

# The Stronger

## Chamber Opera in One Act

by Martin Halpern

Freely based on the play by August Strindberg

### Characters:

Miss Y, in her middle thirties; soprano

Mrs. X, in her middle thirties, soprano

*(Lights come up slowly on Miss Y, seated at a cafe table with a glass of beer before her and a playscript in her hand, which she is marking up with a pencil.)*

**Adagio** ♩ = 44

**Piano** *mp*

**Pno.** *mf*

*(Mrs. X, enters left,, carrying a Christmas basket laden with gifts.)*

**Mrs. X**

5

Why Mil-lie my dear,

**Pno.** *mp*

(Copyright by the composer, 2009)

♩ = 40

Mrs. X <sup>7</sup> how are you? It's been a while.

Miss Y So it has.

Pno. *mp*

Mrs. X <sup>9</sup> Sit-ting here all a-lone, and on Christ-mas eve?

Pno. *mf*

Mrs. X <sup>11</sup> How sad you look!— Per-haps it's that part you're stud-y-ing.

Miss Y Do I?

Pno. *mp*

Miss Y

13

It's a sad char - ac - ter. But quite well writ - ten.

Pno.

Mrs. X

15

(Laying down the playscript) And I'm sure you'll play her well.

Miss Y

I look for - ward to play - ing her. —

Pno.

15

*mf*

Mrs. X

17

But would you care for some com - pan - y? — For just a lit - tle while. —

Miss Y

If you'd like. Of course.

Pno.

17

*mp* *mf*

(Mrs. X sits in the other chair,  
laying the basket on the table.)

Mrs. X

19

I have these gifts I've bought,

Pno.

Mrs. X

20

for Bob and the child-ren. I've got to get them home\_\_\_\_\_

Pno.

20

*mp*

Mrs. X

22

and un - der the tree\_\_\_\_\_ fair - ly soon.

Miss Y

Of course.

Pno.

22

*mf*

(She draws a female doll out of the basket.) <sup>5</sup>

Mrs. X <sup>24</sup> But you must see what I've bought. Now

Pno.

Mrs. X <sup>26</sup> this one's for Li - sa. Is-n't it love - ly? \_\_\_\_\_

Miss Y \_\_\_\_\_ Charm - ing.

Pno.

Mrs. X <sup>28</sup> See how she rolls her eyes

Pno.

(She lays down the doll and draws a pair of tulip-embroidered slippers out of the basket,)

29

Mrs. X

and turns her head. Now here's what I got for Bob.

Miss Y

Ver - y clev - er.

Pno.

31

Mrs. X

Yes. He's ver - y fond of tu - lips.

Miss Y

Slip - pers! — With tu - lips on them!

Pno.

Mrs. X <sup>33</sup> So I had them em-broid-ered. Do you like tul-ips too?

Miss Y They're ver-y pret-ty. Oh ver-y

Pno.

Mrs. X <sup>35</sup> How in-t'rest-ing. Well you see,

Miss Y *(She takes a sip from her beer glass.)* much. *(Putting down the glass)* Why so?

Pno. *mp*

Mrs. X <sup>37</sup> I my-self have nev-er cared for them, and he knows that.

Pno. <sup>37</sup>

Mrs. X <sup>39</sup> Yet he seems to want them ev-'ry - where.\_\_\_\_ And of course,

Miss Y Does he?

Pno. <sup>39</sup> *mf*

Mrs. X <sup>41</sup> what - ev - er pleas - es him I do for him.\_\_\_\_ And he ap - pre - ci - ates that.\_\_\_\_

Miss Y Of course. I'm

Pno. <sup>41</sup>

(She lays down the slippers  
and draws a toy pistol out of  
the basket.)

(She points it  
at Miss Y, who  
pulls back.) 9

Mrs. X

Miss Y

Pno.

Now here's what I bought for litt-tle Es-kil.

sure he does.

*ff*

Mrs. X

Miss Y

Pno.

