

AUTUMN

A Play In Two Acts

By Motti Lerner

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Translated by Hillel Halkin

AUTUMN was first performed at Beit Lessin Theater in Tel Aviv
on March 2 1996, Directed by Gedalia Besser.

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The Cast

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|------------------|---|---|
| 1. Ephraim Weiss | - | a farmer of 52 |
| 2. Regina | - | his wife, about 50. |
| 3. Adela | - | his mother, about 75. |
| 4. Alexander | - | his younger son, 24. |
| 5. Fanya | - | his older daughter, 26. |
| 6. Misha | - | her husband, about 30. |
| 7. Rosa | - | a distant cousin of Regina's from Iasi, a town in Romania - about 45. |
| 8. Mina | - | her daughter, 19. |
| 9. Yanek | - | a cook, Regina's neighbor from Iasi, about 40. |
| 10. Melchior | - | a gardener, a distant cousin of Regina's from Iasi, about 75. |
| 11. Lazar | - | a hired hand, a cousin of Regina's, 28. |
| 12. Feivl | - | a hired hand, Lazar's brother, 26, has speaking difficulties. |

The Stage

The play takes place in an old farmhouse on the outskirts of a small village near Tel Aviv in 1926. Most of the scenes are set in the front yard, in which stand a few trees and some stacked, empty lemon crates, old plows, wooden barrels, work tools, laundry lines, wash basins, etc. In a corner of the yard is a drinking trough with a faucet. In another corner is a bench. On one side of the house is a large porch; on the other, a smaller one, partly enclosed by broken blinds.

A note to the reader: The play might appear to be realistic but it actually is not. It is rather a “nightmare” play. It is the nightmare of Ephraim who desires to leave his family and is very anxious about the consequences. Reading the play with this note in mind might be helpful in understanding its essence.

ACT ONE

Scene 1

The afternoon of a hot summer day. Yanek the cook stands by a laden table in the yard, chasing away flies from the food and drink with a swatter. Melchior, humming a tune, stands helping him at the other end of the table. Lazar and Feivl enter from the house carrying suitcases and exit through the gate.

Yanek: Hot, sticky, and swarming with flies. The first breeze will bring the mosquitoes from the swamps. Pssst, pssst! Palestina, Palestina. The flies are sucking your blood. **(Angrily)** Keep your hands off that cake, Old man!

Melchior: I was only taking the crumbs, Yanek.

Yanek: Don't you see what's on the borscht? If you don't care about flies, go and eat in the toilet. **(He swats at a fly and knocks a glass off the table)** Damn it.

He stealthily cleans the glass with his saliva. Melchior reaches out toward the cake again.

Yanek: **(Swatting at him)** I told you to keep your hands off that cake, Old Man.

Melchior: **(Picking up a jug)** Try that again and I'll pour away all this borscht.

Yanek: No, please, don't! Old man, please. Not the borscht! **(Melchior puts down the jug and Yanek swats at him)** Paskudniak! Sadist! Anarchist! Communist!

Lazar and Feivl return through the gate without the suitcases and approach the table. They take advantage of the opportunity to grab a few slices of the cake.

Yanek: Bastards! You treat all the girls in the village to tea and marmalade and then come to steal from my kitchen!

Lazar: My father was Mrs. Weiss' cousin. She won't like leaving me here with an empty stomach.

Feivl: **(stammers)** I've worked all day... I'm hungry...

Yanek: Every bit of filth from Iasi washes up here. Like the flies. Bandits! Hooligans! Syphilitics!

Feivl: We get cholera from your food.

All laugh. Alexander enters, followed by Misha, who is wearing clean clothes despite his work boots. He is carrying a camera on a tripod.

Misha: Stop being so stubborn, Alexander. Your parents deserve a few farewell words from you. Do you want us to bring the piano so that you can play something?

Alexander: No. **(Takes a slice of cake)**

Yanek: With your hands, Mister Alexander? Have you forgotten about knives? Look what a mess you've made of the table.

Misha: I'll take your portrait. A good portrait will bring good luck. To you and your parents.

Alexander takes another slice of cake.

Yanek: No, no, young man. Please. Your mother sees every crumb. To this day the mice in Iasi celebrate the day she left.

Misha: **(To Alexander)** They took good care of you when you needed them. Wish them well and they'll be off.

Alexander sneezes. He grabs a bunch of grapes from the table and sits on the bench. Fanya enters. She wears work clothes and is sweaty and dusty.

Fanya: **(To Yanek)** Couldn't you have iced the fruit? Put some grapes in their wagon. **(To Misha)** I can't believe they're really going.

Misha: It's time you did.

Fanya: I found more dry leaves on the lemon trees. **(She takes a piece of cake)**

Misha: I watered them yesterday.

Fanya: **(Smells)** Do you have your boots on?

Misha: **(Surprised)** I suppose I have. **(Exits)**

Fanya: **(To Alexander)** I was certain something would go wrong today too. **(She takes another piece)** What heat! I was so nervous I couldn't eat all morning. **(To Lazar)** And make sure you water the horses before they leave. We don't want them to drop dead on the way. I'll dress and be right back.

She exits. Misha returns with his shoes on.

Yanek: **(To Misha)** She wants to have her cake and eat it too. **(To Feivl)** I ought to stick a finger down your throat and make you puke.

Feivl: I would have eaten all this anyway.

Yanek: Because of you she'll throw me out of here. Where will I go? Who will I cook for? What will I eat? Where will I sleep?

Feivl: In the stable.

Yanek: For God's sake, how can we build this country with people like you? **(All laugh)**

Lazar: Here they come.

Everyone stands for Ephraim and Regina, who push Adela into the yard in a wheelchair. Feivl plays a gay tune on his harmonica.

Adela: What's that stench?

Ephraim: Please, Mama.

Regina: All this is for us? Are you so grateful for what we're leaving you, or just glad to see us go?

Adela: Why doesn't someone bring me my cane? I don't want to sit in this chair.

Ephraim: If you start hopping around here, you'll get tired and fall down.

Adela: He's afraid that if he brings me my cane I'll clobber him. It's never too late to give the rascal a few whacks. **(She laughs)**

Ephraim: You've given me so many that a few more won't hurt.

Adela: **(Noticing the melody)** A waltz! I'll show you how to dance. Where's my cane? **(Regina hands it to her)** When we first came to this country, I danced a waltz with a Turkish officer who had ears as big as fans. We danced all night and your father laughed. And I'm still dancing, Ephraim.

With the help of the cane Adela manages to stand and amaze everyone by tapping her feet.

Misha: Just a minute. Now is the time for a photograph. **(He rushes to the camera)**

Adela: What is that stench?

Misha: It's nothing. I just forgot to change my socks. Please, Alexander! This way, please. A little more. That's right, that's right, a little more.

Regina: Alexander! You promised to say a nice goodbye.
 Alexander: **(Refusing to be photographed)** I don't like the way I look today.
 Ephraim: You look the same as always.
 Alexander: I was scratched by a lemon tree thorn. **(He points to his cheek)**
 Ephraim: It's no tragedy if he's not in the picture.
 Misha: One, Two...

Before he can snap the shutter, Rosa and Mina enter the yard with suitcases. Rosa is a restrained, severe-looking woman. Mina is slim and vivacious. Adela is the first to notice them.

Adela: Who is this woman?
 Yanek: Madam Rosa, is that you? What are you doing here, in this country, in this heat?
 Rosa: Sweating.
 Ephraim: Rosa? Good God! Rosa Zimmer! Is it really you? What brings you here? Yes, it is. It's you. How the years...
 Regina: **(Interrupting him)** Hello, Rosa.
 Rosa: Hello. We were on our way to Tel Aviv and missed the last coach. This is my daughter Mina. I thought I'd bring you some regards from Iasi.
 Ephraim: When did you arrive? Someone told us that you got married and had a daughter. **(To Regina)** Who was it that told us?
 Regina: Actually, I did hear that you had arrived in the country last summer.
 Rosa: We left Iasi after the pogrom. We've been living around here and there. We thought you'd be happy to hear that none of your relatives was...
 Ephraim: **(To Adela)** This is Rosa. The peddler's daughter, Mama. It can't be that you don't remember her.
 Adela: I do. Not that there's very much to remember.
 Ephraim: **(To Rosa)** I recognized you by your daughter. **(To Regina)** Doesn't she look exactly like Rosa did? **(All laugh)**
 Lazar: **(Reminds Rosa who he is)** Lazar the poet. The cantor's son. And this is my brother Feivl. We've cut off our ear locks and shaved our beards.

Feivl: **(To Mina)** I remember you.
 Rosa: **(Turns in surprise to Melchior)** Hello, Old man! In Iasi they buried you long ago. Did you hear that your cousins fled to America last year?

He nods. Fanya enters.

Misha: And here's our Fanya.
 Fanya: Who are these people?
 Regina: This is my sister-in-law Elka's cousin.
 Rosa: This is my daughter Mina. She's practically your second cousin.
 Fanya: **(To Regina)** But you're leaving today.
 Regina: **(To Rosa)** We're moving to Tel Aviv today.
 Ephraim: At last.
 Adela: Where did she say we're moving, Ephraim?
 Ephraim: To Tel Aviv. **(She shrugs her shoulders)**
 Rosa: But you seem to have such a nice life here. Even better than you had there.
 Regina: There's always a place where we can be happier.
 Ephraim: And we always end up in the same place. **(He points at everyone)** We left Iasi thirty years ago, and we're leaving it again today. **(To Regina)** If we manage to buy that plot by the town hall, we can build nine apartments. Just imagine how many Iasiians will live in them. **(To Rosa and Mina)** You too, maybe.
 Rosa: Thank you, but...
 Ephraim: Everything will be better now. The British are much more generous than the Turks. They'll let more people in. They'll let us build more towns, more villages.
 Adela: **(Firmly to Rosa and Mina)** Didn't I tell you to get out of here? Get out. Now! Before I talk to your father.
 Ephraim: Mama...
 Adela: I said get out! I don't want you around us.
 Ephraim: They won't stay around us. We are leaving in few minutes.
 Regina: It's all right, Rosa. You can get a ride with us.
 Adela: What ride?
 Ephraim: To Tel Aviv.
 Adela: I'm not going riding anywhere in the middle of the winter.

Ephraim: It's the end of the summer now, Mama. Perhaps we can cool off in the sea tonight.

Adela: Where is there a sea here?

Ephraim: In Tel Aviv.

Adela: Why are we going to Tel Aviv?

Ephraim: We're moving there, Mama. We are going to build apartment blocks for all these new comers.

Adela: I thought today was your wedding day.

Regina: Mama...

Ephraim: We've been talking about it for a year now.

Adela: But we just finished building this house. And I don't want this woman around us. I hope you didn't make her pregnant already.

Rosa: What is she talking about?

Adela: **(To Regina)** Why don't you go ahead and marry him? Make a man out of him.

Ephraim: I think the party is over. Let's get her onto the wagon and go. **(He mops his face with a handkerchief)**

Adela: You'll only get me to leave in a coffin! I see you whispering behind my back. I'm not going. I've left enough houses in my life. Get these flies off of me!

Ephraim: All right, Mama. All right. There are no more flies. Let's get on the wagon. Goodbye, Alexander. Goodbye, Fanya.

Adela: Your father and two sisters are buried in this earth. You'll bury me next to them. We ate stones rather than leave this place. Do you hear me? I'm not going to wait for the raising of the dead among all kinds of riffraff who never ate an apple from their own tree. Get these flies off of me! I said I don't want that woman here!

Regina: She needs to rest a bit, Ephraim.

Ephraim: She'll rest on the wagon.

Adela: **(Suddenly disoriented)** Take your hands off me. Who do you think you are? I have a son, a farmer in the village.

Ephraim: That's me, Mama.

Adela: He'll be here any minute. This is my house. I built it. We were the first ones here.

Regina: Lazar can bring her tomorrow.

