

**Frank Wedekind**

**Spring Awakening**

Translated and introduced by Edward Bond



PROFESSOR GUTGRINDER  
PROFESSOR BONEBREAKER  
PROFESSOR TONGUETWISTER  
PROFESSOR FLYSWATTER  
PROFESSOR THICKSTICK  
PROFESSOR APELARD

Other adults

THE MASKED MAN  
DR LEMONADE  
DR PROCRUSTES  
REVEREND BALDBELLY  
FASTCRAWLER, the school porter  
FRIEND ZIEG (named GOAT in this text)  
LOCKSMITH  
UNCLE PROBST

*Directed by* Bill Bryden

The action takes place in a provincial town in Germany,  
1891-1892.

Kenneth Benda  
Alex McCrindle  
Stephen Williams  
Peter Needham  
Kenneth Mackintosh  
Colin Fay

Cyril Cusack  
Daniel Thorndike  
Alan Hay  
Pitt Wilkinson  
Alan Hay  
Glyn Grain  
Pitt Wilkinson  
Peter Rocca

## Act One

### SCENE ONE

*Living room.*

WENDLA. Why have you made my dress so long, mother?  
FRAU BERGMANN. You're fourteen today.

WENDLA. I'd rather not have been fourteen if I'd known you'd  
make my dress so long.

FRAU BERGMANN. Your dress isn't too long, Wendla. What next?  
Can I help it if my child is four inches taller every spring? A  
grown girl can't still go round dressed like a little princess.

WENDLA. At least the little princess's dress suits me better than  
this nightshirt. Let me wear it once more, mother. One more  
long summer. Fourteen or fifteen, that's still soon enough for  
this sackcloth. Let's keep it till my next birthday. I'd only  
trip over the braid and tear it.

FRAU BERGMANN. I don't know what I should say. I'd  
willingly keep you exactly as you are, darling. Other girls are  
stringy or plump at your age. You're not. Who knows what  
you'll be like when they're grown up?

WENDLA. Who knows — perhaps I won't be anything anymore.  
FRAU BERGMANN. Child, child, where d'you get these ideas?

WENDLA. Don't, mummy. Don't be sad.

FRAU BERGMANN (*kisses her*). My precious.

WENDLA. They come to me in the evening when I can't sleep.  
It doesn't make me the least bit sad, and I go to sleep better  
then. Is it a sin to think about such things, mother?

FRAU BERGMANN. Go and hang the sackcloth in the wardrobe.  
Put your little princess's dress on again and God bless you.

When I get a moment I'll sew a broad flounce round  
the bottom.

WENDLA (*hanging the dress in the wardrobe*). No, I'd rather  
even be twenty than that . . .!

## SPRING AWAKENING

FRAU BERGMANN. Only so that you don't catch cold! There was a time when this little dress was too long on you, but . . .

WENDLA. Now, when summer's coming? O mother, even children don't catch diphtheria in the knees! How can you be so fussy? You don't feel cold when you're my age — least of all in your knees. Would it be better if I was too hot? You ought to thank God that early one morning your precious doesn't rip the sleeves off her dress and come to you before it's still light with no shoes and stockings on! When I wear my sackcloth I'll be dressed like a fairy queen underneath. Don't be cross, mummy. No one can see it then.

## SCENE TWO

*Sunday evening.*

MELCHIOR. It's too boring. I give up.

OTTO. Then we'll all have to stop! — Have you done your homework, Melchior?

MELCHIOR. Go on playing!

MORITZ. Where are you going?

MELCHIOR. Walking.

GEORG. It'll be dark soon!

ROBERT. Have you done your homework already?

MELCHIOR. Why shouldn't I walk in the dark?

ERNST. Central America! Louis the fifteenth! Sixty verses of Homer! Seven quadratic equations!

MELCHIOR. Damned homework!

GEORG. If only the Latin essay wasn't wanted tomorrow!

MORITZ. You can't think of anything without homework getting in the way!

OTTO. I'm going home.

GEORG. And me. Homework!

ERNST. And me, and me.

ROBERT. Night, Melchior.

MELCHIOR. Sleep well!

*They all go except MORITZ and MELCHIOR.*

## ACT ONE SCENE TWO

MELCHIOR. I'd like to know exactly what we're in this world for!

MORITZ. School makes me wish I was a cart horse! What do we go to school for? To be examined! And why are we examined? So we can fail. Seven have got to fail because the next class is only big enough for sixty. — I've felt so odd since Christmas . . . O hell, if it wasn't for papa I'd pack my things tonight and sign on board a ship.

MELCHIOR. Let's talk about something else.

*They walk.*

MORITZ. Look at that cat with its tail poking up in the air!

MELCHIOR. D'you believe in omens?

MORITZ. Don't really know. It came from over there. It's nothing.

MELCHIOR. In my opinion that's the Charybdis people fall into when they try to rise out of the Scylla of religious superstition. Let's sit under this beech. The warm wind's blowing over the mountains. I'd like to be a little animal that's rocked and swayed in the tops of the trees the whole night.

MORITZ. Undo your waistcoat, Melchior.

MELCHIOR. O, the way the wind blows your clothes!

MORITZ. God, it's getting pitch dark, you can't see a hand stuck up in front of you. Where are you, actually? — Melchior, don't you also think that man's sense of shame is just a product of his education?

MELCHIOR. I was thinking about that the other day. It seems to me, at least, it's deeply rooted in human nature. For example, suppose you had to completely strip off in front of your best friend. You wouldn't do it, not unless he does it at the same time. — But then perhaps it's all just a question of whatever happens to be in good taste.

MORITZ. I've already decided when I have children I'll let them sleep together in the same room, in the same bed if possible — boys and girls. I'll let them help each other to dress and undress morning and night, and when it's hot the boys and the girls will both wear nothing all day except a white wollen tunic and a leather belt. I think that then when they grow up they won't be as tense as most of us are.

MELCHIOR. I'm sure of it! The only question is, what about when the girls have babies?

MORITZ. Why have babies?

MELCHIOR. I believe in a definite instinct in these things. For example, suppose you keep two cats — a tom and a bitch — shut up together from when they're kittens. You keep them away from all contact with the outside world so they've only got their instincts left. Sooner or later the cat will become pregnant, even though they had no example to follow.

MORITZ. With animals that must finally happen by itself.

MELCHIOR. Even more so with men I think! Listen, Moritz, when your boys are sleeping in the same bed with your girls and suddenly they feel their first masculine itch — I'll take a bet with anyone that —

MORITZ. You may be right. But still.

MELCHIOR. And I'm sure it would be just the same with the girls! Not that girls actually — obviously one can't speak definitely — but at least you can surmise — and their natural curiosity would do the rest!

MORITZ. By the way, I've got a question.

MELCHIOR. What?

MORITZ. But you will answer?

MELCHIOR. Of course!

MORITZ. Promise!

MELCHIOR. My hand on it. Well, Moritz?

MORITZ. Have you really done your homework?

MELCHIOR. Come on, you can tell me. There's no one else here.

MORITZ. Of course, my children will have to work all day in the farm or the garden — or play games that are good for their bodies. Riding, gymnastics, climbing — and certainly no sleeping on soft beds like us. We're terribly weak. I don't believe you'd ever have dreams if you slept on a hard bed.

MELCHIOR. From now till after the harvest I'm only going to sleep in my hammock. I've put my bed away. It folds up . . . Last winter I dreamed I whipped our Rufus so long he couldn't move. That's the worst thing I've dreamed. — Why are you staring at me like that?

MORITZ. Have you already felt it?

MELCHIOR. What?

MORITZ. How you said.

MELCHIOR. The masculine itch?

MORITZ. H-hm.

MELCHIOR. And how!

MORITZ. Me too.

MELCHIOR. I've been able to for a long time. Almost a year now.

MORITZ. It was like being struck by lightning.

MELCHIOR. Did you have a dream?

MORITZ. But only very short — some legs in bright blue ballet tights climbing over the teacher's desk or at any rate I thought they wanted to climb over — I only caught a glimpse.

MELCHIOR. Georg Zirnschnitz dreamed about his *mother*!

MORITZ. Did he tell you that?

MELCHIOR. Out on Hangman's Hill.

MORITZ. If you knew what I've gone through since that night!

MELCHIOR. Bad conscience?

MORITZ. Bad conscience? *Fear of death*!

MELCHIOR. My God!

MORITZ. I thought I was incurable. I believed I was suffering from an internal defect. In the end I only quietened down when I started to write my Memoirs. Yes, yes, Melchior, the last three weeks have been a Golgotha to me.

MELCHIOR. I was more or less all set for it. I felt a bit ashamed. But that was all.

MORITZ. And you're almost a whole year younger than me!

MELCHIOR. I shouldn't give it another thought, Moritz. In my experience there isn't a set age for the first time these feelings turn up. You know that tall Lammermeier with the blond hair and hooked nose? He's three years older than me.

Hänschen Rilow says he still dreams about apple tart and custard.

MORITZ. Chuck it, Melchior, how can Hänschen Rilow know?

MELCHIOR. He asked him.

MORITZ. He asked him? I wouldn't dare ask anyone.

MELCHIOR. You just asked me.

MORITZ. Good Lord, yes! Perhaps Hänschen also wrote his *Last Will*! The games they play with us! And we're supposed to be grateful. I don't remember ever wanting that sort of

excitement! Why couldn't I just sleep in peace till it was all over? My poor parents could have had a hundred better children than me. But I came, I don't know how, and then it's my fault I didn't stay away! Haven't you ever thought about that, Melchior, exactly how we came into this madhouse?

MELCHIOR. You don't even know that, Moritz?

MORITZ. How should I! I see how hens lay eggs, and I hear mother's supposed to have carried me under her heart! Is that enough? And I remember that when I was five I was already embarrassed when anyone turned up the Queen of Hearts with the low-cut dress. That feeling's gone. But now I can't even speak to a girl without something I ought to be ashamed of coming into my head and — I swear to you, Melchior — I don't know *what*.

MELCHIOR. I'll tell you everything. I got it partly from books, partly from illustrations, partly from looking at nature. You'll be surprised. It turned me into an atheist. I've already told Georg Zirnschnitz! He wanted to tell Hänschen Rilow, but he'd already had it from his governess when he was a kid.

MORITZ. I've gone through the encyclopaedia from A to Z. Words — nothing but words, words! Not one single straightforward explanation. O this feeling of shame! What good is an encyclopaedia if it doesn't answer the first questions about life?

MELCHIOR. Have you ever seen two dogs running across the street?

MORITZ. No! You'd better not tell me now, Melchior. I've got to face Central America and Louis the fifteenth! As well as sixty verses of Homer, seven quadratic equations, the Latin essay — I'd just get into hot water with everyone again tomorrow. When you have to study like a cart horse you must be as docile and stupid as a donkey.

MELCHIOR. Come back to my room. In three quarters of an hour I'll do the Homer, the equations, and *two* essays. I'll decorate yours with a few simple mistakes, and the ball's in the hole! Mother will make us some more lemonade and we'll have a pleasant chat about reproduction.

MORITZ. I can't. I can't have a pleasant chat about reproduction. If you want to do me a favour give me some written

instructions. Write down all you know. Write it as simply and clearly as possible and stick it in my book during PT tomorrow. I'll take it home without knowing it's there. I'll come across it sometime when I'm not expecting to. I won't be able to stop my weary eyes running over it . . . If it's absolutely unavoidable you can go as far as a few diagrams in the margin.

MELCHIOR. You're like a girl. Well, have it your own way! It'll be rather interesting homework. One thing, Moritz.

MORITZ. Hn?

MELCHIOR. Have you seen a girl?

MORITZ. Yes!

MELCHIOR. Everything?

MORITZ. The lot.

MELCHIOR. And me! So you won't need many diagrams.

MORITZ. At the fair. In the cubicle at the back of the wax

works. If I'd been caught I'd have been chased out of school!

So beautiful — and o! as clear as daylight.

MELCHIOR. Last summer I was with mama at Frankfurt . . .

Are you going already, Moritz?

