

Spring Awakening
„A Children's Tragedy“

By

Frank Wedekind

Translated by Daisy Ingrey

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CHARACTER LIST:

MELCHIOR GABOR
 MR GABOR, his father
 ANNA GABOR, his mother
 WENDLA BERGMANN
 MRS BERGMANN, her mother
 INA MÜLLER, Wendla's married sister
 MORITZ STIEFEL
 MR STIEFEL, his father

Students at the high school:

OTTO
 ROBERT
 GEORGE ZIRSCHNITZ
 ERNST RÖBEL
 LITTLE HANS RILOW
 LÄMMERMEIER
 MARTHA BESSEL
 THEA

ILSE, a model

Staff at the high school:

HEADMASTER
 PROFESSOR TONGUE-TIED
 PROFESSOR PERNICKETY
 PROFESSOR GROUCH
 PROFESSOR GUT-BUCKET
 JANITOR

PASTOR

2X RELATIVES OF THE STIEFEL FAMILY

Inmates of the correction facility:

DIETHELM
 REINHOLD
 RUPERT
 HELMUT
 GASTON

WARDEN

LOCKSMITH

DOCTOR

THE MASKED MAN

Act One

Scene One

Living room.

WENDLA: Why did you make my dress so long, Mama?

MRS BERGMANN: You're going to be fourteen today!

WENDLA: If I had known you were going to make my dress this long, then I wouldn't want to turn fourteen in the first place.

MRS BERGMANN: The dress isn't too long, Wendla. What do you want me to say? What am I supposed to do, when my child grows four inches taller every spring? Now that you're a grown girl, you can't wander around in princess dresses anymore.

WENDLA: My princess dress suits me better than this stupid one - Please let me wear it again Mama! Just for the summer. Doesn't matter if I'm turning fourteen or fifteen, this sackcloth will still fit me. - Let's leave it until my next birthday; if I wear it now I'll only trip over the hem.

MRS BERGMANN: I don't know what to say. I want you to stay this age as well, child, exactly as you are. Other girls your age are stocky and plump. You're the opposite. - Who knows what you'll be like, when the others have grown.

WENDLA: Who knows, maybe I won't even be at all.

MRS BERGMANN: Child, child, how do you think of such things?

WENDLA: Don't, my dear Mama; don't be sad!

MRS BERGMANN: *(kissing her)* My sweetheart!

WENDLA: I get these nights when I just can't fall asleep. I'm not really that sad, and I know that once I fall asleep all will be better. Is it bad, Mama, to think about such things?

MRS BERGMANN: Go and hang this sackcloth in the wardrobe then! Stay in your princess dress then!- I'll have to sew another flounce under it when I have time.

WENDLA: *(hanging the dress in the wardrobe)* No!

MRS BERGMANN: I don't want you catching cold!- That dress used to be the perfect size, but...

WENDLA: Now that summer is coming? Mama, I'm not going to catch my death of cold just because my knees are on show! Who would be so stupid? As a child you don't even get cold, at the very least not in your legs. Would it be better, Mama, if I was too hot? Say thank you to your dear God that your little darling won't come to you, having ripped off the sleeves of her dresses and wearing no shoes and stockings! Don't tell me off, Mummy! Nobody can even see it.

Scene Two

Sunday evening.

MELCHIOR: This is boring. I give up.

OTTO: Then all the rest of us have to stop, as well! Do you have homework to do, Melchior?

MELCHIOR: You guys can keep playing!

MORITZ: Where are you going?

MELCHIOR: For a walk.

GEORGE: It's getting dark!

ROBERT: Do you already have homework to do?

MELCHIOR: Why shouldn't I go for a walk in the dark?

ERNST: Central America!- Ludwig the fifteenth! Sixty verses of Homer!- Equations to solve!

MELCHIOR: Bloody homework.

GEORGE: If only we didn't have the Latin test tomorrow.

MELCHIOR: This stupid homework, always on my mind.

OTTO: I'm going home.

GEORGE: Me too, homework to do.

ERNST: Me too, me too.

ROBERT: Goodnight, Melchior.

MELCHIOR: Sleep well!

(All leave aside from Moritz and Melchior.)

MELCHIOR: Do you ever wonder, why we're actually here on this planet?

