

EXILE IN JERUSALEM

A play in two acts

By Motti Lerner

©

English Translation by Hillel Halkin

Edited by Stanley Price

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in Tel Aviv in 1990 under the title "ELSE"**

**The poems by Else Lasker Schuller were translated by Audrei Durchslag, Jeanette
Litman-Demeestere and Sigrid Bauschinger.**

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Communications should be addressed to the Author's representative: Susan Schulman A
Literary Agency, 454 West 44th St. New York, NY 10036 Tel: 212-713-1633
Fax: 212-581-8830 E-mail: susan@schulmanagency.com

Motti Lerner
5 Massada St. Ramat Hasharon 4729097 Israel
Tel: 972-54-4583356
motti_lerner@hotmail.com

ACT ONE

Scene 1

A winter evening in 1939. A small park in Jerusalem. Werner, a 38 old refugee from Germany who has reached Jerusalem in roundabout ways, sits on a bench and eats his supper. He opens a tin of sardines, cuts slices of bread, and dips the bread in the oil with a flourish of table manners. Else enters, carrying a suitcase. She is a woman of seventy and wears a coat with a colorful kerchief around the collar and a hat. Upon closer inspection she turns out to have a small hump on her back that she tries hiding by means of the coat.

- Else: **(Testing to see if he speaks German)** Guten abend?
- Werner : **(Happily)** Ja, ja. Guten abend.
- Else: **(Relieved)** Gott sei Dank. I hope you are not the only creature in Jerusalem, mein guten Herr, who can be spoken to in an intelligible language.
- Werner: Of course not, meine Dame. For the past hour I've been speaking German to these unfortunately mute sardines. In Hebrew, by the way you say sardine too. **(He points to the tin)**
- Else: That must be because they're Hebrew sardines. **(Chuckles)**
- Werner: You should know, meine Dame, that the public here thinks very highly of the Hebrew sardine. There are patriots who even claim it has the bouquet of smoked salmon. But the trees, unfortunately, they speak Hebrew here. **(He laughs in a shrill voice and opens his suitcase)** Would meine Dame care to buy some perfume or lipstick?
- Else: **(Peering for a moment into the suitcase)** Nein, danke. You haven't by any chance seen the mayor of Jerusalem and his entourage, have you, mein Herr?
- Werner: No.
- Else: I must be a bit early. **(Pause)** Or a bit late. **(Sits down)**
- Werner: These Levantines, meine Dame, are far from punctual. Even if they promise to come, there's not much chance they ever will. Are you planning to wait for the mayor here?
- Else: He wrote that all of Jerusalem was looking forward to my arrival. I wouldn't want him to comb the streets for me. **(Takes a letter out of her pocket)**
- Werner: **(With a hint of sarcasm)** On a winter day like this.
- Else: He also asked me to dine with him in the Town Hall.
- Werner: I'm sure his servants will be glad to reheat the goose for you. **(He laughs his strange laugh)**
- Else: He even wrote to me about a cave in which King David's harp is kept. Tomorrow I'll play a song of praise to Jerusalem on it.
- Werner: All that's left in the caves of Jerusalem, meine Dame, is crumbling bones. This city is the biggest graveyard in the world. For the time being, of course. Our Fuehrer is planning even bigger ones. **(Gestures towards a bottle)** Tea?
- Else: And a bit of smoked salmon, bitte.
- Werner: **(Handing her a sardine and a lemon)** With lemon? A squashed survivor from a Hebrew lemon boat sunk by a submarine of the Reich and washed up in Jaffa. I rescued it as it lay dying in a pile of rubbish in the marketplace. Perhaps meine Dame would like to buy something after all? Some soap?
- Else: Danke. **(Points to the bottle)** and is there sugar for the tea?

- Werner: **(Pouring her some)** The sugar sank and melted in the sea. The water, on the other hand, is from the spring King David drank from. For a minute, meine Dame, you looked familiar to me. To tell the truth, I haven't spoken German for quite awhile. **(Laughs)**
- Else: **(While eating and drinking)** The poor mayor must be so hungry by now that he's chewing his coat tails. If you promise not to tell him I've eaten already, I'll have him invite you to my heavenly banquet of saints. Do you think he'll like my dress? **(She opens her coat enough for him to see a bright red dress)** I also have a flaming green silk scarf with real peacock feathers that I was given by a young Tibetan prince. Perhaps I should change hats, though. Mayors have a weakness for hats. I once met one who went down on his knees every time he saw a feather hat. Do you think the mayor of Jerusalem will be as passionate? Anyone sitting on King David's throne must surely have a little bit of the poet in him.
- Werner: **(Tentatively)** Frau Schuller?
- Else: You look so like my little son Paul, whose curls had garlands of red and white roses.
- Werner: **(Interrupting her astonished)** Frau Lasker-Schuller! It is you! Good God. What are you doing in Jerusalem? I was told you had left for Switzerland back in '33! It's unbelievable. Just a week ago I read two of your poems in an old issue of the Zurich Literatur. Wonderful poems, Frau Schuller. "And I drink quiet wine from the moon". **(He is speechless)** Here, have some more tea. I can't tell you how surprised I was, Frau Schuller, to find Baroque imagery in those poems.
- Else: And you mein Herr, must be... **(Tries to remember)**
- Werner: Doktor Werner Hermann. I left Germany for Paris a week before you did. The day before that I ate cream cakes at the table next to you in the Grossenwahn Café.
- Else: **(Seems to remember)** Ah. Werner Doktor Hermann from Heidelberg!
- Werner: No, no. From the Grossenwahn Cafe' near the Kaiser Wilhelm Church. My wife is Gertrud Wendel of the opera.
- Else: Gertrud?
- Werner: She stayed behind with the girls. She's of pure Aryan aristocratic stock. Don't you remember me, Frau Schuller? Back in '29 I wrote an article about you in the Frankfurter Zeitung called "Passion and Death in Expressionist Poetry."
- Else: **(Pretending to know him)** Werner Doktor Hermann! How are you, my dear man? For a moment I thought you were Stefan Zweig or Arthur Koestler. I dreamt about them last night. **(Laughs)** Could I have a little more of the smoked salmon, bitte?
- Werner: Ja, ja. Here's some more tea too. I have got half a cup of sugar in my room, but I'm keeping it to sweeten harder times. Perhaps you haven't heard, my dear Frau Schuller, but Stefan Zweig managed to get to Brazil with his wife, and I ran into Arthur Kostler six months ago in Marseilles. A broken man, shaking with fear that the French might hand him over to the S.S. I gave him half of my morphine, enough to kill a horse. **(Laughs)** Apropos horses, it's just possible that the mayor doesn't know you've arrived. Perhaps we should go to the town hall.

Else: I'll certainly tell him about your generosity, dear Doktor Hermann. I'm sure he'll reward you handsomely. You wouldn't happen to have any chocolate, would you? I'm very fond of chocolate with almonds and walnuts.

Werner: So am I. Don't you remember how it stuck to my beard once?

Else: To your beard?

Werner: And then I had to shave it.

Else: **(Remembering)** Werner Hermann! My "Prince of Cairo"! Isn't that what I called you?

Werner: Yes, it is.

Else: You sat every night in the Grossenwahn Cafe' playing songs from Brecht operas on the piano with your nose.

Werner: That's right.

Else: You used to organize a choir from the beggars in the street. I paid them with cigarette butts from the ashtrays. And your Gertrud used to sing. I heard her "Die Tote Stadt". Oh, my Prince of Cairo. So, you're still alive?

Werner: Apparently, it's not so easy to kill me. **(Laughs)**

Else: And does your nose still play the piano?

Werner: It does. **(They both laugh)**

Else mimics him swaying back and forth as he plays and starts to sing a Brecht song about Hitler. Werner joins laughingly in.

Together: Mister Hitlerhousepainter said,
 "You want a painter, sir?
 Step aside, that's me!"
 He took a can of paint
 And in colors far from faint
 He painted Germany He painted Germany
 Mister Hitlerhousepainter
 Said, "You want a painter, sir?
 I'm the man for it!"
 In no time flat the job was done,
 And before the paint could run
 He whitewashed all the shit,
 He whitewashed all the shit.

In the background British policemen can be heard announcing a curfew.

Scene 2

Werner and Else are in Werner's room, in an old building near downtown Jerusalem. The room is rundown and almost empty. It has a table with a typewriter and another piece of furniture that serves as a bed. The sole window faces the street.

Werner: I lit the paraffin burner. The smoke will go away soon. I'm truly sorry, Frau Schuller, to have had to drag you here so unexpectedly. The British can be very unpleasant in a curfew. **(He doesn't notice that she has fallen asleep)** Over here they call this lamp a "Lux", although it gives off more soot than light. They haven't invented Hebrew words for everything yet... The water

must have boiled by now. I'll bring you your tea. **(Exits. Comes back after a short moment with a cup of tea)** I almost forgot how to make tea for more than one. **(Notices that she is asleep)**

Scene 3

Morning. Else rises from the bed. Birds chirp outside. She notices Werner's suitcase of perfumes and sniffs at it. Unable to resist temptation, she opens the suitcase and takes out a bottle of perfume. She smells it and sprays some of it on her throat. Werner speaks from outside the room.