Adela: He'll come from his groves and make you wish you'd never thought of taking me from here. Get your dirty hands off me. I've worked hard all my life. I'm not a dead tree to rip out and

throw away. I'm not talking to you again until I die. Or until you do! **(Sits in her wheelchair)** No, I'm not talking! **(Falls silent)**

- Ephraim: If we had suggested you stay, you would have insisted on coming with us. **(She doesn't answer)** The flies are gone. **(She doesn't answer)** If you want to stay so badly, you can stay.
- Fanya: You don't mean that, father.
- Regina: I'm taking you to your bed, Mama. **(Wheel her away)**
- Ephraim: I'll take her. **(Takes the chair)**
- Fanya: Just a minute, father. How long is she staying? Who'll look after her? The picking season starts in two weeks.
- Ephraim: What is it, Mama? What is it?
- Fanya: **(Following him)** I asked you something.
- Ephraim: I heard you. Misha, harness the horses and put our bags on the wagon.
- Fanya: You know how hard I work.
- Ephraim: **(To Misha)** Didn't I tell you to do something?
- Misha: Yes, you did.
- Ephraim: **(To Adela)** The heat wave will break tomorrow morning, and Lazar will bring you then. **(They exit)**
- Fanya: **(To Regina)** What will I do if she doesn't want to go tomorrow? Force her onto the wagon?
- Regina: I'm not at all sure she'll be happy to stay with you. Put the table back in the kitchen, Lazar. **(To Rosa)** You can eat with them. We'll call for you when we leave. **(She turns to go to the house)**
- Rosa: Thank you, Mrs. Weiss.

She goes to help Yanek. Mina joins her.

- Melchior: **(To Regina)** Even the dogs stop barking when their master goes deaf.

He helps the others to carry the table and dishes indoors.

- Alexander: **(Stopping Regina)** I sat there waiting, but you didn't say one word to father.
- Regina: I didn't find the right moment.

Alexander: Because you don't care about me. Not as much as you do about the lemons. Well, you should know that I have no intention of looking after them.

Regina: You'll get used to it. I wasn't born a farmer either.

Alexander: I'm a pianist, not a farmer. Look what's happened to my fingers. **(He sneezes)** Why did I ever agree to inherit these groves. To make you happy, I'll be miserable for the rest of my life.

Regina: I'll talk to your father on the way.

Alexander: It will be too late. I want to come with you now.

Regina: Why will you be miserable? If you dream of being a pianist, you'll be a pianist. We all followed our dreams to this place. Now your father has a new dream and I'm following him again.

Alexander: Give my groves to Fanya.

Regina: And you'll be hungry for the rest of your life.

Fanya: I'll be glad to buy them from him.

Regina: You don't have the money for it.

Alexander: Then I'll sell them to someone else.

Regina: Is that what I slaved my whole life for, for you to sell the groves?

Ephraim enters, having heard Alexander's last words.

Ephraim: Let him go ahead and sell them. Some pianist! You should see the dust on his piano.

Regina: He's not selling anything.

Ephraim: Let him sell. The whole country is waiting for his first concert. It's already sold out.

Alexander: I don't understand. You're leaving and yet you want me to stay?

Ephraim: I've worked here for thirty years. You haven't even dirtied your nails yet, you parasite!

Regina: Ephraim!

Alexander leaves in a huff.

Ephraim: **(To Regina)** Mama is in bed. She'll fall asleep soon. **(To Misha)** I asked you to harness the horses and put the bags on the wagon.

Misha: Yes, but what about the portrait? A bad portrait brings bad luck. Couldn't we take another one before you leave?
 Regina: We're not leaving before Mama falls asleep.
 Ephraim: It's almost sunset.
 Regina: Then we'll go tomorrow.
 Fanya: You said you were leaving today.
 Regina: You'll be none the worse off for one more night.

Rosa and Mina emerge from the house, heading for their suitcases.

Rosa: Excuse me, Mrs. Weiss. We'd rather not leave these in the dust.
 Regina: We're not going until tomorrow. You can sleep here tonight on the little porch.
 Rosa: Thank you. Thank you so much. I was thinking that as long as we're here...
 Fanya: Are they staying too?
 Regina: Just for one night.
 Ephraim: We're going now, Regina.
 Fanya: You also invited Lazar for just one night. And the cook was just for lunch. And the Old man for just some grapes.
 Rosa: As long as we're here, Mrs. Weiss, perhaps we can help out in the kitchen, or with Mama. I'm a laundress too, even though my hands don't show it.
 Mina: I once looked after an old lady. I even bathed her.
 Rosa: Let's thank Mrs. Weiss again, and go wash the dishes.

They take their bags and enter the house.

Ephraim: We're about to get on to the wagon, Regina. We have appointments tomorrow. We're supposed to look at two building plots. And we have to find an office.
 Regina: We'll leave before the sun is up.
 Misha: Then perhaps we can do one more portrait now? If you leave before the sun is up, I won't have enough light.
 Ephraim: **(Angrily)** We're not doing any more portraits, is that clear? The ones you did are good enough!
 Fanya: What do you want from him?
 Ephraim: You're the smartest, prettiest girl in this whole village...
 Regina: Enough, Ephraim.

Ephraim: I want to see her happy before I leave.
 Fanya: You want to see me happy, so you insult him? You're leaving me here with Mama and half of Iasi just to see me happy? Is that why you're giving Alexander groves that I'll have to take care of? Is that why for a whole year now you've been walking around in a white suit babbling about apartment blocks while the lemons rot on the trees? **(Ephraim mops his brow with a handkerchief)** And stop wiping your face all the time.
 Regina: Why are you talking to your father like that?
 Fanya: Because he never listens to me.
 Ephraim: I've been listening to you since you were born.
 Fanya: But you never hear me.
 Ephraim: What do I never hear?
 Fanya: If you don't take Mama now, she'll never go. And you'll keep coming back to see her. When will we get a chance to breathe? You're smothering us and you wonder why we haven't started to live. **(Exits)**
 Misha: The bags are on the wagon. **(He follows her)**

Ephraim and Regina are left alone. Alexander's piano is heard in the background.

Ephraim: He's playing again.
 Regina: He plays very nicely.
 Ephraim: He plays five minutes a day and thinks he's Rubinstein.
 Regina: She knows just how to hurt me. You might think it was our fault she has no children. I don't know why we're in such a hurry. Maybe we should think it over. The season starts in two weeks.
 Ephraim: We're finished with that debate.
 Regina: We've lived here for thirty years, we can live here for one more. Can't you see how Alexander is desperate? He's not serious about selling the groves. It's just his way of asking us to stay.
 Ephraim: Let him sell the damn groves. We've been their slaves for thirty years. Thirty years of torment. And look what has become of you.
 Regina: **(Swallowing the insult)** He needs help. If we don't stay with him, he may harm himself again.
 Ephraim: You know that he can't really do it.

Regina: He can.

Ephraim: We said we will leave on the day Fanya gets married. This was three years ago. I must have a rest from this place. The moment I saw Rosa, I realized what has become of me.

Regina: You won't spend your days in Tel Aviv in a beach chair, looking at the sea.

Ephraim: Half the world sits squeezing our lemons into their tea and smacking their lips. It's time for us to smack our lips.

Regina: Our great adventures are behind us. Yours with Rosa too. If we're going to have peace in this world, we'll have it here. And no lip smacking, please.

Ephraim: What are you talking about? I haven't thought about her for thirty years.

Regina: At your age people don't sprout wings and fly. They sit at home and wait to die. **(Ephraim walks angrily away)** Where are you going?

Ephraim: Don't you hear the dogs? Maybe a fox got into the shed.

Regina: A fox? We haven't seen the shadow of a fox for years. If Mama doesn't feel better in the morning, we won't go. Did you hear me?

Ephraim: I heard you. **(He exits)**

Scene 2

Morning. Melchior is sitting in a corner of the yard, patching jute sacks. Lazar and Feivl stand by the faucet, rinsing whitewash from some brushes. Next to them is a ladder.

Lazar: So Fanya told us to hurry up, so what?

Feivl: **(stammers)** She'll kick us out if we don't finish.

Lazar: She needs hands for the harvest.

He suddenly sees Mina entering, wheeling a silent Adela on a morning walk.

Mina: **(To Adela)** We'll just take a little stroll around the yard. That's all. And if you'd like, I'll make you a glass of tea. You'll enjoy it and I'll have something to do. Should I cover your feet?

(Apologizing) I don't usually steal people away like this. My mother asked me to do this. Don't be afraid, we won't leave the

courtyard. Are you sure you wouldn't like some tea? Or water? If you don't tell me to stop chattering, I'll go on like this all day long. My mouth keeps chattering even in my sleep. Why don't you say something? If they stay here, I'll have to stay too. **(To Melchior, Lazar and Feivl)** Good morning!

Melchior: **(Angrily)** There's nothing good about chattering, when some of us have to be silent.

Mina: You call this chattering? You should hear me when someone actually answers.

Melchior: If I was her, I'd swallow my tongue.

Feivl turns to Mina and stammers to her.

Feivl: Good morning... I hope you're not busy tonight...

Mina: I don't understand.

Feivl: The nights here are beautiful. We can take a walk in the groves.

Mina: What?

Lazar: He wants to tell you that I'm giving a poetry reading tonight at the Worker's Club.

Feivl: **(Protests vigorously)** No. Not the club. The groves.

Mina: Thank you very much. I don't think that we're staying here.

Lazar: It's better for you to stay. Believe me. Here is where we're creating the new culture. Here you can see love of earth and love of women and love of poetry joined in total abandon, united in one divine emotion.

Feivl: Get out of here, you bastard.

Lazar: "Passion's slave, I crawl to you, from the bare earth I call to you."

Ephraim enters, dressed in his traveling clothes. Lazar and Feivl hurry to take the ladder and brushes and enter the house. Melchior exits too.

Ephraim: Good morning, Mama. I see you're up early for the trip. Every new day has its new hope, doesn't it? **(Adela says nothing)**
Good morning, Mama.

Mina: She's not talking, Mr. Weiss.

Ephraim: **(Loudly)** Good morning, Mama!

Mina: In Iasi they said she talked so much that she talked you into

- coming here.
- Ephraim: You look like you've slept well, Mama. Now we'll have some breakfast. We'll say goodbye to the children and get on the wagon. **(Adela says nothing)** You can keep silent all day, if that's what you want. **(To Mina)** What else do they say about us in Iasi?
- Mina: All kinds of things, Mr. Weiss. Stories. **(She smiles)**
- Ephraim: Did you hear that, Mama? They still talk about us in Iasi. Soon we'll sit in the wagon and listen to stories of Iasi all the way to Tel Aviv. **(To Mina)** Won't we?
- Mina: They say that when you were a child, you suckled until the age of three and didn't want to stop. But Mama had no milk left, and you wouldn't eat anything else. **(Adela is surprised)** And no one understood why you weren't starving. Until someone saw you steal into the neighbors' yard and drink from the udders of their cow. **(She laughs)**
- Ephraim: That's what they say about me in Iasi?
- Mina: And that you could ride a horse like a Cossack. And that once you wanted to ride the priest's mule and...
- Ephraim: It was on the Tsar's birthday.
- Mina: And it reared up and threw you...
- Ephraim: Right into the chicken run.
- Mina: **(Laughing)** And you tore your trousers...
- Ephraim: So I did.
- Mina: And the chickens came and started to peck...
- Ephraim: **(Laughing)** At my behind. **(He turns to Adela)** Do you remember? For a month I couldn't sit on a donkey. **(Mina and Ephraim laugh. He turns to Adela)** You're allowed a laugh, Mama.
- Mina: They say that once, when you were a medical student, you went to help a family of gypsies who came to town with a dancing bear.
- Ephraim: Yes, their grandfather broke his arm.
- Mina: And the next day you came home with your head shaved... **(She bursts out laughing)**
- Ephraim: And covered with tar. Do you remember, Mama? **(To Mina)** I kissed their daughter. After I saw her grandfather I stayed with her for a while. They were all snoring in the wagon and I was kissing her underneath it. Behind the bear's back... **(Laughs)** She had dark hair, and eyes like yours. And lips like these. Just

then the bear began to growl and they woke up. **(Laughs)** I see the old Iasi stories are still amusing.