MORITZ: -Why do we even go to school? - We go to school, so that we can be examined. - And why do they examine us? - So we can fail. - Seven have to fail, because the class can only take sixty.- I've been feeling so out of it since Christmas... what the hell, if it weren't for Papa I would pack up my shit and escape to America.

MELCHIOR: Let's talk about something else.

(They walk.)

MORITZ: Do you see the black cat over there?

MELCHIOR: Do you believe in omens?

MORITZ: I don't really know. - The cat just came over here. No reason.

MELCHIOR: Let's sit down under this tree.

MORITZ: It's getting so dark that you can't see your hand in front of you. Where are you, Melchior? - Don't you think, Melchi, that the feeling of shame in people is only a product of their education?

MELCHIOR: I was actually thinking about that the other day. It seems to me that it is deeply rooted in human nature. Think about it, imagine if you had to undress in front of your best friend. You wouldn't do it if he didn't.- It's more or less a thing of fashion.

MORITZ: I've already thought, that when I have children, boys and girls, I'll let them occupy the same room from early on, if possible let them sleep together in the same bed. I would let them help each other dress and undress in the mornings and evenings. In the hot weather, the boys would be the same as the girls and wear nothing all day long aside from a short, white wool shirt. - In my opinion, if they grow up this way, they'll be less likely to rebel later on, unlike us who grew up with so many rules.

MELCHIOR: I think so, Moritz!- The question is, what would be done if the girls got pregnant?

MORITZ: How could they get pregnant?!

MELCHIOR: I believe in instinct, in this case. I believe, for example, that if you brought up a male and a female cat together, and kept both away from the outside world- so that they were left entirely to their own devices- that the female cat would become pregnant sooner or later, even if she or the male cat had nobody to open their eyes for example.

MORITZ: That might happen with animals...

MELCHIOR: But I think the same would happen with human beings! I ask you, Moritz, if your boys and your girls would sleep in the same bed, and then unexpectedly the first emotion of manhood would come to them- what do you expect? I would make a bet with anyone..

MORITZ: You may be right.- But anyhow..

MELCHIOR: And with your girls when they reach the right age the same thing would happen! One can't judge the same with the boys as with the girls... but in any case it would be assumed..

MORITZ: Can I ask you a question?

MELCHIOR: Go for it.

MORITZ: You'll give me an honest answer?

MELCHIOR: Of course!

MORITZ: Truthfully?!

MELCHIOR: I swear. - So, Moritz?

MORITZ: Have you done the homework already?

MELCHIOR: Just say what you want to say! No one can see or hear us here.

MORITZ: Of course my children must work during the day, in the yard and the garden, or find some fun in games, so that they know what it means to work hard. They must ride, do gymnastics, climb and above anything not sleep so well as we do. We are so weakened.- I believe, you don't dream at all when you sleep so deeply.

MELCHIOR: I put my folding bed behind the oven and I'm going to sleep until autumn in my hammock. In the past winters, I dreamt once that I beat our dog so hard until he could no longer move.- That was the worst thing, I've ever dreamt.- Why are you looking at me so weirdly?

MORITZ: Have you already experienced it?

MELCHIOR: What?

MORITZ: How do you say it?

MELCHIOR: Manly emotion?

MORITZ: Mhmm.

MELCHIOR: - Of course!

MORITZ: Me too.

MELCHIOR: I've known it for a long while! - Nearly a year.

MORITZ: I was shocked out of my skin.

MELCHIOR: Did you dream it?

MORITZ: Only for a little while... I dreamt of a teacher wearing light blue tights, walking up to her desk- I only saw them for an instant.

MELCHIOR: George Zirschnitz dreamt of his mother.

MORITZ: Did he tell you that?

MELCHIOR: Out there on the hangman's bridge!

MORITZ: If only you knew, what I've been through since that night!

MELCHIOR: Were you feeling guilty?

MORITZ: Feeling guilty??- Fear of death!

MELCHIOR: Oh Lord...

MORITZ: I thought I was incurable. I thought I was suffering from some incurable disease. Finally I became calm enough to write everything down. Yes, yes, mate, the past three weeks were hell for me.

MELCHIOR: At the time, I was more or less prepared for it. I was just a bit embarrassed, that's all.

MORITZ: And you're nearly a year younger than me!

MELCHIOR: I wouldn't think too much about that, Moritz. All my experiences afterwards told me that for the first appearance of this *thing* there is no specific age group. You know Lämmermeier with the straw gold hair and the hooked nose? He's three years older than I am. Little Hans Rilow says that now, he only dreams of tarts and apricot preserves.