Werner: Frau Schuller?
 Else: Ja, ja... bitte. **(She quickly returns the perfume to the suitcase)**
 Werner: Guten Morgen. **(He smells the perfume but is not sure where the odor comes from)** I've brought you a cup of fresh tea. And this is the same bread that King David ate. It's called "pita".
 Else: Pita? **(The word amuses her)** Pita. pita? pita! That's a word the birds must understand. Pit, pit, pita! Pita, bitte, pita. **(She breaks off some crumbs for the birds)**
 Werner: **(Stopping her)** Frau Schuller.
 Else: They're also looking for a safe haven until the storm blows over. I met them in Trieste. They hovered over the ship all the way to Haifa and escorted me from there by train to Jerusalem. Now and then they knocked on the window pane and I gave them crumbs. **(Throws them more crumbs)**
 Werner: **(Quickly taking the bread away from her)** Frau Schuller, I bought this pita for you. **(He realizes where the smell of perfume is coming from)** That scent. It's very familiar.
 Else: I always had good taste in perfume.
 Werner: Frau Schuller! I barely make a living from those perfumes. My university job doesn't start until the spring.
 Else: Is it so hard to sell perfume in such a sweaty country?
 Werner: My Gertrud always said I couldn't sell water to a thirsty man in the Sahara.
 Else: She was right. Give me that suitcase and I'll sell all its contents in a day.
 Werner: That's very kind of you.
 Else: Picture me wrapped in a gold silk robe, smelling of myrrh and cinnamon as I ride about Jerusalem on a camel with your suitcase.
 Werner: Even the Chassidim will line up to buy.

They laugh. She takes off her coat, and hangs it up. She opens her suitcase.

Else: The Prince of Cairo mustn't be upset if I hang up a few of my things, just in the corner. They'll blossom there like white, red and blue lilies growing out of the rocks. The angels will come and peek at us through the cracks in the walls.
 Werner: Yes, indeed.

She takes her clothes out of the suitcase and hangs them in the room.

Else: You mustn't dream of sleeping in the hallway again. You can bring your blanket in here and stand it by the door. I'll go and sell your perfume today.

- Werner: By all means. But look, Frau Schuller, I've no objections to being your host, but perhaps we had better ask the landlord.
- Else: No, no. You mustn't interrupt me when I'm working on a new idea, Werner. Didn't you say you had found Baroque imagery in my poems? Baroque! What a wonderful title that would make! I'll compose a few poems, you'll write an article about them, and my friend Professor Buber will publish it in the newspapers. You'll be the leading literary critic of the Levant! Every landlord in Jerusalem will be happy to have you for a tenant.
- Werner: That's a wonderful idea, Frau Schuller, but too much intimacy between a poet and her critic might be detrimental both to the poetry and the criticism.
- Else: There's nothing intimate about living together! What's intimate is that I'm willing to publish a whole book for you. A big book, bound in fragrant leather. My little son Paul will illustrate it with lovely spring flowers.
- Werner: **(Startled)** Paul? But he's... over ten years ago...
- Else: Such gentle young boys never die, Werner. He'll illustrate it and you'll add your notes in the corners.
- Werner: Frau Schuller, you don't know the landlord. He's a fascist.
- Else: You're the man for it. What would poets be without their critics? It's only through your insight that our poems gain their rightful place.
- Werner: Frau Schuller. I assume you have no other place to live, and I'm happy to be able to share this room with you, but...
- Else: You don't understand, Werner Doktor Hermann, you yourself will choose the poems and edit them.
- Werner: We're in Jerusalem, not Berlin. In Jerusalem you can only publish books in Hebrew.
- Else: In Hebrew?
- Werner: I stopped writing in German the day I left Germany.
- Else: Werner...
- Werner: I refuse to be at the mercy of their language any more, Frau Schuller.
- Else: **(Taking a looseleaf notebook with a few pages from her suitcase)** And what am I supposed to do with these poems? Tear them up? I don't have any other language. **(She holds them out to him)** God has sent me to you with a treasure that only comes the way of a chosen few.

He hesitates at first to look at the poems but then cannot restrain himself. His face lights up as he reads them.

- Werner: New poems! If you have no objection, I'll try to translate them. I write Hebrew better than I speak it.
- Else: God kisses you with my lips, Werner, you dear, dear man.

She kisses him on the forehead, then skips away with surprisingly childlike gaiety.

- Werner: About the room, Frau Schuller...
- Else: I won't bother you. I promise to be a very considerate tenant. You can sit quietly in a corner and write. You won't even notice I'm here. I'll spend the days riding our camel, selling perfume, and at night I'll go to the cinema.
- Werner: I still think I should talk to the landlord and...
- Else: And now I'm off to see the poor mayor who went hungry all night while he waited for me. Auf Wiedersehen.

She kisses him again and leaves. He reads from her papers.

Werner: O, God. Wrap up your robe around me fast
I know I'm just the drop left in the glass
And as the last man stands pouring out the world,
Out of your power you'll never let me pass,
And a new globe around me will be furled.

Scene 4

Werner turns to the audience as if it were gathered in the German synagogue in Jerusalem for a poetry recital by Else Lasker-Schuller. Else is late. Werner stalls for a time while he waits for her.

Werner: Guten Abend, meine Damen und Herren. Good evening, Mister Mayor.
Good evening Professor Buber. It is a great honour and pleasure to present you with our renowned poet who will read us a selection of her latest poetry, written in defiance of the Fuehrer and his murderous henchmen. These poems are dedicated by her to her unforgettable friends who have been driven into exile all over the world. Meine Damen und Herren, Frau Else Lasker-Schuller! **(Apologetically)** She'll be with us in a minute. Meanwhile, let me thank the rabbi of this synagogue and his assistants for making this distinguished evening possible. All of us, I am sure, share the hope that we will soon be holding evenings of poetry in Hebrew. **(Seeing Else)** Please accept my apologies for the delay. Frau Else Lasker-Schuller -- bitte!

Else comes on stage. Werner vacates his place for her. She is wearing a colorful robe and a hat with a huge feather in it. Her throat, arms, and hands are adorned with heavy jewelry. In one hand she holds a candle, and in the other a little bell. She puts down the candle and begins reading her poetry, accompanying herself now and then with the bell.

Else: **My Mother**
The candle burns on my table
All night long for my mother
For my mother.

My heart burns beneath my shoulder blade
All night long. For my mother

Else: **The End of The World**
There is a weeping in the world
As if the good Lord now lay dead
And heavy as the grave, the weight
of the shadow falls like lead.

Come, let's go sneaking
In everybody's heart life lies
As in a coffin.

Ah! Let's kiss deeply, you and I
 A longing's knocking at the world
 From which we'll surely die.

My Blue Piano

At home I have a blue piano
 But have no note to play.
 It stands in the shadow of the cellar door,
 There since the world's decay.

Four star-hands played harmony
 - The Moon-maiden sang in her boat -
 Now the rats dance jangling,
 Broken is the keyboard.
 I weep for the blue dead.
 Ah, dear angel, open to me
 - What bitter bread I ate - Even against the law's decree,
 In life, heaven's gate.

There is scattered applause. Else bows to the audience.

Else: Good evening, Mister Mayor. How is Your Grace? I have something wonderful and precious to tell you. Your Grace will never believe it. On our way here we stopped to rest at the number fifteen bus stop, Werner and I -- and who do you think was sitting on the other side of me? Who? **(There is silence)** You can't guess either, Herr Professor Buber? **(No one answers)** King David! None other than King David in person, isn't that so, Werner? And I, who all my life have wanted to know what King David wore -- I reached out quite shamelessly to touch him. And what do you think he was wearing? Well? **(No one guesses)** A tweed jacket. I swear by my little son Paul! English tweed. **(Laughing)** You tell them, Werner. Tell them...

Werner steps up hastily to put an end to the embarrassing moment.

Werner: Many thanks to our renowned poet. And thank you all for coming!
 Else: I have something else quite wonderful to tell you too.
 Werner: Permit me to apologize for the slight misunderstanding. Incidentally, next Saturday night our poet will give another recital in the synagogue. The cost of a ticket will be three piastres, even for poetry lovers. No substitutes, such as eggs or tomatoes, can be accepted. Thank you very much, und auf Wiedersehen.

Scene 5

Werner's room. Night. Werner sits at his typewriter, lights a cigarette, and tries to translate "The Blue Piano" into Hebrew.

Werner: At home I have a blue piano. At home I have a blue piano. **(Types)** No, no. **(He crosses out and types again)** But have no note to play. But have no note to play. **(He opens a dictionary)** But have no note to play. Yes, yes. That's it. **(He types)**

Else enters.