Mina: My mother tells them all the time.

Ephraim: Your mother?

Mina: She tells all kinds of stories about you. That you wanted to become a doctor in Bucharest. That the two of you wanted to get married, but your Mama refused to... **(She checks herself)** I shouldn't have... My father hated those stories. He even beat her because of them. In the end he ran off to Berlin with a cabaret singer. They say I have his eyes. And his lips. I hardly remember him. I was a little girl.

She falls silent. Ephraim fails to see Melchior observing the scene from the corner of the yard. He takes Mina behind Adela's back and kisses her. She freezes. After a moment he lets her go.

Ephraim: It will be hot soon. We'd better get going. Are your bags ready?

Mina: Yes, Mr. Weiss.

Ephraim: She should drink something before we start out.

Mina: Yes, Mr. Weiss.

Ephraim: **(To Adela)** If it's so important to you to say nothing, you can say it in Tel Aviv too.

Mina turns to Adela, but stumbles into Ephraim, who awkwardly kisses her again. Mina stands there trembling. Regina enters the yard in her work clothes, pushing a wheelbarrow. She sees Ephraim releasing Mina and stops short, surprised.

Ephraim: **(To Mina)** You can go. Go. **(She pushes the wheelchair towards the house)**

Regina: Well, what does she say?

Ephraim: **(Startled)** Who?

Regina: Mama.

Ephraim: I don't know.

Regina: Has she said anything?

Ephraim: Why are you wearing work clothes? We're going.

Regina: I am just spreading some manure under the trees. **(He**

suddenly kisses her. She squirms away) You're getting your shirt dirty.

Ephraim: **(Letting go of her)** I don't know what's happening to me here. I'll end up foolish as a colt.

Regina: If you want to go that badly, you can leave. I'm not a demanding woman, and I don't tie down every colt in the stable.

Ephraim: I'm not going without you.

Regina: I'll take care of Mama and Alexander. We'll finish picking the fruit. And if things don't go well in Tel Aviv, you'll have a place to come back to.

Ephraim: I'm not going without you, Regina.

Regina: Why not? You're wasting away here. Weren't you going to rent an office today and look at that plot near the town hall? People won't come to this country if there aren't any apartments for them. I'll join you in a few weeks.

Ephraim: In a few weeks?

Regina: When I'm no longer needed here. **(She turns to go when she notices Lazar and Feivl coming out of the house to refill their buckets with whitewash)** What are you doing?

Lazar: We're whitewashing Mama's room.

Feivl: Miss Fanya told us.

Regina: Forget about Mama's room. Go and water the lemon trees.

Lazar: But Miss Fanya said...

Regina: Go and water the lemon trees!

Ephraim, taken aback, watches her. She exits, pushing the wheelbarrow. Lazar and Feivl follow her. Ephraim remains standing there thoughtfully, mopping his brow with his handkerchief. Melchior enters and turns to him.

Melchior: There's just one little thing, Mr. Weiss. It has to do with Mama. It takes an old person to know one, and there's no place for an old person like home, and home for an old person is.

Ephraim: Not now, Melchior. This isn't the time for old men's wisdom.

Melchior resumes patching the jute sacks. As he does, Rosa steps out onto the porch, spreads a rug on the railing, and begins to brush it.

Ephraim: Good morning, Rosa.

- Rosa: Isn't it a very good morning? I've never slept so well since I left Iasi.
- Ephraim: You're our guest, Rosa. You shouldn't be working. You should be getting ready. We're leaving soon.
- Rosa: Well, we are not in such a hurry. I'd rather stay here and work for a few days.
- Ephraim: Here?
- Rosa: It would make your daughter happy too. When she sees what a housekeeper I am, she'll understand that she can't keep a house without me.
- Ephraim: I can help you to find work in Tel Aviv too.
- Rosa: We're not obliged to live in the city. Too many new comers are looking for jobs there.
- Ephraim: Because it is growing so fast. It already has three banks and a power station. This is the beginning of prosperity. They need nurses for the new hospital.
- Rosa: This place seems rather prosperous. And if I may say so, I don't think that your mother will be very pleased if I come with you. She's already thrown me out once.
- Ephraim: This was thirty years ago, Rosa. She's changed. We've changed.
- Rosa: Yes. We've really changed. But if you want to help us, talk to your daughter. In the year that we've been here, I haven't asked you for anything. Now I want to be able to send Mina to school.
- Ephraim: I'll be glad to help. I can talk to people at the Teachers College there.
- Rosa: She's staying with me.
- Ephraim: I don't think Fanya will need you.
- Rosa: You are the last one I wanted to ask for help. You don't owe me anything.
- Ephraim: It's been thirty years, Rosa. I hope we can forgive and forget. You know exactly what I went through.
- Rosa: Yes. I know.
- Ephraim: So why can't you join us? Before you even think of asking for something, it'll be there for you.

Alexander appears unexpectedly. Ephraim falls silent. Rosa folds the rug and exits.

Alexander: Good morning, father. I need to talk to you. You know how I hate myself when you're angry with me.

Ephraim: What is it you want to talk about?

Alexander: I thought it over again and again. I must go to Tel Aviv with you.

Ephraim: You must? Who's making you? Me?

Alexander: I must find another teacher. I know my technique is good, but my playing has become sentimental. Even the birds fly off into the woods when I play.

Ephraim: What birds? Where is there a wood here?

Alexander: Never mind. I can't find the right teacher here. Tel Aviv is a more cultured place. It has plenty of teachers. I don't want to look back a few years from now, and discover that I'm the only person who thought I was a lousy pianist. It would be a tragedy.

Ephraim: What tragedy? I told you a hundred times that this country does not need musicians, so why do you keep...

Alexander: I want to make something of myself. You stop me, and then complain that I'm a parasite.

Ephraim: Please, Alexander. I want you to be happy. Believe me. But I'm too busy now.

He exits. Alexander turns to Melchior.

Alexander: I know I have talent. But I play as if I were carrying the world's sorrow on my shoulders.

Melchior: It's the heat. These winds from the desert fry the brain.

Alexander: One day I'll play more optimistically. Like a fresh breeze. Like new grass. Like Rachmaninov.

Regina returns to the yard, tired and perspiring. Melchior hurriedly leaves.

Regina: What are you gabbing with him so early in the morning for? Come inside. Say goodbye to father, change your clothes, and then we'll go out to the groves.

Alexander: I'm not going out to the groves. I'm going to sell them. And if you so don't want me around you, I'll spare you the agony of having to see me.

Regina: Who doesn't want you around? Why do you insist on making

- my life so miserable with all this talk?
- Alexander: Your life is miserable? The thought of selling the groves makes me hate myself. I know what they mean to you. But I also know I can't take care of them. Living here is like dying. And now I hate myself even more for having said that.
- Regina: I thought we agreed you'd stop talking like that. Don't worry. I won't leave you until you're set up.
- Alexander: Wait a minute. You aren't going? Your bags are all packed! And I'm packed and ready too.

Fanya and Misha enter, returning hurriedly from the groves.

- Fanya: Why did you send the workers to water the lemons? I told them to whitewash Mama's room. And now you're spreading manure? You're leaving. Aren't you?
- Regina: I don't think I can go today. Father is going without me. I'm staying to look after Mama.
- Fanya: I don't understand. Yesterday you said that you were taking Mama with you this morning.
- Misha: Fanya, not now.
- Regina: I'll stay with her here until she's better.
- Fanya: Last year you were staying until the end of the season. After the season you said you'd stay until Alexander got married. You can't make a fool out of me.
- Regina: I'm the one being made a fool.
- Fanya: **(To Alexander)** Say something. You live here too.
- Alexander: I'm not so sure I do.
- Misha: **(To Regina)** She doesn't really mean it. It's the heat. Yesterday we saw some lemons rotting on the trees. There's some kind of disease. **(Superstitious)** Maybe someone harnessed a horse and unhitched it without leaving the yard.

Ephraim enters the yard, wheeling Adela.

- Fanya: And he's not going either.
- Ephraim: I can't leave her like this. Yesterday she was just pretending to be sick and today she really is.
- Regina: You have appointments in Tel Aviv, Ephraim.
- Ephraim: They can wait a day or two. I have to show Alexander how to

run the well pump.

Alexander: **(Sneezes)** I need to study harmonics, not hydraulics. I'm not going near that stinking well. I'll sell my groves and go without you.

Ephraim: Then sell. Sell! You couldn't sell an old shoe, you parasite.

Alexander sneezes and exits angrily.

Fanya: Mama isn't sick. She's not talking to you just to make you stay.

Ephraim: If she's not talking to make us stay, we'll stay until she talks.

Fanya: I'll take care of her. I'll hire a nurse.

Regina: It's no disaster if we stay a few more days. We've lived very well here together.

Fanya: Have we? Everything is falling apart. The house. The yard. The trees are rotting. The groves need a new well. We need a new packinghouse.

Ephraim: **(Astonished)** What are you talking about?

Regina: Nothing is falling apart. Our lemons are the best in the country.

Fanya: If we had known how long you were going to stay, we could have built another house. We have a life of our own. We can't move without your breathing down our necks.

Misha: All right, Fanya...

Ephraim: Just a minute, Fanya. Just one minute. Who's breathing down your neck? I gave you the house. I gave you the groves. I only want to make you happy.

Fanya: It didn't work, father. It never did.

Ephraim: What didn't work? **(He mops his brow)**

Fanya: Stop wiping yourself with all those handkerchiefs.

Misha: It's the heat. In the groves. The lemons. We've been watering them daily, and some are still drying out.

Ephraim: That's not your concern, Misha.

Fanya: And since when have you become so afraid of sunstroke? Yesterday you rode your donkey down the main street with a parasol.

Ephraim: What didn't work, Fanya?

Misha: Perhaps they've got some disease. A fungus. Perhaps someone unhitched a horse without leaving the yard.

Ephraim: **(Angrily)** Who asked you to interfere?

Fanya: Why are you torturing me like this? I married young to get

away from you, and so you keep getting back at him. **(To Regina)** You promised he wouldn't talk to him like that.

Ephraim: **(To Fanya)** What didn't work out?

Fanya: This is my house now. If you don't leave by yourselves, I'll throw you out of it. **(Exits)**

Misha: Wait a minute, Fanya. Maybe there's another way. **(Exits after her)**

Regina: That's the thanks I get from her. I told you we shouldn't rush to give her everything.

Ephraim: It's him. I should have kicked him out the day she brought him here.

Regina: But he's here now and he's her husband and she's happy with him.

Ephraim: She is not happy. She deliberately hurts me, as if it were my fault that she married him. Why do you think they don't have children?

Regina: I honestly think it's time for you to leave.

Ephraim: I can't. I tried saying goodbye to Mama, and she wouldn't talk to me.

Regina: **(Trying to control herself)** I'll take care of her. That's why I'm staying. So that you can leave.

Ephraim: I'm not leaving.

Regina: I'm begging you to go. Go away and calm down.

Ephraim: I am calm.

He pushes the wheelchair into the house. Mina steps out onto the porch. She bumps into Ephraim but overcomes her embarrassment and turns to Regina.

Mina: I just wanted to ask, Mrs. Weiss, if it's time to give Mama her medicine.

Regina: **(Angrily)** And stay with her in her room. All day long.

Regina heads for the stable. Mina stands there, surprised. Yanek enters.

Yanek: **(Handing her a package)** It's for you. In honor of your staying.

Mina: Thank you.

Yanek: Herring. I got it from the kitchen just for you. With onion.