MORITZ: But, how can Little Hans Rilow know that?!

MELCHIOR: He asked him.

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

MELCHIOR: But you asked me.

MORITZ: God knows, yes! I don't remember ever wanting this kind of excitement so badly. Why couldn't I have been left in peaceful ignorance? My poor parents could have had hundreds of better children. I was brought into this world, I don't know how, and now I feel as if I owe my parents an apology.- Have you never also wondered, Melchior, about how we were actually brought into this world?

MELCHIOR: You don't know how, Moritz?

MORITZ: How should I know?- I see how the hens lay eggs, and I heard that my mother carried me in her womb. But is that enough?! Now I can barely speak to a girl, without thinking of something- something disgusting-, and- I swear to you Melchior- I don't know.

MELCHIOR: I will tell you everything. I have learnt it partly from books, partly from illustrations, partly from observations in nature. You will be surprised; it made me an atheist. I already told it to George Zirschnitz! He wanted to tell little Hans Rilow, but he already learnt it from his governess when he was younger.

MORITZ: I read the encyclopaedia from A to Z. Words- nothing but words on words! Not a single simple explanation. Oh, this feeling of shame! What good to me is a shitty encyclopaedia that doesn't answer the most important question in life?

MELCHIOR: Have you ever seen two dogs walking across the street?

MORITZ: No!- Please don't tell me anything yet, Melchior. I still have Central America and Ludwig the Fifteenth to do. And then the sixty verses of Homer, the equations, the Latin essay- I will fail in all of them tomorrow.

MELCHIOR: Come back to mine. In three quarters of an hour I'll be done with the Homer, the equations and the two essays. I'll put some stupid mistakes in yours, and then it's done. Mama will make us some lemonade, and we can chat comfortably about reproduction.

MORITZ: I cannot. - I can't chat comfortably about reproduction! If you want to do me a favour, give me the instructions in writing. Write down what you know. Write it as concise and clear as possible and hide it between my books during our sport lesson tomorrow. I'll take it home, without knowing that I have it. Then I'll find it again unexpectedly. I won't be able to avoid it, to skim through it quickly with tired eyes... if it's necessary, you can add some individual drawings in the margin.

MELCHIOR: You're like a girl.- Whatever you want! For me, it's an interesting task. - A question, Moritz.

MORITZ: Hm?

MELCHIOR: Have you ever seen a girl before?

MORITZ: Yes!

MELCHIOR: But all of her?

MORITZ: *Everything.*

MELCHIOR: So have I!- Then we won't need any illustrations.

MORITZ: During the shooting festival, in Leilich's anatomical museum! - She was beautiful as the light of day and- so lifelike!

MELCHIOR: I was in Frankfurt last summer with Mama- are you leaving already, Moritz?

MORITZ: Homework to do. - Goodnight.

MELCHIOR: Goodbye.

Scene Three

THEA, WENDLA and MARTHA are walking arm in arm along the street.

MARTHA: It's so cold, my hands are frozen!

WENDLA: Let's go out there to the bridge. Ilse says that the river is full of bushes and trees. The boys have built a raft. Melchi Gabor nearly drowned yesterday.

THEA: Your plait's coming undone, Martha; your plait's coming undone!

MARTHA: Ugh- let it come undone. It annoys me day and night. I can't wear my hair short like you, I can't wear it loose like Wendla, can't wear ponytails either, and at home I always have to have my hair up, all because of my aunt!

WENDLA: I'll bring a pair of scissors to religion class tomorrow. During the "Blessed are they who do not stray" prayer, I'll chop it off.

MARTHA: For God's sake, Wendla! Papa would beat me black and blue, and Mama would lock me up in the coal cellar for three nights.

WENDLA: What does he hit you with, Martha?

MARTHA: Sometimes I think that they wouldn't notice if they didn't have such an ill-conditioned brat like me.

THEA: Why?

MARTHA: Have you ever been allowed to thread a blue ribbon through the top of your chemise?

THEA: A pink ribbon! Mama says, pink suits my dark eyes.

MARTHA: Blue suits me completely!- Mama pulled me out of bed by my hair when she saw it. I fell on my knees on the floor.

WENDLA: If I were you, I would have ran away long ago.