Else: Are you planning to work all night, Werner?
 Werner: If your poems are published in Hebrew, the mayor may forgive you that scene at the synagogue.
 Else: I didn't make any scene. He laughed along with everyone.
 Werner: He certainly did.
 Else: They all laughed.
 Werner: Certainly. **(He continues translating)** It stands in the shadow of the cellar door.
 Else: I don't understand how such a poem can be translated.
 Werner: Professor Buber was quite enthusiastic about my translations. "Your command of Hebrew is impressive", he said to me. **(Goes on typing)**
 Else: Even your typewriter is groaning.
 Werner: If you give me some of your books, Frau Schuller, I can do some more tonight.
 Else: What books?
 Werner: Buber suggested including some of your early poetry too.
 Else: But I don't have a single one of my books.
 Werner: You don't?
 Else: I fled Berlin with the dress on my back. I found this suitcase thrown away in Zurich. At the bus station.
 Werner: **(Surprised)** You don't even have one book?
 Else: No. Don't you?
 Werner: I left everything behind in Paris.
 Else: **(Alarmed)** There must be someone in this country who has a book of mine.
 Werner: Maybe in a second-hand bookshop.
 Else: Someone has to have my books!
 Werner: **(Hesitantly)** Of course. I'll go and look there tomorrow.
 Else: **(Interrupting him)** You'll go and look this minute and you'll keep on looking until you find them! They're being burned right now in Germany, huge piles of them, hundreds of poems going up in flames! The mayor must make an announcement on the radio. **(She starts to leave and returns)** I want to know the truth, Werner. I have written poems in my life, haven't I? Nineteen books. I haven't suddenly woken up from a dream, have I? Did I or did I not stay up every night in the Grossenwahn Café', reading them aloud? My Paul sat next to me listening. Didn't he?
 Werner: He did.
 Else: And then one day men in brown and black shirts appeared in the streets. They broke the windows of the Café' and beat me with their clubs.
 Werner: They did.

Else: I even have a big scar on my scalp, don't I? **(She bends her head)**
 Werner: Frau Schuller, your books are safe in the libraries of Zurich. You needn't worry about the immortality of your poems. We can put out a new book without them.
 Else: **(Touching her scalp)** Do I or do I not have a scar?
 Werner: Today, you're writing different poems. About the hell our lives have become.
 Else: I have a scar and I wrote books! The Hebrew Ballads, The Prince of Thebes, The Miracle Rabbi of Barcelona. Now they're hiding in the suitcases and coat pockets of refugees. I hear them calling me, banished books in battered bindings, trembling with shame in the darkness, waiting for me, Else Lasker Schuller, to come and save them. **(She storms out)**

Scene 6

Werner is waiting for Else by the front gate of Professor Buber's house in Jerusalem. Street sounds can be heard. A wagon driver cries, "Ice! Ice!" Dogs bark with pent-up fury and children cry. Werner's patience is running thin. Suddenly he notices a cigarette butt on the pavement. He picks it up and lights it. A minute later Else enters, dressed in colorful clothes, a slim book in her hand.

Else: The Hebrew Ballads.
 Werner: That's all?
 Else: I sent it to him myself in 1910. **(Hands him the book)**
 Werner: **(Reading aloud)** "To Martin Buber, the Holy Prophet of the Jews, with a primal Kiss".
 Else: You should have seen how he adored my scarves. He even said I looked like Greta Garbo in this hat!
 Werner: Even a blind man could tell you that. **(They both laugh)** And now to the great writer Agnon?
 Else: You know, when Agnon lived in Berlin, he used to wait in the doorway of the Grossenwahn Café every morning just to hear me laugh. His lovely wife Esther turned green with envy. Even then I was prettier than she was. **(Takes a partly chewed loaf of bread from her pocket)** This is for you.
 Werner: You stole that from Martin Buber?
 Else: Stole? He served me a whole meal. I kept the bread, that's all - for you.
 Werner: Thank you. I've already eaten. I'm full.
 Else: **(Takes an ashtray from her pocket)** And this is for your room.
 Werner: You walked off with that too!
 Else: You really do need an ashtray, and you haven't eaten, Werner. You're hungry.
 Werner: I said I'm full. And I must ask you to return this ashtray.
 Else: If you were a poet, you would know how to accept humiliation.
 Werner: It's not a question of humiliation. **(Silence)** Sometimes, when I walk down this street with my suitcase of perfumes, I see Herr Professor Buber sitting on his terrace and writing. A philosopher for salons and newspapers! If I could have stayed one more year in Germany, I'd have managed to publish my studies on Goethe. All the universities in the world would be after me today.
 Else: I'll wait here while you're seeing Agnon.

Werner: While I'm seeing him?
 Else: He lives just around the corner.
 Werner: Absolutely not.
 Else: He must have a few of my books.
 Werner: No, no. You may not know this, Frau Schuller, but I once wrote a piece for *Literarische Welt* in which I said that Agnon's books about the black-garbed Jews of the shtetl are millstones about the neck of the modern Jew.
 Else: But I told you his Esther can't stand me. She'll never let me in to see him.
 Werner: Nor me. She thinks I ruined his career in Berlin.
 Else: Go and see him, Werner. I beg you, go.
 Werner: Agnon can't abide people like us. I once heard him say that we turned a blind eye to Nazism and sold our souls to the devil just to go on sitting in the cafes of Berlin. To him I'm an assimilated Jew who married a goy, and I can go on pounding these pavements, selling perfume for the rest of my life.
 Else: **(Angrily)** For days on end you've been poking through my poems, Werner, pawing at them as if you owned them.
 Werner: Frau Schuller...
 Else: And now, when finally I beg you for some help, all you do is give me excuses. You're nothing but a wretched critic, a nobody who follows me around and lives off the crumbs of my genius.
 Werner: Frau Schuller, our friendship is the most precious thing to have happened to me since I came to Jerusalem.
 Else: You want to be friends with the Poet, but you'll do nothing for the person inside.
 Werner: Agnon will slam the door in my face. I've already seen him several times about a position at the university, and he turned me out of his house like a pariah.
 Else: You're still young, Werner. You'll make him pay for it one day. I'm ten thousand years old.
 Werner: Go and see him yourself. Maybe you'll get some pudding. **(Looks at the loaf of bread)** You had your main course at Buber's, haven't you?
 Else: Of course I did! He poured me a glass of port, and his wife served me petite four and... **(She trails off)**
 Werner: Fine, fine. So the holy prophet of the Jews didn't even offer you a bite. If you hear Agnon screaming through the window you'd better come to his rescue. **(Exits)**

Scene 7

Else is left alone on the bench. She huddles there, sunken into herself like a sudden victim of old age. After a minute she reaches into her pocket, takes out the bread, and munches on it slowly. Soon Werner returns with a broad smile.

Werner: He had a postcard. One poem. Untitled. **(Shows her)** They did everything they could to throw me out. His Esther was pale with fright. **(He mimics her)** "You're not to write a word about him, do you hear? Not a word."
(Laughs)
 Else: He didn't ask about me?
 Werner: Of course he did. He even invited you to visit him. When I wanted to sit on a chair, she said it was broken. **(Laughs)**
 Else: When did he invite me?

Werner: Anytime you like. **(She understands. He continues)** So I went to sit on the couch -- and she told me my trousers were dusty.

Else: And my books?

Werner: He'll ask his friends. When I began to brush them off, she pushed me off the rug.

Else: What friends?

Werner: I went back to the chair, sat down, and went sprawling. It was broken. **(Laughs)**

Else: He did not invite me to visit him.

Werner: Of course, he did. He wants to help. He's even ready to recommend a native Hebrew-speaker to translate your poems. **(Ironically)** Not that he doesn't think my Hebrew is good. **(Laughs)** I went sprawling on the floor...

Else: **(Angrily)** I'm not letting anyone touch my poems.

Werner: And just how do you expect anyone to read them?

Else: I've been a Hebrew poet all my life. My poems are already in Hebrew.

Werner: Agnon knows they're full of Hebraic symbols. But he was referring to the actual language in which they are written.

Else: My poems are Hebrew poems. I will not start patching and cobbling them now.

Werner: Frau Schuller, He's right. Nobody in this country is going to read poetry in the language abused by the housepainter.

Else: But that's how I wrote them. I can't write any other way. If you whitewash a violet, is it still a violet?

Werner: We're trying to make a life for ourselves here. Living means writing. And your violets that wilted there can only bloom here in the language people live in. If Agnon thinks I'm not the person to translate your poetry, I'm willing to abide by his judgment.

Else: My violets never wilted, Werner. They never did and never will. **(She waves the copy of Hebrew Ballads)** With these letters I drew them. With these commas and colons I decorated them. That's how they fell into my lap, like ripe pears, like pomegranates. And I will not allow them to be skinned alive.

Werner: Goethe and Heine have been translated.

Else: My poems are the word of the living God. Yes, the word of God. This is the way He wanted them written. In these very words. In these very lines. He chose me and sent me His angels from the clouds, bearing gifts wrapped in softest silk. He watched me through the window as I sat at my typewriter. Whenever I wrote anything He disliked, He tapped on the pane with His ring. **(Agitatedly)** I won't change the tail of one comma for these Philistines. A Jewish poet knocks on their door -- and they shut the bolts and sit inside jabbering away in their own oriental patois - so pleased with themselves. The swine aren't worthy of my poetry. they aren't worthy of anything. Anything. They aren't worthy of God.

She faints. Werner rushes over and catches her.

Werner: Frau Schuller? Frau Schuller? **(Carries her off to her bed)**

Scene 8

Else and Werner are in their room. Else is lying in bed. Werner lights a cigarette and listens to the voices of the children outside.

Children: Crazy Else
Ate a mouse.
She hides Nazis
In her house!

The chanting and laughter fade away. Werner puts out his cigarette and picks up a newspaper from the table.

