CAST

Professor Carl Rosen, academic: *mid-fifties, basically RP but not plummy, with a bit of an estuary drawl*

Lena Morozova, ex-dancer: *22, Ukrainian citizen but from a Russian city, Odessa, so Russian accent*

Jonny Carreras, postgrad philosophy student: *24, nasal uptalking American dude, but smart, stoner who's not stoned.*

Herbert Mantalla, philosopher: *75, slightly aristocratic German*

Vice Chancellor (of Carl’s university)

Andrew Simmons, lawyer

Airline cabin attendant

Football commentator
SCENE 1.  

SWISH OF OARS DIPPING IN AND OUT OF WATER AND
SLAP OF KEEL ON SMALL ROWING BOAT

1  CARL: Where are we going?

2  BOATMAN: To the island of Kadûn.

FX:  ARVO PART MUSIC BEGINS

   This is what you wanted, yes?

3  CARL: I suppose it is.

4  BOATMAN: Five euros to go there.

5  CARL: You’re very kind!

6  BOATMAN: One hundred euros to go back.
SCENE 2. BUZZ OF STUDENTS MOVING BETWEEN CLASSES IN COLLEGE CORRIDOR

1 SIMMONS: (OFF) Professor Rosen! (CLOSE) Professor Rosen, could I have a word?

2 CARL: Can't see you now, got a lecture.

3 SIMMONS: It's rather urgent.

FX: THEY PUSH THROUGH FIRE DOORS - BUZZ FADES

4 CARL: Nothing is urgent. (OPENS SECOND SET OF FIRE DOORS) Everything is contingent.

5 SIMMONS: I'm not sure what that means.
SCENE 3  
SILENT, ECHOING LECTURE HALL. CARL ASCENDS STEPS AND WALKS OUT ONTO STAGE.

1 CARL: My name is Carl Rosen, and over the next few weeks we shall consider the philosophy of Europe's greatest living thinker, Herbert Mantalla. In preparation for this summer school you will have read Mantalla's major work, Why I Exist, either in translation, or, if you're serious, in the original German...

2 JONNY: Professor Rosen?

3 CARL: I'll take questions at the end. Mantalla's Why I Exist -

4 JONNY: But I'm, like, the only student here?

5 CARL: No you're not, there's another one at the back.

6 SIMMONS: (OFF) I'm not a student. I'm a lawyer. Andrew Simmons? I was trying to introduce myself in the corridor just now.

7 CARL: You can tell my ex-wife: no more money.

8 SIMMONS: It's not about your family.

9 CARL: Are you one of the vice-chancellor's goons? I used to have three hundred students in this hall hanging on my every word. People came here to learn. Now it's an academic supermarket, push your trolley round the aisles, oh look, organic existentialism air-freighted in from Chile, wow, Naomi Klein, fair trade ontology, taste the difference.
1 SIMMONS: I'm -

2 CARL: I can still pull them in. I’ve got a dozen Chinese students signed up for the autumn term.

3 SIMMONS: I’m not from the university. I’ve come to see you on a personal matter.

4 JONNY: May I ask my question, please? You were saying -

5 CARL: Name!

6 JONNY: It’s Jonny Carreras? I transferred from Syracuse last semester? Because your papers on Mantalla were so awesome?

7 CARL: This is a summer school. You’re not supposed to be joining the postgraduate class till October.

8 JONNY: I was kinda keen to get started. So you were saying we were gonna be focusing on, like, Why I Exist, which is cool? And I have read it in German, and it’s way cooler, so that’s great? But besides the philosophy I wanna be sure we’re gonna talk about the part of the book where he explains why he didn’t want it to be published. The personal chapter? Where he says these amazing things about, like, celebrity, and fame, and what it means to be great?
CARL: Mantalla’s views on celebrity are simple. He wanted to be unknown. He saw the desire for fame as the thinker’s greatest enemy. As he says, ‘the only thing more contemptible than a man who boasts of his wisdom is a man who gets others to boast for him’.

JONNY: I totally respect Mantalla on that. But -

CARL: How his book came to be published doesn’t matter. The only Mantalla you need to know is a cool, distant, abstract figure, weighing the mystery of human consciousness on the palm of his hand. Now the three key elements to Mantalla’s analysis are as follows...

FADE
SCENE 4. IN CARL’S OFFICE

1 SIMMONS: May I sit down?

2 CARL: Not for me to say. None of the furniture’s mine.

FX: SIMMONS PULLS UP A CHAIR AND SITS

Sad, isn’t it, a professor without a chair. I’m hot-desking. I have to share this office with the head of something. I can never remember if it’s creative writing or creative accounting... What do you want?

3 SIMMONS: I represent the estate of the late Herbert Prenskas Mantalla, of Kadûn Island, Estonia.

4 CARL: (DEVASTATED) The late...? He’s dead? Oh no. No!

5 SIMMONS: I’m sorry to break the news in this way. He was elderly.

6 CARL: Dead! I’ve read his chapters on the inevitability of death so many times. And now he’s dead, and his words are so little comfort. I’ve given my life to him, studying him, teaching his work. I’ve been writing to him every week for thirty years, hoping one day he’d write back. And now he never will.

7 SIMMONS: Dr Mantalla was a recluse. He was an only child, his parents died in Vienna long ago, and he left no living relatives or descendants. He bought Kadûn Island after the collapse of the Soviet Union and lived alone there. He didn’t welcome visitors. His body was found by the boatman who delivers his supplies. It was a natural death.
CARL: As Mantalla says, death is always natural.

SIMMONS: Our client left his estate to a charitable foundation. But he also leaves behind a considerable mass of unpublished papers. He named you, Professor Rosen, as his literary executor, to determine, in accordance with what you consider would have been his wishes, the fate of his unpublished writings. Professor Rosen? Are you all right?

CARL: (STAGGERED) I meant something to him!

SIMMONS: Oh, there's no doubt of that.

CARL: Let me get this clear. He sat down, picked up a pen, and wrote my name. He wrote my name and said that I, Carl Rosen, was to be the caretaker of everything he ever wrote.

SIMMONS: That's right! He did!

CARL: Does the will mention his second, unpublished book? The Virtues of Oblivion?