Mina: I have to give Mama her medicine.
 Yanek: Can I kiss your hand now?
 Mina: No.
 Yanek: **(Taken aback)** This is Palestine, not Iasi. When I go with Lazar to the Workers Club we even dance with girls.
 Mina: My mother might see us.
 Yanek: In Palestine girls can get their hands kissed without their mother's permission.
 Mina: I'm not looking for any kisses.
 Yanek: Lazar wants to take you to the club tonight. He can only ask you if he puts it in a poem. I'm asking in prose. **(Very hesitantly)** Do you know how good you'll feel if you let me hug you for just a moment.
 Mina: No.
 Yanek: Try it. All women like to be hugged.
 Mina: Please.
 Yanek: Life is so hard here that if no one hugs you, you won't wish to stay.
 Mina: I wish you'd leave me alone.
 Yanek: Alright, let's just talk. Lazar thinks he's an intellectual. He goes everywhere with a book in his hand, but he never opens it. Why don't you come with me to the club tonight?
 Mina: I don't know what I'm doing now, and I certainly don't know what I'm doing tonight.
 Yanek: I can understand why you're so sad here, but I know a very touching way of cheering you up.
 Mina: **(Angrily)** Stop that!
 Yanek: **(Insulted)** A newcomer needs friends. And I couldn't care less what anyone says about your mother.
 Mina: Take your hands off me! **(She slips away from him)**
 Yanek: They were never on you. Never. Please. I'll wait for you tonight outside the kitchen.

Mina exits. Fanya enters, wheeling Adela onto the porch. Yanek sees them and disappears.

Fanya: Why don't you answer me, Mama? I've promised you, you can stay. Just tell them to go, and I'll never make you say another word. **(Adela says nothing)** Answer me.
 Mina: **(Entering with a bottle of medicine)** Here's Mama's

medicine, Miss Fanya.

Fanya: Thank you.

Mina: Your mother said I should put her to bed.

Fanya: My mother can say what she wants.

Mina: **(Handing her the bottle)** She only gets two spoonfuls of the fish oil.

Fanya: You're already an expert on what she gets.

Mina: I'm not staying here because I want to. **(Exits)**

Fanya: **(To Adela)** Just make them go and I won't bother you after that. I'll have my hands full repairing the mess he's left. Even the land has become barren because of his laziness. Please, Mama. Tell him you're willing to have me look after you. You know I can do it. I wasn't born bad. It's only now that I've become so bitter. Do you remember how he used to spray me with water from the hose, when we were watering the lemons? I would stand dripping wet, almost choking from laughter. So full of promises were those laughs. And then one day it was all gone. I don't know why. What have I done? I went on working for him as hard as I could, but he was never pleased. Now I'm growing more and more hateful. I'm wilting away. How can I conceive when I'm so full of hate?

Adela: **(Touched by her)** It's not that he was never pleased. He just loved you too much. That's all.

They suddenly notice Ephraim approaching Mina at the small porch.

Ephraim: What a coincidence! I've been wanting to ask you something. I hope you're all right.

Mina: Yes, Mr. Weiss.

Ephraim: I'm sorry about this morning. It was just a bad joke.

Mina: Yes, Mr. Weiss.

Ephraim: I don't know what else your mother has told you. I don't want you to be afraid of me.

Mina: I'm not afraid.

Ephraim: So why don't you come with us when we go?

Mina: Without my mother?

Ephraim: Tell her I'll help you.

Mina: I hope she'll agree. I'd love to live in Tel Aviv. Why not? I'm not a country girl.

Ephraim: Then everything is all right. Isn't it?

Mina: Yes. It will be even better there. I can be a waitress and take evening classes. I think that people laugh more over there.

Ephraim: Yes, they do. **(Taking her hand)** You aren't a little girl any more. You know what I'm talking about.

Mina: No, Mr. Weiss.

Ephraim: Come, let's get out of here. Someone might see us. **(Heads for the shed. She follows him)** You must understand why I stayed.

Mina: Yes. No. I don't understand anything. **(Giggles)**

Ephraim: Don't laugh. I know I must sound funny. It's not every day I stop a girl in the yard and kiss her.

Mina: I didn't mean anything. I told you what I'd heard from my mother. It was funny, so I laughed.

Ephraim: I know you didn't mean anything. It's me. You were trembling in my arms. I thought something had happened to you.

Mina: No, I don't think I was trembling. Perhaps I was cold. It was early in the morning. I should have dressed more warmly.

Ephraim: **(Holding her)** I don't think I'm wrong, Mina.

Mina: You're not wrong Mr. Weiss. It's just that... Please...

He looks around, sees neither Fanya nor Adela, and kisses Mina's lips. Fanya is thunderstruck. She throws the medicine bottle on the floor and wheels Adela outside. Ephraim hears the bottle shatter and glances in the direction of the porch but sees no one. Mina clings to him.

Ephraim: Why are you shaking?

Mina: No, I'm not.

Ephraim: Don't be afraid.

Mina: I'm not. It just that I feel like little birds are pecking me all over.

Ephraim: That's what I was talking about.

He Kisses her again. Alexander enters the yard and sees them. He halts, dumbfounded. Ephraim notices him. Mina pulls herself together and breaks away from Ephraim. She does not notice Alexander yet.

Mina: **(Still giggling)** Forgive me, Mr. Weiss. Honestly, I don't know what's happening to me. I'm not like this, even though I sometimes laugh too much. I want to come with you, but that's not why I did it. I just couldn't think straight. I really didn't

mean to...

She turns towards the house, bump into Alexander, but exits.

Ephraim: **(To Alexander)** What are you doing here?

Alexander: What are you doing?

Ephraim: What are you hanging around for in the middle of the day?

Alexander: I was looking for you.

Ephraim: For me? In the middle of the day? Don't you have anything better to do?

Alexander: I was thinking. Now I don't even care anymore that you don't want me in Tel Aviv. Actually, I don't want to go to Tel Aviv. I'll never be able to find a good teacher there. I want to go to Vienna.

Ephraim: Vienna? Why on earth Vienna? Do you know anyone there? Do you know a word of Viennese?

Alexander: In Vienna I can play Viennese.

Ephraim: Play Viennese? When you start talking to me like that, I don't understand anything.

Alexander: In Vienna there are still some people who use their brains.

Ephraim: What brains? What do you want from me today of all these days?

Alexander: I've been telling you all my life what I want. But you...

(Breaks off) I can't go on living here. I can't go on living near you. Do I have to kill myself before you understand what I'm going through?

Ephraim: Stop it. Your mother might be frightened by your threats. I'm not. We didn't come to this country just so you would wake up one day and leave it. When you do something useful with your life, I'll be ready to listen to you. **(Turns to go)**

Alexander: **(After him)** You'll end up cursing this day for the rest of your life. **(Regina enters. He turns to her)** How in hell does he think he's doing something useful? He lets himself be carried away by every passing whim and leaves me to rot among the lemons! I'd like to know what's so sublime about lemons. They're nothing but a lot of stupid sourness, with a bitter peel and a few seeds. Is that something to live for? **(Heads for the gate)**

Regina: What did he say to you? Where are you going? Wait a minute,

Alexander. I can't run after you anymore.

She follows him offstage.

Scene 3

Dawn. The yard is still dark. Ephraim's wheels Adela in her chair.

Ephraim: What could be nicer than a walk on a crisp, cool morning?
Let's tell Mina to bring you a scarf. **(Towards the house)**
Mina! **(To Adela)** Would you like her to make you a glass of
tea? **(Towards the house)** Mina!

Regina enters, looking exhausted.

Regina: She's in the kitchen.
Ephraim: The kitchen? **(turns towards the kitchen)**
Regina: Is this a time to take Mama for a walk, Ephraim?
Ephraim: We're looking for him just like you are.
Regina: Don't you think you should be looking outside the yard?
Ephraim: We're looking for him everywhere.
Regina: Here?
Ephraim: Around.
Regina: You aren't that blind, Ephraim. You know he's run away
because of you, and you still take Mama out for a walk like
some old nursemaid?
Ephraim: We're not out for a walk. I'm looking for him with her. She
needs the fresh air. She's coughing. Aren't you, Mama?
Regina: Tell him to open his eyes, Mama. He can't go on making a fool
of himself when his son is wandering in the dunes, at the end
of his strength, without water, in the hot sun.
Ephraim: Perhaps he's finally found some young lady who thinks he
plays well.
Regina: **(Angrily)** Really, Ephraim!

Rosa appears on the porch.

Rosa: I've made breakfast, Mrs. Weiss. I was just thinking that you'll
need your strength back.
Regina: Come here, Rosa, and take Mama to her room. **(To Ephraim)**

- I want you to be with me when he's found lying beneath some bush. **(She tries taking the wheelchair)**
- Ephraim: He's not lying beneath any bush, Regina. He's walking through the fields and whistling to the birds. **(Angrily)** Leave me alone. I'm trying to talk to her. Please. **(Makes Regina aware that Rosa is watching them)**
- Regina: She already knows who you are.
- Ephraim: **(Wheeling the chair away from her)** I'm sorry I ever stayed.
- Regina: So am I. If you hadn't been hanging around here with your hands in your pockets, he wouldn't have run away in the middle of the night. The minute we find him, you get on the wagon and go. Do you hear me?
- Ephraim: I hear you. **(Exits with Adela)**
- Regina: **(To Rosa)** What are you watching us for like that? Go and look behind the house.

Rosa exits. Regina turns to continue the search just as Misha comes out of the house and walks after her.

- Misha: Mrs. Regina, Perhaps your husband is so angry because he's unhappy with me. If we could only have a farmer- to-farmer talk, he might get to know me better.
- Fanya: **(Stepping out on the porch)** Come inside, Misha.
- Regina: What do you want to talk to him about?
- Misha: We're all farmers, you know. I can pluck a cypress tree out of the ground with my bare hands. All these quarrels aren't good for the lemons. There was once a woman in the village whose fig trees all died just after she divorced her husband.
- Regina: We're looking for Alexander now, Misha.
- Misha: I was thinking about him too. If he's too delicate to work in the groves, we could buy him a few sheep. He can take them out to the hills and play the flute.
- Fanya: I told you to come inside, Misha.
- Misha: I can't be shut up inside when everyone is looking for him.
- Fanya: They'll look for him without you.
- Regina: **(To Fanya)** Are you too weak to help us?
- Misha: I was just going to make her some tea.
- Regina: Let her make her own tea. Go and look for him under the eucalyptus trees.
- Misha: I'm going. **(Regina exits. Misha turns to Fanya)** I must look

for him. It's a matter of life and death. Please. **(He notices someone entering the yard)** There he is! Alexander! Alexander? **(But it is Feivl)** Did you find him?

Feivl: **(Stammers)** I want to take a donkey and ride around the village.

Misha: **(Does not understand)** He is in the packinghouse?

Feivl: I want to take a donkey and ride around the village.

Misha: **(Still does not understand)** The lemon groves? **(Feivl snorts like a horse)** You saw a horse? **(To Fanya)** Didn't I tell you that someone unhitched a horse before leaving the yard?

Feivl: I want to take a donkey and ride around the village!

Misha: **(Finally understands)** You want to take a donkey and look for him around the village? **(Feivl stammers yes)** All right.

Feivl: **(Stammer)** You are such an idiot. **(Exits)**

Misha: **(To Fanya)** Why don't you go on inside? I'll be right back.

Fanya: I don't want you to go.

Misha: Aren't you worried about him?

Fanya: No.

Misha: He's your brother.

Fanya: It's not him. It's my father. Don't you see what he's doing?

Misha: If you're angry at your father because of me, you needn't be. I don't take offense at him. If I did, I would have answered back years ago. I was born in this country, you know. Harness me to a plow and I'll beat every ox in the village. Actually, when you protect me from him like that, it makes me feel proud. With a little patience I'll run this farm, whether he likes it or not.

Fanya: That's enough, Misha.

Misha: By the way, I saw some storks yesterday. That's a good omen. I was also born nine months after the harvest.

Fanya: There's not going to be any harvest, not while they're here. I won't lift a finger, even if every lemon rots.

Ephraim's voice is heard as he returns to the yard.

Ephraim: We're looking for him, Mama. We'll keep looking everywhere in this damned yard.

Fanya: **(To Misha)** Come inside. We are not leaving this house until we hear their wagon leaving. **(Exits)**

Misha: **(To Ephraim)** I was just on my way to make her some tea.