Werner: The Wehrmacht entered Paris yesterday. No doubt the Gestapo are there today. Would you like me to read you what it says about them in the "Hebrew Made Easy for Immigrants" column? **(Else doesn't answer)** If my books have been gathering dust in Montmartre, now they'll be gathering crowds to watch them burn on the Champs Elyse. I left a pair of woolen slippers there too. **(Puts the paper down)** Hell! My little girls are in Berlin and all I can think of is my slippers. **(Reaches for the paper again but throws it back down)** I'm embarrassed to read this. It's like it's written for children. **(He puts the paper away in a drawer)** Would you like a glass of tea, Frau Schuller? **(Else doesn't answer)** Grass will grow on my palms before I master this language! I understand every rule and every exception to every rule, and I still can't compose a single elegant phrase. **(Pause)** You're looking much better today. As an amateur doctor and a professional patient, I give you my permission to go out for a walk. And to go back to work, if you'd like to. **(She doesn't answer)** Perhaps, Frau Schuller, you could write another letter to Thomas Mann about your books. **(He takes a letter from his pocket)** He left Switzerland two months ago. The last one you sent came back. He managed to get his wife and children to New York. **(Angrily)** Aryan exiles are even able to save their books. **(Pause)** Does your arm still hurt? I can give you a bit of morphine. If Arthur Koestler had taken all the morphine I offered him in Marseilles, I wouldn't be walking around with enough in my pocket to kill a horse.

Else: Hold me, Werner. Embrace me. Not a soul in Jerusalem has held me yet. **(Clings to him)**

Werner: Frau Schuller.

Else: Call me Else, Werner.

Werner: Frau Schuller.

Else: Caress me, Werner. Please, caress me.

Werner: **(Embarrassed)** Frau Schuller. I just told you that Paris has fallen to the Wehrmacht and that Thomas Mann has fled to New York. I should also have confessed that the mayor has refused to see me about your books.

Else: Forget about the mayor. The two of us are alone on this earth. If only a tiger would bridge the distance between us with his body.

Werner: The distance is even greater between me and my... **(Trails off)**

Else: Look at me, Werner. I was also created in God's image.

Werner: Frau Schuller, I know you're beautiful. But I've always kept away from beautiful women on account of my long nose.

Else: Don't be evasive. I know the chariots must be thundering in your heart too.

- Werner: **(Breaking away from her)** Please, Frau Schuller.
- Else: I've been talking nonsense again, haven't I? Well, I've been a foolish woman all my life, and yet they say the sky is never so deep as when seen through my babbling.
- Werner: You're not foolish, Frau Schuller. You're probably the world's greatest poetess. You're a unique personality. I'm a great admirer of yours. But this kind of intimacy is impossible.
- Else: Don't humiliate me, Werner. **(Grabs him)** Kiss me. Kiss me. Please. The stars destined me to love, and I love. Yes, I love.
- Werner: Frau Schuller, I'm a critic, a critic and scholar, not a lover. I'm delighted to share my room with you, but you must respect the privacy of my feelings.
- Else: I have no one else here but you, in this whole horrible desert, no one.
- Werner: **(Angrily)** Frau Schuller, I'm a married man. I have a wife and children in Berlin, although it's been two years since I've heard from them. **(He starts to leave)**
- Else: **(Hurrying after him)** Werner! Werner! Forgive me. **(Grabs hold of him)** I just suddenly felt so sad. If only you could understand how it hurt.
- Werner: I have my own reasons to feel sad.
- Else: I know. Don't go.
- Werner: **(Relenting and lighting a cigarette)** These past few days my nightmares have become unbearable. If I were to shed a single tear, it would be followed by a flood. They'd have been worse off if I'd stayed, wouldn't they?
- Else: Of course.
- Werner: I wanted to smuggle them out with me, but Gertrud wouldn't hear of it. Until the war I wrote to them every day. I begged them to join me.
- Else: They're perfectly well, Werner. I know they are.
- Werner: **(Adamantly)** Of course they are! **(Puts out his cigarette and sticks the stub in a box)** I never meant to leave you either, Frau Schuller. You're very dear to me.
- Else: There, you see? Your heart is full of love for me! Kiss me. Kiss me, please.
- Werner: Can't you see I'm falling apart right in front of you?

Else embraces him. He tears himself away.

Werner: Can't you realize that all I can think about is the morphine in my pocket?

Werner leaves. Else hesitates for a moment, and then hurries after him.

Else: Werner! Your coat!

But Werner is already gone. She returns to the room and sits down. She is cold. She gets up and puts the coat on.

Scene 9

Morning. Else is sleeping in Werner's chair with his coat on. Werner enters. His clothes are wet and he is shaking from the cold. He sees her in his coat and is furious. Quietly, he goes to look for dry clothes and finds some near her chair. He takes off his trousers. She wakes up.

Else: Werner?

Werner: **(Quickly putting on the dry trousers)** Guten Morgen, Frau Schuller. You must be very warm in my coat.

Else: I looked everywhere for you last night. I went to the Cafe Europa and the Cafe Zichel and the Cafe Atara. From there I ran to the railway station.

Werner: I was out walking on the Friedrichstrasse.

Else: **(Almost believing him)** You were walking on the Friederichstrasse?

Werner: And I'm going to have a glass of tea before I have to go back there.

Else: **(Handing him a sheaf of papers)** Look, Werner: ancient pearls and crystal, diamonds hidden in dust. I was sitting here in the dark when I suddenly saw them glitter. **(She reads aloud)**

Else: I have chosen you
Under all the stars.
And lie awake -- an eavesdropping flower
In the buzzing leaves.

Our lips would make honey.
Our shimmering nights have broken into bloom.

My heart lights its sky
From your body's blissful gleam.

My dreams hang on your gold.
I have chosen you under all the stars.

Werner: "Secretly by Night". You wrote it in 1910.

Else: For the King of Bavaria. How I loved him! **(Shows him some more sheets)** And here are poems I wrote for Georg Grosz and Franz Werfel. I loved them too.

Werner: You did all this tonight?!

Else: Ja.

Werner: Even poets cried when you read this in the Grossenwahn Cafe.

Else: And the more they cried, the more coins they threw in my hat. **(They laugh)** I was the richest beggar in Berlin. Do you remember how I used to stand like a scarecrow in the fountain in the Alexander Platz and let the birds land on my wet felt hat? **(They laugh)**

Werner: We've got the Hebrew Ballads you found at Buber's, the postcard from Agnon, the Blue Piano poems you've written here. and now these too. It's a book! A thin book, but a book. I can write an afterward, and perhaps you'll add a few sketches -- it's practically ready for the printer. We'll give another poetry recital too.

Else: **(Taking his hands)** Are you happy, Werner? Do you really like my poems? I traveled a long way back in time to dig up these treasures for you.

Werner: Frau Schuller...

Else: No, no, Werner. I'm sorry if my poems are an illustrated map of my soul, that my inmost caves are open to you.

Werner: Frau Schuller. I don't want to have to sleep out-of-doors again.

Else: I won't say another word. I'll sit here quietly. **(Sits)** You won't hear one more bit of nonsense from me. Even the angels will be amazed by my silence. Aren't you proud of me for being so quiet?

Werner: Marvelous. And now I'm off to Dvir Publishers. Auf wiedersehen!

He tries to leave. Else kisses him on the mouth and bursts out laughing at her triumph.

Else: **(After him)** My dreams hang on your gold!

Scene 10

Werner's room. Werner enters, hiding an ice cream cone behind his back.

Else: I'm keeping quiet, Werner. I haven't said a word since you left. I've been waiting for hours in absolute silence.

Werner: I could hear you keeping quiet from the bottom of the stairs. It had me worried. **(Shows her the ice cream and announces)** Ice cream! Vanilla fudge with cherry and chocolate!

Else: Cherry and chocolate? **(She reaches out for the cone)**

Werner: **(Holding it at arm's length and declaiming)** Vanilla like in Berlin. **(Else tries again)** No, no. I want a poem first.

Else: Werner.

Werner: At least a stanza.

Else: **(Unable to contain herself)** Werner!

Werner: Not bad. Let's have another line.

Else: Werner.

Werner: **(As if quoting her)** "Werner, Werner, Werner." Would you call that expressionistic? Surrealistic? Dada?

Else: **(Suddenly suspicious)** They don't want to publish my book, do they?

Werner: Of course they do. We even set a date.

Else: When?

Werner: In a few months. Frau Schuller, your ice cream.

Else: They said they're not interested in my poems.

Werner: Not at all.

Else: That they're muddled expressions of a feeble mind. That for the healthy Hebrew people they're just morbid flights of fancy.

Werner: Nothing of the sort.

Else: Just like the Nazis wrote about me in Der Sturmer!

Werner: **(Offering her the ice cream)** How could you even think such a thing? Yours are among the most lyrical poems being written anywhere today. They suggested translating them into Hebrew. They just need time to look for a translator.

Else: Translating them?

Werner: I told them I would have to discuss it with the poet.