MARTHA: „So that’s what you’re up to!“ She said. „We’ll see about that my girl!“ But they will soon see, oh they will soon see! At least I won’t be able to blame my mother for once..

THEA: Well I never!

MARTHA: What do you think think Mama meant with that, Thea?

THEA: I don’t know.- Do you, Wendla?

WEDNLA: I would have simply asked her.

MARTHA: I lay on the ground and screamed and wailed. Then Papa came. Rip- he tore off my nightdress and shoved me out into the street. „There you are!“ He said. „Why don’t you go into the street like that?“

WENDLA: But that’s not true, Martha.

MARTHA: It’s true, I froze. I was locked up. They made me sleep in a sack for the whole night.

THEA: I could never sleep in a sack.

WENDLA: I wish I could take your place and sleep in a sack for you, once.

MARTHA: If it wasn’t for the beatings.

THEA: But wouldn’t you suffocate?

MARTHA: Your head stays free. It’s tied underneath your chin.

THEA: And then they beat you?

MARTHA: No. Only when there is a special occasion.

WENDLA: What do they beat you with, then, Martha?

MARTHA: Ah, what. With anything. Does your mother think it’s vulgar, to snack on a piece of bread in bed?

WENDLA: No, no.

MARTHA: I always think that they enjoy it, deep down. If I ever have children, I would let them grow like the weeds in our garden. No one worries about them, and they grow so high, so thick, whilst the roses that everyone fusses about grow weaker and weaker every summer.

THEA: If I ever have children, I'd dress them all in pink. Pink hats, pink dresses, pink clothes. Only the tights, the tights would be black as night. When I would go out for a walk, I would let them walk in front of me. What about you, Wendla?

WENDLA: How do you know if you'll have any?

THEA: Why wouldn't we have any?

MARTHA: Aunt Euphemia doesn't have any, actually.

THEA: Silly goose!- Because she isn't married.

WENDLA: Aunt Bauer was married three times and still doesn't have any.

MARTHA: If you would have children, Wendla, what would you prefer, boys or girls?

WENDLA: Boys! Boys!

THEA: Me too!

MARTHA: Me too. I'd prefer twenty boys over three girls.

THEA: Girls are boring.

MARTHA: If I wasn't already a girl, I wouldn't know.

WENDLA: That's a matter of taste, Martha. I thank my lucky stars everyday that I'm a girl. I wouldn't change places with a king's son. That's why I only want boys!

THEA: That's so stupid, Wendla!

WENDLA: But, wouldn't it be a thousand times better to be loved by a man than by a girl?

THEA: So you're saying that the Forest Inspector loves Melitta more than she does him?

WENDLA: Exactly! The Forest Inspector has pride. He's proud to be Forest Inspector, because that's all he has. He has nothing else to give so he gives his love freely. Melitta is happy because he gives her ten thousand times more love than if she were alone.

MARTHA: Are you not proud of yourself, Wendla?

WENDLA: That would be stupid.

MARTHA: I'd be proud of myself, if I looked like you.

THEA: Just look, how she walks, how she holds herself, Martha! If that isn't pride!

WENDLA: Why not? I'm so happy to be a girl. If I wasn't a girl, I would kill myself so that the next time...

(Melchior passes by and greets them).

THEA: He has a pretty little air about him.

MARTHA: He makes me think of young Alexander, on his way to school with Aristotle!

THEA: You and your bloody Greek history! I only know about how Socrates lay in the barrel as Alexander sold him that thing about the donkey's shadow.

WENDLA: I think he's the third best in class.

THEA: Professor Pernickety says, that if he wanted, he could be top of the class.

MARTHA: He has a nice forehead, but his friend always looks so deep in thought and sad.

THEA: Moritz Stiefel? - He's stupid!

MARTHA: I never had a problem with him.

THEA: He embarrasses whoever he's with. At the fête at Rilows he gave me some chocolates. Only think, Wendla, they were so soft and warm. Isn't that weird...? He said they'd been in his trouser pockets for too long.

WENDLA: You know, Melchior Gabor told me once, that he doesn't believe in anything- not in God, not in the afterlife, not in anything in this world.

Scene Four

Carpark outside the high school.- MELCHIOR, OTTO, GEORGE, ROBERT, LITTLE HANS RILOW, LÄMMERMEIER.

MELCHIOR: Can anyone tell me where the hell Moritz Stiefel is?

GEORGE: He's in deep shit, deep shit.