SIMMONS: The Virtues of Oblivion does exist. Only on paper, and only in one example, which is on his desk on Kadùn. The will states that the fate of the manuscript is to be determined by the executors.

CARL: So he chose me, of all the interpreters of his work, to be the man who'd shape his legacy for the world. Me, and me alone.

SIMMONS: Absolutely! Only you. You and the other executor.
CARL: What other executor?

SIMMONS: Your duties as literary executor are to be shared equally with a Miss Lena Morózova.

CARL: Never heard of her. Where's she from?

SIMMONS: Odessa. In Ukraine.

CARL: There aren't any Mantalla scholars in Ukraine. What's the university?

SIMMONS: I'm not sure she's affiliated to a university.

CARL: Is she a journalist? Is there some new feature of the Internet that allows logorrheic harpies in the arse-end of eastern Europe to pass themselves off as intellectuals?

SIMMONS: I don't believe she's ever tried to pass herself off as an intellectual.

CARL: What is she, then?

SIMMONS: As far as I know she's an exotic dancer.
SCENE 5  
A RESTAURANT. SOUND OF HIGH HEELS APPROACHING.  
THEY COME UP TO CARL’S TABLE AND STOP.  

1  LENA: Professor Rosen?  

2  CARL: Yes, it doesn’t look as if my friend is coming, so just bring me a bottle of the Picpoul de Pinet.  

3  LENA: It’s me, Professor. Lena Morózova. I’m Bertie’s – Dr Mantalla’s other executioner.  

4  CARL: I thought you were the waitress.  

5  LENA: I didn’t have your number to say I’d be late…  

6  CARL: Now you mention it, the heels and skirt aren’t really compatible with the safe delivery of soup. Have a seat. Did you leave your axe outside?  

7  LENA: (DRAWING OUT A CHAIR, SITTING DOWN) I don’t understand.  

8  CARL: Your axe. We’re executors, not executioners.  

9  LENA: English is not my first language.  

10 CARL: Miss Morozova -  

11 LENA: Lena.
CARL: Lena, it’s sweet that you came all the way to England, but there’s no reason to take this any further. Am I going too fast for you?

LENA: It’s fine.

CARL: If it makes it easier, I’m happy to suppose Herbert Mantalla didn’t meet you when you were “dancing”. We’ll take it you met in some charming café, noticed you were reading the same issue of Philosopher’s Quarterly, got talking, went for a long walk, exchanged phone numbers, saw the Godard retrospective at the local fleapit and shyly held hands when the lights went down.

LENA: Perhaps this is your fantasy.

CARL: I’m sorry?

LENA: You never met him, and you wish you had.

CARL: I knew him through his work rather better, I suspect, than you.

LENA: I don’t think so!

CARL: I’m trying not to assume your relationship with Mantalla was, you know...

LENA: Financial?

CARL: I didn’t say that.
lena: He saw me dance around a pole in a strip club. He was in the audience. He clapped with his arms held straight out and shouted ‘Bravo!’ like some aristocrat in an old film. He came to my dressing room. He took me to dinner. He charmed me. I took him back to my flat. We became lovers.

2   carl: The international academic community doesn’t recognise becoming lovers as a qualification. It’s not a PhD, is it? What’s the point of you schlepping all the way to Estonia to look at Mantalla’s old papers? Those dusty files would bore you senseless.

3   lena: Some of that work he wrote using my naked body as a writing desk.

4   carl: [I’m sure you made a beautiful desk. But a desk is just an object. It doesn’t know the work, does it? (BEAT) Does it?] Did you read it?

5   lena: No. He did not let me.

6   carl: (RELIEVED) Of course he didn’t. What would it have meant to you? What do you know about phenomenology? What do you know about the problem of existence?

7   lena: I live in a country where nurses get paid a hundred dollars a month. I know about the problem of existence.

8   carl: Do you know who Husserl is? Heidegger? I bet you’ve never even heard of Schopenhauer.
LENA: I do know Schopenhauer. He is a goalkeeper for Arsenal football club.

CARL: You had sex with a guy you met when you were working in a strip club. Fine. That doesn't give you the right to poke around in the intellectual legacy of a genius. Let me have the travel expenses sent to you. Mantalla wanted to make you a gesture, but his work was meant for me. This is my labour of love.

LENA: You did not know him, and you did not love him. I did.

CARL: You were the last carnal pleasure for an old man at the end of his life. A plaything.

LENA: You were not there. You did not touch his heart. You did not look into his eyes when he told you about his childhood.

CARL: This isn’t about his childhood. It’s about man's place in the universe.

LENA: It’s true that when I tried to read Why I Exist, I found it cold and pointless. But I know some things. I know he wanted to prove he could be a great thinker without ever being published, without anyone knowing it except him. Isn't that right?

CARL: You could have read that on Wikipedia.

LENA: I know he mislaid the manuscript of Why I Exist, and a publisher got hold of it somehow. Bertie’s need to be a great philosopher just for himself was violated.
1  CARL:  If he’d really wanted to stop publication, he could have.

2  LENA:  It was too late. It had been seen. Once the book was out of his hands he might as well let it be published properly.

3  CARL:  And now there’s another book. Don’t you think Mantalla would have been even keener to keep this one out of strangers’ hands?

4  LENA:  I was not a stranger to him.

5  CARL:  Do you have a view as to what should be done with the manuscript?

6  LENA:  I don’t make plans like that. I won’t know until I’m there.

7  CARL:  So you’re determined to come to the island with me.

8  LENA:  That is the least we deserve.

9  CARL:  ‘We’? Who is ‘we’? Is somebody else involved in this?

10 LENA:  I meant I. I meant you and I. It doesn’t matter what I meant. But when you go to Estonia, I’m coming with you.

MUSIC
SCENE 6.  THE VICE-CHANCELLOR’S OFFICE

1 VICE-CHANCELLOR: Academia’s dead, Carl. Higher education is a product in the global consumer lifestyle marketplace, and this university is fighting for market share. If your philosopher were a management guru, or a celebrity leftie, it’d be different, but as it is, the interest’s not there. Your literary executorship doesn’t change anything.