- Else: But didn't you promise that you would never let anyone peck out the eyes of my poems? **(She drops the ice cream)**
- Werner: Frau Schuller, that ice cream cost me my whole fortune.
- Else: I'm not the gullible old fool you take me for, Werner.
- Werner: Frau Schuller...
- Else: I still have eyes and ears. And I understand everything. Did you think I could be seduced with an ice cream? You were the only friend I had here. **(She goes to pack her suitcase)**
- Werner: **(Now desperate)** We have to translate these poems into Hebrew. No one is going to publish them in German.
- Else: No, Werner.
- Werner: We have no choice. If you're my friend, you have to compromise. For your own sake - and for mine.
- Else: Absolutely not!
- Werner: Frau Schuller, for three years I've been running around the streets of this city selling perfume. Is that what I came here for? Your book is my one chance to stake an intellectual claim here.
- Else: I'll publish it in Switzerland.
- Werner: It has to be published here, and in Hebrew, so that I can write something for it. Anything -- an introduction, an afterward, notes, anything at all, if not with one publisher, then with another.
- Else: Poets are truth-tellers, Werner. I would have gone to any lengths for you, had you only told me the truth. But you've deceived me. You've betrayed me like all the other Jews in Jerusalem. The day will yet come when you'll tear out my soul to get some appointment at the university. **(She finishes packing her suitcase)**
- Werner: Where will you go? Please, Frau Schuller, Be reasonable. Put down that suitcase. You were expelled from Switzerland -- you'll never be allowed back.
- Else: Jerusalem should have been entrusted to poets, not to ordinary Jews. That's why it's such a mean place. I will not be stoned by the city for whose sake I have written all my life.
- Werner: I shouldn't have gone to Dvir. It was a mistake. They were the wrong publisher. I admit it. I'm sorry. They think you have to come from Russia to be a poet. We should go to Schocken. Herr Schocken is a good German Jew. He knows your reputation.
- Else: There is no place for a poet in Jerusalem. If King David came and offered his psalms to Dvir, or Solomon his songs, they'd be thrown out on their ear.
- Werner: Frau Schuller. Please. A little patience. The audience for your poetry is right here in Jerusalem... Or else in Dachau.
- Else: I'm an old woman, Werner. I can't wait any longer. I want to go home.
- Werner: **(Holding her hands)** You have no home. The home you had is destroyed.
- Else: It's hard for me here, Werner.
- Werner: It will be far harder without you.
- Else: **(Cradling her cheeks in his palms)** I walked up King George Street today in the rain that God cried, and I didn't see any angels. The sky was empty.
- Werner: **(Moving away from her)** Even when this war is over, there'll be nowhere else to go. If there are still angels in the world, this is the place to look for them.
- Else: **(Taking hold of him again)** Werner.

Werner: **(Moving away once more)** You need to rest a little and calm down.

Else: **(Fiercely)** I don't want to calm down, Werner! I want you to love me. I want someone on this earth to love me. Hold me! **(She embraces him)**

Werner: Frau Schuller, I beg you. You can't flirt with everyone in Jerusalem. The Mayor himself has declared you unwelcome in his office because of the eyes you make at him.

Else: I do not!

Werner: Everyone at the town hall saw you pinch his cheek.

Else: That's a lie! You're the only one I love. **(She kisses him on the mouth)** Here, take my poems. Do what you want with them.

Werner: **(Struggling to break free)** You can't seduce me with your poems. What do you take me for? Don't you ever touch me again! Don't ever come near me. **(Gathering a few of his things)** Your writing gives you no rights over me. I warned you.

Else: Don't do it for the poems, Werner. Do it for me.

Werner: Leave me alone! I still love women. Yes. I still want women. But I'm not so desperate that I have to accept your advances. Goodbye, Frau Schuller. **(He turns and goes)**

Else: I'll help the sun paint your face on all the houses. I'll hang your smile from the branches of every tree. I want someone on this earth to love me!

Werner!! **(Blackout)**

Act Two

Scene 11

Werner's new room, which looks even poorer and more threadbare than his old one. Werner sits in his underwear by the table, soaking his feet in a bucket of water. Else suddenly enters.

- Else: Guten Tag, Herr Werner Doktor Hermann!
- Werner: **(Surprised)** Guten Tag, Frau Schuller.
- Else: So, here you are at last!
- Werner: I've always been here.
- Else: I waited a whole year for you to visit me, but you never came.
- Werner: I meant to visit you. I really did.
- Else: You meant to? **(Surveying the room)** What a sad room this is, Werner! How empty and gray.
- Werner: This past year has been a self-portrait in black and white, Frau Schuller. **(Else laughs. He shows her a bundle of manuscripts)** I managed to translate my never-to-be-published book on Goethe into Hebrew and I've begun to talk like him.
- Else: You look at the world through merely human eyes, while I see its reflection in the running water. I think you urgently need some of your old chief's magic prairie tea. What a tiny window.
- Werner: Did you find my new address reflected in the running water too?
- Else: What an idea! The other day I was taking the river route through the jungle on my way to darkest Chicago when a sudden flash of lightening revealed your smiling ox-face.
- Werner: **(Bellowing)** Moo.moo. **(They both laugh)** Will plain local tea be good enough for meine Dame?
- Else: Nein, danke! **(She peers behind the bed)** I see, Herr Doktor, that you still haven't found any plain local woman.
- Werner: The local women seem to prefer local men.
- Else: **(Taking heart)** You'll never guess what made the angels bring me to your abode, Werner.
- Werner: Perhaps they discovered how much I missed you.
- Else: Doctor Spitzer at Tarshish Books is putting out a volume of my new poems. Your introduction will be the golden bridge which the pilgrims cross to the true Promised Land. **(She hands him the manuscript)**
- Werner: **(Looking at it)** My Blue Piano. And Spitzer is going to publish it like this. In German?
- Else: In German.

He kisses her hands. She kisses him back. He pulls away.

- Werner: In happier times we'd have lit up the Friedrichstrasse with fireworks and rung all the bells of the Kaiser Wilhelm Church. I will be delighted to write an introduction, meine Dame. And if you care to leave the manuscript with me for a day or two, I'll write an afterward - a bridge for the pilgrims to return by.
- Else: Can I also leave you a few other belongings for safekeeping?
- Werner: Yes of course, Frau Schuller.

She exits. He reads one of the poems out loud.

If only I could go home.
The lights go out,
Out goes their last farewell.
Where now?
Oh, mother, do you know?
Our garden too is dead.

I have no sisters, no, nor brothers, any more.
Winter played with Death in all the nests,
And frost killed off the many songs of love.

As Werner absorbs the pain expressed by the poem, he grows sad. A minute later Else reappears, dragging her suitcase behind.

- Else: It's just for a few days, Werner, until I find a new room.
Werner: What was the matter with the room I left you?
Else: The landlord came with his Gestapo gang. They grunted and groaned and chased away the birds who lived on the window sill.
Werner: Frau Schuller, it was a comfortable, quiet, inexpensive room right in the middle of town.
Else: It was a dark, dank room, Werner, and I loathed it.
Werner: If meine Dame can afford more luxurious quarters, who am I to object? I'll be glad to look after your things in the meantime. **(Else turns to go. He stops her)** And if you have nowhere else to go, you can always stay here. Until you find another room.
Else: You're very generous, Herr Werner Doktor Hermann, but I already have many kind offers of accommodation. Buber and Agnon have both asked me to stay with them.
Werner: I'm rarely here at night. I'm working night shifts in a bakery. It's only temporary. I start teaching at the university in the spring.
Else: **(Ironically)** Why, how marvelous, Werner.
Werner: And as for my afterward, I can already see the opening. "These poems express the destruction of an entire spiritual world." "Our garden too is dead. Winter has played with Death in every nest". Here you have the clean, simple essence of Horror, a drop of pure blood on a white cloth."
Else: You keep talking and talking, and you haven't even asked me to stay yet.
Werner: **(Clearing his throat)** I would like you, Frau Schuller, to stay here. **(She puts down her suitcase)** As a matter of fact, it was rather sad without you. I really did miss you. Truly. If you've paid the landlord for this month's rent, you can ask for it back.
Else: I haven't paid him for a year, the swine. This morning I sneaked into his kitchen and took a fork, a spoon and a cup. **(She takes them from her dress pocket)**
Werner: What, no table cloth?

She shows him table cloth too. Werner breaks into a shrill laugh.

Scene 12

The scene changes suddenly to the Atara Cafe on Ben-Yehuda Street. Noises from the street mingle with the conversations of the customer's and the music of a saxophone. Werner serves Else a cup of tea.