MORITZ. Homework. 'Night.

MELCHIOR. Good night.

### SCENE THREE

THEA, WENDLA and MARTHA come along the street arm in arm.

MARTHA. How the water gets into your shoes!

WENDLA. How the wind blows in your face!

THEA. How your heart thumps!

WENDLA. Let's go to the bridge. Ilse said the river's full of trees and bushes. The boys have taken a raft out on the water. They say Melchior Gabor was nearly drowned last night.

THEA. O, he can swim!

MARTHA. Of course he can, brat!

WENDLA. If he couldn't swim he could easily have been drowned!

THEA. Your plait's coming undone, Martha! Your plait's coming undone!

MARTHA. O — let it come undone! It annoys me day and night. I mustn't have short hair like you, I mustn't have natural hair like Wendla, I mustn't have a fringe, I even have to go round the house with it done up — all to please my aunts!

WENDLA. Tomorrow I'll bring some scissors to Bible class. While you recite "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked" I'll cut it off.

MARTHA. For God's sake, Wendla! Papa beats me till I'm crippled and mama locks me up in the coal cellar for three nights at a time.

WENDLA. What does he beat you with, Martha?

MARTHA. Sometimes I think they'd miss something if they didn't have a disgraceful brat like me!

THEA. But, Martha!

WENDLA. And they wouldn't let you thread a bright blue ribbon through the top of your petticoat like us?

THEA. Pink satin! Mama insists pink satin goes with my pitch black eyes.

MARTHA. Blue looked so well on me! Mama pulled me out of my bed by my plait. Well — I fell head first flat on the floor. You see, mother comes up to pray with us every evening . . .

WENDLA. If I was you I'd have run far away long ago.

MARTHA. "There you are, see what it'll come to! Yes, there you are! But she'll learn — O, she'll soon learn! At least I'll never be able to blame my mother when anything goes wrong —"

THEA. Hoo hoo!

MARTHA. D'you know what my mother meant by that, Thea?

THEA. No. Do you, Wendla?

WENDLA. I'd have asked her.

MARTHA. I lay on the floor and screamed and roared. Then papa comes. Rip — petticoat down. I'm out through the door. "There you are! Now I want to go out on the street like that! —"

WENDLA. But that wasn't true, Martha!

MARTHA. I was freezing. I'd got the street door open. I had to sleep in a sack all night.

THEA. I couldn't sleep in a sack to save my life!

WENDLA. I'd like to sleep in your sack for you once.

MARTHA. If only they wouldn't beat me.

THEA. But you'd suffocate in it!

MARTHA. Your head's free. They tie it under your chin.

THEA. And then they beat you?

MARTHA. No. Only when it's something special.

WENDLA. What do they beat you with, Martha?

MARTHA. O, whatever they lay their hands on. Does *your* mother maintain it's indecent to eat bread in bed?

WENDLA. No, no.

MARTHA. I always think, they have their pleasure — even though they never talk about it. When I have children I'll let them grow up like the weeds in our rose garden. No one looks after them but they grow tall and strong — and the roses get weaker every summer and hang down on their stems.

THEA. When I have children I'll dress them all in pink — pink hats, little pink dresses, pink shoes. Only the stockings — stockings pitch black. When I go for a walk I'll let them all trot along in front of me. What about you, Wendla?

WENDLA. D'you already know you'll get some?

THEA. Why shouldn't we get some?

MARTHA. Aunt Euphemia hasn't got any.

THEA. Goose! Because she's not *married*!

WENDLA. Aunt Bauer was married three times — and she hasn't got even one.

MARTHA. If you do get some, Wendla, what d'you want: boys or girls?

WENDLA. Boys! Boys!

THEA. And boys for me!

MARTHA. And me. I'd rather have twenty boys than three girls.

THEA. Girls are boring.

MARTHA. If I wasn't already a girl I know I wouldn't want to become one.

WENDLA. That's a matter of taste, Martha. I'm happy because I'm a girl. Believe me I wouldn't change places with a king's son. — But I still only want boys!

THEA. That's stupid, so stupid, Wendla!

WENDLA. But surely, child, it must be a thousand times more ennobling to be loved by a man than a girl!

THEA. You're not claiming that Herr Pfalle the Junior Afforestation Officer loves Melli more than she loves him?

WENDLA. Of course I do, Thea. Pfaller has pride. He's proud of being a Junior Afforestation Officer — because that's all he's got! But Melli has *bliss* — because she's got a million times more than she had when she was on her own!

MARTHA. Aren't you proud of yourself, Wendla?  
WENDLA. That would be silly.

THEA. Watch how she walks — how she looks — how she holds herself, Martha! If that's not pride!

WENDLA. But why? I'm just so happy at being a girl. If I wasn't a girl I'd kill myself so that next time . . .

MELCHIOR *passes and greets them.*

THEA. He's got such a wonderful head.

MARTHA. He makes me think of the young Alexander going to school with Aristotle.

THEA. O God, Greek history! All I remember is that Socrates lay in a barrel while Alexander sold him a donkey's shadow.

WENDLA. I heard he's third in his class.

THEA. Professor Bonebreaker says he could be first if he wanted.  
MARTHA. He's got a beautiful forehead, but his friend's got soulful eyes.

THEA. Moritz Stiefel? That doormouse, always asleep.

MARTHA. I've always found him very interesting company.

THEA. He puts you in a compromising situation everytime you meet. At the Rilow's Children's Ball he offered me some chocolates. Imagine, Wendla, they were warm and soft. Isn't that — ? He said they'd been in his trousers too long.

WENDLA. What d'you think: Melchior Gabor once told me he didn't believe in anything — not in God, the afterworld — hardly in anything in this world!

#### SCENE FOUR

*Park in front of the Grammar School.*

MELCHIOR, OTTO, GEORG, ROBERT, HÄNSCHEN RILOW,  
LAMMERMEIER.

MELCHIOR. D'you know where Moritz Stiefel's got to?

GEORG. He'll catch it! O, he'll catch it!  
OTTO. He goes too far, he'll trip up one day!

LAMMERMEIER. God knows I wouldn't like to be in his shoes now!

ROBERT. Impertinence! Disgraceful!

MELCHIOR. What — what is it?

GEORG. What is it? I'll tell you what it is . . .

LAMMERMEIER. I don't want to be involved.

OTTO. Nor me — God, no.

MELCHIOR. If you don't tell me immediately . . .

ROBERT. It's very simple, Moritz Stiefel is burgling the staff room.

MELCHIOR. The staff room!

OTTO. The staff room. Straight after Latin.

GEORG. He was last. He stayed behind on purpose.

LAMMERMEIER. When I went down the corridor I saw him open the door.

MELCHIOR. I'll be damned!

LAMMERMEIER. No — he'll be!

GEORG. They probably forgot the key.

ROBERT. Or Moritz carries a skeleton key.

OTTO. I wouldn't put that past him!

LAMMERMEIER. He'll be lucky if all he gets is detention.

ROBERT. It'll go on his report.

OTTO. If the governors don't just kick him out.

HÄNSCHEN. There he is.

MELCHIOR. White as a sheet.

MORITZ *comes in in frantic excitement.*

LAMMERMEIER. Moritz, Moritz, what have you done now!

MORITZ. Nothing — nothing . . .

ROBERT. You're shaking.

MORITZ. With excitement — with happiness — with luck.

OTTO. Were you copped?

MORITZ. I've passed! Melchior, I've passed! O now the world can go to hell! I've passed! Who thought I'd pass? I still can't believe it! I read it twenty times! I couldn't believe it! O God it was still there! Still there! *I've passed!* (Smiles.) I don't know — it's so funny — the floor's going round — Melchior,

Melchior, if you knew what it was like!  
HÄNSCHEN. Congratulations, Moritz. Just be grateful you got away.

MORITZ. You can't know, Hänschen, you can't imagine the risk! For three weeks I crept by that door as if it was the gates of hell. And today a crack, the door was open. I think if someone had offered me a fortune — nothing, o nothing could have stopped me! I stood in the middle of the room. I pulled the files open — tore through the pages — there it is! — and the whole time . . . I'm shuddering.

MELCHIOR. And the whole time . . . ?

MORITZ. The whole time the door was wide open behind me. How I got out — how I got down the stairs I'll never know.

HÄNSCHEN. Has Ernst Röbel passed?

MORITZ. O yes, Hänschen! Ernst Röbel passed too!

ROBERT. Then you didn't read it right. If you don't count the dunces, then we and you and Röbel make sixty-one, and the next class only holds sixty.

MORITZ. I read it perfectly clearly. Ernst Röbel goes up as well as me — of course at the moment we're both only provisional. Next term they'll decide which of us has to give way. Poor Röbel! God knows I'm not worried about myself now. I've been too near the abyss already.

OTTO. I bet five marks you have to give way.

MORITZ. You haven't got it. I don't want to clean you out.

O Lord, I'll work like a slave after this. I can tell you now — I don't care if you believe me — it doesn't matter anymore — I — I know how true it is: if I hadn't passed I'd have shot myself.

ROBERT. With a peashooter!

GEORG. Yellow belly!

OTTO. I'd like to see you shoot!

LAMMERMEIER. Clip his ear and see what he does!

MELCHIOR (*bits LAMMERMEIER*). Come on, Moritz. Let's go to the forester's hut.

GEORG. You don't believe that rubbish!

MELCHIOR. Would it bother you? Let them chatter, Moritz, we'll go — out of this town!

PROFESSORS GUTGRINDER and BONEBREAKER *go by*.

BONEBREAKER. Beyond my comprehension, my dear fellow, how my best student can feel himself drawn towards precisely my very worst.

GUTGRINDER. Beyond mine too, my dear chap.

## SCENE FIVE

*A sunny afternoon.*

MELCHIOR and WENDLA *meet each other in the forest.*

MELCHIOR. Is it really you, Wendla? What are you doing up here on your own? I've been wandering through the forest for three hours without meeting a soul, and now suddenly you come towards me out of the trees.

WENDLA. Yes, it's me.

MELCHIOR. If I didn't know you were Wendla Bergmann I'd think you were a wood nymph that's fallen out of the branches.

WENDLA. No, no, I'm Wendla Bergmann. Where have you come from?

MELCHIOR. I've been thinking.

WENDLA. I'm collecting woodruff. Mama uses them for spring wine. She *was* coming with me but Aunt Bauer turned up at the last moment. She doesn't like climbing so I came on my own.

MELCHIOR. Have you got the woodruff?

WENDLA. A whole basket full! It's as thick as clover over there under the beeches. Now I'm trying to find a path. I seem to have gone wrong. Perhaps you could tell me what time it is? MELCHIOR. Just after half past three. When are you expected? WENDLA. I thought it was later. I lay down quite a while on the moss by the stream and dreamed. Time went so quickly. I was afraid evening was already coming.

MELCHIOR. If you're not expected, let's stay here a little bit longer. My favourite spot's under the oak. If you lean your head back against the trunk and stare through the branches up at the sky, it hypnotises you. The ground's still warm from



the sun this morning. — I've wanted to ask you something for weeks, Wendla.

WENDLA. But I must be home by five.

MELCHIOR. We'll go together. I'll carry the basket and we'll go along the river bed and be on the bridge in ten minutes. When you lie like this with your head propped in your hands you have the strangest ideas . . .

*Both are lying under the oak.*

WENDLA. What did you want to ask me, Melchior?

MELCHIOR. I know you often visit the poor, Wendla, and take them food and clothes and money. D'you go because you want to or does your mother send you?

WENDLA. Mostly mother sends me. They're poor working-class families with too many children. Often the man can't find work so they're cold and hungry. We've got a lot of left-over things lying about in cupboards and drawers, we'll never use them now. What made you think of that?

MELCHIOR. Are you pleased when your mother sends you?

WENDLA. O very pleased! How can you ask!

MELCHIOR. But the children are dirty, the women are sick, the rooms are crowded with filth, the men hate you because you don't have to work . . .

WENDLA. That's not true, Melchior. And if it were true I'd go even more.