LÄMMERMEIER: God knows, I wouldn't want to be him right now!

ROBERT: So stupid! So dumb!

MELCHIOR: What, what, what do you guys know?

GEORGE: What do we know? Ok, I'll tell you...

LÄMMERMEIER: I wish I hadn't said anything!

OTTO: Me neither-

MELCHIOR: If you lot don't tell me now...

ROBERT: Alright, the long and short of it is, Moritz Stiefel broke into the headmaster's office.

MELCHIOR: The headmaster's office..?

OTTO: Into the headmaster's office. Right after the Latin lesson.

GEORGE: He was the last to leave; he hung back.

LÄMMERMEIER: When I turned the corner of the corridor, I saw him opening the door.

MELCHIOR: Fuck's sake!

LÄMMERMEIER: He's in deep shit!

GEORGE: Maybe the headmaster didn't take the key out.

ROBERT: Or Moritz Stiefel carries a bloody skeleton key.

OTTO: I could see him doing that.

LÄMMERMEIER: If he's lucky, he'll only get detention.

ROBERT: Or a demerit mark!

OTTO: If he doesn't get expelled.

LITTLE HANS RILOW: There he is!

MELCHIOR: White as a sheet.

(MORITZ comes in extreme excitement).

LÄMMERMEIER: Moritz, Moritz, what have you done!

MORITZ: - Nothing- nothing-

ROBERT: You're sweating!

MORITZ: From happiness, from bliss, my heart rejoices!

OTTO: You got caught?!

MORITZ: I passed!- Melchior, I passed!- Oh, now the world can carry on!- I passed!- Who would have thought, that I would have passed?- I wouldn't! I read it twenty times!- I couldn't believe it, but oh God, it's true! It's true! I passed!- (*Laughing*) I don't know- I feel so strange, the world is spinning... Melchior, Melchior, do you know what I've been through?

LITTLE HANS RILOW: Congratulations, Moritz. - Just be happy that you got away with it!

MORITZ: You don't know, Hans, what was at risk here. For three weeks I've been avoiding that door like the plague. And then I saw today, that it was ajar. I believe that even if someone had offered me a million euros, nothing, nothing could have stopped me. I was standing in the middle of the room, I opened the document, looked over the pages, found, and the whole time... I was shivering..

MELCHIOR: The whole time?!

MORITZ: The whole time the door behind me was wide open. How I left the room, how I managed to get downstairs, I don't know.

LITTLE HANS RILOW: Did Ernst Röbel pass as well?

MORITZ: Oh certainly, little Hans, certainly! Ernst Röbel also passed.

ROBERT: You can't have read it right. Counting the idiot, us, you and myself, that makes sixty one; and the class can't take more than sixty.

MORITZ: I definitely read it right. Ernst Röbel had just a high mark as me, both of us need to work harder. During the first term next year, we'll see which of us will fail. God knows, I'm not so afraid of myself anymore. I've freaked myself out too much for that.

OTTO: I bet five euros that you'll fail.

MORITZ: Shut up, there's nothing to bet on. Lord, I'm going to work so hard from today onwards! Now I'll tell you, whether you believe it or not, it's all the same, I, I know, how true it is. If I wouldn't have passed, I would have shot myself.

ROBERT: Coward!

GEORGE: Wanker!

OTTO: I'd like to see you shoot yourself!

LÄMMERMEIER: What you need is a good punch in the face.

MELCHIOR: (*slaps him*). - Come on, Moritz! Let's go to the cabin in the woods.

GEORGE: Do you believe his bullshit?

MELCHIOR: Who cares? Let them talk, Moritz! Come on, let's get out of here.

(Professors PERNICKETY and GUT-BUCKET pass by.)

PROFESSOR PERNICKETY: It's inexplicable to me, Professor, why my very best student could be attracted to the worst.

PROFESSOR GUT-BUCKET: Me too, Professor.

Scene Five

A sunny afternoon- MELCHIOR and WENDLA meet each other in the forest.

MELCHIOR: Is that you, Wendla? What are you doing out here all alone? For three hours I've been wandering from one side of the wood to the other without seeing anyone, and then I run into you!

WENDLA: Yup, it's me.

MELCHIOR: If I didn't know you, I would have said you were a dryad who fell from the branches.

WENDLA: No, no, it's me, Wendla Bergmann. What are you doing here?