2 CARL: Just imagine, vice-chancellor. A centre on this campus dedicated to the study of a great modern philosopher. At its heart a locked room containing a book that has never been published and that no-one is permitted to read.

3 VICE-CHANCELLOR: Hm! (THINKS IT OVER) Institution dedicated to learning blocks access to knowledge...I like that, it has a retro vibe. If you can get hold of Mantalla’s unpublished book and bring it here, Carl, we might be in business. Until then, I’m afraid, you’re hanging by a thread. You’ve got no students.

4 CARL: The dip in Mantalla’s reputation is temporary.

5 VICE-CHANCELLOR: You think his death might revive him?

6 CARL: I’ve got a dozen Chinese students for the BA next term. I’ve got one young postgrad who’s so keen he’s doing my Mantalla class at the summer school.
SCENE 7  PUB

1 JONNY: I want to write Mantalla’s life story. With your help. You’re my supervisor. A supervisor who could use a boost right now.

2 CARL: His work is what matters, not his life.

3 JONNY: You were interested in his life. You wrote to him, like, constantly.

4 CARL: To try to get him to discuss his ideas! Not to rummage through his personal affairs.

5 JONNY: But in history, whenever awesome guys die, their friends, like, take a view, right? So Franz Kafka, he's like, hey, Max Brod, you're my best friend, when I croak, you take everything I've written and just like totally burn it, put it all on the fire. And Max Brod is like sure, Franz, whatever you say, I'll have the gasoline and lighter ready. And then Franz Kafka croaks, and Max Brod is all wah, wah, Franz Kafka’s dead, and then he's like: Am I gonna burn the work of the most amazing writer ever, so the world's never gonna know how amazing he was? No way! So I'm saying you've gotta have more of a Max Brod thing going on.

6 CARL: Mantalla spelled it out more clearly than Kafka. He left no room for doubt. I intend to forbid access to all Mantalla’s papers, including the Virtues of Oblivion.
1  JONNY: It’s crazy. Herbert Mantalla, your number one guy, just died. It’s like this gigantic tree just fell in the forest, and you’re the only person who saw it, and you don’t want to tell anyone about it. What does his girlfriend think?

2  CARL: I wouldn’t call Lena his girlfriend. Great men have physical needs, like everyone.

3  JONNY: Did you meet her? What’s she like?

4  CARL: You could say the aesthetic standards of Odessa pole dancing venues turn out to be quite high.

5  JONNY: Have you got the hots for her, professor?

6  CARL: She’s young. Younger than you. Mantalla was old enough to be her grandfather. I wonder what state of mind he was in when he wrote her into his will. It can’t have been long before he died.

7  JONNY: But he didn’t leave her any money. You hear of Playboy models who, like, cash in when they marry a ninety-year-old millionaire and he doesn’t survive the wedding night. But nobody sets out to hump their way to a literary trusteeship.
CARL: I caught her saying there was someone else involved with her in this. She talked about ‘we’ and then denied it. I couldn’t forgive myself if she was scheming to commercialise Mantalla’s book and I didn’t try to stop her. (BEAT) I don’t like your biography plan, but I can’t stop you writing it. Maybe in your researches you’ll look into the end of Mantalla’s life as well as the beginning. Maybe you’ll find out what Lena means by ‘we’.

JONNY: Maybe.
SCENE 8.  
EMPTY LECTURE HALL. CARL SNORING.

1  LENA:  Professor Rosen?

2  CARL:  (WAKING UP) What?

3  LENA:  I’m sorry to wake you. They said you were giving a lecture here today.

4  CARL:  Oh yes...it was cancelled...

5  LENA:  I wanted to say goodbye. I’m going back to Ukraine today.

6  CARL:  (DELIGHTED) Excellent!

7  LENA:  And I’ll see you in Tallinn next week.

8  CARL:  (DISAPPOINTED) Oh. You haven’t changed your mind, then.

9  LENA:  I wanted to give you this. (RUSTLE OF PLASTIC BAG) I know for you it is what Bertie wrote that mattered, and not his life as a man, but still I thought you might like to have something that belonged to him. This is his old jacket.

10  CARL:  He wore this?

1        CARL:      See you...

FX:  LENA EXITS THROUGH SWING DOORS.

Thank you!

FX:  WE HEAR CARL SNIFF THE JACKET, THEN TAKE A
LONGER SNIFF: HE BEGINS TO SOB.

MUSIC
SCENE 9.  FADE IN TO PASSENGER JET IN FLIGHT & ANNOUNCEMENT

1 ANNOUNCEMENT: (D) Ladies and gentlemen, in a few minutes we shall begin our descent into Tallinn. Please make sure (CONTINUES IN BACKGROUND OVER DIALOGUE) your seatbelts are fastened, your seats are in the upright position and your tray tables are fastened to the seat back in front of you.

2 JONNY: (FROM THE AISLE) Hey professor.

3 CARL: Jonny! (CONTROLLED ANGER) Of all the flights on all the budget airlines in the world, you have to book a seat on mine.

4 JONNY: I thought it might be fun. I’ve never been to the Baltics.

5 CARL: Are you out of your mind? What the hell do you think you’re doing? I haven’t seen you for weeks. I’ve got the vice-chancellor breathing down my neck and my only student disappears. I had to sit in an empty hall with the blinds closed.

6 JONNY: I’ve been travelling. Researching Mantalla stuff. The things I’ve found out are like totally amazing.

7 CARL: About Lena?

8 JONNY: You can’t take her to Mantalla’s island.

9 CARL: Go on.
JONNY: Take me instead.

CARL: What?

JONNY: You need me. You need my help to get out of this rut you’re in. I came from the States to learn from you, but I don’t want to use what I learn to write journal papers nobody reads. I want to do TED talks and get profiled in the New York Times. And that’s what you want too, but you won’t admit it, and you don’t know how.

CARL: I thought you were about to explain how Lena was in cahoots with some dodgy Ukrainian mafioso trying to make money out of the Mantalla legacy. Unless you’ve got proof of that sort of malarkey, I can’t stop her coming with me.

