

HABANERA

By John Hildebidle

<after a family dinner at "the home">

"This lady used to be an *opera singer!*"

"Indeed I was. (Distractedly, she pats her clothes --

lost keys? a list, a scribbled memo crumpled in a pocket?)

"Have you seen her? My daughter. I know she's here." (we make noncommittal noises. Her clothes match, only just, as if she had to keep them firmly in mind or they'd fly into disparate paisleys. She smiles) "Are you Polish? That boy (my son) has the map of Poland on his face. (We wait for her to wander off. She heads out into the dark cold night. Shouldn't someone help her? Worry deepens her slouch. None of our affair. A relief when she comes back, though).

In time, from the "Friendship Parlor," a piano, firmly played, but slowly. Familiar -- *dah dah dah DUM. dah dah dah DUM. dah dah dah dadayada DUMDUMDUM*. Oh, yes -- Bizet! At last, her voice -- the marks of long training, but drifting aside from true mezzo. "*L'amour, L'amour*. Cadenza. Pause for recognition. Two passers-by ("neighbors," they call them here), in loud voices only the old and the very young can afford, insist, "Well, at least, she's **better**." "A little."

"Next, Sir Arthur Sullivan."

-John Hildebidle