MELCHIOR. Why even more, Wendla?

WENDLA. I'd go to them even more. It would give me far more happiness to be able to help them.

MELCHIOR. So you go to the poor to make yourself happy?

WENDLA. I go to them because they're poor.

MELCHIOR. And if it didn't make you happy you wouldn't go?

WENDLA. Can I help it if it makes me happy?

MELCHIOR. And for that you go to heaven! I was right, I've been going over this for a month! Can a miser help it if visiting dirty, sick children doesn't make him happy?

WENDLA. O, I'm sure it would make you very happy!

MELCHIOR. And yet because of that he suffers eternal damnation! I'll write an essay and send it to the Reverend Baldy. He put all this in my head! Why does he drivel on at

us about the joys of sacrificing yourself for others? If he can't answer, I'm not going to any more confirmation classes and I won't be confirmed.

WENDLA. Don't make your poor parents miserable over that! Let them confirm you. They don't cut your head off. If it wasn't for our dreadful white dresses and your baggy trousers we might even get some fun out of it.

MELCHIOR. There is no self-sacrifice! There is no selflessness! I watch the good enjoying themselves while the bad tremble and groan — I watch you shaking your curls and laughing, Wendla Bergmann, and it all makes me feel as lost as an outcast — Wendla, what did you dream about when you were on the grass by the stream?

WENDLA. Nonsense — silly things . . .

MELCHIOR. With your eyes open?

WENDLA. I dreamed I was a poor, poor beggar girl. I was sent out on the streets every morning before five. I had to beg from brutal, heartless people, all day in the storm and rain. And when I came home at night, shivering with hunger and cold, and when I didn't have all the money my father wanted, I was beaten . . . beaten . . .

MELCHIOR. I understand, Wendla. You get that from silly children's books. I promise you there aren't brutal people like that any more.

WENDLA. O no, Melchior, you're wrong. Martha Bessel is beaten night after night and you can see the weals next day. O what she must suffer! It makes me hot when she tells us about it. I pity her so much. I often have to cry in my pillow in the middle of the night. I've been thinking for months how I can help her. I'd happily take her place just for one week.

MELCHIOR. The father should be reported immediately. Then they'd take the child away.

WENDLA. I haven't been hit in my whole life, Melchior — not even once. I can hardly imagine what it's like to be beaten. I've beaten myself to find out what it does to you. It must be a horrifying feeling.

MELCHIOR. I don't believe it ever makes a child better.

WENDLA. What?

MELCHIOR. Being beaten.

WENDLA. With this switch for example. Ugh, how springy and thin.

MELCHIOR. That would draw blood.

WENDLA. Would you like to beat me with it once?

MELCHIOR. Who?

WENDLA. Me.

MELCHIOR. What's the matter, Wendla?

WENDLA. There's no harm in it.

MELCHIOR. O be quiet! I won't beat you.

WENDLA. But if I let you do it!

MELCHIOR. No, Wendla.

WENDLA. But if I ask you for it, Melchior!

MELCHIOR. Are you out of your mind?

WENDLA. I've never been beaten in my whole life!

MELCHIOR. If you can ask for something like that . . .

WENDLA. Please, please!

MELCHIOR. I'll teach you to ask! (*He bits her.*)

WENDLA. O God — I don't feel it at all . . .

MELCHIOR. Of course not — through all your skirts.

WENDLA. Then beat my legs!

MELCHIOR. Wendla! (*He bits her harder.*)

WENDLA. You're only stroking me! Stroking me!

MELCHIOR. You wait, you bitch, I'll thrash the hide off you!

*He throws the stick away and bits out at her with his fists.*

*She bursts into a terrible scream. He takes no notice and*

*punches at her in fury. Heavy tears stream down his face.*

*He jumps up, grips his head and runs into the wood*

*sobbing with misery.*

## Act Two

### SCENE ONE

*Evening in Melchior's study.*

*The window is open, the lamp burns on the table. MELCHIOR and MORITZ sit on the sofa.*

MORITZ. I'm quite lively again now, just a bit on edge. But I slept all through Greek. I'm surprised old Tonguetwister didn't twist my ears. I just scraped in on time this morning.

My first thought when I woke up was irregular verbs.

Damnation-hell-and-fireworks, I conjugated all through breakfast and all the way to school, till everything was green in front of my eyes . . . I must have gone blank about three.

The pen made one more blot in my book. When Mathilde woke me up the lamp was smoking and the blackbirds were singing their hearts out in the lilac under the window — suddenly I felt so completely miserable again. I fastened my collar and put a brush through my hair. — But you feel satisfied when you've forced something out of yourself.

MELCHIOR. May I roll you a cigarette?

MORITZ. Thanks, I'm not smoking. — If I can only keep it up!

I'll work and work till my eyes drop out. Ernst Röbel's

already failed six times since the holidays: three times in Greek, twice with Bonebreaker, the last time in literary history. I've only been in that pitiful condition five times, and and it's definitely not happening again! Röbel won't shoot himself! Röbel's parents didn't sacrifice everything for him. He can become a mercenary whenever he likes, or a cowboy or a sailor. If I fail my father will have a heart attack and my mother go into a madhouse. I'd never survive it. Before the exams I prayed like Christ in the garden, I implored God to let me catch consumption so that this bitter cup would pass. It passed — but I'm still afraid to look up day or night. The

halo that floats over it is winking at me from the distance. Well now I've got the bull by the horns I'm going to climb on its back. Then if I fall I have an infallible guarantee that I'll break my neck.

MELCHIOR. Life is always unexpectedly mean. I rather incline to hanging myself from a tree. What's keeping mama with the tea? MORITZ. Tea will do me good. I'm actually shaking. Melchior! I feel so strangely disembodied. Please touch me. I see — I hear — I feel much more clearly — and yet it's all in a dream — o, so strange. The garden's lying down there in the moonlight, so still and deep, as if it's lying in eternity. There are veiled figures coming out of the ground under the bushes. They hurry over the clearings — busy and breathless — and vanish in the dusk. It's as if a meeting's gathering under the chestnut trees. Shouldn't we go down, Melchior?

MELCHIOR. After tea.

MORITZ. The leaves are rustling like little insects! It's as if my dead grandmother was telling me the story of "The Queen with No Head". There was a beautiful queen, as beautiful as the sun, more beautiful than all the other girls. But unfortunately she came into the world with no head. She couldn't eat, or drink, or see, or laugh, or even kiss. She could only make the court understand her by her soft little hands, and she tapped out declarations of war and death sentences with her pretty little feet. One day she was defeated by a king who happened to have two heads. They got in each other's hair all the time and quarrelled so much that neither of them could get a word in. The top wizard took the smaller head and put it on the queen. There, it fits marvellously. So the king married the queen, and instead of getting in each other's hair they kissed: on their foreheads, their cheeks, their mouths — and lived happily ever after. All rubbish! Since the holidays I can't get the headless queen out of my mind. When I see a beautiful girl, I see her with no head — and I keep suddenly seeing myself with no head . . . Perhaps one day someone will put a head on me.

FRAU GABOR *brings tea and puts it on the table in front of MORITZ and MELCHIOR.*

FRAU GABOR. There, boys, drink your tea. Good evening, Herr Stiefel, how are you?

MORITZ. Thank you, Frau Gabor. — I'm watching the dance down there.

FRAU GABOR. You don't look too well. D'you feel all right? MORITZ. It's nothing. I've been going to bed a bit late the last few nights.

MELCHIOR. Imagine, he worked through the whole night.

FRAU GABOR. You shouldn't, Herr Stiefel. You must look after yourself. Think of your health. School can't give you your health back again. Brisk walks in the fresh air. That's worth more at your age than perfect grammar.

MORITZ. Yes — brisk walks! While you're walking you can work in your head! Why didn't I think of that? — But I'd still have to do the written work indoors.

MELCHIOR. Do the written stuff with me. That'll make it easier for both of us. Mother, you know Max von Trenk went down with nervous exhaustion? Well, Hänschen Rilow came straight from Trenk's deathbed lunch-time today and told the Head Trenk had just died in his presence. The Head said "Indeed. Haven't you still got two hours detention owing from last week? Here's a note for your Form Master. Get it sorted out. The whole class will assist at his funeral". Hänschen could hardly move.

FRAU GABOR. What's your book, Melchior?

MELCHIOR. *Faust.*

FRAU GABOR. Have you read it?

MELCHIOR. Not all of it.

MORITZ. We're just in the Walpurgis Night.

FRAU GABOR. If I were you I'd have waited a year or two for that.

MELCHIOR. I haven't come across any other book that I think is so beautiful, mother. Why shouldn't I read it?

FRAU GABOR. Because you don't understand it.

MELCHIOR. You can't know that, mother. Of course, I know I don't understand its deepest meaning . . .

MORITZ. We always read together. That makes it incredibly easier to understand.

FRAU GABOR. You're old enough to know what's good for

You and what's bad for you, Melchior. Do whatever you feel able to answer for to your own conscience. I shall be the first to acknowledge it if you never give me any cause to forbid you anything. I only want to make you aware that even the best can work harm when one lacks the maturity to know how to use it.

But I shall always put my trust in you, rather than in some vague doctrine of education. If you need anything else, boys, come and call me, Melchior. I'm in my bedroom. (*Goes.*)

MORITZ. Your mother meant the business with Gretchen and the baby.

MELCHIOR. Did we even pause over it?

MORITZ. *Faust* couldn't have treated it more cold-bloodedly! MELCHIOR. A common little scandal like that can't be the summit of such a masterpiece! Suppose *Faust* had just promised to marry her and then walked off? That would have been just as bad. There'd have been no baby — but Gretchen could still have died of a broken heart. When you see how frantically they all pounce on that one incident you'd think the whole world revolved round penis and vagina.

MORITZ. Frankly, Melchior, since reading your essay I feel it does. It fell out on the floor when I was reading a history book. I bolted the door and went through your lines like an owl flying through a burning wood. I think I read most of it with my eyes shut. It was like listening to your own forgotten memories — a song you hummed to yourself when you played as a child, and then hearing it again when you're lying down to die, coming out of someone else's mouth and breaking your heart. What moved me most was the part you wrote about the girl. I can't get it out of my mind. Honestly, Melchior, I'd rather suffer wrong than do wrong. To have to be overpowered by such a gentle force, and still be innocent — that seems the greatest sort of happiness to me.

MELCHIOR. I don't want to be given happiness like a beggar!

MORITZ. Why not?

MELCHIOR. I don't want anything I didn't have to fight for!

MORITZ. But would that still be happiness, Melchior? Melchior, the girl enjoys it like someone in heaven. It's a girl's nature to protect herself, to keep herself free from all bitterness till the last moment — so that she can feel all heaven falling on her at

once. A girl is afraid of hell even at the moment she steps into paradise. Her feelings are as fresh as a stream when it breaks from the rocks. The girl lifts up a chalice that no earthly mouth has touched, a cup of flaming sparkling nectar and gulps it down — I think the satisfaction a man gets out of it must be cold and flat.

MELCHIOR. Think what you like but shut up. I don't like to think about it . . .

## SCENE TWO

FRAU BERGMANN *wearing a hat and cape, and with a beaming face, comes through the middle door. She carries a basket on her arm.*

FRAU BERGMANN. Wendla! Wendla!

WENDLA *appears in petticoat and stays at the side door right.*

WENDLA. What is it, mother?

FRAU BERGMANN. You're up already, precious? What a good girl!

WENDLA. You've been out this early?

FRAU BERGMANN. Get dressed quickly. You must go down to Ina. You must take her this basket.

WENDLA (*gets fully dressed during the following*). You've been to Ina's? How was Ina? Won't she ever get better?

FRAU BERGMANN. You'll never guess, Wendla, last night the stork was with her and brought her a little boy.

WENDLA. A boy! A boy! O that's wonderful! That's what her chronic influenza was!

FRAU BERGMANN. A perfect boy!

WENDLA. I must see him, mother! Now I'm an aunt three times — aunt to one girl and two boys!