(Follows her)

Ephraim: **(To Adela)** I'm looking for him. Searching everywhere. I'm only fifty-two. That's not too old to search. And don't come complaining to me. I stayed here for your sake. I came here for your sake. I could've been a doctor all these years. Who knows, maybe it isn't too late. I've already found some of my old books in the attic. Don't look at me like that. I have nothing to be ashamed of. And even if I did, that's no reason to give up.

He mops his brow with his handkerchief and shoos the flies from around Adela's face. Rosa and Yanek suddenly appear. Ephraim stands awkwardly by Adela.

Yanek: So what if I'm only a cook? Is being a poet any better? Lazar is nothing but a layabout. I can bake, too. A baker for a husband gives a wife a sweet life.

Rosa: She doesn't like cakes. **(Loudly)** Alexander!

Yanek: But Mrs. Rosa, if you will agree, she will too.

Rosa: On the contrary, if I agree, she never will.

Yanek: All right. **(Notices Ephraim but continues talking to Rosa)** If you agree, say you don't agree, and then she will agree.

Rosa: Are you deaf, or just stupid? I already told you I don't agree. We'll work here for a few months and then she'll go to school and find someone who she'll never want to leave.

Yanek: If that someone heard what they said about you, he'd never marry her.

Rosa: **(Proudly)** No, he'd want to marry me instead. **(Exits)**

Yanek: **(Apologizing to Ephraim)** We're looking, Mr. Weiss. We're looking everywhere. **(Turns after Rosa)** Mrs. Rosa! Mrs. Rosa! **(Exits)**

Ephraim: **(To Adela)** We are also looking. I'll look as much as I please. Day and night, rain or shine. And don't come preaching to me. What's so moral about driving me up the wall? **(He notices Mina going over to the laundry line)** There she is.

He abandons Adela in the middle of the yard, hurries over to Mina, and steers her to a corner.

Mina: Excuse me, Mr. Weiss. I have to hang up the wash.

Ephraim: I have to talk to you. Are you all right?

Mina: She can see us.

Ephraim: You disappeared yesterday before I could say anything.

Mina: Mrs. Weiss asked me to tidy up the house.

Ephraim: I'm leaving today. On my own. I can't stay here any longer. Something devilish has got into everyone. You'll come with me.

Mina: Where?

Ephraim: With me. To look for work. With your mother, if you like.

Mina: But we already have work here.

Ephraim: Here? This place will spew us all out. When you hoe the ground you never know what you'll find. In Tel Aviv we'll have so many opportunities. Everything is possible there. There's this little cafe I know. They're looking for a waitress. I'm sure five girls are already standing in line for it.

Ephraim: I'll help your mother too. You'll want for nothing.

Mina: I'm not sure that I want to be helped. Not like that. Not because...

Ephraim: That isn't what I meant.

Mina: I'm young. I'm not afraid of hardship. I'll study next year.

Ephraim: I know you're not afraid, but I also know how hard it is to live in a place that you don't want to live in. And I'm sure you don't want to live here. You said so. **(He grabs hold of her hand)**

Mina: Don't touch me. Please. **(Adela coughs in the yard)**

Ephraim: You don't have to do anything you don't want to. You don't owe me anything.

Mina: That's easy enough for you to say, but I know how hard it is to say no to you. It's all beginning to seem so ugly.

Ephraim: What's ugly about it?

Mina: I can never do what I want. And all of a sudden I find myself here, doing what I don't want to do. We wanted to go to America, but we couldn't get a visa. Now I'm new here, and all sorts of things are happening to me. I don't know what's allowed and what isn't. And because I'm not pretty, people think I'll do anything to be liked. If my mother finds out, she'll lock me up in the kitchen for the rest of my life.

Ephraim: What is it that you don't want to do? **(He kisses her hand)**

Ephraim: What do you think it is that is not allowed?

Mina: Please, leave me alone.

Ephraim: Talk to your mother. She knows that this is no place for

dreams to come true. Until I met you, I'd forgotten that I once wanted to be a doctor. **(He feels her hand)** I have to leave soon.

Mina: No, please, don't. **(He feels her arm)**

Melchior enters the yard, exhausted from searching. He sees Adela and hurries toward her without noticing Ephraim and Mina in the corner.

Melchior: Ma'am? What are you doing here? **(She doesn't answer)** No, no one has left you alone. Everyone is looking for the boy. I went running after him too, but my legs won't obey me anymore. It's probably cold in the house and they just wanted you to be warm up in the sun. And these are only flies bothering you, here one second and gone the next. **(He shoos away the flies)**

Ephraim: If you can't come with me now, I'll stay another day. We'll meet tonight, all right? **(He kisses her hand again)** Who says you're not pretty? You're magnificent.

Mina: No, not tonight. In a few more days. The way this is happening frightens me. That's enough. She'll see us.

She runs abruptly into the house. Ephraim runs after her and finds her on the small porch. Melchior sees them and stands dumbstruck.

Mina: I beg you. Please, not here. Not now.

Ephraim: There's nobody here.

Mina: Please don't. We'll meet tomorrow. All right. Tonight.

Ephraim: We both want it now.

Mina: No. Don't.

But she doesn't resist. He takes her blouse off. Suddenly he realizes what he is doing and he stops.

Ephraim: I'm sorry. I don't mean to... No. Please, listen to me. I am sorry. You must believe me. You must forgive me.

Mina: Leave me alone now.

Meanwhile Melchior is wheeling Adela away.

Melchior: We saw nothing. And we heard nothing. It never happened. It's

the heat. These desert winds fry the brain. And such awful things hurt the elders much more. You have to get away from all this. I can take care of you if you want. When you have to run away from your own children you can't be a chooser.

Ephraim tries to help Mina putting on her blouse.

Mina: Please, let me go.
 Ephraim: Are you sure you're all right?
 Mina: Just let me go.

She exits. Ephraim steps out into the yard and sees Melchior, who is standing sternly beside Adela. He wheels Adela into the house and returns to Melchior.

Ephraim: What are you doing here?
 Melchior: Shooing the flies, Mr. Weiss.
 Ephraim: You were eavesdropping. No one can whisper a word around here without someone listening.
 Melchior: I didn't hear anything.
 Ephraim: You didn't hear anything?
 Melchior: Even if I did, Mr. Weiss, I can't remember what it was. And in a day or two I won't even remember I did hear something. Or didn't hear.
 Ephraim: **(Realizes that Melchior heard)** Look, I've always been generous with you. I've never asked you for anything. It's not me that I'm worried about. But Regina and the children. and her too.
 Melchior: I heard nothing, Mr. Weiss. And I know nothing. And I don't want to know anything. The more you know, the more you have to do. And what can a man do at my age?
 Ephraim: You're right, Melchior. What I've done is unforgivable. Who knows what else I'll do if I stay here.
 Melchior: I didn't hear a thing.
 Ephraim: I'll leave today. I promise you.
 Melchior: When you leave, I'll forget what I didn't hear, and I'll take care of Mama.
 Ephraim: By all means, Melchior.
 Melchior: Then I've already forgotten everything. I've even forgotten

what I promised to forget.

He exits. Regina enters, searching for Alexander, together with Misha, Rosa, Yanek and Lazar. She is perspiring and exhausted.

Ephraim: I'm going, Regina.

Regina: Alexander has disappeared, Ephraim!

Ephraim: He'll turn up.

Regina: Didn't you hear me? The child is gone.

Ephraim: I'm going now. **(Turns to the house)**

Regina: **(Calling after him)** He's taken an overdose again, Ephraim, I know it. He must have passed out in the dunes. He'll dry out in the sun. Who knows if he's still breathing.

Ephraim: You said you want me to go. **(Exits into the house)**

Regina: What's more important than Alexander right now? Perhaps we can still save him. We need to find a doctor and get him to the hospital. I don't want to hear anything else until I see him alive and well. **(He doesn't answer)** Aren't you his father? Aren't you my husband? I don't understand you. I'm going out of my mind. Not everything is permissible.

Ephraim: **(Enters with a suitcase)** I must go.

Regina: Don't start again. I can't take any more of your madness.

Ephraim: Goodbye.

Regina: **(Grabbing him)** You're going? Just like that?

Ephraim: Please.

Regina: Now I'm saying please. Please wake up and see what you're doing before it's too late. You've already driven him to swallow pills twice before. **(Quietly)** Don't force me to think that you're deliberately ruining our entire lives.

Ephraim: Stop it, Regina. We'll settle accounts some other time.

Regina: I'm not settling any more accounts. You can go. And don't ever come back here again. You hear me? Get out and don't come back. **(Turns furiously toward the gate)**

Ephraim: **(Yielding)** All right, Regina. I'll look for him with you.

He follows her. Feivl notices Alexander riding in on his bicycle.

Feivl: Here he is!

Regina: Where have you been all night? **(Slaps Alexander's face)**

Why must I run through the village looking for you like a madwoman? Won't you be happy until you see me dead?

Alexander: What do you want from me? I've been here all night. I slept on the roof.

Regina: You've been hiding out all night just to frighten me to death.

Alexander: I was sneezing in morning and I went to the doctor. He said I'm too sensitive to...

Regina: I don't care what he said! You're not leaving this house again!

Alexander: He said I should go to Vienna. He said the plants there are not as wild as here. **(To Ephraim)** And the glands don't swell up so much.

Regina: You're not going anywhere!

Alexander: The doctor is willing to buy the piano. Tomorrow I'll buy the ticket and go.

Regina: **(Furiously)** Go, then! Go! You can go now if you have to, if you have the same devil in you too. This is no place for lunatics. Not everything is permissible. No one can just come and go as if all the doors in the world are open. If you go, you're not coming back. I'll lock all the doors and keep the keys in my pocket.

Ephraim: Regina, please.

Regina: Don't come near me. There's nothing for you in this house. Get out. All of you. Go!

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

Scene 4

The next day. Hot autumn twilight. Ephraim is sitting at one end of the bench in the yard, leafing through a file of documents. Alexander is sitting at the other end of the bench, shooing flies from Adela, who is in her wheelchair. Melchior is sweeping leaves, humming, unaware that the clouds of dust he is sending up are landing on the sheets spread out on the porch railing.

Melchior: Above the Sycamore tree flew a stork,
A feather fell down from its wing,
And left me only with longing.

A breeze carried this feather
Gently to a rippling stream,
And left me only with longing.

The stream hurried to the sea,
The feather sank slowly beneath,
And left me only with longing.

Alexander: **(To Ephraim)** If you think I won't sell the piano, you're wrong. Mama won't be needing it. **(To Adela)** Will you, Mama? You don't plan to play, do you? **(To Ephraim)** You see? **(Ephraim says nothing)** Why do you insist on keeping me here? I'm beginning to think that you enjoy seeing me around.

Ephraim: Leave me alone.

Alexander: I can see you're just leafing through.

Ephraim: Then you should learn to see better. **(To Melchior)** Stop chasing me with that broom, Old man. Who asked you to sweep here? **(Melchior is offended)** It's alright. I haven't forgotten. I'll make up with her and we'll go.

Melchior: I have forgotten, Mr. Weiss. Time is too long to remember everything. But if you want to dredge up ancient memories, you still haven't answered my request.

Ephraim: I've already told you. When Mama starts talking, we'll ask her.

Alexander: I can't understand why you don't understand me. We're so alike, the two of us. You go around angry and bitter all day, and so do I. You want to start a new life. So do I. We both want to get away. Or am I wrong and you're just saying it?

Ephraim: I'm only staying because of your mother. Once we're gone, you can do as you like.

Alexander: Perhaps you'll explain to me why I'm asking for your permission. Why don't I just go and sell my groves and leave? Who says that everyone must die where he was born? You left your home when you were much younger than me.

Ephraim: I never left home. I brought it here with me.

Enter Regina, Lazar and Feivl, returning from the groves with their work tools and water jugs.

Ephraim: Why did you stay out there so long in this heat, Regina? Haven't you worked enough in your life?

Regina: **(To the workers)** Where are you running off to? Empty your buckets into the trough and go give the mules some water.

Ephraim: Regina...

Feivl: **(Stammers)** There's a wedding tonight. Mina is coming with me. I must go and change.