Oh don't be fright-ened. It's on - ly a toy.

Now why should I be fright-ened?

*mf*

Mrs. X

Miss Y

Pno.

I mean, the way you... Well nev - er mind.

(Laying down the pistol)

*f*

48

Mrs. X

I should - n't \_\_\_ have point - ed it like that. I'm sor - ry. \_\_\_\_\_

Miss Y

No need to ap - ol - o - gize.

Pno.

*mf*

50

Miss Y

But don't you think it's time to get home and put those un - der the tree?

Pno.

52

Mrs. X

Oh I can spare a few more min - utes, on this Christ - mas eve \_\_\_\_\_

Pno.

(She puts the pistol back in the basket and stares at Miss Y for a moment.)

Mrs. X <sup>54</sup> — when you're so a-lone.

Miss Y How kind of you.

Pno. <sup>54</sup> *mp*

Mrs. X <sup>56</sup> It's strange you've nev - er mar - ried.

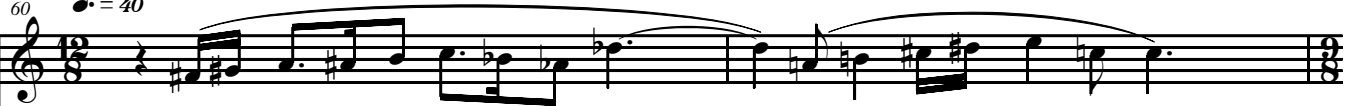
Pno. <sup>56</sup>

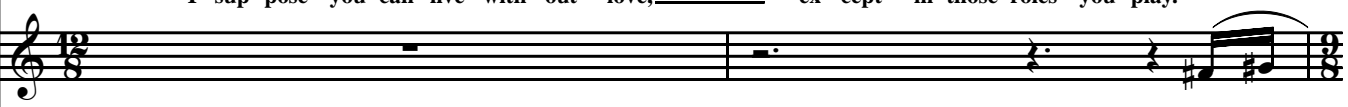
Mrs. X <sup>58</sup> I've of - ten wond - ered why.

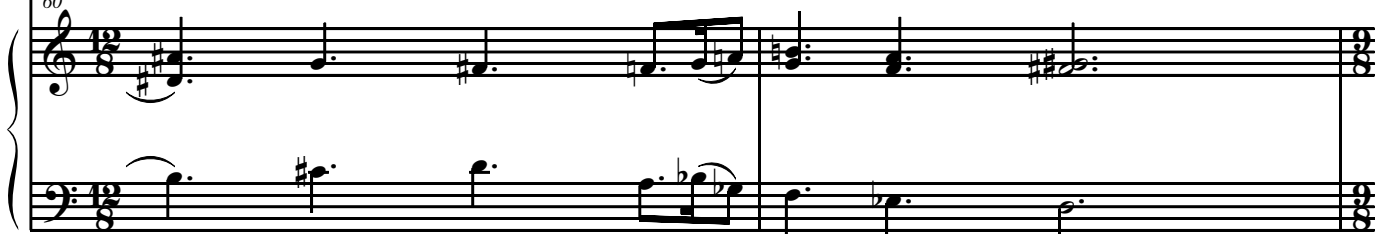
Miss Y <sup>58</sup> Have you?

Pno. <sup>58</sup> *mf*

60  $\bullet = 40$

Mrs. X 

Miss Y 

Pno. 

62

Mrs. X 

Miss Y 

Pno. 

64

Mrs. X  
miss the theat - er. \_\_\_\_\_ Oh by far..

Miss Y  
Since you have some - thing bet - ter. \_\_\_\_\_ Luck - y you.

Pno.

66

Mrs. X  
Now Bob, of course, has the best of both worlds.

Pno.

68

Mrs. X  
Di - rect - or. \_\_\_\_\_ Yes.

Miss Y  
And hus - band and fath - er. \_\_\_\_\_

Pno.