FRAU BERGMANN. And what boys! That's what happens when you live so close to the stork! It's only two years since she walked up the aisle in her white dress.

WENDLA. Were you there when he brought him?

FRAU BERGMANN. He'd just flown off again. Don't you want

to pin on a rose?

WENDLA. Why didn't you get there a bit sooner, mother?  
 FRAU BERGMANN. I believe he might have brought you something too — a brooch perhaps.

WENDLA. It's such a pity.

FRAU BERGMANN. Now I told you he brought you a brooch.  
 WENDLA. I've got enough brooches.

FRAU BERGMANN. Then be contented, child. What more do you want?

WENDLA. I would very much like to have known whether he flew in through the window or down the chimney.

FRAU BERGMANN. You must ask Ina. O yes, you must ask Ina that, precious. Ina will tell you exactly. Ina spoke to him for a good half hour.

WENDLA. I shall ask Ina when I get there.

FRAU BERGMANN. And don't forget, precious. I shall be very interested myself to know if he came in through the window or the chimney.

WENDLA. Or perhaps I'd better ask the chimney-sweep. The chimney-sweep's bound to know if he used the chimney.

FRAU BERGMANN. Not the chimney-sweep, dear. Not the chimney-sweep. What does the chimney-sweep know about storks? He'll tell you all sorts of nonsense he doesn't believe himself. What — what are you staring at in the street?

WENDLA. Mother, a man — as big as three horses, with feet like paddle-steamer!

FRAU BERGMANN (*running to the window*). I don't believe it! I don't believe it!

WENDLA (*at the same time*). He's holding a bedstead under his chin and playing "Watch on the Rhine" on it — he's just gone round the corner.

FRAU BERGMANN. You'll always be a child! Frightening your young silly old mother. Go and get your hat. I sometimes wonder if you'll ever get any sense in your head. I've given up hope.

WENDLA. So have I, mother, so have I. There's not much hope for my head. I've got a sister who's been married two and a half years, and I'm an aunt three times, and I've no idea how it all happens . . . Don't be cross, mummy, don't be cross!

Who in the world should I ask but you? Please, mummy, tell me. Tell me, dear. I feel ashamed of myself. Do tell me, mummy! Don't scold me for asking such things. Answer me — what is it? — how does it happen? You can't really insist that now I'm fourteen I still have to believe in the stork?

FRAU BERGMANN. But good lord, child, how funny you are! What ideas you get! I really cannot do such a thing.

WENDLA. Why not, mother? Why not? It can't be anything ugly if it makes you all so happy.

FRAU BERGMANN. O — O God help me! I would deserve to be . . . Go and get dressed, Wendla. Get dressed.

WENDLA. I'll go . . . and what if your child goes to the chimney-sweep to ask?

FRAU BERGMANN. But this will send me out of my mind!

Come here, Wendla, come to me. I'll tell you! I'll tell you everything! O Almighty Father! — Only not now, Wendla. Tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, next week — whenever you like, my precious.

WENDLA. Tell me today, mother! Tell me now! This moment. I can never stop asking now I've seen you so frightened.

FRAU BERGMANN. I can't Wendla.

WENDLA. O why can't you, Mummy? I'll kneel at your feet and lay my head in your lap. Put your apron over my head and talk and talk as if you were sitting alone in your room. I won't flinch or cry out. I'll be patient and bear it whatever it is.

FRAU BERGMANN. Heaven knows none of this is my fault. Wendla! Heaven sees into my heart. I'll put myself into God's hands, Wendla — and tell you how you came into this world. Now listen to me, Wendla.

WENDLA (*under the apron*). I'm listening.

FRAU BERGMANN (*ecstatically*). But I can't, child! I can't be responsible! I'd deserve to be put in prison — to have you taken away from me . . .

WENDLA (*under the apron*). Be brave, mother!

FRAU BERGMANN. Well, listen!

WENDLA (*under the apron, trembling*). O God, o God!

FRAU BERGMANN. To have a child — you understand me, Wendla?

WENDLA. Quickly, mother — I can't bear it anymore.

FRAU BERGMANN. To have a child — the man — to whom you're married — you must — *love* — love, you see — as you can only love your husband. You must love him *very much with your whole heart* — in a way that can't be put into words! You must *love* him, Wendla, in a way that you certainly can't love at your age. . . . Now you know.

WENDLA (*getting up*). Well, good heavens!

FRAU BERGMANN. Now you know what a testing time lies before you!

WENDLA. And that's all?

FRAU BERGMANN. As God is my witness! Now take that basket and go to Ina. She'll give you some chocolate to drink, and some cake too. Come on, let me look at you once more — boots laced up, silk gloves, sailor suit, rose in your hair . . .

WENDLA. Have you bought the meat for lunch, mummy?

FRAU BERGMANN. God bless you. I must sew a broad flounce round the bottom.

### SCENE THREE

HANSCHEN RILOW (*with a light in his hand, he bolts the door behind him and lifts the lid*). Have you prayed tonight Desdemona?

*He takes a reproduction of the Venus of Palma Vecchio from the inside pocket of his jacket.*

You don't look like the Lord's Prayer, darling — contemplating the coming moments, the lovely moments of coming ecstasy — still just as when I first saw you lying in the window of that little corner shop, just as alluring with those smooth limbs, this soft curve of the hips, these young, tense breasts — o, how drunk the Great Master must have been when the fourteen-year-old original lay stretched out before him on the studio couch!

Will you come to me in my dreams now and then? I'll welcome you with outstretched arms and kiss your breath

away. You'll take me over like an heiress moving back into her deserted palace. Gates and doors fly open with unseen hands, and down below in the park the fountain begins to splash happily . . .

It is the cause! It is the cause! The terrible hammering in my breast proves I'm not murdering you for a whim! My throat goes dry when I think of the lonely nights ahead. And I swear to you, woman, it's not the disgust that comes from over-indulgence! Who'd flatter himself by being disgusted with you? No — you suck the marrow from my bones, bend my back, take the sparkle from my young eyes. Your inhuman modesty is too demanding, your motionless limbs too exhausting! It's me or you! And I've won!

If I counted them all — all the others I fought this battle with on this same spot! Ruben's Venus — bequeathed to me by that waspish-thin governess Miss Hatherley-Brown, the rattlesnake in my nursery paradise! Correggio's Io. Titian's Galathea. J van Beer's Ada. Cupid by Bouguereau — the Cupid I abducted from the secret drawer in papa's desk and locked up in my harem. A quivering, trembling Leda by Makart I came across in my brother's exercise books. *Seven*, o, lovely candidate for death, have gone before you down the path to Tartarus. Let that console you and don't make my torments unbearable with those imploring looks!

You don't die for *your* sins but *mine*! With a bleeding heart I've murdered seven wives in self-defence. There's something tragic in the role of Bluebeard. All his wives put together didn't suffer as much when he strangled them as he did each time!

But my conscience will be at peace, my body will get stronger when you no longer dwell in the red silk cushions of my jewelry box. Now I shall open my opulent pleasure dome to portraits of The Puritan Maid, Mary Magdalen, The Respectable Farmer's Wife — and then I'll get over you sooner. Perhaps in another three months, my angel, your naked flesh-pot would have started to gnaw my brains like the sun melting butter pudding. It's time we were granted a decree!

Ugh, I feel a Heliogabalus rising in me! Moritura me salutat!

Girl, girl why d'you press your knees together — even now when you stand before eternity? *One* tremble, and I'll set you free! *One* feminine wriggle, *one* flicker of lust, of pity, woman! I'd let you lie in a gold frame over my bed! Don't you know it's your respectability that drives me to my debaucheries? Alas, alas, so much inhumanity! *One* always notices her sort had a good upbringing! It's exactly the same with me! Have you prayed tonight, Desdemona?

My heart breaks. Rot! Even St. Agnes had to die for her virginity, and she wasn't half as naked as you! *One* last kiss on your blooming body, your girlish, budding breasts, your sweet curved — your cruel knees. . . .

It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul! Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars! It is the cause!

*The picture falls into the depths. He shuts the lid.*

#### SCENE FOUR

*A bayloft.*

MELCHIOR *lies on his back in fresh bay. WENDLA comes up the ladder.*

WENDLA. *Here's where you've crept to! They're all looking for you. The hay wagon's gone out again. You've got to help. There's a storm coming.*

MELCHIOR. Go away. Go away.

WENDLA. What is it? Why are you hiding your face?

MELCHIOR. Get out! I'll throw you down on the threshing floor!

WENDLA. Now I certainly won't go. (*Kneels beside him.*) Come out in the fields with me, Melchior? It's sticky and gloomy here. It doesn't matter to us if we get soaked!

MELCHIOR. The hay smells so good. The sky outside must be as dark as the grave. All I can see is the bright poppy on your breast — I can hear your heartbeat. . . .

WENDLA. Don't kiss me, Melchior! Don't kiss me!

MELCHIOR. Your heart — listen to it beating.

WENDLA. You love each other — when you kiss — no, no!

MELCHIOR. O, believe me, there's no such thing as *love*! It's all self, all ego. I don't love you anymore than you love me.

WENDLA. Don't! Don't, Melchior!

MELCHIOR. Wendla!

WENDLA. O, Melchior! Don't, don't.

#### SCENE FIVE

FRAU GABOR *sits and writes.*

FRAU GABOR. Dear Herr Stiefel,

After twenty-four hours of thinking and thinking over what you have written to me, I take up my pen with a heavy heart. I cannot, I give you my solemn word, obtain the cost of a passage to America for you. Firstly, I do not have that much at my disposal, and secondly, if I had, it would be the greatest possible sin to put into your hands the means of carrying out a recklessness so fraught with consequence. You would do me a grave injustice, Herr Stiefel, if you found in this refusal a sign of any lack of love on my part. On the contrary, it would be a grave offence to my duty as a motherly friend if I also were to lose my head and, influenced by your momentary desperation, abandon myself to first impulses. I will gladly, should you so wish, write to your parents and try to persuade them that throughout this term you have done all that lay in your power, and exhausted your strength — so much so that any rigorous condemnation of your failure would not only be unjust but might very well be detrimental to your physical and spiritual health.

The threat hinted at in your letter — that if your escape were not made possible you would take your life — does to be frank, Herr Stiefel, somewhat surprise me. Be a misfortune never so undeserved, one should not allow oneself to stoop to underhand methods. The method by which you seek to make me, who have always been kind to you, responsible for any ensuing tragedy, smacks somewhat of that which in the eyes of ill-disposed persons might well be taken as an attempt at

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extortion. I must own that, least of all from you, who otherwise know so well the respect one owes oneself, was the above mentioned to be expected. However, I am convinced that you were still suffering from the effects of first shock and therefore unable to understand the nature of your conduct. And so I confidently trust that these my words will reach you in an already more composed frame of mind. Take things for what they are. In my opinion it is quite wrong to judge a young man by his examination results. We have too many instances before us of bad scholars who became remarkable men, and, contrariwise, of splendid scholars who did not especially prove themselves in later life. Be that as it may, I give you my assurance that, so far as lies within my power, your misfortune shall in no way alter your relations with Melchior. It will always afford me joy to watch my son's intercourse with a young man who, let the world judge him how it may, will always be able to command my fullest sympathy. And therefore, head up, Herr Stiefel. These crises come to us all in one form or another and must be seen through. If we immediately resort to dagger and poison there will very soon be no one left in the world. Let me hear a line from you before long. The very best wishes of your staunch devoted motherly friend Fanny G.

## SCENE SIX

*The BERGMANNS' garden in morning sunlight.*

WENDLA. Why did you slip out of the room? To pick violets! Because mother sees me smiling. Why can't you close your lips anymore? I don't know. I really don't know, I don't know the words . . .

The path's like a soft carpet. No stones, no thorns. My feet don't touch the ground . . . O how I slept last night! They were here. I feel as solemn as a nun at communion. These beautiful violets! Hush, mother, I'll wear my sackcloth. O God, if only someone could come and I could throw my arms round his neck and tell!