JONNY: I know what you want. You wanna be the, like, solitary keeper of the Herbert Mantalla flame, [and boss of the Mantalla library, and be like ‘Don’t touch that!’ and ‘Nobody’s allowed to see that manuscript ever, cause Mantalla wouldn’t have liked it.’] You want me to help you keep Lena away from the island, but you don’t want to help me.

CARL: How?

JONNY: By letting me read the Virtues of Oblivion. By letting me use it for my biography of Mantalla.

CARL: Out of the question. [What are these totally amazing things you’ve found out?]
1 JONNY: I’m not ready to, like, tell you now? You’ve gotta trust me, Professor. You really have gotta take me to Mantalla’s island, and you really can’t let Lena go.]

2 CARL: Get back to your seat.

3 JONNY: (MOVING AWAY) How you persuade her [Lena] to back off is up to you!
SCENE 10. FOOTBALL MATCH PLAYING ON TV IN CARL’S HOTEL ROOM. KNOCKING ON DOOR.

1 CARL: Just a moment... (TURNS TV VOLUME DOWN, CROSSES ROOM, OPENS DOOR) Oh. Hello.

2 LENA: They gave you a nicer room than me. You can see the sea! (LAUGHS) Didn’t you get my text? I’ve been waiting for you.

3 CARL: I was collecting my thoughts.

4 LENA: For a philosophy professor that is a big job. Maybe I could help. I made a reservation at the Georgian restaurant on the other side of the square.

5 CARL: Shouldn’t it be Estonian?

6 LENA: Georgian restaurants are like the Chinese restaurants of the former Soviet Union. How do I look?

7 CARL: (RELUCTANTLY) Good. Very good.

8 LENA: This dress was one of Bertie’s favourites.

9 CARL: Sit down, Lena. There’s something I need to –

10 LENA: Oh, you’re watching football! That’s the team Bertie used to like!

FX: TV VOLUME UP
1 COMMENTATOR:  (D, CROWD ROARING IN BACKGROUND) ...unbelievable scenes here at the Emirates! With their first choice keeper already injured, Arsenal’s reserve keeper is being stretchered off, and the job of protecting the goal from a remorseless City onslaught falls to the untried youngster from Germany, Hans Schopenhauer.

FX: CARL SWITCHES TV OFF

2 LENA: What were you going to tell me?

3 CARL: Let’s get something to eat first. And drink.
LENA: This is khachapouri. It’s like pizza, but the cheese is on the inside. Have you ever eaten Georgian food?

CARL: I used to own a Georgian house. My ex-wife lives there now. Do you have someone like that?

LENA: That’s the first time you’ve asked me a question about myself.

CARL: Here’s another one. How come you speak English so well? You don’t pick that up in a strip club.

LENA: English was my favourite at school. I liked George Eliot. George Eliot and Candace Bushnell. I got into university to study English. My mother got sick and there was no-one else to look after her. I dropped out. After she died, they wouldn’t take me back on the course unless I paid foreigner’s rates.

CARL: Foreigner’s rates. Yes, universities like them.

LENA: I could not afford it. A friend told me I could earn good money dancing in the club. It was OK. Not like you imagine. Some of the clients were very bad people, but the guys looked after us. The manager told me I should have an operation, you know, enhancement, to make them bigger? I told him no. And he didn’t ask me again.

CARL: A true gentleman.
LENA: I guess I was lucky. One of the girls got her face smashed in. Another one married a mafia guy. For me it was a job. I never had to sleep with anyone for dollars.

CARL: And then Mantalla came along.

LENA: He had a way of looking at me as if I were the first woman he’d seen. He felt the joy and sadness in the smallest thing, a crumpled pack of cigarettes in the gutter, the last leaf on the tree, my skin showing through the hole a moth ate in my sweater. That was his philosophy to me. I loved him. He was selfish, very sure of his greatness. Sometimes I wanted to kill him. But I couldn’t stay angry with him.

CARL: And you still had to pay for the English classes.

LENA: Bertie didn’t want me to go on dancing at the club. I didn’t want to stop my classes. He had money. I let him pay my bills and moved into his suite. I wasn’t a strong independent woman like those New York single ladies.

CARL: My ex-wife was strong and independent. She knew what she wanted. She wanted someone else.

LENA: You sound as if you still care about her. And yet you split up such a long time ago.

CARL: How do you know that?

LENA: Bertie read parts of your last letters aloud to me. He was fascinated. He said it was like having a – what was the word he used? – an epistolary pet.
Herbert Mantalla was fascinated by my life?

Why not? He didn’t have friends, except for one he used to know long ago in Vienna, but they fell out.

Who was this friend?

He never told me.

FADE OUT AND BACK IN TO SAME RESTAURANT, LATER, QUIETER

I have a son. He’s fourteen now. I see him every second weekend...is something the matter?

It’s nothing. Is there a woman in your life?

I’ve been out with a few. It never lasts much beyond the first date.

I am doing well, then.

If a woman likes me, it makes me anxious, and I start to drink too much.

So I should pretend to hate you?

You didn’t answer when I asked if you had someone in your life. Who did you mean before when you talked about ‘we’?

It was a slip of the tongue. I think I was already feeling close to you.
1 CARL: Listen, Lena – you’re making it hard for me to say what I have to say. I can’t take you with me to Kadún. It’s impossible. I know you have a right, but Mantalla is dead. What’s left for you there? What can I say to make you understand that you’d distract me from his papers and waste your time?

2 LENA: It’s summer. I will read. I will make meals. You are a teacher. You will teach me philosophy. I will walk around the island and swim while you are working on the papers. Then in the evening you will come down to the beach and tell me what you have found.

3 CARL: (BEAT) Give me some more of that wine.
SCENE 12.  CENTRAL TALLINN STREET, EVENING, TRAFFIC SOUNDS, DING OF A TRAM BELL. LENA AND CARL WALKING OVER COBBLES.

1  CARL:  (SLIGHTLY TIPSY) Doesn’t it ever get dark here?

2  LENA:  These are the white nights. I would like to see the view from the terrace of your room again.

3  CARL:  More wine!
SCENE 13. TERRACE OFF CARL’S ROOM. DOOR OPENS, CARL AND LENA STUMBLE THROUGH.

1 LENA: The sea!

FX: MUSIC BEGINS

2 CARL: (BESIDE HER) Sunlight and moonlight together. How strange it looks, like a blank sheet of paper, waiting to be written on.