70

Mrs. X

And he's ab - so - lute - ly faith - ful,

Miss Y

Luck - y Bob.

Pno.

*f*

72

Mrs. X

though more than one young act - ress has tried to se - duce him,

Pno.

*mf*

*tr*

74

Mrs. X

in hopes of ad - vance - ment. — Oh yes.

Miss Y

He's told you that?

Pno.

*3*

76

Mrs. X

We're ver - y hon - est with each oth - er.

Pno.

77

Mrs. X

Do you doubt that?

Miss Y

Are you?

Pno.

78

Mrs. X

*(Rising quickly)*  
What does *that* mean?

Miss Y

Not if you don't.

Pno.

Mrs. X

79

Are you im - ply - ing I *should* have doubts?

Pno.

Mrs. X

80

I think you *are*!

Miss Y

I'm not im - ply - ing an - y - thing.

Pno.

Miss Y

81

I be-lieve he *has* been faith - ful, since your mar - riage.

Pno.

83

Miss Y

What else should mat - ter to you? Now I think it's time you...

Pno.

85

Mrs. X

Not quite yet. There's some - thing I've a right to know.

Pno.

87

Mrs. X

Be - fore our mar - riage, was there some - thing be - tween you? \_\_\_\_\_

Miss Y

Be - tween us?

Pno.

Mrs. X <sup>89</sup>  
 You know what I mean. Were you and Bob ev-er lov-ers?

Pno. <sup>89</sup>  
*f*

Mrs. X <sup>91</sup>  
 I'm ask-ing you!

Miss Y <sup>91</sup>  
 You'd bet-ter \_\_\_\_\_ ask *him* that.

Pno. <sup>91</sup>  
*mf*

Mrs. X <sup>93</sup>  
 Then you *were*! And he's nev-er told me!

Miss Y <sup>93</sup>  
 What's past is past.

Pno. <sup>93</sup>  
*f*

Mrs. X

95

He has - n't been hon - est, a - bout that!

Pno.

*mp*

Miss Y

96

Why should he be? It end - ed, and that was that!

Pno.

Miss Y

98

There was noth - ing he had to tell you!

Pno.

*mf*

Mrs. X <sup>99</sup> But *why* did it end? Come tell me!

Pno.

Mrs. X <sup>101</sup> Why did it end?

Miss Y All right, since you in - sist, I will.

Pno. <sup>101</sup> *f* *mp*

Miss Y <sup>103</sup> There came a time \_\_\_\_\_ when mere pas - sion

Pno. <sup>103</sup>

105

Mrs. X

Mere pas - sion?

Miss Y

was - n't e - nough for him. — He want - ed a wife,

Pno.

*mf* *mp*

107

Miss Y

a moth - er for his child - ren, the joys of do - mes - tic - i - ty.

Pno.

*mf*

109

Mrs. X

I see. With or with - out pas - sion.

Pno.

*f* *mp* *mf* *f*

Mrs. X <sup>111</sup> And since you were - n't fit for that role, he turned to some - one who was.

Miss Y Ex - act - ly.

Pno. <sup>111</sup> *mf*

Mrs. X <sup>113</sup> As sim - ple as that. \_\_\_\_\_

Miss Y As simp - le as that. Now please,

Pno. <sup>113</sup>

115

Mrs. X

But not so sim - ple.

Miss Y

he must be wait - ing for you at home.

Pno.

*f*

117

Mrs. X

I see now why I had to have tu - lips

Pno.

*mp*

118

Mrs. X

em - broid - ered on these slip - pers.

Pno.

*mf*

119

Mrs. X

I see now why the clothes he buys me look so much like *your* clothes?

Pno.

121

Mrs. X

$\bullet = 36$

I see why our son was named Es - kil. Be - cause that was your fath - er's name.

Pno.

*f*

123

(Sitting back down)

Mrs. X

Oh yes, he may have dropped you for me,

Pno.

*mp*

♩ = 40

Mrs. X <sup>125</sup>   
 but he's still in love with you! — And for all I know, you're still...