- Werner: A lonely ship sails down the Rhein
Sails straining toward the sea.
Seventy sailors pull its oars,
Bringing you your tea.
- Else: You sing like Kurt Weill, Werner. He's just a little hoarser. **(Sings in a grotesquely hoarse voice)** "Surabaya Johnny, how you hurt me so?
Surabaya Johnny. God, I love so."
- Werner: Weill once told me that song was a variation of Kol Nidrei. His father, you know, was the cantor of a synagogue in Dessau.
- Else: **(To the tune of "Surabaya Johnny")** Kol Nidre-e-e-i ve'esorei. Take that damn pipe out of your mouth! **(They both laugh)** If only we were in Berlin now, I'd put a chair on my table at the Grossenwahn, sit, open my new book, and read. And Herr Albert Professor Einstein would stand behind me and accompany me on his violin. He's always very excited, Herr Albert, when I give birth to a new book. Do you know what Herr Sigmund Professor Freud will say when he reads it?
- Werner: **(Mimicking Freud)** "Frau Lasker-Schuller's Oriental delusions stand in total contradiction to the psychoanalytic concept of the sub conscious, which is why I consider them mere hallucinations." **(Laughs)**
- Else: No, no, no, Werner. He'll cough a bit because of his throat cancer, and sigh: "You are a transparent woman, Frau Schuller. The curtains of your soul fly in the breeze like swallows. Would you do me the great kindness of stretching out on my couch?" **(Laughs)** Did you hear that, Werner? Dirty old man! That's what he said each time I sent him a new book. "Would you stretch out on my couch?" **(They both laugh)**
- Werner: Did you know that he died in London three years ago?
- Else: Sigmund died? It's not possible. Stubborn old men like him never die. But if they buried him alive, we'll send a copy to the cemetery. We'll send another to Pope Pius, and a third to Mussolini. Did you know how wild the Duce is about me? He invited me to eat gelato with him in Rome. Una grande cassata. Just last week I wrote to him about my wonderful plan to end the war.
- Werner: You wrote to Mussolini?
- Else: Yes. I sent him a recipe for strudel. Peace strudel. If he and Churchill sat down together over some strudel then surely...
- Werner: And is the Fuehrer wild about you too? **(They laugh)**
- Else: **(She wedges a strip of paper between her nose and upper lip and sings, mimicking Hitler)**
Ja. Jawohl. Let them eat strudel.
Und give each Frau a poodle,
And swastikas we'll doodle
From Moscow to the Rhein.
And you, Herr Doktor Noodle,
Please take a piece of kugel. **(They laugh)**

Else: And I hereby appoint you, Herr Doktor, National critic of German Poetry - in perpetuity.

Werner: Shhh... **(He tries to check his laughter)** I still haven't got my university appointment. **(She goes on laughing)** And if some professor should see me now, I won't get it either.

Else: Heil! **(They both laugh)**

Else puts the chair on the table, climbs up and sits on it. She pulls out her book from her dress.

Werner: **(Introducing her)** Ladies and Gentlemen, I give you Frau Else Lasker-Schuller at the Cafe Atara!.

Else's laughter vanishes as she opens the book.

Else: **I know**
 I know that soon I must die,
 Yet all the trees are radiant
 After the longed-for kiss of July-
 My dreams have grown pale with time-
 Never have I drawn so dark an end
 In my books of rhyme.
 You break off a flower to greet me-
 I loved it already in the bud.
 Yet I know that soon I must die.
 My breath hovers over God's river-
 Softly I set my foot
 On the path to my eternal home.

Werner helps her down into a second chair standing on the floor.

Scene 13

Else sits silently by the table in Werner's room. Werner is setting the table. He spreads a newspaper for a table cloth and puts two plates, one spoon, and one fork on it.

Werner: Doesn't that smell good? I've fried the croutons, and in a minute we'll have a good German soup made from good Jewish onions. This is a celebration. It's not every day a new book gets published here. **(He puts the spoon down next to her)** The spoon is for you. You're about to see someone eat soup with a fork for the first time in your life. The next time you have dinner with one of your admirers, steal a soup spoon for me. **(He laughs shrilly and goes to fetch the soup pot. In a minute he returns while glancing out the window)** It's unbelievable! A herd of cows is marching up King George Street. Do you hear that? **(He moos at them and laughs)** Moo.moo.just look how proud they are! **(He sets the pot on the table)** Ah, to be a bull in Jerusalem! **(He laughs)** Did you know that the Dutch cow has adjusted to Palestine with no problems at all? Who would have thought a cow could be so cosmopolitan? And now why don't you take off your coat

and tuck yourself into this napkin. **(Else doesn't respond. He tries a kind of napkin to her neck and pours the soup)** Aren't you hungry? The soup is really good.

Else: I would like to die, Werner.

Werner: To die, Frau Schuller? Whatever gave you such an idea? Now, of all times, when we've shown them that we can survive, that we can go on writing our books no matter where they stick us? At least taste it, please. I made it for you. **(Tries feeding her with the spoon)** You were so beautiful reading your poem at the Cafe'. Your face beamed, your eyes shone, your voice was as clear and full as a choir of angels. **(Strokes her hands and face)** Frau Schuller, you're such a precious woman. such a dear. **(Falls silent)** Before, when Jews went into exile, they had to leave their houses and belongings behind, but they could still take their spiritual property. Who else wanted it? This war has robbed us of everything, even of the Spirit. **(He is silent)** The soup is cold already. I forgot all about the flower I picked for you! **(Quotes)** "You break off a flower to greet me. I loved it already in the bud." That's the saddest poem I've ever heard... **(Takes a flower from his jacket pocket and gives it to her)** If only I could express my suffering. But I can't. I can't forgive myself. How could I have let Gertrud keep the girls? She swore they would be safe with her. She swore! I tried to be logical. Her parents promised to obtain new birth certificates for them. Last night I saw them. They were running hand in hand chasing pigeons in Goethe Park, in white dresses with ribbons in their hair. **(He sobs)** I want to live, Frau Schuller. I want to live...

Werner seizes Else and embraces her. She yields. The physical contact between them becomes openly sexual.

Scene 14

Morning. Else rises, combs her hair, sticks Werner's flower into it, puts on some jewelry, dons her coat, and heads for the door while humming a German children's song. Werner enters, returning from the night shift in the bakery. His hair is unkempt and his face and hands are sooty. He is tired and in a bad mood.

Else: **(Noticing his blackened face)** Your beautiful lashes are charred -- and your eyebrows too. your eyes are weeping pearls. **(Strokes his face. He pushes her gently away)** Doesn't my Prince want his face cooled by my kisses?

Werner: Your prince is in a hurry to get to the University. **(She persists)** Frau Schuller, I've asked you more than once.

Else: I've tried keeping all my promises. It's you who. **(She stops herself)** You look so gray I only want to color you red a little.

Werner: **(Noticing some postcards on the table)** What are those?

Else: I'm going to fly some little messages up over the rooftops to tell the pedestrians below about my recital. **(Points to one of them)** On this one I drew the dream I had the other night about you and me - David and Abigail. **(Sticks the cards in her coat pocket)**

Werner: I hate to spoil your dreams, but I very much doubt that anyone will be at your recital. **(Takes a newspaper out of his pocket)** As I was leaving the bakery this morning, I looked at last week's Davar and thought I would

faint. **(Reads)** "The German Invasion of Palestine. Last week I came across a book of German poems by a new immigrant called Else Lasker-Muller, published by Tarshish Books." Muller! **(Throws the newspaper on the table and lights a cigarette)** We ran away from one nationalism to fall into the clutches of another!

Else: **(Picking up the paper and looking at it)** I don't think God reads this newspaper, Werner.

Werner: I'm not God, Frau Schuller. And I do read it. **(He reads)** "Are we so lacking treasures of our own that we must rummage in the garbage thrown out by the anti-Semites?" We laughed at Gobbels and Streicher for asking such questions too, and look where we are now.

Else: If it were me instead of that Muller woman, I'd be tearing my hair out.

Werner: But it is you this Polish Yid is writing about! It's your book that he's calling rubbish.

Else: My name is Schuller. Lasker-Schuller, not Lasker-Muller.

Werner: There aren't any poets called Lasker-Muller in Jerusalem.

Else: **(Still examining the newspaper)** Is this where he writes about my poems?

Werner: He doesn't write anything about your poems. They're in German, and this fool refuses to look at a Gothic letter. We were driven out of Germany because we're Jews, and here the door is slammed in our face because we're Germans. **(Bitterly)** Only that God of yours still loves us. The doors of His heaven are the only ones still open to us. Stefan Zweig killed himself in Brazil. Kurt Tucholski in Sweden. Ernst Toller hanged himself in New York. Walter Benjamin swallowed morphine in Spain. And the list keeps growing. **(Grunts with pain as he tries taking off his shoes)** Everyone in the bakery works barefoot, but I'm the only one who gets blisters. **(He massages the bottoms of his feet)** Once I stank of soap and perfume, now it's of smoke. I can't understand such chauvinism. We were exiled here against our will, and we're not wanted here either. Who knows why I've been summoned to the dean's office today? A few more articles like this and he'll cancel all the German literature courses.

Else: How can you say I'm not wanted, Werner? Yesterday at the Rex Cinema the man at the kiosk gave me a free chocolate bar. And when I went in everyone applauded and asked me to read my poems.

Werner: I find it hard to believe after what I had to go through to arrange this Saturday's recital.

Else: You needn't have bothered. The angels would have done it for me. Just yesterday, as I was walking down Jaffa Street, one of them landed on my shoulder and said: "Dear poet, here are a thousand more years of life for you." And my Paul, he was so annoyed that he said: "Just a thousand? Why, a thousand years are hardly a single day."

Werner: Your Paul? Your Paul...

Else: Yes. my Paul.

Werner: Frau Schuller, there are no angels on Jaffa Street. There are nothing but petty, narrow-minded Jews who care only for patriotic marches. It's time you faced up to it. No one out there cares about you or your poems.

Else: You're wrong.

