

# IN GILDED PALACES

A Play in One Act

written by  
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“Sorrow is concealed in gilded palaces, and there’s no escaping it.”  
– *The Double*, Fyodor Dostoyevsky

## **CHARACTERS**

PETE – in his late 20s, a guy who can blend into the background of any room. He’s made enough traumatic emotional messes to be guarded and measured, avoiding any big emotion.

MAYA – in her late 20s, a woman whose default setting is lively joy, but since her husband’s death she hasn’t had the energy, or even looked very hard, though she’s working on getting it back.

WENDY – in her late 20s, a sweet, thoughtful woman who’s too nervous to be completely supportive when her friend needs her.

DOCTOR – in his 60s, a warm and connected psychiatrist who still holds himself at a good, professional reserve.

FRIEND (voice) – in his late 20s, affable but distant.

## **SETTING**

Modern day; a bachelor pad, a psychiatrist’s office, the kitchen and living room of a ranch home, and the southern California desert. Furniture indicating these locations can be arranged across the stage in as impressionistic a way as necessary, with lighting design or minor scene changes to indicate the shifts.

*Lights up on Pete's small, nondescript apartment—  
loveseat, coffee table, old TV.*

*(Wendy and Pete enter. Wendy holds a  
canvas tote by the handles. Pete is beaten  
down by the world, and very tired.)*

WENDY

*(chipper, but forced)*

Home sweet home.

PETE

I guess.

WENDY

What should I do with your stuff?

PETE

Wherever

*(Wendy sets the tote bag down on the couch.)*

WENDY

What are you gonna get up to the rest of the day?

PETE

*(shrug)*

Maybe watch some TV.

WENDY

You should go for a walk. Clear your head.

*(Pete chuckles, rueful.)*

WENDY

Well, at least watch something good. *The Godfather.*

PETE

Thanks for picking me up.

WENDY

I'm always here if you need to talk or anything. We could get coffee sometime.

PETE

*(hopeful, but resigned)*

Do you want some now? I could put the water on.

WENDY

You know, I wish I could. I do. But Andy has this work thing that I should probably go to.

PETE

Sure.

WENDY

I'm sorry. I just really have to be there.

PETE

Hey, don't worry. Another time.

WENDY

Another time. Soon.

*(She hesitates, and then gives him a big hug.)*

PETE

See ya, Wendy.

WENDY

Call me if you need.

*(He nods, and she goes.)*

*Pete looks around, then goes to his tote bag, takes out a belt, and puts it on. He takes shoelaces out and starts to re-lace his shoes. He pulls up the cuff of his shirt and starts trying to pull off his hospital bracelet, but it's tough. He starts working on it with his teeth, finally gnawing it off. He drops it in a trash bin and sits on the couch. He picks up the remote, and turns the TV on. He channel surfs for a few moments, then turns the TV off.*

*He picks up a book from the coffee table and opens it. He reads for a few moments, then shuts it and tosses it back on the table.*

*Fade to black.*

*Lights up on a psychiatrist's office. Pete and his doctor sit in easy chairs, angled towards each other but cheated out. The doctor wears a polo and horn-rim glasses, and he holds a notepad, taking notes as Pete talks.)*

PETE

Last time, by the time they sent me home – it just felt like I wrestled it down faster.

DOCTOR

Has the sleeping gotten back to normal?

PETE

I lie in bed and just stare at the ceiling. Sometimes for an hour. And then five hours later, my eyes just spring open. I feel body-tired, but not sleepy.

DOCTOR

Have you thought about looking for another job?

PETE

I don't think I'll be getting a good reference.

DOCTOR

Well, it's something to start thinking about.

PETE

I can't draw.

DOCTOR

Say more about that.

PETE

I'm usually pretty good, not to toot my own horn. But I went up to the park yesterday, just to get out of the house, and I took my notebook, I thought I'd draw the view or something. I just couldn't.

DOCTOR

Couldn't get inspired?

PETE

It was like I forgot how to draw at all. The proportions were all wrong. I couldn't get my perspective right. It was like I was a little kid again. Can the meds do that?

DOCTOR

I've never heard of it, but I wouldn't say it's impossible.

PETE

I'm not interested in music. It's all just white noise.

DOCTOR

Those side effects will level off as you get used to the new dosage.

PETE

*(slightly desperate)*

When?

DOCTOR

I'm sorry, I can't say. I'd like to keep talking about your neurovegetative signs. How's the appetite?

PETE

I know I should be hungry. The idea of eating just has no appeal for me. I force stuff down.

DOCTOR

Libido?

PETE

There's nobody to act on my libido with, so it's not really an issue.

DOCTOR

But do you want to be acting on it?

PETE

I don't really think about it.

DOCTOR

What *do* you think about?

PETE

Nothing.

*(The doctor nods and writes a note.)*

PETE

I feel like I've forgotten who I am. Or my identity was a sick person, and now that I'm trying to get better, I have to figure out who I am in the first place.

DOCTOR

And are you seeing friends?

PETE

Not really.

DOCTOR

That would be my prescription. Get out there, be around people.

PETE

They're all coupled off, or they've got kids. They're living their lives.

DOCTOR

Well, it's as much a prescription as the medication. Don't be alone. Find something to be part of.

*(Pete nods.)*

DOCTOR

What's going on with your inner life?

PETE

What do you mean?

DOCTOR

What do you think about? When you're walking around?

PETE

*(considers the question)*

I'm just walking around. Y'know?

*(Fade to black.)*

*Lights up on Pete in his apartment. He's got a friend on speaker, holding the phone near his mouth.)*

PETE

I was thinking about getting a beer later, maybe at Lula's. You around?

FRIEND (voice)

Tonight's not so good. Maybe next week.

PETE

Sure. Monday?

FRIEND (voice)

Let's touch base next week, figure it out then.

PETE

OK. I'll call you on Monday.

FRIEND (voice)

Sure. I'll talk to you later.

*(Pete hangs up. He picks up a book, then puts it back down. He picks up a baseball and tosses it back and forth between his hands.)*