MELCHIOR: I just followed my thoughts.

WENDLA: I'm looking for Waldmeister.* Mama wants to make tea. At first she wanted to come with me, but then at the last minute Aunt Bauer dropped round, and she doesn't like walking. So I came by myself.

MELCHIOR: Did you find the Waldmeister already?

WENDLA: A whole basket full. Over there under the beech trees there's so much of it. Now I'm trying to get out of the forest, but I seem to have lost the path. Could you possibly tell me what the time is?

MELCHIOR: Just gone half three. When are you supposed to be home?

WENDLA: I thought it was later. I sat for a long time daydreaming by the stream. Time passed by so quickly, I thought it was already evening.

* An aromatic herb, used for preparing a special spring tea.

MELCHIOR: If no one's expecting you, let's linger here a little longer. Under the oak tree over there is my favourite place. It's hypnotising looking up at the sky from there. And the ground is still warm from the morning sun. -For a few weeks I've been meaning to ask you something, Wendla.

WENDLA: I have to be home before five.

MELCHIOR: We'll go together then. I'll take your basket and if we beat our way through these bushes, in ten minutes we'll be at the bridge! When you lie like this, with your head in your hands, you think the strangest thoughts...

(Both lie down under the oak.)

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

MELCHIOR: I heard, Wendla, that you're often helping out poorer people. You bring them food, clothes, and money. Do you do this of your own accord, or does your mum send you?

WENDLA: Usually Mummy sends me. It's the poor council families, that have so many children. Often the father can't find any work, and these children freeze and starve. We had a lot of things that were lying around in cupboards and wardrobes that we didn't use anymore. Why do you want to know?

MELCHIOR: When your mum sends you, do you like going or not?

WENDLA: Of course I like going! How can you ask that?

MELCHIOR: But the children are so dirty, all the women are sick, and their flats are full of rubbish, the men hate you, because you don't work...

WENDLA: That's not true, Melchior. And even if it was, I'd still go!

MELCHIOR: Why, even then?

WENDLA: I would still go, even then. It makes me so happy to be able to help them.

MELCHIOR: So you go to see these poor people because it makes you happy?

WENDLA: I go to see them because they are poor.

MELCHIOR: But if it didn't make you happy, would you still go?

WENDLA: I can't help that it makes me happy?

MELCHIOR: And for that you'll end up in heaven. So it's true then, what's been on my mind for the past month. Can the simple man help it, that it doesn't bring him joy to go and see dirty, sick children?

WENDLA: I'm sure it would make you very happy!

MELCHIOR: But he'll die an eternal death for it! I'll write a paper about it and give it to the Pastor. All he does is chat shit about sacrifice!- If he can't tell me, I'm not going to Sunday school and won't let myself get confirmed.

WENDLA: Why are you causing your parents such grief! Go and get confirmed, it doesn't cost you anything. If it weren't for our stupid white dresses and your long trousers you might be more into it.

MELCHIOR: There's no sacrifice! There's no selfishness! I see the good people rejoicing in their hearts, I see the bad people in pain, I see you, Wendla Bergmann, shaking your head and laughing. What were you thinking of, Wendla, when you were lying under the oak?

WENDLA: Stupid things.

MELCHIOR: With your eyes open?

WENDLA: I dreamt, that I was a poor, poor beggar child, I was sent to beg on the streets when I was only five. I had to spend the whole day out in the awful, horrible weather, asking for help from heartless, mean people. When I came home in the evening, shivering from hunger and the cold, and I hadn't earned as much as I my father wanted, then... he would hit me, and hit me...

MELCHIOR: Oh, Wendla. You've read too many horror children's stories. Believe me, such horrible people don't exist anymore.

WENDLA: Melchior, you're wrong. Night after night, Martha Bessel is beaten by her father, so hard that the next day you can see all these bruises. Oh, how it must hurt! I get so angry when she tells me about it. I feel so awful for her, I cry into my pillow at night about it. I've been thinking for months about how I could possibly help her. I'd happily take her place for a few days just to make her feel better.

MELCHIOR: She should report her father to the police. Then, because she's still a child, she would be taken away from him.

WENDLA: Melchior, I've never been beaten in my life, not even once. I can't even imagine, how it feels, to be beaten. Once, I tried hitting myself, to see how it feels. It must be an awful feeling.

MELCHIOR: I don't think a child is better off for it.