Lazar: There's a wedding in the village tonight. Mina is going with him. He's in hurry to change clothes. I'm going with him to tell her what he's saying.

Regina: Are people still getting married? Well, don't come home late. There's manure to be spread in the morning.

They exit. She sits down on the front steps and takes off her shoes.

Ephraim: Couldn't they spread the manure without you? We haven't spoken in two days.

Regina: **(Towards the house)** Fanya! The mules need water! **(There is no answer. To Melchior)** Can't you see all the dust you're making? The entire world will have to be washed now.

Ephraim: **(To Melchior)** Why are you making so much dust?

Regina: Fanya! **(Rises to fold the sheets)**

Ephraim: **(To Alexander)** Go and give the mules some water.

Alexander: They kick at me when I get close to them.

Ephraim: **(To Regina)** You'll exhaust yourself. Rest a minute. **(He reaches for a sheet, but she snatches it away)** Regina!

Regina: Fanya!

Ephraim: Fanya won't leave the house, Mama won't talk, and now you? I don't intend to spend the rest of my life waiting for this lunacy to stop.

Melchior: **(Humming a line)** ...And left me only with longing.

Ephraim: All right. I can be a lunatic too sometimes. But I'm over it now. Let's go. I received the papers from the bank this morning. As soon as we buy that plot near the town hall, they'll give us a loan for construction.

Regina: Fanya!

Ephraim: Mama will be all right. Melchior will take better care of her than we would. Why are you so angry? Because of some imaginary foolishness? You yourself said that it's possible to ruin thirty years of life together in a single moment, so why do you keep...

Regina: The mules need water, Fanya.

Ephraim: Are you putting me to some sort of test? Do you want to see how long it takes my patience to snap? What do you want from me?

Regina: Fanya!

Misha suddenly hurries out of the house.

Misha: Fanya isn't feeling so well. I'll give the mules water.

Fanya: **(Following him into the yard)** You're not giving anyone water, Misha!

Misha: But Fanya...

Regina: They have to drink, Fanya.

Fanya: Give them water yourself. **(To Misha)** Come inside.

Ephraim: That will do, Fanya.

Regina: I spent the whole day watering your lemon trees.

Fanya: I'll do it only after you go.

Misha: She doesn't really mean right now. Not just this minute.

Ephraim: I want to go even more than you want me to.

Fanya: Then go. **(Ironically)** Go and build your apartment blocks.

Ephraim: But why are you driving us out of our minds?

Fanya: Why? Can't you see the sort of person you've become?

- Ephraim: What sort of person? What have I done? Have I robbed anyone? Have I murdered anyone? I've worked hard all my life to leave you this house and these groves. You've been my pride and my joy since the day you were born.
- Regina: Leave her alone.
- Ephraim: **(Angrily)** I'm not blind, Regina. We've been fooled. We brought her up in this house with so much love. Now the walls are cracking with her hatred. **(To Fanya)** Why? What have I done to you?
- Fanya: You know that better than anyone.
- Ephraim: That's right. I do. I stayed here to take care of Mama and to appease your mother. **(Ironically)** What a terrible crime.
- Regina: Don't argue with her.
- Misha: I'll be glad to water the mules. They're always happy to see me.
- Ephraim: I don't understand these accusations. What does she want from me? **(To Fanya)** You've changed. There's a meanness in you that we've never seen before.
- Fanya: A meanness? In me?
- Ephraim: And you'd better control it, before I throw you out of this house and sell it. We're human beings, not wolves.
- Fanya: The house is mine now. You can't sell it.
- Ephraim: It's yours because I gave it to you.
- Fanya: And now you can go.
- Regina: Stop it.
- Fanya: I'll tell you what sort of a person you've become. Right here in the yard you have...
- Regina: **(Shouting)** I said stop it!
- Fanya: Only if you go. Only if you take all your belongings and leave. **(Hurries back into the house)**
- Misha: I can't let her be alone in such a state. It breaks my heart. I'll water the mules later. She's not crying but she's full of tears. A flood of them.

Misha follows Fanya into the house. Suddenly she emerges with an armful of clothing and linen belonging to Ephraim and Regina and throws them into the yard.

Fanya: Go now! Take what belongs to you and get out. Leave me only the walls.
 Misha: Please, Fanya!
 Ephraim: You get out of here! This minute! You get out and don't ever come back!
 Misha: Keep away from her!

He Hugs Fanya and leads her back into the house. Suddenly Adela explodes.

Adela: I'd rather die. I'd rather... **(She falls silent)**
 Ephraim: **(To Alexander)** Take her to her room.

But Melchior wheels her away.

Alexander: When I see what's happened to her, I'm glad you never loved me. **(Ephraim doesn't respond)** If we sell the piano and I go to Vienna, that will be one less problem for you. I won't wait for her to start throwing my clothes out too.

Ephraim doesn't respond. Alexander exits.

Ephraim: It can't go on like this, Regina. Every little misunderstanding turns into an endless war.
 Regina: If you could control yourself, we all could.
 Ephraim: I've controlled myself for thirty years. For thirty years I've done my best. I built a house, and it's no longer mine. These children are strangers to me. The lemon trees don't grow for me anymore. I once wanted to become a doctor. Don't you remember? Look what has become of me. I'm a tired old lumbering man, ruminating like a peasant. Is that why we came here? And you too. When did I last see any joy in you? Your face is a testament to your life. If we had left three years ago none of this would have happened. Now the sooner we get out of here, the better. Let's put an end to this madness. It's time to leave and let the children live.
 Regina: How can I go anywhere with you? How can I believe anything you say? We built a house here. We raised children. We planted trees. And suddenly you wreck everything on some mad whim.

Ephraim: What kind of a whim? I spent thirty years trying to live here.
 Regina: And you have.
 Ephraim: I lived very badly.
 Regina: We lived like everyone else. There's no life like the one you dream of. If only I could learn to live with her meanness. It's because of you that she never even wanted to drink my milk.
 Ephraim: Because of me?
 Regina: Because you loved her too much. And when her time came, you turned into stone. You deserve her hatred. Not me. But I suppose I have no choice either. It's already too late in the day. Maybe you'll still be decent enough to remember what you owe me. She won't. I'm going to pack.

She picks up what Fanya has thrown in the yard and enters the house.

Scene 5

Evening. The first stars are out. Ephraim sits on a crate in the yard, tense and irritable. All at once he notices Yanek, dressed to kill, tapping on the blinds of Mina's porch.

Yanek: **(Through the blinds)** Mina, I've brought you something special. It's a treat you won't get at the wedding. **(He offers her a bowl)** I slaughtered a goose for you. If Mrs. Weiss finds out, she'll roast me in the oven.
 Mina: **(From within)** I'm not hungry.

Ephraim can barely control himself. He wets his face in the drinking trough but remains agitated.

Yanek: So perhaps we can spend some time hugging now, and eat a little later.
 Mina: Thank you. I have to finish dressing.
 Yanek: I can't force you not to go with Feivl and Lazar to the wedding. But I have to tell you that you're making a big mistake. He couldn't boil an egg, that Lazar. And all his mute brother is good for is scaring the foxes. Come on, have a taste. If you want to finish dressing, that's all right. I won't bother you. I'll just stand and watch. Without a peep. Your leg slips

into its stocking. And then into its shoe. And then the other leg. And your hair falling on your shoulders. And down to your waist.

Ephraim: Yanek... **(Mina hears him and opens the blinds)**

Yanek: He can yell all he wants.

Ephraim: Go bring some cold water, Yanek.

Yanek: Don't pay him any attention. He'll be gone by tomorrow.

Mina: **(Surprised)** He will?

Yanek: Your mother is already packing their bags. If you insist on going to that wedding, you can come with me, and you'll never have to pack other people's bags.

Mina: I'm not going to any wedding.

Yanek: That's very kind of you. We'll stay here and hug. You won't regret it. Give me your hand and you'll see how nice it is.

Mina: Keep your hands off me.

Ephraim gets angrily to his feet. Mina eludes Yanek and exits. He exits too. Ephraim sits back on the bench. Lazar enters and sits down next to him. He is drunk.

Lazar: With the fall of night the stars light up, and with the crack of dawn they disappear disappointed. I was planning to go to the wedding tonight, Mr. Weiss, and to quote Mayakovski to all the girls. But midnight would only see them snug in their beds, hugging their pillows, while I'm left all alone with Feivl. It's so sad. I only love Mina, Mr. Weiss. And she's going to the wedding with Feivl! Why? I invited her too. It's the last time I grovel for her. The next wedding I go to, I'll be the groom and she'll be the bride.

Ephraim: You've had too much to drink. **(He pours a bucket of water over Lazar's head)** That's enough. It's late. Go to sleep.

Yanek enters on the run.

Yanek: Here you are, Mr. Weiss. I've been looking for you. My life is entirely in your hands. I want Mina. Yes. Mina. I can't go on any longer without a woman. I'm almost forty. Say a good word for me to Rosa, Mr. Weiss. I'm begging you. I've worked for you for nine years, and I'm ready to work nine more.

He kneels and kisses Ephraim's shoes.

Ephraim: Have you gone mad? Leave my shoes alone.
 Yanek: Just look what's become of me. Forty years old and I'm crying!
 I'm not ashamed to kiss shoes. Mina. Mina. She's made a
 plucked chicken of me. The more I tell myself it's hopeless,
 the more I want her. **(Cries)**
 Ephraim: You're out of your mind, Yanek. You're both out of your
 minds.

He exits in the direction of the shed.

Yanek : I want Mina.

Regina, having heard Yanek, steps out on the big porch.

Regina: What's the matter, Yanek? What are you screaming in the
 middle of the night for?
 Yanek: I want Mina, Mrs. Weiss.
 Regina: Mina? **(Angrily)** She's gone to the wedding.
 Yanek: I want Mina!
 Regina: Have you seen Ephraim?
 Yanek: It's Mina I want. Mina.
 Regina: Go to sleep. Tomorrow's a work day. **(Exits)**
 Yanek: Not tomorrow. Now. Tonight. Even your donkey has found an
 ass in the stable. I'm no more of an ass than he is! How can
 anyone live in this wilderness without a woman to sweeten up
 the night? Someone to live for. A reason to want to live. I ran
 away from Romania because we weren't allowed to even look
 at a woman there. And here no woman wants to look at me. It's
 against nature. It's against life. It's against me! I've been
 cheated here. Nothing has changed. If no woman wants me,
 then they can all die. All of them. I hope that their breasts dry
 up. That their hair falls out. That their flesh rots. **(Runs out)**

Mina enters. She looks around. Lazar turns to her.

Lazar: Is that you?
 Mina: What do you want?

Lazar: You can go to the wedding with Feivl if you want. But you should know that I'm a poet. I write poems to the earth. To women. Without your love my poems are barren.

Mina: Leave me alone. I'm in a hurry.

Lazar: My father always said that a cantor who's never been in love is worse than a cantor who doesn't believe in God. It goes without saying, then, that a poet also must be in love, so he can write. And if you don't love me, our new literature will suffer.

Mina: Please. I'm busy.

Lazar: **(Hurt)** I probably seem as pathetic as my poems. Is that it?

Mina: It just isn't the time, Lazar. **(Turns to go)**

Feivl enters, in his best shirt, ready for the wedding.

Feivl: **(Stammers to Mina)** I was looking for you in your room, and you are waiting for me here.

Lazar: What do you see in Feivl that you don't see in me?

Feivl: **(To Lazar)** I've got brains in my head.

Lazar exits. Feivl turns to Mina.

Feivl: You are so beautiful. Your dress is so beautiful.

Mina: **(Imploringly)** Go by yourself. I'm not coming with you.

Feivl: But why? I changed my shirt. I combed my hair.

Mina: Please, go. **(He hesitates)** Please. Go.

He exits, insulted. She walks off behind the shed and discovers Ephraim waiting for her.

Ephraim: Mina...

Mina: Here you are. I dressed for the wedding. I didn't want to go, but my mother insisted. And everyone keeps leeching onto me.