## SCENE SEVEN

*Evening, dusk.*

*The sky is lightly clouded, the path winds between low bushes and reeds. The river is heard a little way off.*

MORITZ. The sooner the better. I don't belong here. Let them kick each other to bits. I'll shut the door behind me and walk away into freedom. Why should I let them push me about? I didn't force myself on them. Why should I force myself on them now? I haven't got a contract with God. Look at it from any angle you like, they forced me. I don't blame my parents. Still, they were old enough to know what they were doing. I was a baby when I came in the world — or I'd have had enough sense to come as someone else!

I'd have to be off my head!  
I'd have to be off my head: someone gives me a mad dog, and when he won't take his mad dog back I play the gentleman and . . .

I'd have to be off my head!  
You're born by pure chance and after mature reconsideration you mustn't . . . ? I could die laughing! At least the weather cares. It looked like rain all day and now it's cleared. The whole strange stillness everywhere. Nothing harsh or loud. The whole world like a fine cobweb. Everything so calm and still. The landscape is a beautiful lullabye. "Sleep, little prince, go to sleep." Fraulein Hectorina's song. A pity she holds her elbows awkwardly! The last time I danced it was the feast of St. Cicelia. Hectorina only dances with young toffs. Her dress was cut so low at the back and the front. Down to the hips at the back, and in front down to — you mustn't think about it. She couldn't have had a bodice on . . . That might keep me here. More out of curiosity. It must be a strange sensation — like being dragged over maelstroms. I won't tell anyone I've come back half-cocked. I'll behave as if I've done everything. It's shameful to have been a man and not known the most human thing. You come from *Egypt*, dear sir, and you've never seen the pyramids?  
I don't want to cry anymore. Or think about my funeral.

Melchior will lay a wreath on my coffin. Reverend Baldbelly will console my parents. The Head will cite examples from history. I don't suppose I'll get a tombstone. I'd have liked a snow-white marble urn on a black syenite column — luckily I won't miss it. Monuments are for the living not the dead. It would take at least a year to go through everyone in my head and say goodbye. I don't want to cry now. I'm glad I can look back without bitterness. The beautiful evenings with Melchior! — under the willows, the forester's hut, the old battleground with the five lime trees, the quiet ruins of the castle. When the moment comes I'll think with my whole being of whipped cream. Whipped cream won't stop me. It leaves behind a pleasant aftertaste, it doesn't end up in your trousers . . . And then I've always thought people were worse than they are. I've never met one who didn't try his best. I felt sorry for them because they had me to deal with. I go to the altar like an ancient Etruscan youth. His death rattles bring his brothers prosperity for the year ahead. Drop by drop I drink the dregs. The secret shudders of crossing over. I weep with the sadness of my lot. Life gave me the cold shoulder. From the other side solemn, friendly faces beckon me: the headless queen, the headless queen — compassion, waiting for me, with open arms . . . The laws of this world are for children, I've earned my pass. The balance sinks, the butterfly rises and flies away. The painted veil no longer blinds me. Why should I play this mad game with Illusion? The mists part! Life is a question of taste.

ILSE, *in torn clothes and with a coloured scarf on her head, taps bis shoulder from behind.*

ILSE. What have you lost?

MORITZ. Ilse?

ILSE. What are you looking for?

MORITZ. Why did you frighten me?

ILSE. What are you looking for? What have you lost?

MORITZ. Why did you frighten me like that?

ILSE. I've just come from town. I'm going home.

MORITZ. I don't know what I've lost.

ILSE. No use looking for it then.

MORITZ. Blast! Blast!

ILSE. I haven't been home for four days.

MORITZ. Creeping about like a cat.

ILSE. I've got my dancing shoes on. Mother's eyes will pop out. Walk back to our house with me.

MORITZ. Where have you been this time?

ILSE. With the Phallustics!

MORITZ. Phallustics!

ILSE. With Nohl, Karl, Paganini, Schiller, Rank, Dostoevsky — with anyone I could! O, mother will jump!

MORITZ. Do you sit for them?

ILSE. Karl's painting me as an ermite. I stand on a Corinthian column. Karl's off his head, believe me. Last time I trod on his tube of paint. He wiped his brush in my hair. I boxed his ears. He threw his palette at me. I knock the easel down. He chases me with his paint stick over the divan, tables, chairs, round and round the studio. There's a drawing by the fire. Behave or I'll tear it! He says he'll behave and then ends up kissing me terribly-terribly, believe me.

MORITZ. Where d'you spend the nights when you're in town?

ILSE. Yesterday at Nohl's — the day before at El Greco's — Sunday with Bojokewitsch. We had champagne at Paganini's. Velazquez sold his Plague Sufferer. Adolar drank out of the ashtray. Schiller sang "The Mother who Murdered her Child" and Adolar beat hell out of the guitar. I was so drunk they had to put me to bed. You're still at school, Moritz?

MORITZ. No, no — this is my last term.

ILSE. That's right. O, time passes much better when you're earning. D'you remember how we played bandits? Wendla Bergmann and you and me and the others. You all came to our place in the evenings and drank the goat's milk while it was still warm. What's Wendla up to? Last time I saw her was at the flood. What does Melchior Gabor do? Does he still look so solemn? We used to stand opposite each other in music.

MORITZ. He's a philosopher.

ILSE. Wendla was at our place a while back and brought mother some stewed fruit. I was sitting for Isidor Landauer then. He wants me for the Virgin Mary, the mother of God with the baby Jesus. He's an idiot and disgusting. Ugh, never settles.

Have you got a hangover?

MORITZ. From last night. We knocked it back like hippopotamuses. I staggered home at five.

ILSE. You've only got to look at you! Were there any girls? MORITZ. Arabella. We drank beer out of her slipper. She's

Spanish, you know. The landlord left us alone with her the whole night.

ILSE. You've only got to look at you, Moritz! I don't know what a hangover is! Last carnival I didn't go to bed or get out of my clothes for three days and nights! From Fancy Dress Balls to the cafés, lunch on the lake, cellar revues in the evenings, nights back to the Fancy Dress Balls. Lena was with me and that fat Viola. Heinrich found me on the third night.

MORITZ. Was he looking for you?

ILSE. He tripped over my arm. I was lying unconscious on the street in the snow. Afterwards I went back to his place. I couldn't get away for two weeks — that was a terrible time! Every morning I had to pose in his Persian dressing gown, and every evening walk round his rooms in a black page-boy tunic. White lace, cuffs, collar and knees. He photographed me in a different way every day — once as Ariadne on the arm of a sofa, once as Leda, once as Ganymede, and once on all fours as a female Nobobycesor. He was always squirming on about murder, shooting, suicide, drugs and fumes. He brought a pistol in bed every morning, loaded it with shot, and pushed it into my breast: one twitch and I press. O, he would have pressed, Moritz, he would have pressed. Then he put the thing in his mouth like a pea-shooter. It's supposed to be good for the self-preservation instinct. Ugh — the bullet would have gone through my spine!

MORITZ. Is Heinrich still alive?

ILSE. How should I know? There was a big mirror in the ceiling over the bed. The little room looked as tall as a tower, as bright as an opera house. You saw yourself hanging down alive from the sky. I had terrible dreams. God, o God, if only the day would come. Good night, Ilse. When you're asleep you're so beautiful I could murder you.

MORITZ. Is this Heinrich still alive?

ILSE. No, please God. One day he was fetching absinthe and I

threw my coat on and slipped out in the street. The carnival was over. The police picked me up. What was I doing in men's clothes? They took me to the station. Then Nohl, Karl, Paganini, Schiller and El Greco, all the Phallustics, came and stood bail for me. They carried me home in a posh cab. Since then I've stuck to the crowd. Karl's an ape, Nohl's a pig, Berlioz's goat, Dostoevsky's a hyena, El Greco's a bear — but I love them, all of them together, and I wouldn't trust anyone else even if the world was full of saints and millionaires.

MORITZ. I must go home, Ilse.

ILSE. Come back to my place.

MORITZ. Why? Why . . . ?

ILSE. To drink warm goat's milk. I'll curl your hair and hang a bell round your neck. Or there's a rocking-horse you can play on.

MORITZ. I must go home. I've still got the Sassanids, the sermon on the mount, and the Parallelepipedon on my conscience.

Good night, Ilse.

ILSE. Sleep tight! D'you still play in the wigwam where Melchior Gabor buried my tomahawk? Ugh! Before you're ready I'll be in the dustbin. (*She hurries away.*)

MORITZ (*alone*). One word! That's all it needed! (*Calls.*) Ilse!

Ilse! Thank God she can't hear.

I'm not in the mood. You have to be clear-headed and relaxed for that. Pity, pity — a wasted chance.

I'll say I had huge crystal mirrors over my beds and reared an untamed colt and let it prance round me on carpets in long black silk stockings and shiny black boots and long black kid gloves and black velvet round its throat and in an insane frenzy I took the pillow and smothered it — I will smile when they talk of lust — I will — scream! — Scream! To be you, Ilse! Phallic! Unselfconscious! That's what takes my strength away! That happy child, that child of nature — that little whore on my path of misery!

(*In the bushes on the bank.*) I've come here again without knowing it . . . the grass bank. The rods of the bulrushes look taller since yesterday. The view through the willows is the same. The river passes as slowly as melted lead. I mustn't forget . . . (*He takes FRAU GABOR's letter from his pocket,*

## SPRING AWAKENING

*and burns it.*) How the sparks float . . . here and there, round and round — souls! Shooting stars! Before I made the flame I could see the rushes and a line on the horizon. Now it's dark. I shan't go home now.

## Act Three

## SCENE ONE

*Staff room.*

*Portraits of Pestalozzi and J. J. Rousseau. Gas-lamps burn over a green table. At the table sit PROFESSORS APELARD, THICKSTICK, GUTGRINDER, BONEBREAKER, TONGUE-TWISTER and FLYSWATTER. HEADMASTER SUNSTROKE sits at the head of the table on a raised chair. The School Porter FASTCRAWLER huddles by the door.*

SUNSTROKE. Would any gentleman care to add any further remarks? Gentlemen! We cannot for the gravest of reasons abstain from asking the Minister of State for Cultural Affairs for the expulsion of our guilt-laden student. We cannot abstain so as to atone for the disaster that has already befallen us, and no less we cannot so as to secure our Institution against similar blows. We cannot abstain so as to chastise our guilt-laden student for the demoralising influence he has borne over his fellow students, and no less we cannot so as to prevent the further bearing of that demoralising influence. We cannot abstain — and here, gentlemen, might lie our most compelling reason, whereby whatsoever objections that are raised may be utterly crushed — so as to protect our Institution from the devastation of a suicide epidemic which has already come to pass in other Institutions and which has rendered, until now, our scholarly task of uniting our scholars by means of the fruits of scholarly instruction to the fruition of the life of scholarship, ridiculous. Would any gentlemen care to add any further remarks?

THICKSTICK. I can no longer close my mind to the conviction that the time has come when the opening of a window should be permitted somewhere.

TONGUETWISTER. The at-atmosphere here is dom-dominated



make on obscene literature.

MELCHIOR. I have . . .

SUNSTROKE. You have to be silent. After Herr Stiefel had put the document in question into our hands and we had given the bewildered father our solemn word to at all costs ascertain its author, the handwriting was compared with the handwriting of every fellow student of the deceased malpractiser and matched, according to the unanimous verdict of the whole faculty and in complete agreement with the expert opinion of our honoured colleague the Professor of Calligraphy, yours.

MELCHIOR. I have . . .

SUNSTROKE. You have to be silent. Notwithstanding the overwhelming evidence of this identification, acceded to by such unimpeachable authorities, we believe ourselves able to refrain from precipitate action for the moment, and to instead impartially interrogate you about the crime against morality of which you stand accused and which served as an incitement to self-destruction.

MELCHIOR. I have . . .

SUNSTROKE. You have to answer the precisely phrased questions, which I shall put to you one after the other, with a simple and respectful yes or no. Fastcrawler!

FASTCRAWLER. Present, sir!

SUNSTROKE. The file. I request our secretary, Herr Flyswatter, to take down the protocol from now on word for word as exactly as possible. (To MELCHIOR.) Do you know this document?