3 LENA: There is a poet in you.

4 CARL: (INTIMATELY) You cannot come to the island.

5 LENA: You cannot stop me.

FX: THEY KISS

6 LENA: My dear executor.

7 CARL: My dear executioner.

FX: MUSIC CONTINUES, THEN FADES INTO LENA WEEPING.

8 CARL: What’s wrong?

9 LENA: I can’t do this.

10 CARL: What do you mean? What’s going on?
LENA: If I let you make love to me, it will confirm all the bad things you think about me. You will think I am doing it to get what I want. That this is what I am like. You thought when you met me, ‘Oh, she’s young, she’s pretty, she’s from a poor country, she worked in a strip club, she must have been after the philosopher for his money.’

CARL: I had my doubts, but...

LENA: I loved him, and he loved me. If he paid for my education, it does not make me a prostitute.

CARL: I agree. Can we go back to where we were just now?

LENA: I would be doing it to get what I wanted, because I don’t have those feelings for you.

CARL: Ah.

LENA: I would be making you like me so you would let me use Bertie’s book. There is somebody in Odessa. I wanted to do this for him.

CARL: So that is why you’re here. You are a gold-digger. I knew it.

LENA: I talked to a German publisher. I tried to sell them the story of my life with Mantalla and they said no, because I’m not a writer. But when I told them I could put bits of his unpublished book together with my story, they offered me a lot of money.

CARL: Oh, Lena.
LENA: I should not have to sleep with you to persuade you to let me use the book.

CARL: I didn’t force you to kiss me.

LENA: It was you who kissed me.

CARL: You led me on!

LENA: We have a right to use whatever is in Bertie’s book.

CARL: We again! Who is this ‘we’? [You and your mother? Some sleazeball uncle?] Your home town boyfriend who wants you to bring him a ticket to the good life?

LENA: ‘We’ is me and my son.

CARL: What?

LENA: The son of Herbert Mantalla, born last year. Bertie was very uncompromising. When I told him I was pregnant, he left. I didn’t hear from him again. He has left us with nothing, except this thing with you.

CARL: Why didn’t you tell me?

LENA: You mistrusted me from the start. Would you have been any more welcoming if you’d known I was the mother of his child?
CARL: Lena, listen to me. It’s all clear now. It’s going to be all right. Go to your room. I have to send a message. I’ll see you in the morning and we’ll take the bus to the ferry port as planned.

LENA: We’re going together?

CARL: Together to the island of Kadùn.

LENA: Don’t disappoint me.

SHE LEAVES

CARL TEXTING

CARL: Jonny, Jonny, Jonny....OK. ‘Hi Jonny, Carl here. Have decided acceptable to take Lena to island. Reckon I know what you found out about her so no need for further contact, suggest you return to UK ASAP.’

WHOOSH OF TEXT BEING SENT

CARL WALKS OVER TO TERRACE DOOR, FLINGS IT OPEN. DISTANT AMBIENCE OF DAWN SEA.

CARL: The sea!

FX: MUSIC, MIX INTO
LENAs. THROB OF LARGE MARINE ENGINE, CHURN OF WAKE.

1 LENA: We’re almost at Muhu. From there it’s not far to Kuressaare.

2 CARL: And then we take a small boat to Mantalla’s island. Did you visit him there?

3 LENA: He never invited me. I only saw him in Odessa. (BEAT) You are wearing Bertie’s jacket.

4 CARL: Do you mind?

5 LENA: It suits you. Look, we’re coming to the harbour.

FX: FERRY HOOTER GOES, CHANGE IN TEMPO OF ENGINE, GARBLED INSTRUCTIONS ON PA. IN THE BACKGROUND, VERY FAINTLY, JONNY IS SHOUTING FROM THE QUAY

6 JONNY: Professor!

7 LENA: That cute young man on the dock. It sounds as if he’s shouting ‘Professor’. Do you know him?

8 CARL: Oh no. He’s my – he’s one of my postgraduate students.

FX: MOBILE RINGS

He shouldn’t be here. Hello?

9 JONNY: (D) Hey, professor! Can you see me? I rented a car. Meet you on the dock.
CARL: I told you to go back to England. I don’t want your car, I don’t want to see you here, I want you to remove yourself from the entire Baltic region.

JONNY: Not an option, professor.

CARL: What’s that supposed to mean?

LENA: Oh, Carl, if your student has a car, let’s go with him. I don’t want to spend more time on that horrible coach.

CARL: Lena, you have no idea how annoying he is.

LENA: Come on, Carl.
SCENE 15. IN THE CAR, DRIVING. JONNY AT THE WHEEL, LENA IN THE PASSENGER SEAT, CARL IN THE BACK

1 JONNY: ...and my parents have this beautiful cabin by a lake in upstate New York.

2 LENA: I’ve never been to America.

3 JONNY: My God, it’s so amazing to be sitting next to someone who actually knew Mantalla. He was such a recluse. I mean the only photo of him anyone’s ever seen is from like 1966. Have you got pictures of him?

4 LENA: No. He was strict about that.

5 CARL: What are you two talking about in the front? I can’t hear what you’re saying. I should be doing the driving.

6 JONNY: Relax, Professor. Enjoy the scenery.

7 CARL: You shouldn’t even be here. [Things have changed.] Lena and I can handle the trip to the island by ourselves.

8 JONNY: Lena and I? Wow this journey has really like brought you two together.

9 CARL: Don’t go there, Jonny.

10 JONNY: So is there like a clause in the will that says ‘Hey guys, I’m not gonna leave you any cash, but you can have each other?’
1 CARL: (LOSING CONTROL) I said don’t go there! Just go back to England! Whatever you might have found out about Lena, I don’t need it now!