Ephraim: Are you all right?

Mina: Yes. Only I just now heard that you're leaving and we're staying.

Ephraim: I've been looking for you. I wanted to tell you. To apologize.

Mina: No, don't. Everything is all right. It's just that I can't stay. I haven't spoken with my mother, but I don't belong with all these people. I wasn't born to clean houses all my life. What I wanted to tell you was that I'm sorry about yesterday. I'm

- enough of a fool to tell you the truth. But you're truthful with me. That's what I feel. And you're certainly no fool.
- Ephraim: I'm not so sure. It wouldn't have happened if I weren't foolish. I can't forgive myself for it.
- Mina: No, it was all right. I shouldn't have said no to you. That's what I was so sorry about. I hope that's not the reason you're going. I really wanted to. I only said no because I was afraid. Because I never did it. See what a fool I am? **(Laughs)**
- Ephraim: You're not foolish at all. You have more charm in you than all the rest of this country put together. You can love in a way that we've forgotten. **(He sniffs)** There's an odd smell in the air. It's like orchids, isn't it?
- Mina: **(Laughing)** It's the patchouli on my neck. I bought it in Iasi. It was hot. I didn't want to smell like the rest. I must come with you. I wouldn't ask you to leave your wife. I'll be faithful to you. All I need is somewhere to stay. I'll always love you. I'll do anything for you. **(She takes off her blouse)**
- Ephraim: **(Startled)** No, Mina. We're leaving in the morning. I promised Regina we'd start out early. This is madness, I swear. I'll come back in a few days to visit. Regina has offered your mother the job of looking after Mama, and Fanya has agreed. There was nothing I could say. **(She presses his hands to her body)** How slender and soft you are. Like a green stalk of wheat. Don't be offended. Please, wait a few days...

But Ephraim cannot control his desire. He embraces Mina and kisses her. She unbuttons his shirt. Lazar enters and stands in front of the small porch. Thinking that Mina is in there, he declaims passionately.

- Lazar: Not for thine eyes do I yearn,
Nor for thy lips do I burn:
They chill not a fever that's desperate.
In thy breast is no peace,
'Twixt thy thighs no release,
And thy heart for my soul hath no respite.

He is still declaiming when Misha enters with a lantern. A moment later Regina appears too.

- Misha: Lazar!

Lazar: Yet somewhere there are places
 Where the sweet loving embraces
 Of a woman like thee still await me.

Regina: Aren't we going to get any sleep tonight? He's drunk. You should be ashamed of yourself, Lazar. **(To Misha)** Put him to bed.

Misha takes hold of Lazar and drags him away.

Ephraim: **(Buttoning his pants)** Put your clothes on, Mina, hurry up.

Mina: Where are you going?

Ephraim: I'll be right back.

Mina: No. Hold me. Don't go.

Ephraim: Please, Mina.

But she hugs him fiercely. Regina sees their silhouettes in the darkness.

Regina: Ephraim? Is that you?

Rosa enters, looking for Mina.

Rosa: I don't understand where Mina has disappeared to, Mrs. Weiss. I was almost done packing your bags when I saw Feivl by himself in the kitchen. I thought she went with him.

Regina: Get back inside the house. At once!

Rosa: I hope she didn't go to the wedding with Yanek.

Regina: I said get inside. She's not here!

Rosa backs away and re-enters the house. Ephraim seeks to free himself of Mina's embrace.

Mina: You can't just leave me like this in the dust.

Ephraim: You're scratching me. Go to your room. **(Buttons up his shirt)**

Mina: Don't go.

Regina: Ephraim!

Ephraim tears himself away from Mina, who is left holding his jacket. He regains his composure and goes over to Regina.

Ephraim: What is it? What are you shouting for?
 Regina: You're not setting foot in that house any more, you bastard.
 Ephraim: What do you want from me? The dogs were barking. I chased a fox away from the chicken coop.
 Regina: One more word and I'll vomit from your lies.
 Ephraim: That's enough, Regina.
 Regina: You're as old as I am. You're not what you were. No one knows that better than me. You're deceiving yourself. And her too.
 Ephraim: **(Angrily)** Who is 'her'?
 Regina: Don't even try to apologize.
 Ephraim: What did I do? What did you see me do?

Regina loses her temper and slaps him. A moment later he seizes and embraces her.

Ephraim: Enough, Regina, enough.
 Regina: **(Sobbing)** I don't know what's come over me. I'm crazy with fear. I think every shadow is a woman. You go out at night and leave me in the house, and I know there's no fox in the yard. But when you disappear, my thoughts run wild. What can I do to get you back? I know I'm not the woman I used to be. Whatever I had, I put into you, into this house. I don't deserve to be punished for my devotion.
 Ephraim: Enough, Regina.
 Regina: Tell me I'm imagining it. That I didn't even see shadows. That there was no one else by the shed. Tell me you're not going to leave me. It's because of you that I've become petty and nosy. It's no wonder you want to run away from me. **(She hugs him)**
 Ephraim: There was no woman there. It was a bad dream. A figment of your imagination. Let's go inside. In the morning we'll awaken and all the bad dreams will be gone. The horses will be hitched to the wagon and we'll have only to climb aboard.

Misha returns.

Misha: I see that everything is all right. Can we all go to sleep now?
 Ephraim: Yes. We can.
 Regina: I don't want to sleep. Let's go now.
 Ephraim: Now? In the middle of the night?

Regina: The bags are packed.
 Ephraim: You worked all day. You need to rest.
 Regina: We'll rest in Tel Aviv. Go and harness the horses, Misha. Tell Lazar and Feivl to put the bags on the wagon.
 Ephraim: Regina...
 Regina: We're going now. **(In a loud voice)** We're leaving. Fanya. Alexander! We're leaving.

Regina enters the house. Ephraim follows her. Misha, surprised, is left in the yard. A second later he rushes to Fanya's window.

Misha: **(Excitedly)** They're going, Fanya. They're going now. **(Fanya comes out to him. He embraces her)** I knew it. I told you. Didn't I see the storks? I'm going to harness up the horses. **(Hurries toward the shed)** Lazar! Feivl! Get up. Get up. From now on you do what I tell you. So put a sack of barley on the wagon, and two jugs of water. Get up! On your feet! Get to work. **(On his way he encounters Mina emerging from the shed, and addresses her triumphantly)** They're going! Believe it or not. They're going! **(Exits)**

Mina returns to the house, still holding Ephraim's jacket, and runs into Fanya. Fanya takes the jacket from her. Mina passes Ephraim, who is stepping outside with a traveling bag. He sees her and awkwardly goes over to take his jacket from Fanya, then calls Regina, who is still in the house.

Ephraim: Let him be, Regina. He can do what he wants. We can go without his good wishes. **(She lingers)** He'll be alright. He's incapable of harming himself. Come on, Regina.

Regina emerges with her bag and a few pillows and blankets.

Ephraim: Goodbye, Fanya.
 Fanya: Goodbye.

Suddenly Mina approaches, carrying a suitcase.

Mina: Excuse me, Mrs. Weiss. I thought there might be room for me on the wagon.

Regina: **(Not knowing how to react)** I don't understand.
 Mina: I've found work as a waitress in a cafe. My mother will stay and take care of Mama.
 Regina: Just a minute. I really do not understand.
 Ephraim: She can put her suitcase underneath the seat.
 Fanya: I need her here.
 Ephraim: What for?
 Fanya: I want her here. We'll marry her off to Lazar or Yanek and she'll be taken care of.
 Mina: I can take care of myself.
 Fanya: So I've seen.
 Regina: **(To Ephraim)** Perhaps she really should stay.
 Ephraim: There's plenty of room on the wagon.

He takes Mina's suitcase. Alexander appears on the porch.

Fanya: **(To Regina)** Can't you see what he's plotting right in front of you?
 Regina: I don't want to hear about it now.
 Fanya: He only wants her to come with you so that he can go on...
 Ephraim: Enough, Fanya!
 Fanya: I won't let it happen. I'll chase him wherever he takes her. **(To Ephraim)** You'll have to kill me before you lay a hand on her.
 Ephraim: Fanya!
 Fanya: **(To Mina)** Don't go with him, you stupid fool. He'll betray you just like he's betrayed us.
 Ephraim: Who betrayed you? What are you talking about? When did I betray you?
 Regina: He has never betrayed anybody. **(To Ephraim)** Let's go!
 Alexander: He'll go without you. Don't give him the pleasure of seeing you dying of grief.
 Regina: **(Angrily)** No one is dying of grief. **(To Fanya)** And you're doing everything just to drive me mad.
 Ephraim: She only wants a ride.
 Alexander: **(To Regina)** Let him take her. Let him go. You don't have to live with him. He doesn't deserve it. And you certainly don't deserve a man like him.
 Ephraim: Will you shut up!

Alexander: And I wanted to kill myself because of you! How stupid could I have been? If I hadn't been so afraid of you all my life, I'd be so different today. **(To Regina)** If you go with him, don't expect me to shed any tears for you.

Regina: There's nothing to worry about. I'll deal with everything there.

Alexander exits.

Ephraim: **(To Mina)** Climb aboard and sit in the back.

He heads for exit. Regina and Mina follow him. Rosa enters.

Rosa: **(To Mina)** There you are. Where were you? What's the suitcase for?

Mina: I'm going with them.

Rosa: What are you talking about? Did I say you could go? Were you going to tell me? **(To Ephraim and Regina)** And you are taking her? I really don't understand.

Mina: I'm not staying here.

Regina: Please, Ephraim, do something!

Rosa: **(Angrily to Ephraim)** Did you want to steal her? She's only a child. She has no one there. And what about me? Haven't I lost enough in my life? **(To Mina)** come with me! **(Takes her hand)**

Mina: Mr. Weiss promised to find me work in a cafe. I'll have a job and I'll study.

Rosa: He did what? **(As the truth dawns on her, she snatches Mina's suitcase from Ephraim)** Just one minute. You talked this over with her? Behind my back? And made her promises?

Regina: Enough already!

Ephraim: I didn't promise anything. All I said was that.

Mina: Please, Mr. Weiss. You did promise.

Regina: He says he didn't!

Rosa: **(To Mina)** And you probably made him promises too.

Ephraim: I only said I'd try to help.

Rosa: I've heard that. No one knows better than me what happens to a young woman after you promise her help in some dark corner.

Regina: No one promised her anything in any dark corner! I don't want to hear any more. We're going, Ephraim. This minute! Before I go mad and burn the house down.

She takes her bag and exits. Ephraim follows her.

Rosa: You won't see him again for the rest of your life. Anyone but him. Just seeing him touch you makes me feel his nails in my flesh. And button up that dress of yours. You are not the only woman with breasts in this world.

Mina runs inside. Rosa follows her. Melchior appears on the large porch and calls after Ephraim and Regina.

Melchior: Mr. Weiss! What's going to happen with Mama? Who's going to take care of her? Mr. Weiss! **(To Fanya)** Is that any way to say goodbye? I'd better say nothing. **(Exits)**

Misha: **(Enters and turns to Fanya)** They're gone. The horses whinnied. That's a good omen. They even took those lousy portraits that I did. Everything will be all right now. The house is ours. We'll have children. And we'll be happy. **(She chokes back her tears)** Why are you crying, Fanya?

She exits. He follows her.

Scene 6

The next morning. The sun is up and it is already very hot. Yanek sits by the shed, patching jute bags. Lazar and Feivl carry Alexander's piano through the yard.

Lazar: **(To Feivl)** I'm a poet. I won't go after a woman who laughed at my poems.
 Feivl: I'm going after her wherever she goes.
 Lazar: She has nowhere to go.
 Feivl: I want to marry her.
 Lazar: She wasn't crying all night because of you. It wasn't because of you that they had to wet her face with vinegar so she could breathe.
 Feivl: She'll never cry because of me.
 Lazar: The lowliest matchmaker in Iasi could have saved you the sorrow of her reply.
 Feivl: You say so because you want her, bastard.

He abandons the piano and walks away.