MELCHIOR. Yes.

SUNSTROKE. Do you know what this document contains?

MELCHIOR. Yes.

SUNSTROKE. Is the handwriting in this document yours?

MELCHIOR. Yes.

SUNSTROKE. Does this obscene document owe its manufacture to you?

MELCHIOR. Yes. Sir, I ask you to show me one obscenity in it.

SUNSTROKE. You have to answer the precisely phrased questions, which I shall put to you, with a simple and respectful yes or no.

MELCHIOR. I've written no more and no less than everyone of you knows to be a fact.

SUNSTROKE. This insolent puppy!

MELCHIOR. I ask you to show me one offence against morality in that paper!

SUNSTROKE. Do you imagine that I will stand here and let myself become the butt of your jests? Fastcrawler!

MELCHIOR. I have . . .

SUNSTROKE. You have as little respect for the dignity of your assembled masters as you have for mankind's sense of shame when confronted with the moral order of the universe.

Fastcrawler!

FASTCRAWLER. Present, sir!

SUNSTROKE. This is the definitive text on how to learn

Esperanto in three easy months without a master!

MELCHIOR. I have . . .

SUNSTROKE. I call upon our secretary to close the protocol.

MELCHIOR. I have . . .

SUNSTROKE. You have to be silent. Fastcrawler!

FASTCRAWLER. Present, sir!

SUNSTROKE. Put him down.

## SCENE TWO

*Churchyard in pouring rain.*

REVEREND BALDBELLY stands in front of the open grave with an umbrella in his hand. On his right HERR STIEFEL, his friend GOAT and UNCLE PROBST. On the left HEADMASTER SUNSTROKE and PROFESSOR BONEBREAKER. STUDENTS make up the rest of a circle. Some distance off MARTHA and ILSE stand by a half-fallen grave stone.

BALDBELLY. Whosoever spurns the grace with which the

Eternal Father blesses all who are born in sin, he shall die the death of the spirit. And whosoever in flesh and pride denies the worship owed to God and lives and serves evil, he shall die the death of the body. But whosoever sacrilegiously casts

aside the cross with which the Almighty inflicts this life of sin, verily, verily I say unto you, he shall die the eternal death. (*He throws a shovel of earth into the grave.*) But we who go forth on the path of thorns, let us praise the Lord, the All Merciful, and thank him for his unsearchable gift of predestination. For as surely as this died the three-fold death, as surely will Lord God lead the righteous to salvation and eternal life. Amen.

HERR STIEFEL (*with tear-choked voice as he throws a shovel of earth into the grave*). That boy wasn't mine. That boy wasn't mine. I had my doubts about that boy since he was a tot.

SUNSTROKE. (*throws a shovel of earth into the grave*). While suicide is the greatest conceivable offence against the moral order of the universe, it is at the same time the greatest conceivable proof of the moral order of the universe, in that the suicide spares the moral order of the universe the necessity of pronouncing its verdict and so confirms its existence.

BONEBREAKER (*throws a shovel of earth into the grave*).

Dilatory — dissipated — debauched — dissolute — and dirty! UNCLE PROBST (*throws a shovel of earth into the grave*). I would not have believed my own mother if she'd told me a child would treat its parents so basely.

FRIEND GOAT (*throws a shovel of earth into the grave*). To do that to a father who for twenty years cherished no other thought from morning till night than the welfare of his son! BALDBELLY (*shaking HERR STIEFEL'S band*). We know that they who love God make all things serve the best. Corinthians I, 14:12. Think of the comfortless mother and try to replace her loss by redoubled love.

SUNSTROKE. (*shaking HERR STIEFEL'S band*). And after all it's clear that we might well not have been able to promote him anyway.

BONEBREAKER (*shaking HERR STIEFEL'S band*). And if we had promoted him he'd certainly have been left standing next spring.

UNCLE PROBST (*shaking HERR STIEFEL'S band*). It's your duty to think of yourself before everything else now. You are head of a family . . .

FRIEND GOAT (*shaking HERR STIEFEL'S band*). Take my arm.

Cats-and-dogs weather, enough to wring the bowels. If we don't all immediately perform the vanishing trick with a glass of hot punch we'll catch a heart condition!

HERR STIEFEL (*blowing his nose*). That boy wasn't mine. That boy wasn't mine.

HERR STIEFEL is lead away by PASTOR BALDBELLY, HEADMASTER SUNSTROKE, PROFESSOR BONEBREAKER, UNCLE PROBST and FRIEND GOAT.

*The rain lessens.*

HÄNSCHEN (*throws a shovel of earth into the grave*). Rest in peace, poor sod. Give my regards to my dead brides — and put in a word for me to God, you poor fool. You're so innocent they'll have to put something on your grave to scare the birds off.

GEORG. Did they find the pistol?

ROBERT. There's no point in looking for a pistol.

ERNST. Did you see him, Robert?

ROBERT. Rotten, blasted swizz! Who saw him? Anyone?

OTTO. That's the mystery! They threw a cloth over him.

GEORG. Did his tongue hang out?

ROBERT. The eyes! That's why they threw the cloth over him.

OTTO. Horrible!

HÄNSCHEN. Are you sure he hanged himself?

ERNST. They say he's got no head now.

OTTO. Rubbish! All talk!

ROBERT. I had the rope in my hand. They always cover up a hanged man.

GEORG. He couldn't have chosen a more small-minded way of going off.

HÄNSCHEN. What the hell, hanging's supposed to be fun!

OTTO. The fact is, he still owes me five marks. We had a bet. He

swore he'd be promoted.

HÄNSCHEN. It's your fault he's down there. You said he was bragging.

OTTO. Rot! I have to slave through the nights too. If he'd

learned his Greek history he wouldn't have had to hang himself.

ERNST. Have you done your essay, Otto?

OTTO. Only the start.

ERNST. I don't know what we're supposed to write about.

GEORG. Weren't you there when Apelard gave it out?

HANSCHEN. I'll stick together some bits of Democritus.

ERNST. I'll get something out of the reference library.

OTTO. Have you done tomorrow's Virgil?

*The STUDENTS go. MARTHA and ILSE come to the grave.*

ILSE. Quick, quick! The gravediggers are coming over there.

MARTHA. Shouldn't we wait?

ILSE. What for? We'll bring fresh ones. Always fresh, fresh! They grow everywhere!

MARTHA. That's right, Ilse. *(She throws an ivy wreath into the*

*grave. ILSE opens her apron and lets a stream of fresh*

*anemones fall onto the coffin.)* I'll dig up our roses. I get

beaten anyway. They'll grow so well here.

ILSE. I'll water them every time I go by. I'll bring forget-me-nots from the brook and irises from home.

MARTHA. It'll become a marvel!

ILSE. I'd already crossed the bridge when I heard the bang.

MARTHA. Poor thing.

ILSE. And I know why, Martha.

MARTHA. Did he tell you something?

ILSE. He was on parralepipedon! Don't tell.

MARTHA. Cross my heart.

ILSE. Here's the pistol.

MARTHA. That's why they couldn't find it.

ILSE. I took it straight out of his hand when I went by.

MARTHA. Let's have it, Ilse! Let's have it, please!

ILSE. No, it's my keepsake.

MARTHA. Ilse, is it true he's down there with no head?

ILSE. He must have loaded it with water. His blood was

spattered round and round on the bulrushes. His brains were hanging all over the willows.

## SCENE THREE

HERR and FRAU GABOR.

FRAU GABOR. . . . They needed a scapegoat. The accusations

were getting louder and they couldn't wait for them to die

down. And because Meichior had the misfortune to cross those

pedants just at this moment, shall I, his mother, help the

hangmen to finish their work? God keep me from such a thing!

HERR GABOR. For fourteen years I've silently observed my

imaginative methods of rearing children. They contradicted my

own convictions. I have always lived by the conviction that a

child isn't a toy. A child has a right to our solemn seriousness.

But I told myself, if spirit and grace can replace serious

principles, then they might be preferable to serious principles.

I'm not blaming you, Fanny. But don't stand in my way when

I try to make amends for the wrong you and I have done the

boy.

FRAU GABOR. I'll stand in your way as long as there's a drop of

human blood in me! My child would be lost in a reformatory.

A natural criminal might be made better in such an institution.

I don't know. But a decent nature will be made criminal just as

a plant dies when it's taken from the light. I'm not aware of

any wrong. I thank God now, as I always have, for showing me

how to make my child decent and honest. What has he done

that's so terrible? It would never enter my head to make

excuses for him — but it's not his fault he's been hounded out

of school! And if it had been his fault he's certainly paid for

it! You may understand these things better than I do.

Theoretically you may be perfectly right. But I will not allow

my son to be brutally hounded to his death!

HERR GABOR. That doesn't depend on us, Fanny, that's the

risk that went with our happiness. He who's too weak falls by

the wayside. And in the end it's not the worst if the inevitable

comes on time. May heaven spare us that! Our duty now is to

strengthen the waverer, so long as reason shows us how. It's

not his fault they hounded him out of school. If they hadn't

hounded him out that wouldn't be his fault either! You're too



easy going. You see minor peccadillos when we are faced with fundamental defects of character. Women aren't called on to judge these things. Whoever can write what Melchior wrote must be contaminated in his innermost core. The marrow is effected. Even a nature only half-sound couldn't bring itself to that! None of us are saints, we all stray from the way. But his document is grounded in Principle. It doesn't suggest one accidental false step, it documents with terrifying clarity an openly cherished talent, a natural propensity, for the Immoral for the sake of the Immoral. It shows that rare spiritual corruption we lawyers call "moral insanity". Whether anything can be done about his condition, it's not for me to say. If we wish to preserve one glimmer of hope, and above all keep our consciences un sullied as the parents of the culprit, then we must act with resolution and determination. Don't let's quarrel anymore, Fanny! I know how hard this is for you. You worship him because he matches your own generous nature so well. Rise above yourself! For once act unselfishly in your relations with your son.

FRAU GABOR. O God — how can one fight against it! Only a man can talk like that. Only a man can be so blinded by the dead letter he can't see what's staring him in the face! I've handled Melchior responsibly and carefully from the beginning. Are we to blame for this coincidence? Tomorrow a tile could fall on your head and your friend comes — your father, and instead of tending your wounds he treads on you! I will not let my child be taken out and murdered in front of my eyes. That's what his mother's for! — I cannot understand it. It's beyond belief. What in the world has he written? Isn't it the clearest proof of his harmlessness, his silliness, his child-like innocence, that he *can* write something like that? You don't need to know much about people — you must be an utterly soulless bureaucrat or totally shrivelled up, to see moral corruption in that! Say what you like. When you put Melchior in a reformatory, I shall divorce you! And then I shall see if somewhere in the world I can't find help to save my son from destruction.

HERR GABOR. You will have to give in — if not today then tomorrow. It's not easy for any of us to discount our

misfortunes. I shall stand by you when your courage fails, I shall begrudge no effort or sacrifice to lighten your burden. I see the future so grey, so overcast — it only needs you to be lost to me now.

FRAU GABOR. I'll never see him again. I'll never see him again. He can't bear vulgarity. He can't live with filth. He'll lose all restraints — that terrible example is before his eyes! And if I saw him again — O God, God, that heart full of spring — that bright laughter — all, all — his young determination to fight for everything that's good and just — as bright and fresh as the morning sky — that boy I cherished as my highest good! Take me if his crime cries out for retribution! Take me! Do what you want with me! Let me bear the guilt! But keep your terrible hand away from my child.

HERR GABOR. He has offended!

FRAU GABOR. *He has not offended!*

HERR GABOR. *He has offended!* I would have given anything to spare your boundless love for him. This morning a woman came to me, like a ghost, hardly able to speak, with *this* letter in her hand — a letter to her fifteen year-old daughter. Out of silly curiosity she'd opened it — her daughter was not at home. In the letter Melchior explains to the fifteen year-old child that his conduct gives him no peace, he has wronged her etcetera etcetera. She is not to worry, even if she suspects consequences. He is already taking steps to find help, his expulsion makes that easier. The earlier wrong may yet lead to their happiness — and more of the same meaningless chatter.