(BEAT)

2 LENA: Stop the car.

3 JONNY: (TO CARL) Oh, good job, professor.

4 LENA: (INSISTENT) Stop the car.

FX: JONNY STOPS THE CAR AND SWITCHES OFF THE ENGINE

5 CARL: (LEANING FORWARD BETWEEN THE FRONT SEATS) Lena, let me explain.

6 LENA: (TRYING TO KEEP IT TOGETHER) I need a cigarette.

FX: OPENS DOOR, GETS OUT

7 CARL: (TO JONNY) Stay here.

8 JONNY: (SOTTO VOCE) Listen, man, what was the deal with that text you sent me last night? Lena seems like a sweet girl. Why are you stringing her along? You know you can’t take her to Mantalla’s house.

9 CARL: Why?

10 JONNY: You know why. And now I know why.
CARL: You’re not making any sense. We’ll talk about this later.

FX: AWAY FROM THE CAR, CARL APPROACHES LENA, WHO LIGHTS UP WITH TREMBLING FINGERS, INHALES, EXHALES.

LENA: You sent your student off to find out something nasty you could use against me.

CARL: I told him not to go digging into Mantalla’s private life, but I couldn’t stop him. Since he was going, I asked him to keep his ears open.

LENA: About me.

CARL: Look at it from my point of view. I was afraid a trust I’d been given by a great man was going to be compromised by something materialistic.

LENA: Something materialistic? You mean me?

CARL: All I knew about you was you were a pole dancer in a town on the Black Sea! If you’d told me everything from the beginning, about the child, your life...

LENA: You made up your mind before the beginning. You take so much care to understand Herbert’s thoughts about man’s place in the universe, but when it comes to imagining the feelings of one real, ordinary woman, you are a block of stone.
CARL: I promise that soon you’ll understand he didn’t leave you with nothing. And neither will I.

LENA: Soon. I have waited all my life for soon.

FX: STUBS OUT CIGARETTE, STRIDES BACK TO CAR, PULLS OPEN DOOR

So, Mr Student, what did you find out on your spying trip?

CARL: There’s no need –

LENA: I would like to hear it.

CARL: If it’s about Lena having Mantalla’s child, I already know.

JONNY: (ASTONISHED LAUGHTER) Wh-a-a-a-t? You’re kidding me! Seriously? Oh my God! Lena! Congratulations!

LENA: (TAKEN ABACK) Thank you...

JONNY: Oh my God this is like so amazing. I want to hear all about it.

CARL: So that wasn’t what you found out.

JONNY: Oh no. No I never found out anything about you, Lena. I never went anywhere near Odessa. (BEAT) I only went to Vienna.

CARL: (STARTLED) Vienna? I told you, nothing happened in Vienna.
1 JONNY: [You and I need to have like a chat about it, professor. But in the meantime] I want to hear about this kid.

FX: STARTS ENGINE, DOORS SLAM AS OTHERS GET IN

What’s his name?

2 LENA: Alexander. He’s two...

FADE
SCENE 16.  
FADE IN TO HOTEL LOBBY, MUZAK, CARL ON PHONE TO ENGLAND

1 VICE-CHANCELLOR:  (D)...simply not acceptable, efficiency-wise.

2 CARL:  (PLEADING ON PHONE) But the book, vice-chancellor! The locked room!

3 VICE-CHANCELLOR:  (D) If you bring home the book, we can talk. Until then all I know is your dozen Chinese students have cancelled and I have to ask you to take early retirement.
SCENE 17.  JONNY’S ROOM

1  JONNY:  So I go to Vienna, and I start like talking to people. And I find out so much. Like how Herbert Mantalla ends up in Austria after the Second World War when his family become refugees from East Prussia. How he’s like this obscure teacher of linguistics and is secretly working on a totally brilliant work of philosophy.

2  CARL:  What you’re telling me is common knowledge.

3  JONNY:  And then along comes this lonely young English philosophy major doing his doctorate in Vienna. Who makes friends with Mantalla, gets his trust, listens to his ideas, convinces himself the dude is a stone cold genius. But he can’t persuade Mantalla to let him see his book, let alone to publish it. Then one day the student steals it from a café table, copies it, and returns it to the café. Do you wanna know the student’s name?

4  CARL:  No.

5  JONNY:  Carl Rosen.

6  [CARL:  You’ve got no proof.

7  JONNY:  I’ve got like eight hours of notarised testimony.]

8  CARL:  Max Brod was supposed to burn Kafka’s work, but after Kafka died, he didn’t.

9  JONNY:  Mantalla wasn’t dead when you stole his book.
CARL: I didn’t steal it. I made sure the world got to see it. I thought when I was younger that whatever he wrote belonged to the world, and not to him. Now I’m older I understand I was wrong. It’s his right to choose between obscurity and vanity, and he chose obscurity.

JONNY: Uh, hello? Nobody chooses obscurity? Mantalla needed you to steal his work in Vienna. Why else would he have been so careless? Now we can, like, re-enact the past, you and me. You play the one who pretends he doesn’t want his book to be read, and I play the, like, well-intentioned thief.

CARL: Let me guess. You’ve already had a big advance from an American publisher, conditional on you getting access to Mantalla’s book.

JONNY: All this flying around is, like, expensive? As long as we’re working together my publisher doesn’t need to know what you did in Vienna.

CARL: I wish you’d said all this when we met on the plane.

JONNY: I wanted to collaborate, professor, not twist your arm up behind your back. I thought you’d guess what I meant. That’s why you don’t want Lena to go to the island. All this crap about being worried she’s working for some Ukrainian hustler. You’re not afraid she’ll sneak a peek at Mantalla’s second book. You’re afraid she’ll find something there that tells her you took the first one.

CARL: My early letters to him. Asking for his forgiveness.
1 JONNY: You’re not protecting Mantalla. You’re protecting yourself.

2 CARL: Why did you have to dredge this up? I just wanted to do the right thing this time.

3 JONNY: Hey, I’m cool with what you did in Vienna. That was the right thing. (BEAT) Lena is kind of amazing.

4 CARL: (ABSENTLY) Mm?

5 JONNY: There was kind of like this weird vibe between the two of you...have you and her...like...you know...

6 CARL: Nothing happened.

7 JONNY: Cool. It’s too bad she can’t come with us. You’re gonna tell her, right?

8 CARL: (GETTING UP) I’ll find her and talk to her. And then we’ll sort out a boat to take us to the island.
SCENE 18. HOTEL LOBBY. MUZAK. JONNY APPROACHES RECEPTION

1  JONNY: Hi, I’m trying to find one of your guests – Professor Carl Rosen?
SCENE 19. STREET IN SMALL PORT, LIGHT TRAFFIC, TOURISTS POTTERING. JONNY RUNNING DOWN THE STREET, OUT OF BREATH.