Werner: To date your book has sold a grand total of eleven copies. Four were bought by libraries, five by collectors, and only two by the public. That article has ruined any chance you had of selling more.

- Else: Don't try to be so logical Werner. We've already seen that nothing is less logical than logic.
- Werner: **(Angrily)** I wish I had some other straw to clutch at.
- Else: If you would just look up, you would see the angels sitting in the branches of the cypress trees and playing Kurt Weill's melodies on their flutes.
- Werner: Perhaps Chagal can afford to see it that way. Not us.

Else hums some popular tune and leaves. Werner puts his shoes back on, dons his jacket; he clears his throat and turns to the audience.

Scene 15

A side room in the German synagogue on Shmuel Hanagid Street. Werner addresses the audience in the theatre as if it were the handful of people who have come to hear Else read her poems.

- Werner: Guten Abend, meine Damen und Herren, and my special thanks to our sexton, Herr Kurt Stark, for making this evening possible. Tonight, the renowned poet Else Lasker-Schuller will read to us from her new book *My Blue Piano*, which was published with the generous help of the distinguished Dr. Spitzer. **(Bows to Spitzer)** I am sure that if only the British had ended the curfew earlier, there would be more of us here to make the acquaintance of this great poet and her poems. Frau Lasker-Schuller, bitte.

Else enters, wearing a lace robe and a feather hat. She holds her book and her little silver bell. She bows to the audience, desperately trying to hide her disappointment at its small size.

- Werner: If only the British had ended their curfew earlier, there would have been more of us here.
- Else: **(Ignoring him and turning to the audience)** Thank you very much for taking the trouble to come to the heart of Jerusalem to hear my poems. Of course, God would have been happier had a few more of his chosen people, troubled themselves, but God's sorrow does not seem to move many people these days. **(She smiles)** And apropos God, there's something very, very funny that I must tell you about Him. Naturally, you'll have to keep it a secret. **(In a whisper)** God wears a big ring on His right hand. It's a plain bronze ring, but it's so rough and thick that you can't hold His hand because of it. Do you get me? When he grips the hands of the angels, His ring hurts their fingers so that they scream with pain. **(She laughs)** What a pity there aren't more people here! I'm sure they would have laughed too. **(She counts the audience)** Eins, zwei, drei, vier, funf, sechs, sieben. the seven righteous men of Sodom. Good evening, Herr Doktor Spitzer. **(She laughs again, but at once grows serious)** I also have something very serious to tell you about Him. **(She points overhead)** Well, it's not so serious, because God himself isn't as serious as He looks in our paintings of Him. That at least is the opinion of the birds, who are no doubt the closest to Him. Yesterday, by the way, I saw a bird. No, that isn't what I wanted to tell you. Yesterday I was looking at the sky and sketching some small children as they rode their

sheep through the clouds. They were shouting "Giddyap" when who should look down and fear they might fall but little God Himself. And so He ran after them, whistling through a hole in an apricot stone. **(Whistles)** Isn't that something? **(Bursts into laughter. Werner steps up to her. She apologizes)** Yes, yes, just one more little thing and then I'll read. When I gave recitals in the Grossenwahn Cafe in Berlin, all the other Cafe's were deserted. Even the whores came to peek through the windows. **(Laughs)** Oops, I shouldn't utter such a word in a synagogue. The rabbi will be angry with me. But I am a poet after all. Or, to be more precise, I am a woman in whom poems happen. That is, the words run around inside me, and I play with them like children with colored buttons. And when I'm stuck in the middle of a poem, I throw the buttons on the floor and choose my words by how the colors go together. **(Laughs)**

Werner: Frau Schuller. I think you had better start reading.

Else: Yes, yes. I'll start in a minute, Herr Doktor Spitzer. There's just one more thing I want to say. When I think of Jerusalem and all the people in it, I say to myself: how happy I am to be with you all! How good and cozy you make me feel! How much love you shower on me! If only two or three more of you could have come tonight. And now I'll begin. **(She opens her book and reaches for her bell. She looks at the audience, still unable to accept how small it is)** Herr Albert Professor Einstein once told me that he never played his violin unless he was sure the walls were listening. Herr Albert is such a funny man. If I were a bird, I'd sit on his bald patch and weave a nest from his curls.

Werner: Please, can you start reading?

Else: **(Laughing)** But I'm starting. Can't you see. **(Reads from the book)**
A Prayer

My God, my heart is filled with pain
 So take and cup it in your hands
 Till the evening sun has set again
 In time and Nature's ordered plan.

(She can't go on reading) One more little thing. If anyone here has any golden sweet wrappers, anything bright or shiny, please let me have them. I can make wonderful flowers out of them. My Paul colors them and we sell them for ten pfennings apiece. **(She begins to weep)** and for five pfennings more, I'll autograph the petals.

Werner sees she has lost control of herself and hurries to her side.

Werner: Frau Schuller, perhaps you need to rest a bit. **(Takes her hands)**

Else: I'm reading my poems!

Werner: Frau Schuller. Perhaps you'd like to sit down for a minute.

Else: **(Venting all her frustration on him)** Let go of me, you pig. I haven't finished. You're driving away my audience. It's your fault no one came.

Werner: Frau Schuller...

Else: Mind your own business, you pest of a critic, you literary parasite, you!

Werner: The recital is over, ladies and gentleman.

Else: **(To the audience)** This heartless man abandoned his daughters back there.

Werner: Stop it!

Else: He cared only for saving his own neck, the worm.
 Werner: Stop it!!
 Else: Imagine two little girls, abandoned, alone with the pigeons in Berlin.
 Werner: Stop it!!

He seizes her and claps his hand over her mouth. She goes limp and loses consciousness. He carries her to bed. He stands looking at her for a moment, checks her breathing, and leaves.

Scene 16

Else is lying in bed in Werner's room. Out in the street the children are singing a jeering song about her. Werner enters.

Children: Else the whore
 Is Hitler's wife!
 If you see her,
 Run for your life.

The children's voices fade away.

Else: I don't know how to apologize, Werner. You're as dear to me as my own Paul.
 Werner: I have to go to the bakery. **(He changes into his work clothes without caring whether she looks at him)**
 Else: I'm sorry for saying what I did, Werner. You've been a wonderful father to your girls. I know how you worry about them.
 Werner: **(Ironically)** You were a wonderful mother to Paul, too. It's not your fault he caught tuberculosis.
 Else: Don't hurt me so.
 Werner: You don't hurt me? **(There is a brief pause)**
 Else: You're not going to forgive me, are you?
 Werner: No.
 Else: **(Mollifying)** You know, Werner, I thought that if the book doesn't do well, we can always open a little fun-fair in Talbiya, across from the leper hospital. A fun-fair would be something holy and precious. We could rent donkeys for tourists to ride to the Old City on. For five pfennings a ride. What do you think?
 Werner: **(Sarcastic)** That's a wonderful idea, Frau Schuller. I can't begin to tell you how excited I am.
 Else: I knew you'd love it.
 Werner: I sincerely hope you manage to earn a living from it, because I can barely earn one for myself.
 Else: There'll be a huge carousel. The Grand Mufti of Jerusalem can ride with the Princes of the Jewish Agency, and there will be peace.
 Werner: That's a wonderful dream too.
 Else: I love you so, Werner. I'll carry you in my teeth like a jaguar through the jungle.
 Werner: Frau Schuller...

- Else: Forgive me for talking to you in poetry, but it's the tenderest way to show you my soul.
- Werner: **(Impatiently)** Frau Schuller, I'm begging you. You're a very profound woman. You live every minute of your life with a poetic intensity that is too much for me. Werner Hermann is a simple, shallow, superficial creature. My soul lacks the depths of yours. I really am the literary parasite you said I was.
- Else: You are an Indian Prince and I'm your...
- Werner: **(Desperate)** Please. You promised.
- Else: I'm a nymph floating down the river on water lilies.
- Werner: You're not a nymph, and I'm begging you to leave me alone. I have nowhere left to escape from you.
- Else: If we embrace each other, we won't die. **(She seizes him)**
- Werner: **(Exploding furiously)** I can't embrace. You. Anybody. I have no love left. If I ever had any, you killed it with your own hands, with your insanity. It's time you took a good look at what you've done to me. **(Quoting)** "At home I have a blue piano, but have no note to play". I have no culture left. I have no love left. You've drained me dry. I've become an abyss of hatred and despair. I've become a reflection of the world we live in, every bit as crude, as cruel, and as vile as it is. But no, that's not true. I was always like this. They made a terrible mistake about me back there. I'm a German, just like everyone says I am. I was born in Germany. May 10th 1902. I lived there all my life. I'm as German as the German butcher in the German butcher's shop and the German grocer in the German grocery and the German barman in the German beer cellar. I never had any other home or language. If they'd have accepted me in their party, I'd have marched in the streets with them, and sieg-heiled with them, and burned synagogues and stoned Jews with them. I would have clubbed you just like they did.
- Else: **(Holding him)** Werner, my little Paulchen...
- Werner: I'm not your Paulchen! Paul was a miserable, sickly Jew and I'm a German. I hate Jews and poets. I can't stand their vileness and their poetry. and I can't stand you. no, I can't stand you either. **(He pounces on her suitcase)** Out!! I want you out of here right now! Out before I throw you out with my own hands! I'll show no mercy. you're nothing but an ugly old hunchbacked Jewess! Your Paul would still be alive if you had taken care of him. Out!