FRAU GABOR. I don't believe it!

HERR GABOR. The letter is forged. It's an attack. Someone trying to use an expulsion that's already known to the whole town. I haven't yet spoken to the boy — but kindly look at the hand. Look at the writing.

FRAU GABOR. An unheard of, shameless infamy!

HERR GABOR. I fear so!

FRAU GABOR. No, no — never.

HERR GABOR. Then all the better for us. The woman stood wringing her hands and asking me what she should do. I told her not to let her fifteen-year-old daughter climb about in haylofts. As luck would have it she left the letter with me. If

we send Melchior away to another school, where he wouldn't even be under parental supervision, we'll have another incident within three weeks — another expulsion — his spring-like heart is already getting used to it. Tell me, Fanny, where shall I put the boy?

FRAU GABOR. In the reformatory.

HERR GABOR. The . . . ?

FRAU GABOR. Reformatory.

HERR GABOR. Above all, he'll find there what he was unjustly denied at home: iron discipline, principles and a moral force under which he must at all times subordinate himself. By the way, the reformatory isn't the chamber of horrors you imagine. It lays its main emphasis on developing Christian thinking and sensibility. The boy will finally learn there to put the good before the interesting, and to act not according to his nature but according to the rules. Half an hour ago I had a telegramme from my brother, which confirms the deposition of that woman. Melchior has confided in him and asked for money for their flight to England . . .

FRAU GABOR. (*covers her face*). God have mercy on us!

#### SCENE FOUR

Reformatory. A corridor.

DIETER, REINHOLD, RUPERT, HELMUT, GASTON and MELCHIOR.

DIETER. Here's a coin.

REINHOLD. What for?

DIETER. Drop it on the floor. Spread yourselves out. The one who hits it, keeps it.

RUPERT. Coming in, Melchior.

MELCHIOR. No thanks.

HELMUT. Git!

GASTON. He can't anymore. He's here for the rest cure.

MELCHIOR (*to himself*). It's not clever to stay out. They're all watching me. I'll join in — or I've had it. Being shut up makes them suicidal. If you break your neck it's all right! If you get

out it's all right! You can only win! Rupert looks friendly, he'll show me round. I'll teach him about the Bible — how Lot got drunk and slept with his daughters and offered them to other men, how David was a Peeping Tom who slept with a soldier's wife and warmed his bed with a beautiful virgin called Abishay the Shunnamite. He's got the unluckiest face in my squad.

RUPERT. Coming!

HELMUT. I'm coming too.

GASTON. Day after tomorrow if you're lucky!

HELMUT. Hold on! Now! Jesus — Jesus.

ALL. Altogether now! — Ten out of ten!

RUPERT. (*taking the coin*). Ta, very much.

HELMUT. That's mine, pig!

RUPERT. Animal!

HELMUT. They'll top you!

RUPERT (*bites bim in the face*). For that? (*Turns and runs away*.)

HELMUT (*chasing bim*). I'll kick your head off!

THE OTHERS (*chasing them*). Get him, after him! Get him! Get him! Get him!

MELCHIOR (*alone, turns to the window*). That's where the

lightning conductor goes down. You'd have to wrap a handkerchief round . . . When I think of her the blood goes to my head, and Moritz is like a chain round my feet. I'll try the newspapers. Become a hack. They pay by the hundred lines.

News, gossip, articles — ethics — psychology. You can't starve now! Soup kitchens, hostels. — This building is sixty feet high and the plaster's falling off . . . She hates me — I took her freedom away. Whatever I do now, it's still rape. But later on perhaps she'll . . . I must hope. The new moon in eight days. I'll grease the hinges. Find out who has the key. On Sunday night I'll have a fit in the chapel. I hope to God no one else is ill! I'll slip over the sill — swing — grab — but you must wrap a handkerchief round . . . Here comes the Grand Inquisitor. (*Goes off left*).

DR. PROCURUSTES comes on right with a LOCKSMITH.

PROCURUSTES. Undoubtedly the windows are on the fourth floor, and I've planted stinging nettles underneath. But what are

stinging nettles to degenerate? Last winter one of them climbed out of the skylight. We had all the fuss of fetching, carrying, interning . . .

LOCKSMITH. Would you like the grating in wrought iron? PROCRUSTES. Wrought iron — and since you can't build it into the wall, rivet it.

### SCENE FIVE

A bedroom.

FRAU BERGMANN, INA MÜLLER and DR. LEMONADE.  
WENDLA *in bed*.

DR. LEMONADE. How old are you actually?

WENDLA. Fourteen and a half.

DR. LEMONADE. I've prescribed purgative pills for fifteen years and in a large number of cases witnessed the most dazzling success. I place them above codliver oil and iron tonic. Start with three or four pills a day and increase the dosage just as fast as you can tolerate them. I advised Fräulein Elfriede Baroness von Witzleben to increase the dose by one pill every third day. The baroness misunderstood me and increased the dose by three pills every day. After barely three weeks the baroness could already proceed with her lady mother to an exclusive spa in the mountains. I excuse you from all fatiguing walks and special diets. But you must promise me, dear child, to keep moving and not be too shy to ask for food as soon as the desire for it returns. Then this wind round the heart will go away, and the headaches, the shivering, the dizziness — and our terrible indigestion. Only eight days after starting the cure Fräulein Elfriede Baroness von Witzleben could already eat a whole roast chicken with new boiled potatoes for breakfast.

FRAU BERGMANN. May I offer you a glass of wine, Doctor?

DR. LEMONADE. Thank you kindly, dear Frau Bergmann. My patients await me. Don't take it too much to heart. In a few weeks our charming little patient will once more be as fresh and lively as a sprite. Rest assured. Good day, Frau Bergmann. Good day, dear child. Good day, ladies. Good day.

FRAU BERGMANN goes to show bim out.

INA (*at the window*). The leaves on your plane-trees are changing colour. Can you see it from the bed? They come and go, a short glory, hardly worth being happy about. I must go too. Herr Müller's meeting me at the post office, and before that I have to go to the dressmaker. Mucki's getting his first trousers, and Karl's going to get a new jersey suit for the winter.

WENDLA. Sometimes I'm so happy — there's so much joy and the sunshine is so bright. I want to go out, and walk over the fields when it's dusk, and look for primroses and sit and dream by the river. And then this *tootbache* starts, and I think that tomorrow is the day I shall die. I feel hot and cold, everything goes dark, and the monster flutters in . . . Whenever I wake up mother's crying. O that hurts so much . . . I can't tell you, Ina. INA. Shall I lift your pillow?

FRAU BERGMANN comes back.

FRAU BERGMANN. He thinks the vomiting will stop and then it will be safe for you to get up. I think you should get up soon, too, Wendla.

INA. Perhaps next time I come to see you you'll be jumping round the house again. Bless you, mother. I really must go to the dressmaker. God bless you, Wendla, dear. (*Kisses her.*) Soon, soon better!

WENDLA. Thank you, Ina. Bring me some primroses next time you come. Goodbye. Say hello to the boys for me.

INA goes.

WENDLA. What did he say outside, mother?

FRAU BERGMANN. Nothing. He said Fräulein von Witzleben also tended to faint. Evidently it almost always happens with anemia.

WENDLA. Did he say I have anemia, mother?

FRAU BERGMANN. When your appetite returns you're to drink milk and eat fresh vegetables.

WENDLA. O mother, mother, I don't think I have anemia.

FRAU BERGMANN. You have anemia child. Be quiet, Wendla,

be quiet. You have anemia.  
 WENDLA. No, mother, no! I know it! I can feel it! I haven't got anemia. I've got dropsy.  
 FRAU BERGMANN. You have anemia. He said you have anemia. Be quiet, Wendla. It will get better.  
 WENDLA. It won't get better. I have dropsy. I'm going to die, mother. O mother, I'm going to die.  
 FRAU BERGMANN. You won't have to die, Wendla. You won't have to die . . . Merciful heaven, you won't have to die.  
 WENDLA. Then why d'you cry so much?  
 FRAU BERGMANN. You won't have to die, child! You haven't got dropsy. You have a baby, Wendla! You have a baby! O, why have you done this to me?  
 WENDLA. I haven't done anything to you . . .  
 FRAU BERGMANN. O don't keep lying, Wendla! I know everything. I couldn't say it before. Wendla, Wendla . . .  
 WENDLA. But it's just not possible, mother. I'm not even married.  
 FRAU BERGMANN. God in heaven — that's just it, you're not married! That's what's so terrible! Wendla, Wendla, Wendla, what have you done?  
 WENDLA. O God, I don't know anymore. We were lying in the hay — I've never loved anyone in the world except you, you, mother!  
 FRAU BERGMANN. My precious!  
 WENDLA. O mother, why didn't you tell me everything?  
 FRAU BERGMANN. Child, child, don't let's make each other more unhappy. Keep calm. Don't give up hope, my dear! Tell that to a fourteen year-old girl? No, I'd sooner have believed the sun could go out! I did nothing to you my dear mother hadn't done to me! O let us put our trust in the dear lord, Wendla. Let us hope in his mercy, and do our part. Look, so far nothing's happened. And if only we don't become timid now — God's love will not abandon us. *Be brave, be brave, Wendla* . . . Once before I sat with my hands in my lap and stared out of the window, and in the end everything turned out well — and now suddenly the world falls to pieces and my heart breaks . . . why are you shaking?  
 WENDLA. Someone knocked.  
 FRAU BERGMANN. I didn't hear anything, my precious. (*Goes*

*to the door and opens it.*)

WENDLA. O I heard it so clearly. Who's outside?  
 FRAU BERGMANN. No one. Mr. Schmidt's mother from Garden Street. You're just on time, Mrs. Schmidt.

### SCENE SIX

MEN and WOMEN *working in a billside vineyard.*

*The sun sets behind the mountains. The clear-toned notes of bells come up from the valley. HÄNSCHEN RILOW and ERNST RÖBEL loll in the dry grass at the top of the vineyard, under over-hanging rocks.*

ERNST. I've worked too hard.  
 HÄNSCHEN. We mustn't be sad. Time passes so quickly.  
 ERNST. The grapes hang there. You can't even reach out for them. And tomorrow they're crushed.  
 HÄNSCHEN. Being tired is as bad as being hungry.  
 ERNST. O no more.  
 HÄNSCHEN. That big one.  
 ERNST. I can't stretch.  
 HÄNSCHEN. I could bend the branch till it swings between our mouths. We needn't move. Just bite the grapes and let the branch swing back.  
 ERNST. You only have to make up your mind — and all your old energy gushes up.  
 HÄNSCHEN. And the flaming sky — the evening bells — I don't hope for much more out of life.  
 ERNST. Sometimes I already see myself as a dignified parson — a cheerful little housewife, big library, all sorts of honours and decorations. Six days shalt thou labour and on the seventh open your mouth. When you're out walking school-children greet you politely, and when you get home the coffee's steaming, there's home-made cake on the table, and the girls are bringing in the apples through the garden door. Can anything be better?  
 HÄNSCHEN. Half-shut eyelashes, half-open mouths, and Turkish pillows. I don't believe in the Sentimental. You know,

the old people wear dignified faces to hide their stupidity. Among themselves they call each other fools just as we do. I know it. When I'm a millionaire I'll erect a great monument to God. Think of the future as bread and milk and sugar. Some people drop it and howl, others stir it till they sweat. Why not just cream off the top? Or don't you think you can?

ERNST. Let's cream off the top.

HÄNSCHEN. And throw the rest to the chickens. I've already slipped my head out of so many nooses.

ERNST. Let's cream off the top. Why are you laughing?

HÄNSCHEN. You're off again!

ERNST. Someone's got to start!

HÄNSCHEN. In thirty years when we look back to this evening, I suppose it could seem incredibly beautiful.

ERNST. And now it just happens!

HÄNSCHEN. Why not?

ERNST. If I was on my own — I might even cry.