Miss Y   
 Pos - sib - ly. If

Pno. <sup>125</sup>   
*mf*

Miss Y <sup>127</sup>   
 so, you must wish that pis - tol was real,

Pno. <sup>127</sup>   
*f*

Mrs. X <sup>128</sup>   
 Oh no.

Miss Y   
 so you could real - ly shoot me.

Pno. <sup>128</sup>   
*mp*

130

Mrs. X

I'm re-lieved to know the truth at last. And I have the strength to live with it.

Pno.

*mf*

132

Mrs. X

I won't walk out on Bob,

Miss Y

Good for you.

Pno.

134

Mrs. X

as you may be hop - ing. ————— So what if his tastes are *your* tastes?

Miss Y

Who says I am?

Pno.

*f* *mp* *mf*

Mrs. X

136

So what if when we make love he may e - ven pre - tend I'm you?

Pno.

*mp*

Mrs. X

138

So what if Es - kil is named for your fath - er?

Pno.

*mf*

Mrs. X

140

It was I who bore him, I who bore Li - sa,

Pno.

(Miss Y rises and turns 28  
away from her.)

Mrs. X

142

and I who am bring - ing these gifts to them!

Pno.

*mp*

Detailed description: This system contains the musical score for Mrs. X and her piano accompaniment for measures 142 and 143. Mrs. X's part is in treble clef, 12/8 time, with a melodic line that includes a long slur over measures 142 and 143. The piano accompaniment is in grand staff (treble and bass clefs), 12/8 time, with a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the bass and chords in the treble. A dynamic marking of *mp* is present in measure 143.

Miss Y

144

That's ver - y true. You're the win - ner in this,

Pno.

Detailed description: This system contains the musical score for Miss Y and her piano accompaniment for measures 144 and 145. Miss Y's part is in treble clef, common time, with a melodic line that includes a slur over measures 144 and 145. The piano accompaniment is in grand staff, common time, with chords in the treble and a bass line in the bass. The piano part features a steady accompaniment with some melodic movement.

Miss Y

146

(Turning back to her)

$\bullet = 36$

I'm the los - er, and I have the strength to live with that.

Pno.

*mf*

Detailed description: This system contains the musical score for Miss Y and her piano accompaniment for measures 146 and 147. Miss Y's part is in treble clef, 12/8 time, with a melodic line that includes a slur over measures 146 and 147. The piano accompaniment is in grand staff, 12/8 time, with a melodic line in the treble and a bass line in the bass. A dynamic marking of *mf* is present in measure 146. A tempo marking of  $\bullet = 36$  is also present.

148

Mrs. X

Good for you.

Miss Y

(Sitting back down)

Now go on home,

Pno.

*mp*

150

Miss Y

with that doll, that pis - tol, those slip - pers for him,

Pno.

*mf*

*tr*

152

Mrs. X

(She picks up the playscript.)

I will.

Miss Y

and leave me to stud - y this role.

Pno.

*mp*

(She lays the gifts back in the basket.)

154

Mrs. X

But first, I must thank you. — For be - ing so hon - est. —

Miss Y

Thank me? Ah yes.

Pno.

*mf*

156

Mrs. X

So which of us is the strong - er?

Miss Y

As you've been with me. Now

Pno.

158

Mrs. X *May we both stay e - qual - ly strong, in our dif - f'rent ways.*

Miss Y *that on - ly time will tell. In our*

Pno. *mp*

160

Mrs. X *And to*

Miss Y *dif - f'rent ways. Mer - ry Christ - mas, to the four of you.*

Pno. *mf mp*

*rit. ----- ♩ = 32*

162

Mrs. X *you, in your way.*

Pno. *mf*

*(She pick up the basket, looks tenderly at Miss Y, then quickly exits left.) ♩ = 44*

*(Miss Y watches her go, then takes a large swig from the beer glass, lays the glass down and begins studying the playscript intently.)*