WENDLA: Better off for what?

MELCHIOR: For being beaten.

WENDLA: With this whip for example! Ha, but it's tough 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 with you, Wendla?

WENDLA: What's wrong?

MELCHIOR: Calm down! I'm not going to hit you.

WENDLA: What if I let you beat me?

MELCHIOR: Never, girl!

WENDLA: But not even if I asked you to, Melchior?

MELCHIOR: Are you out of your mind?

WENDLA: I've never been beaten in my life!

MELCHIOR: If you could ask for something like that...

WENDLA: Please... please...

MELCHIOR: I'll teach you to say please! *(He hits her.)*

WENDLA: Oh God, I don't feel it in the least!

MELCHIOR: I bet, not through all those skirts...

WENDLA: So beat my legs!

MELCHIOR: Wendla! *(He hits her harder.)*

WENDLA: It feels like you're stroking me, you're only stroking me!

MELCHIOR: Witch, I'll beat the devil out of you!

(He throws the cane to the side and starts beating her with his fists, so that she lets out a frightened cry. He doesn't pay attention to this, but keeps beating her as if he were crazy, whilst the tears pour down his cheeks. Suddenly he jumps up, holds his hands to his head, and runs off into the woods, crying out in soulful anguish.)

Act 2

Scene One

Evening, in Melchior's study. The window is open, a lamp is burning on the table. MELCHIOR and MORITZ are sat on the sofa.

MORITZ: Now I can finally relax after the stress of today. But in that Greek lesson I was conked out like a sloth. I think the pronunciation of that stupid language is going to give me a headache. This morning I was so close to being late, my first thought when I woke up was conjugating Greek verbs. Wank- shit - bollocks, during breakfast and then on the way to school I conjugated until I felt sick at the sight of a Greek verb. I think I must have dropped off to sleep just before three? My pen made a huge blot in my book. The lamp had gone out when Mathilde woke me, and the birds outside were already chirping- yet I felt so depressed all of a sudden. I got dressed and brushed my hair- But you do feel like you've accomplished something.

MELCHIOR: Can I roll you a cigarette?

MORITZ: No thanks, I don't smoke. I hope I continue studying this hard! I want to work and work until my eyes fall out of my head. Ernst Röbel has failed six times since the holidays; three times in Greek, twice in Biology, and then once in the history of literature. I was in that situation five times before and now, from today, it doesn't bother me anymore! Röbel isn't going to shoot himself. Röbel doesn't have parents that sacrifice everything for him. He can be whatever he wants; a soldier, a cowboy or a sailor. If I fail, my father will have a heart attack and Mama will end up on some kind of psych ward. I wouldn't survive that! Before the exams I prayed so hard, asking God to let me catch typhoid or something so this time would pass. It passed, but I'm still afraid to look up day and night. Now that I've been able to pass I'm not going to let this opportunity go.

MELCHIOR: Life is bullshit. I should have hanged myself when I was still lying in my cot. - Where's Mama with that tea!

MORITZ: Ah, that tea will be good for me, Melchior! I'm shivering. I feel so strangely spiritual all of a sudden. Touch me, please. I see, I hear, I feel so much more clearly, yet everything feels so dreamlike, so atmospheric. Look how the moon shines in the garden, so still, so deep, as if it goes into eternity. Under the bushes, there's these veiled figures emerging. It looks like they're meeting under the chestnut tree. Shouldn't we go down, Melchior?

MELCHIOR: Once we've drunk our tea.

MORITZ: The leaves are rustling so much. It's as if, I can hear my dead grandma telling me the story of the „Headless Queen“. There was a wonderfully beautiful queen, beautiful like the sun, and more so than any girls in the land. Except she was born without a head. She couldn't eat, drink, see, laugh and she couldn't even kiss. She could only communicate with her court with her fine, soft hands. She kicked her delicate feet to announce declarations of war and to set death sentences. Then, one day she was defeated by a king who just happened to have two heads! His two heads had been quarrelling the whole year, and arguing so intensely that no-one would let the other speak. The court magician took the smaller of the two, and put it on the queen, who suited it admirably. Then, the king married the queen, and both were no longer troubled by each other, but instead they kissed each other everywhere, on the forehead, cheeks, and mouth. They lived many happy years together... Cursed nonsense! Since the holidays I can't get this story out of my head. When I see a good-looking girl, all I can think of is of her without a head, and then suddenly they seem to be a headless queen... It seems as if someone will put another head on me.