Pause. Else picks up her suitcase and starts to leave. Werner takes out a pack of cigarettes, discovers that it is empty, and flings it irately on the floor. Suddenly, struck by how terribly pathetic Else is, he caves in and changes his mind.

- Werner: Come back! Come back! I'll go. The children will chase you and throw stones. **(He takes her suitcase)** No, no. I'm just a weak, spoiled Jew myself who was kicked out of his own home. It's time I faced it. I didn't mean to hurt you. You're very dear to me. I have no one else but you, either. **(He chokes on his tears)** I'd better go out for a walk. I should have been at the bakery by now anyway. **(Hurries out)**

Scene 17

The steps leading up to Werner's room. A winter afternoon. From afar the muezzin's call to prayer rises above the sounds of the street. Else stands on the steps talking to a droopy-winged lark. She has clearly aged and looks weak.

Else: I'll wear the blue straw bonnet with a green feather. I'll hold my arms out, and stand on one leg, looking up at the sky, and you, my love, will flutter over me, and chase away the flies. **(Laughs)** Peck away, you clever little lark, peck away. And I'll stick a flower in my hump. Just imagine, a hunchbacked Jewish scarecrow with a lily blooming out of it. **(Laughs)** And if the British come, I'll scare them away, pssst, pssst, pssst. And if Hitler comes, I'll hiss right in his face, hsss, hsss, hsss. Schiclegruber¹!

She laughs. Werner enters.

Werner: Frau Schuller, you're making a laughingstock of yourself in front of all the neighbors. And you're making one of me, too. You promised to stop talking to birds in the street.

Else: I didn't start it. The bird did.

Werner: It's four o'clock.

Else: It's a pity you didn't hear the legend of the scarecrow he just told me. The scarecrows are a very odd people, Werner, and the birds are actually fond of them. Perhaps because of their sadness at having their legs stuck in the ground.

Werner: I can't stand how pathetic you've become.

Else: I just wanted to make you laugh.

Werner: I beg you try to keep your sanity, that's all. Because if you lose it, I'll lose mine too.

Else: **(Insulted)** Why should you lose your sanity? **(He sneezes)** Gesundheit!

Werner: Don't you know I'm allergic to birds? And what are you doing here anyway? Professor Buber is waiting for us.

Else: If you hadn't started arguing with me, we'd be chatting in his living room right now.

Werner: Please, forget the bird. **(Frightens it away)**

Else: Not this one. He's the reincarnation of my Paul.

Werner: He's not your Paul. Your merciful God was kind enough to kill Paul with tuberculosis fifteen years ago.

Else: That's not true. We listen to the Barcarolle every night.

Werner: I wish He were as kind to us. And leave your scarves and chains behind too. You'll have to try to look civilized. **(Helps take off her scarves)**

Else: What's wrong with this one?

Werner: Please don't argue. **(Helps her out of it)** When we get to Professor Buber's, you're to sit opposite him in a chair, cross your arms, and let me do the talking. All you have to say is that Doktor Hermann is one of Europe's leading literary scholars and an expert on the libraries of Frankfurt and Berlin.

Else: Doktor Hermann is one of Europe's leading literary scholars and an expert on the libraries of Frankfurt and Berlin.

¹ Hitler's original name

Werner: Good!

She takes a scarf and tries putting it on again. He removes it again.

Werner: Frau Schuller, I asked you.
 Else: What's wrong with this scarf?
 Werner: You must also say that Doktor Hermann is the most suitable candidate for the available position of assistant librarian at the university.
 Else: Doktor Hermann is the most suitable candidate for...
 Werner: The available position of assistant librarian at the university.
 Else: The available position of assistant librarian at the university.
 Werner: And that's all.
 Else: And that's all.
 Werner: I don't want you saying anything else.
 Else: Nothing else.
 Werner: And keep your hands away from his cheeks.
 Else: His cheeks? I never laid a hand on his cheeks!
 Werner: I know. I'm just taking precautionary measures. And don't try to walk off with his ashtray.
 Else: Since when do I walk off with people's ashtrays?
 Werner: I have the distinct impression that you took an ashtray of Buber's once before.
 Else: I did not!
 Werner: That I then had to return.

He gathers up the scarves and chains and goes to put them away.

Else: It was you who took that ashtray! You've been taking things from me too. You go through my pockets and steal my jewelry.
 Werner: Frau Schuller...
 Else: Don't touch me! Don't touch me! Just who do you think you are, ordering me to sit there with my arms crossed? **(Takes a chain back)**
 Werner: I didn't order you. I asked you. **(He seizes her hand)** And now I'm asking you to put down that chain.
 Else: I will not!
 Werner: **(Angrily)** Do you want me to go on working in the damn bakery until hell freezes over?

Werner grabs the chain and throws it on the floor. Else backs away in fright.

Else: Don't touch me. You want to choke me. I know you do.
 Werner: Frau Schuller, you'd better go home. To hell with Buber. It's going to rain soon.
 Else: No. I'll never find the way without you.
 Werner: Frau Schuller...
 Else: The landlady will hit me with her broom. She's crazy. This whole city is full of crazy people speaking a foreign language I can't understand.
 Werner: It's called Hebrew.
 Else: You're not leaving me all alone in the dark.

Werner: There's nothing to be afraid of. I'll take you home and light the oil lamp for you.

Else: You're lying, Werner! You'll dump me on the way. I know you will.

Werner: Frau Schuller...

Else: You'll let the children throw stones at me.

Werner: I don't understand what I'm doing here with you. I simply don't understand.
(He tries to go)

Else: Just write a few more lines, Werner. **(Holds out a tattered paper and gestures to him to write in it)** My fingers hurt so much.

Werner: I'm asking you to leave me alone!

Else: I can't hold the pencil. I'll tell you what to write.

Werner: Well, I've had enough of your writing.

Else: Don't you believe that the riddle of life can be solved by poetry?

Werner: No!! **(He throws the paper on the ground)**

Else is thunderstruck. She can't pick up the paper. She is trembling. Werner takes off his coat and drapes it over her shoulders.

Else: I've been running after you through the streets for the last two days, bleeding poetry for you.

Werner: Leave me alone, Frau Schuller. Leave me alone.

Else: There's a rose blooming between my thighs, Werner, a soft, tender rose...

Werner: **(Trying to maintain control)** You're making my life hell. Can't you understand that? Do I have to put you in an asylum? Do you want me to stick my head in the oven at the bakery? To swallow morphine? Is that what you want?

He tears himself away and walks off. Else picks up the paper. She tries to follow him but cannot make her legs obey her. She is panic-stricken.

Else: Goddie? Where are you? Come out. Coo-coo... Goddie? Where are you? Come out. **(She runs into some children who taunt her)** No, no. Let me be, children. Let me be... Goddie? Coo-coo... Where are you? I said let me be you little bastards. **(Stones begin to fly at her. She tries to protect herself. Her forehead is bleeding)** Not with the stones of Jerusalem, you bastards, not with the stones of Jerusalem! **(She tries to flee but cannot walk. She collapses and starts to crawl)** Goddie? Goddie?... Coo-coo... Where are you? Come out. Where are you? **(No one answers. Gripped by terror, she continues crawling)** Oh, God, open the door...

She crawls this way and that until, sobbing hysterically, she reaches her bed in Werner's room, which she is too weak to get onto.

Scene 18

The noise of the street fades away. Else is alone in the room, sprawled at the foot of the bed and panting heavily. Werner enters, holding his suitcase. He sees her and rushes over.

Werner: Frau Schuller... **(He puts her in bed and spreads his coat over her. She shows no resistance)** I'm sorry I left you, but you make it impossible for me to stay. I've slept the last three nights on a park bench, but I'm not giving anyone the pleasure of watching me die of pneumonia. **(He opens his suitcase and takes out a cake)** A sponge cake. I stole it from the bakery. Like the rest of them.

Werner offers her some cake. She does not respond and her breathing grows heavier. He bends down to look at her.

Werner: You should eat something. You should take better care of yourself. Do you hear me? Paris has been liberated. The trains are running from Marseilles. We'll start out for Haifa today! We'll be on the deck of the first ship to sail. You have to be strong for the trip. We don't want any complications. Is that clear? No complications! You can stay with me in Paris until you get back on your feet. We'll get in touch with Gertrud when we get there. They're alive, Gertrud and the girls. They're still alive, aren't they? **(Takes the bag of morphine from his pocket)** If we spend one more night here, I'm going to swallow this damned poison. **(Goes over to the window)** In Paris I can jump into the Seine.

Werner wants to pour out the morphine. Suddenly he stops and looks at her. Her loud breathing has stopped. He hurries over to her.

Werner: Frau Schuller? Frau Schuller? What's the matter? Answer me! Frau Schuller? **(Hugs her)** Else? Else? **(Notices the tattered page in her hand, looks at it, and reads it)**

I'm so sad beyond all measure
I who once sat on the branches
Full of joyous song

O God, how should my lament move you
Since so many people on earth Carry their deep burden
And Children are starving at all doors
The need is great. I know.
Therefore, my lips should be silent.

It is suddenly dark.

END