1 JONNY: (SHOUTING) Lena! Lena!

2 LENA: What’s wrong? Where’s Carl?

3 JONNY: I can’t find him! He’s checked out of his hotel!

4 LENA: But we are not going to Kadún until tomorrow.

5 JONNY: That’s what he said. I think he’s like double crossed us, found a boat and gone to the island by himself.

6 LENA: But he cannot go without me. I am the co-executor.

7 JONNY: He can’t have much of a start on us.

8 LENA: What do you mean?

9 JONNY: We need to get to the harbour, get a boat and see if we can get to the island before him.

10 LENA: Are you sure?

11 JONNY: Come on!
SCENE 20. JETTY. WATER SLAPPING AGAINST SIDES OF A SMALL WOODEN BOAT.

1 BOATMAN: (FROM JETTY) Good evening!

2 CARL: (IN BOAT) Hello.

FX: BOATMAN STEPS INTO BOAT

3 BOATMAN: You are sitting in my boat.

4 CARL: Ah. I was hoping the owner would turn up.

5 BOATMAN: (SETTLES HIMSELF DOWN WITH THE EFFORT OF AGE) Give me the oar.

6 CARL: What?

7 BOATMAN: You’re sitting on it.

8 CARL: Oh right. Here.

FX: SOUND OF OARS BEING FITTED INTO ROWLOCK WHILE CARL TALKS.

9 BOATMAN: What brings you to our harbour so late in the evening?

10 CARL: I’m trying to prevent my early retirement.

11 BOATMAN: Take off that rope.
1  CARL: (DOING AS INSTRUCTED) Early retirement. It’s like a cyanide pill, but you have to spend a thousand hours in garden centres before it takes effect. I’ll put this in the bottom of the boat, shall I?

FX: SWISH OF OARS DIPPING IN AND OUT OF THE WATER
AND SLAP OF KEEL AS BOAT MOVES OFF

My only hope now is that book. (BEAT) Where are we going?

2  BOATMAN: To the island of Kadûn.

FX: MUSIC BEGINS

This is what you wanted, yes?

3  CARL: I suppose it is.

4  BOATMAN: Five euros to go there.

5  CARL: You’re very kind!

6  BOATMAN: One hundred euros to go back.
SCENE 21. WRENCH STRIKING HEAVY METAL BLOCK IN ENGINE COMPARTMENT OF BOAT ADRIFT AT SEA, HEARD FROM TOP DECK

1 LENNA: (DOWN BELOW) Kharashó, spasíba.

FX: CLIMBS LADDER FROM BELOW

They say they will have the engine working in one hour.

2 JONNY: What a piece of junk. Any word from Carl?

3 LENNA: I have no signal, same as you. It seems you were right about him. They make you feel small, when you put your little concerns next to their philosophy and their great ideals. And then they do mean things.

4 JONNY: They?

5 LENNA: My dear Bertie left me and my son with nothing. And I thought Carl would let me use the Virtues of Oblivion to write my memoir, but now...

6 JONNY: Woah, your memoir? Are you saying you’ve got like a book deal?

7 LENNA: If I can read the book, I have a deal. I need the money to look after my son.

8 JONNY: I need the book to write my biography of Mantalla! Our needs are so close.
LENA: But we do not know what Carl wants.

JONNY: He wants to take the book back to his university and put it in like a sealed archive where nobody will be allowed to read it. He doesn’t want anyone to do what he did when he was our age.

LENA: What do you mean?

JONNY: It was him who stole Mantalla’s book in Vienna.

LENA: The friend Bertie fell out with. It was Carl!

JONNY: He helped his own career by stealing his hero’s book. Now he’s old and comfortable he won’t help us do what he did. He makes this dumb gesture for his own pride and pretends it’s something noble. He cares more about what the dead want than what the living need.

LENA: People always have more than one reason for whatever they do.

JONNY: I can’t believe we’re just stuck here halfway to the island! They said an hour? (BEAT) What can we do for an hour?

LENA: (LAUGHS)
SCENE 22. ON THE BOATMAN’S BOAT

1 BOATMAN: Now, it is fine summer light. Later, there will be a storm.

2 CARL: You can tell that from looking at the sky?

3 BOATMAN: No, from looking at the Internet.

FX: DOCKING AT A SMALL WOODEN JETTY.

4 BOATMAN: Here is Kadün Island.

FX: MUSIC

5 CARL: So many tall trees!

6 BOATMAN: Be careful. I shall be back at sunrise tomorrow.

FX: PEAL OF THUNDER
SCENE 23. AT SEA. FIERCE STORM, WAVES LASHING AT A TINY INFLATABLE DINGHY

1 JONNY: How could that guy just leave us here in this crappy dinghy?

2 LENA: It was too shallow for his boat! But too deep for us!

3 JONNY: (SHOUTING OVER THE STORM) If we jump out of the boat we can make it to the shore!

4 LENA: Jonny, no!

5 JONNY: We can’t stay here! I’m going to jump!

(SPLASH AS HE GOES INTO THE WATER)

6 JONNY: (GASPS) The current’s too strong!

7 LENA: Hang on! I’m coming to get you! (SHE DIVES IN)

FADE
SCENE 24. OUTSIDE MANTALLA’S WOODEN HOUSE. JONNY AND LENA APPROACH DOOR, TRY IT, IT’S LOCKED; JONNY BANGS ON IT.

1 JONNY: Carl! Are you there? Let us in!

2 LENA: Carl had the only key! We have to break in!
SCENE 25.

INSIDE HOUSE, STORM OUTSIDE. CRASH AS DOOR SPLINTERS OPEN: JONNY AND LENA ENTER, EXHAUSTED AND SOAKED TO THE SKIN.

