter waiting. But I won't mention you — since that might be embarrassing.

GEORG

Yes, I would appreciate that.

(Stands)

Well — I guess I'll get back to the shop...

AMALIA

And I'll follow — as soon as I've written the letter!

GEORG

Oh, no. There's no need for that. Take the rest of the day off. Relax. Read a book. Have you finished "Anna Karenina" yet?

AMALIA

Oh, yes. A long time ago.

GEORG

So did I. But it's remarkable how it stays with me. You know — every platform — every station platform with a train puffing in — is Anna's platform — wherever it may be. And I can see her — actually see her come out of the crowd and walk slowly toward her death. I've even tried to stop her a few times. But she always vanishes into the smoke and steam...

AMALIA

How odd, Mr. Nowack. How very odd. You know — in one of his letters... I wish I could show it to you...

GEORG

You mean — Dear Friend's had the same experience?

AMALIA

More than once!

GEORG

Well — goodbye, Miss Balash.

AMALIA

Goodbye. Oh, Mr. Nowack! May I tell you something — quite sincerely?

(GEORG nods. AMALIA continues with astonished delight)

I like you, Mr. Nowack. Really! I like you!

GEORG

Thank you, Miss Balash. See you in the morning...

#44 *Vanilla Ice Cream* (*Amalia*)

AMALIA

In the morning.

(GEORG EXITS. AMALIA closes the door. SHE goes to the table and takes out pen and paper. She thinks for a moment, then starts to write)

Dear Friend...

I AM SO SORRY ABOUT LAST NIGHT.
IT WAS A NIGHTMARE IN EVERY WAY