Lazar: **(To Yanek)** Can you give me a hand?
 Yanek: If I give you a hand, you won't give it back. Everyone grabs whatever he can here. I'd go back to Iasi right now, if I could.

Alexander, Fanya and Misha enter. Alexander is carrying a suitcase.

Alexander: Look at this trusty old piano. It's sighing. That doctor's daughter is sure to pull out its strings and hang the wash on them.
 Fanya: Get a move on, Lazar. We're in a hurry. **(To Misha)** I asked you to get them out of the house. Even if you have to carry her.
 Misha: She's already putting her shoes on. You forgot to sign here, Alexander. **(He hands him a piece of paper)** And here. And here.
 Fanya: Read it first. This is the contract for the sale of your lemon groves, and this is your waiver of water rights to the well.
 Alexander: What am I going to do in Vienna with water from a well in Palestina? **(Signs)**

Fanya: Drown in it.

Misha: **(Laughing)** Fanya...

Alexander: I couldn't drown even with weights on me. This morning I looked at myself in the mirror and I didn't even feel nauseous. I'm not deluding myself. I'll play. At concerts. With orchestras. Two or three years from now I'll return for a tour and cancel all your debts to me.

Fanya: Don't cancel anything. I'll pay you for every acre down to the last penny. After you drop Rosa and Mina off in the station, wait until they've left on the coach.

Alexander: All right.

Fanya: And I don't want to know where they're going.

Alexander: Right you are.

Fanya" **(To Misha)** How long does it take her to put on a pair of shoes?

Misha turns to go to the house.

Alexander: I'm sorry that I'm so happy to be leaving you.

Fanya: You can't be any happier than I am.

Feivl suddenly returns. Stammering urgently.

Feivl: He's back! I saw him! He's here.

He points to Ephraim, who enters the yard on a bicycle. Everyone is flabbergasted. Ephraim brakes, parks the bicycle, and rinses his face at the drinking trough.

Ephraim: What happened to the piano?

Alexander: I sold it to the doctor. I'm going to Vienna.

Ephraim: It belongs to Mama.

Alexander: I needed money for the trip.

Ephraim: **(To Fanya)** Hello.

Lazar: **(Emotionally)** You have no heart, Mr. Weiss. And if you did have one, it has no soul. You know I love her. I told you. What you did was a despicable thievery. You don't have to fire me, because I'm leaving anyway. **(Turns to go, but returns)** And your passion, sir, is vulgarity. It isn't even fit for a stanza by a minor poet like me. Adieu, sir! **(Exits)**

Feivl: **(Stammers to Ephraim)** You son of a bitch. I should have never worked for you. You bastard.

He spits on the ground and exits after his brother.

Ephraim: I see the word has got round.

Fanya: **(To Yanek)** Come here, Yanek.

Yanek: **(Goes to the piano but turns to Ephraim)** Mr. Weiss... Mr. Weiss... Mr. Weiss!!

Exits at a loss for words.

Ephraim: Him too?

Fanya: Everyone.

Misha: **(To Alexander)** I'll help you.

The two of them grip the piano in order to move it to the gate.

Ephraim: **(To Alexander)** Why don't you wait a few days?

Alexander: What?

Ephraim: I'm leaving. I don't think I'll be back. Mother will probably return today or tomorrow, and...

Alexander: What's that?

Fanya: He can't stay. He sold me everything you left him.

Ephraim: You sold it to her? It's all I had to give you.

Fanya: He doesn't want anything else from you. Get on your bicycle and go.

Misha: **(Assertively to Ephraim)** Please.

Alexander: You're leaving mother and asking me to stay with her?

Ephraim: Just for a few days.

Alexander: My life depends on this trip. Do you expect me to put it off just because of some cheap-novel romance with the servant girl?

Fanya: Clear out of here, father. Every minute you're here will put another ten years between us.

Ephraim: Vienna can wait another day. She's not just my wife. She's also your mother. When she finds out that I'm gone, she's liable to...

Fanya: Don't answer him. Take the piano and go.

Alexander: How can you ask such a thing of me? You're sticking a knife in her back and complaining that I don't stay to bandage the wound?

Fanya: Hurry up, Misha.

Ephraim: I thought you'd have more compassion for people. Even if these people are just your parents. Even if you thought they'd gone mad.

Alexander: Stop it. You won't get me in your clutches again. I'm already on my way. I'm gone. You can just watch the dust behind my wagon.

He takes his suitcase and exits through the gate. Ephraim turns to the house.

Fanya: She's gone.

Ephraim: Where?

Fanya: I said she's gone. **(Ephraim continues toward the house. Fanya takes a pitchfork leaning against the wall of the shed and blocks his way)** You're not setting foot in this house again. **(He tries to advance)** I mean it, father.

Ephraim: What do you intend doing, Fanya? Planting a tree? Burying a corpse?

Misha: Don't, Fanya, please.

She puts down the pitchfork.

Ephraim: I suppose I've been naive. I only had eyes for your beauty. I never imagined what was inside you. In that breast of yours. In that stomach. If you ever nurse a child, your milk will make it vomit. **(To Misha)** How can you climb into bed with her night after night? How could you have survived a single kiss from her? **(To Fanya)** What sort of woman are you? I have more feelings in my little toe than you have in your whole heart.

Fanya: You know very well what sort of woman I am, and what feelings I've had all my life. What you see in me now is your own hatred.

Ephraim: I never hated you.

Fanya: And now you'll take this hatred away with you. This land is mine. All of it. I wouldn't even have you for a neighbor.

Rosa and Mina suddenly appear with their suitcases. They are startled to see Ephraim.

Ephraim: Hold on a minute.

Fanya: Let them go.

Ephraim: Mina, wait.

Rosa prods Mina toward the gate. Fanya grabs hold of Ephraim.

Fanya: What do you see in this poor thing that's driven you out of your senses? Please, father. I'll let you stay. Yes. I want you to stay. I'll do anything for you.

Ephraim: Mina!

But Fanya hugs him.

Rosa: Don't come near us.

Ephraim: **(To Fanya)** Please, let go of me. I spent all morning walking in a daze by the sea, and then suddenly I understood what has happened to me here. So I bought this bicycle from some boy, and...

Fanya: What is there to understand? You are my father. I'm your daughter. We should all live together on this land.

Ephraim: I know. I know that there isn't much logic in what I'm doing, but logic may not matter very much anymore. **(He tears himself away)** I must go with her.

Fanya is choking with tears. Misha holds her and comforts her.

Ephraim turns to Mina.

Mina: Logic may not matter much to you. But it's all I have left.

Rosa: Don't talk to him. Let me do the talking.

Mina: I'll talk as much as I like.

Ephraim: I didn't come back here to say goodbye. We'll leave together, now, in broad daylight, with a team of horses. I've never felt so certain of anything.

Mina: Now you're certain. But last night you left without me.

Rosa: He doesn't deserve your words. Whatever you say just eggs him on and on and on.

Ephraim: I'll never leave you again.

Rosa: That's exactly what he promised me. And he's kept his promise. He doesn't leave me alone.

Mina: Don't come near me.

Ephraim: Don't you understand? I came to take you.

Rosa: She told you not to come near her!

Mina: I do understand, and when I say no, I mean no.

Ephraim: What are you afraid of? Let people talk.

Mina: You don't understand. I don't care what people say. I want to live my own life as I deserve. As I desire. I died last night. I don't want to die like that again.

Rosa: You've said enough.

Mina: When you left me, I ran to the kitchen to pour acid on my face. To cut my body all over with a knife, just to keep myself from running after you.

Ephraim: But you don't have to run after me. I'm here. Look into my heart. **(He takes her hand)**

Rosa: **(Angrily)** What is she supposed to see there? That you'll cheat on her and throw her to the dogs? **(To Mina)** Don't be the fool that I was.

Ephraim: You'll come too.

Rosa: With you and my daughter? Do you think these eyes could stand the sight of her in your arms?

Ephraim: I want to turn over a new leaf, Rosa.

Rosa: How many new leaves can you turn over, Ephraim?

Ephraim: She'll start a new life too. **(To Mina)** We'll sail on the first ship out. We'll never come back.

Mina: **(Desperate to believe him)** I want to believe you, but how can I trust you after all this.

Ephraim: We'll go tonight. By ship. By sailboat. By walnut shell. We'll go wherever it takes us. **(He holds her hands)**

Rosa: Leave her alone. Just leave her alone!

Suddenly Adela enters leaning on her cane through the porch. Melchior follows her. Ephraim lets go of Mina.

Adela: Go to work! You hear me? Put on your work clothes and get out into the groves! **(To Melchior)** Let go of my cane.

Melchior: Let him go.

Ephraim: I'm leaving, Mama. You may never see me again.
 Adela: Hitch up the horses to the plough right away. I've known you since the day you were born. I should have whipped you until all of your bones were broken.
 Ephraim: Please, Mama. Goodbye.
 Adela: I saw you with her. **(Points at Rosa)** And with her too. **(Points at Mina)** Now I won't keep quiet anymore. Go to work!

She waves her cane at him. Rosa takes advantage of the opportunity. She grabs Mina and slip away with her.

Ephraim: Good bye.

He turns to go, but is stopped by Misha.

Adela: **(Beseeching)** Go hitch the horses before it's too late, Ephraim. Please. If you leave, the earth will refuse to be your grave. Please. Don't wreck everything. Don't destroy everything. I want you here when I die.
 Melchior: **(To Adela)** If you ever want to see him again, let him get out of here.

But Ephraim breaks away from Misha and heads for the gate.

Ephraim: **(To Misha)** Get out of my way!
 Adela: **(To Melchior)** No. I don't want to see him again. **(To Ephraim)** May you never walk through this gate alive. **(To Melchior)** You'll bury my bones far away from his.

She turns into the house. Melchior follows her. Ephraim stops at the sight of Regina and Alexander arriving through the gate. She is confused and frightened, her suitcase in her one hand, and Alexander is holding the other.

Regina: **(Breathing heavily)** I thought I'd find you here. It was much too noisy in the city. It was so very hot. Autumn in this country is far worse than the summer. Let's go inside the house and have something cold to drink.

Ephraim: It's not your house any more.

- Regina: You'll see that my chair is still by the table and my bed is still by the wall.
- Ephraim: I don't want to see them. I chained myself here like a dog in a kennel. Tear out my heart and you'll see the chain's scar.
- Regina: You can go. **(But she holds onto him)** I'll sit and wait. I have all the patience in the world. I'll wait in the house until the last star goes out.
- Ephraim: **(Trying gently to break away)** This has never been my house, Regina. I shouldn't have ever come here. I do not belong here. I shouldn't have ever lived here. My entire life here is worth nothing. It was always a delusion.
- Fanya: What about our life here? Is it also worth nothing? Is it also a delusion? You can't go on ruining it for us. We aren't just a herd of cattle of a distant neighbor that you can turn loose in the desert.

She hurries for the pitchfork that she put down earlier. Misha stops her. Alexander, unable to control his anger, takes the pitchfork and brandishes it at Ephraim.

- Alexander: What more do you want from us? Haven't you tortured us enough? Haven't we squirmed enough beneath your boot? You can't go galloping through the world over our corpses.
- Regina: Alexander.
- Alexander: Look at him. How big he is. How strong he is. He can lift a sack of wheat with one hand. Ever since I remember he was as tall as the treetops, trampling us with his feet.
- Ephraim: **(Avoids him)** You won't be a millstone around my neck any longer. Even if everything here goes to ruin. Even if it all turns to dust.

He heads for the gate, smashing everything in his way.

- Misha: **(Stopping him)** Stop it. Stop it now, Mister. You know I can bite a horse to death. One more step and I'll geld you like a calf.

He pushes Ephraim toward the shed. Ephraim falls down but gets up

and makes his way for the gate. Regina takes the pitchfork and stabs him with it.

Ephraim: You're killing me.

Fanya takes the pitchfork from Regina and stabs him again. He falls to the ground. Adela, Melchior and the hired hands come back into the yard and watch him dying. Rosa and Mina join them at the gate.

Regina: He will rot in this earth and we will rot upon it.

END