1 JONNY: Where’d you learn how to wield an axe like that?

2 LENA: Maybe I have a talent for execution.

3 JONNY: (RAISES VOICE) Carl? Anybody home?

4 LENA: He has been here. The stove is warm. There is a note. (PICKS UP PAPER) It’s from Carl.

5 JONNY: (AGGRESSIVELY) Is it a suicide note?

6 LENA: It was you who nearly died tonight.

7 JONNY: Hey, I meant what I said. I’m like your slave for life now. Come on, what does it say?

8 CARL (VO) (ABSENT, VOICING TEXT OF NOTE) Dear Lena and Jonny, I have taken the Virtues of Oblivion –

9 JONNY: No!

10 CARL (VO) (AS BEFORE) – the Virtues of Oblivion, to keep it safe. I renounce my executorship. I have gone and shall not return. Everything you need is here. I hope you will be happy. Carl. PS: Lena, Mantalla’s jacket and its sorry contents are drying in the woodshed.
1 JONNY: What an a-hole! You’re gonna have to like drag him through the courts.

2 LENA: The storm is dropping. You get the stove going. I’m going to fetch that jacket.
SCENE 26. IN THE WOODSHED. LENA OPENS DOOR CAUTIOUSLY

1 CARL: Hello, Lena.

2 LENA: Carl! I hoped you would be here.

3 CARL: You’re wet through! But you’re OK? What happened to the great American biographer?

4 LENA: I saved him from drowning.

5 CARL: How was that? Glad about it, sad about it?

6 LENA: Glad. (SURPRISED LAUGH, THEN SERIOUS) You are taking Bertie’s book.

7 CARL: I have to. Mantalla left it to me as my burden.

8 LENA: Do you remember promising me that I would see Mantalla didn’t leave me with nothing, and neither would you?

9 CARL: Jonny will have told you what happened in Vienna.

10 LENA: Yes.

11 CARL: I have the book. But Mantalla and I are leaving you something worth more at the bank. My confession. In my letters. You’re cleverer than Jonny. You’ll have to explain it to him. How happy your publishers will be to collaborate on the story of the student who betrayed his master. How he’ll get his academic glory, and how you’ll get money to help your son.
LEN A: When everyone finds out you stole Mantalla’s book, you will look bad.

CAR L: Your reward is my punishment. That’s how Mantalla wanted it. (BEAT) Back in Tallinn, I wanted you so much. I still do. But the part of me that might have loved you, the part of me that in other men seeks the unknown in women, will always, in me, be turned towards the unknowns of philosophy.

LEN A: I fell for one like that before. Goodbye, Carl. Keep the jacket. It’s yours now.

CAR L: Thank you.

FX: SHE LEAVES, CLOSING THE DOOR.

Goodbye. Lena.
SCENE 27.  SCULLING ALONG IN THE ROWING BOAT, THE SEA
CALM AGAIN

1  BOATMAN:  What do you have in your hands?


3  BOATMAN:  Are you the author?

4  CARL:  Another man wrote it. He died, and left it to me to take care of.

5  BOATMAN:  What is it about?

6  CARL:  I haven’t read it. I've wanted to read it for a long time, and now there’s nothing to stop me, except that he said he didn’t want anyone to read it, and I believe he meant it.

7  BOATMAN:  Then why do you keep it?

8  CARL:  What do you mean?

9  BOATMAN:  If you truly believe his wish was that this book be for himself alone, you should destroy it. Throw it into the sea.

10  CARL:  I couldn’t do that!

11  BOATMAN:  Aren’t you tempted to read it?

12  CARL:  Of course!

13  BOATMAN:  So throw it in the sea, remove the temptation.
1  CARL: Why would anyone write a book if they didn’t want anyone else to read it?

2  BOATMAN: You seem a clever man. Perhaps you know the answer.

3  CARL: I suppose because the only way they could believe in the truth of what they had written was to be sure it wasn’t written out of a desire to be loved.

FX: SPLASH OF MANUSCRIPT BEING THROWN INTO THE SEA

(DISTRAUGHT) I did it. What a terrible thing. I drowned a book. As if I’d smothered another man’s soul. His great work, lost forever, never seen by human eyes. It’s what he wanted, but why couldn’t he have destroyed it himself? Why did he have to leave me in torment for the rest of my life? Ah, you have no idea what I’m talking about.

4  BOATMAN: ‘Why’ is a small word in many languages, and yet it carries within it all the philosophy that ever was.

5  CARL: All the philosophy that ever was...the first line of Why I Exist...It’s you! [You’ve aged, and grown a beard, but those eyes...] Herbert Mantalla. It’s been thirty five years.

6  MANTALLA: I was angry with you.

7  CARL: And you had to pretend to die to punish me?
MANTALLA: Oh, bureaucratically and legally, I am deceased. The fact that I am biologically alive is a detail. I have no more claim to my work or my property.

CARL: But you have another copy of the book.

MANTALLA: There was no book. I never wrote a second one. The manuscript you threw into the sea was a bundle of blank pages.

CARL: What?

MANTALLA: After you stole my first book you said I was a genius. It always seemed to me a genius was under an obligation not to have second thoughts.

CARL: But unless you come forward nobody will believe me when I tell them those pages were blank. I'll go down in history as the man who destroyed a masterpiece.

MANTALLA: Isn’t that what you thought you were doing a moment ago? You had the appearance of a man doing the most difficult thing he had ever done because he thought it was right. It was a noble sight.

FX: BOAT CLUNKS UP AGAINST HARBOUR JETTY

We have arrived.

CARL: Here’s your money.
1 MANTALLA: You have paid in full.

FX: CARL CLAMBERS ONTO JETTY

FX: MANTALLA PUSHES OFF AND STARTS ROWING AWAY

Where are you going now?

2 MANTALLA: (RECEDING) To Konigsberg.

3 CARL: That city no longer exists!

4 MANTALLA: That which existed once exists forever!

5 CARL: (SHOUTING) Wait! (BEAT; THEN, MORE QUIETLY) Ah, Herbert. Yes. The only way you could believe in the truth of what you wrote was to be sure it wasn’t written out of a desire to be loved. But doesn’t everyone desire to be loved? (SHOUTS) Everyone desires to be loved!

ENDS