HÄNSCHEN. We mustn't be sad. (*Kisses his mouth.*)

ERNST (*kissing him*). When I left home I only meant to speak to you and then go back.

HÄNSCHEN. I was waiting for you. Virtue looks good but it only suits imposing figures.

ERNST. It's several sizes too big for us. I'd have been on edge if I hadn't met you. I love you, Hanschen, I've never loved anyone like this —

HÄNSCHEN. We mustn't be sad! Perhaps when we look back in thirty years we'll jeer — but now everything is beautiful.

Glowing mountains, grapes hanging down in our mouths, the evening wind stroking the rocks like a little kitten playing . . .

## SCENE SEVEN

Bright November night.

*Dry leaves rustle on bushes and trees. Torn clouds chase each other over the moon. MELCHIOR climbs over the churchyard wall.*

MELCHIOR (*jumping down inside*). That pack won't follow me

here. While they search the brothels, I'll get my breath and sort myself out . . . Jacket in shreds, pockets empty. I couldn't defend myself against a child. I'll keep moving through the woods during the day . . . I knocked a cross down — the frost's killed all the flowers anyway. Everything's bare! The kingdom of death!

This is worse than climbing out of the skylight! Like falling and falling and falling into nothing! I wasn't prepared for this! I should have stayed where I was!

Why her and not me? Why not the guilty? Providence or a riddle? I'd break stones, starve — how can I even walk upright?

One crime leads to another: I'll sink in a swamp. I haven't got the strength to finish it . . . It was not wrong! It was not wrong! It was not wrong!

No one's ever walked over graves and been so full of envy. No — I wouldn't have the courage! O, if I could go mad — tonight! The new ones are over there. The wind whistles on each grave-stone in a different key — listen, the voices of pain! The wreaths are rotting on the marble crosses. They fall to pieces and jog up and down on their long strings. There's a forest of scarecrows over the graves. Taller than houses. Even the devil would run away. The gold letters flash so coldly. That's a willow tree groaning. Its branches are like a giant's fingers feeling over the epitaphs. A stone angel. A tablet.

That cloud's thrown its shadow on everything. How it races and howls! Like an army rushing up to the east! And no stars. There's evergreen round this one. Evergreen? A girl.

Here rests in God

Wendla Bergmann

Born 5 May 1878

Died of anemia

27 October 1892

Blessed are the pure in heart

And I murdered her. I am her murderer. Now there's nothing. I mustn't cry here. I must go away. I must go.

MORITZ STIEFEL, *with his head under his arm, comes stamping across the graves.*

MORITZ. One moment, Melchior! This chance won't come again

so soon. You can't know how much depends on time and place . . .

MELCHIOR. Where have you come from?

MORITZ. Over there by the wall. You knocked my cross down.

I lie by the wall. Give me your hand, Melchior.

MELCHIOR. You are *not* Moritz Stiefel!

MORITZ. Give me your hand. I know you'll be grateful. It will never be so easy for you again. This is a very lucky meeting. I came up especially . . .

MELCHIOR. Don't you sleep?

MORITZ. Not what you call sleep. We sit on church towers, on

the roofs of houses — wherever we like . . .

MELCHIOR. At peace?

MORITZ. For pleasure. We ride on the wooden horses at fairs,

and float round empty churches. We fly over great assemblies of people, over scenes of disaster, gardens, festivals. We crouch in the corners of people's houses, and wait by their beds. Give me your hand. The dead are alone, we don't go with each other, but we see and hear everything that happens in the world. We know that it's all vanity, the things men do and strive after, and we laugh at it.

MELCHIOR. What help is that?

MORITZ. What use is help? Nothing touches us now, for good or bad. We stand high above earthly things — each alone for himself. We don't go with each other because it's boring. None of us has anything it would hurt him to lose. We are infinitely above all despair and rejoicing. We are content with ourselves, and that is all. We despise the living so much we can hardly pity them. They amuse us with their pretensions — and if they will live they don't deserve to be pitied. We smile at their tragedies — each to himself — and watch. Give me your hand! When you give me your hand you'll fall over laughing at what happens then —

MELCHIOR. Doesn't that disgust you?

MORITZ. We stand too high for that. We smile! At my funeral I stood among the mourners. I quite enjoyed myself. That is serenity, Melchior, the sublime! I howled more than anyone and tottered to the wall holding my belly with laughing. Our serenity is simply the attitude that allows us to swallow the

dregs. They laughed at me too, before I raised myself up to their height.

MELCHIOR. I don't want to laugh at myself.

MORITZ. The living are the last who deserve to be pitied! I admit I'd never have thought it. But now I don't know how men can be so naïve. I see through the fraud so clearly and no more doubts are left. How can you still hesitate, Melchior? Give me your hand! In less time than it takes to twist a chicken's neck you'll rise high over yourself. Your life is a sin of omission — MELCHIOR. Can you forget?

MORITZ. We can do anything. Give me your hand! We can sorrow for youth because it takes its anxieties for ideals, and old age because stoical resolution breaks its heart. We see the emperor quake with fear at the street ballad, and the clown at the last trumpet. We see through the comedian's make-up, and watch the poet put on his mask in the dark. We look at the satisfied in all their destitution, and the capitalists toiling and groaning. We watch lovers blush before each other, when they already know they'll betray and be betrayed. We see parents bringing children into the world to be able to shout at them: how lucky you are to have such parents — and we see the children go off and do the same. We know about the innocent in their lonely passions, and we hear Schiller in the mouth of a ten-minute whore. We see God and the devil exposing themselves to ridicule in front of each other, and hold in us the unshakable conviction that they're both drunk . . . Peace, rest, Melchior! Just give me your little finger. You can be as white as snow before this moment comes again.

MELCHIOR. If I throw in my lot with you, Moritz, I do it out of self-disgust. I'm a pariah. Everything that gave me courage is in the grave. I'm incapable of any ideals — and I can see nothing, nothing that can stand in my path to the bottom. I think I'm the most disgusting creature in creation . . .

MORITZ. Why hesitate?

A MASKED MAN *comes in.*

MASKED MAN (*to MELCHIOR*). You're shivering with hunger. You're certainly in no state to decide anything. (*To MORITZ*). Get out!

MELCHIOR. Who are you?

MASKED MAN. That will be made clear. (*To MORITZ.*) Hop it! What are you up to? Why aren't you wearing your head?

MORITZ. I shot myself.

MASKED MAN. Then stay where you belong. You're finished! Don't pester us with the stench of your grave. Incredible — look at your fingers! Filthy brute! It's already rotting.

MORITZ. Please, don't send me away —

MELCHIOR. Who are you?

MORITZ. Don't send me away. Please. Let me stay with you a

little longer. I won't contradict you. It's terrible under there.

MASKED MAN. Then why all this bragging about serenity and

the sublime? You know very well that's humbug — sour grapes.

Why must you lie so persistently? — you — you wraith! If it means so much to you, stay as far as I'm concerned. But stop all this huffing and puffing, young man — and please don't stick your rotting thumb in my pie!

MELCHIOR. Will you tell me who you are?

MASKED MAN. No. I'll make you a proposition: put yourself in my hands. For a start, I'll do something about your present mess.

MELCHIOR. You're my father!

MASKED MAN. Wouldn't you know your dear father from his voice?

MELCHIOR. No.

MASKED MAN. Your father is at this moment seeking comfort in the strong arms of your mother. I'll open the world for you. Your temporary despair is caused by your miserable condition. With a hot dinner inside you'll joke about it.

MELCHIOR. (*to himself.*) Only *one* of them can be the devil! (*Aloud.*) After the things I've done, a hot dinner won't give me peace again!

MASKED MAN. It depends on the dinner. One thing I will tell you, your little girl would have given birth marvellously. She was built ideally. Unfortunately, she was put down — entirely by Mother Schmidt's abortion methods. I'll take you out into the world. I'll give you the chance to widen your horizon in astonishing ways. I'll introduce you to every single interesting thing in the world.

MELCHIOR. Who are you? Who are you? I can't put myself in the hands of someone I don't know!

MASKED MAN. You only learn to know me *by* putting yourself in my hands.

MELCHIOR. Is that true?

MASKED MAN. It's a fact. And by the way, you have no choice.

MELCHIOR. I can give my hand to my friend whenever I like.

MASKED MAN. Your friend is a charlatan. No one smiles while

he's still got a penny to spend in his pocket. The sublime

humorist is the most miserable, pitiful creature in creation.

MELCHIOR. The humorist can be what he likes! Tell me who

you are, or I'll give him my hand.

MASKED MAN. Now?

MORITZ. He's right, Melchior. I was trying it on. Take his invitation, and get everything you can out of him. It doesn't

matter how well he's masked — at least he's *something!*

MELCHIOR. Do you believe in God?

MASKED MAN. Depends.

MELCHIOR. Well, tell me who invented gunpowder.

MASKED MAN. Berthold Schwarz — a Franciscan monk at

Freiburg in Breisgau about 1330.

MORITZ. What wouldn't I give if he hadn't!

MASKED MAN. You'd only have hanged yourself.

MELCHIOR. What are your views on morality?

MASKED MAN. Son — am I a schoolboy?

MELCHIOR. How do I know what you are!

MORITZ. Don't quarrel. Please, don't quarrel. What's the use of that? Why sit here in the churchyard — two living and one

dead — at two o'clock in the morning, if all we can do is

quarrel like drunks? It will be a pleasure for me to be present

at these discussions. If you want to quarrel, I'll take my head

and go.

MELCHIOR. You're still the same old drag!

MASKED MAN. The ghost isn't wrong. One should never lose

one's dignity. By morality I understand the real product of

two imaginary forces. The imaginary forces are *should* and

*would*. The product is called Morality, and no one is allowed to

forget that's real.

MORITZ. If only you told me that before! My morality hounded

me to death. I used the murder weapon because of my dear parents. "Honour thy father and mother and thy days shall be long." The Bible certainly came unstuck over me.

**MASKED MAN.** You shouldn't be carried away by appearances, my boy. Your parents would no more have died than you needed to. Looked at clinically, they'd have raged and stormed simply for the good of their health.

**MELCHIOR.** That might be true. But I can certainly tell you that if I'd given my hand to Moritz just now, sir, that would have been purely and simply because of my morality!

**MASKED MAN.** And that's exactly where you're not Moritz!

**MORITZ.** I don't think there's much difference — not so much that you shouldn't have been allowed to pop up for me. I walked slowly enough along that alder plantation with the pistol in my pocket.

**MASKED MAN.** Then you don't remember me? Even in your last moments you were still standing undecided between life and death. But I think this is really not the best place to prolong such a profound discussion.

**MORITZ.** It's certainly getting chilly. They dressed me up in my Sunday suit but they didn't put anything on underneath.

**MELCHIOR.** Goodbye, Moritz. I don't know where this man will take me. But *he* is alive . . .

**MORITZ.** Don't hold it against me for trying to kill you, Melchior. It was only my old devotion. I'd spend a whole lifetime of tears and misery, if I could walk by your side again.

**MASKED MAN.** In the end everyone has his part — *you* the comforting knowledge of having nothing — *you* the tormenting doubt of everything. Goodbye.

**MELCHIOR.** Goodbye, Moritz. Thank you for coming back once more. The happy, good times we had together in those fourteen years! I promise you whatever happens in the years to come, if I change ten times, and go up or down, I'll never forget you . . .

**MORITZ.** Thank you, thank you. You were my only friend.

**MELCHIOR.** . . . and one day if I'm old and my hair's grey, perhaps then you'll be closer to me again than all the people who share my life.

**MORITZ.** Thank you. Good luck on the journey, gentlemen.

Don't let me keep you any longer.

**MASKED MAN.** Come on, young man. (*He takes MELCHIOR's arm and disappears with him over the graves.*)

**MORITZ (alone).** I sit here with my head in my arm. The moon covers its face, the veil falls away, and it doesn't look any wiser. So I go back to my place. I straighten my cross after that clumsy idiot's kicked it over, and when everything's in order I lie down on my back again, warm myself in my rotting decay and smile.