(MRS GABOR comes in with the steaming tea, which she places on the table before Moritz and Melchior.)

MRS GABOR: Here, children, enjoy! Good evening, Mr Stiefel, how are you?

MORITZ: Thank you, Mrs Gabor. - I'm listening to the dance down there.

MRS GABOR: You don't look good at all. Do you feel unwell?

MORITZ: Oh, it's nothing. I've just been to bed a bit too late for the past couple of days.

MELCHIOR: Think, he's been working the whole night through.

MRS GABOR: You shouldn't do that, Mr Stiefel. You need to rest. Think of your health! All that school work isn't good for your health. Go for a walk and get some fresh air! That's more important at your age than knowing how to speak high-German* correctly.

MORITZ: You're right. I *will* go for a long walk. You can still be mindful of your work when walking. Why didn't I think of that before! I would have to do the essay at home, though.

**Mittelhochdeutsch*, known as „high-German“, an English equivalent could be „the Queen's English“

MELCHIOR: Do the essay here, then it'll be easier for the both of us. Oh Mama, did you hear, that Max von Trenk went down with nervous exhaustion! This afternoon Little Hans Rilow went straight from Trenk's death bed to the Head, to tell him that Trenk had just died in his presence. The Head said, "And? Don't you have two hours' detention that you owe me from last week? Here's a note for your head of form. Get it sorted out." Poor Hans was bricking it.

MRS GABOR: What are you reading, Melchior?

MELCHIOR: Goethe's *Faust*.

MRS GABOR: Have you already read it?

MELCHIOR: I haven't finished it yet.

MORITZ: We're just at the Walpurgis night.*

MRS GABOR: I would've waited a couple of years to read that part.

MELCHIOR: I haven't read any other book that is as beautiful as this. Why shouldn't I read it?

MRS GABOR: Because you don't understand it.

MELCHIOR: You don't know that, Mama. Of course, I can't quite grasp a full understanding yet..

MORITZ: We always read together, then it makes it easier!

MRS GABOR: You're old enough, Melchior, to know what's good and what's bad for you. Do, whatever you feel ok with, for your own conscience. I'll be the first to recognise it, if you ever gave me reason to withhold something from you. I just want to make you aware, that even the best of things can be detrimental if you're not mature enough to take them in properly. But I'll always put my trust in you, not in some strange educational measures. If you need anything else, boys, then just shout. I'm in my bedroom. (*Leaves.*)

MORITZ: Your mum means that business with Gretchen and the baby.

MELCHIOR: Did we even stop and talk about it?

MORITZ: Faust couldn't have treated it more coldly!

**Walpurgisnacht*, a scene featuring explicit sexual innuendo in Goethe's *Faust*.

MELCHIOR: A stupid scandal like that can't be the defining feature of such a masterpiece! Faust could have just promised to marry the girl and then left, that would have been just as bad! But Gretchen still could have died of a broken heart. When you see how much people talk about that one moment, you would think the whole world revolved around penis and vagina.

MORITZ: If I'm being honest, having read your essay, Melchior, I think it does. It fell out of a book I was reading. I shut the door and whipped through the pages, like a frightened owl fleeing a burning forest. I think I read most of it with my eyes closed. Your arguments sounded to me like happy memories, like a song you used to hum to yourself as a child. What affected me most, was what you wrote about the girl. You know, Melchior, it must be so much better to be ravished than the ravisher. To innocently submit to such a sweet experience seems to me the epitome of all happiness.

MELCHIOR: I don't want to submit to happiness, like a beggar accepting charity.

MORITZ: Why not?

MELCHIOR: I couldn't enjoy anything that I didn't have to fight for.

MORITZ: But that's still happiness? The girl, Melchior, experiences pleasure as if it's god-given ecstasy. She resists until the very last moment, when it feels as if all the heavens are falling on her at once. Her feelings are pure, like a waterfall running down a mountain. She lifts a goblet to her lips, full of sweet, fiery nectar, untouched by human hands before, and drinks every last drop... The satisfaction that the man gets from it must be quite flat in comparison.

MELCHIOR: Think what you like, but keep it to yourself. I prefer not to think about it...

Scene Two

MRS BERGMANN: (*Wearing a hat and cape, with a basket under her arm, walks through the middle door with a smile on her face*). Wendla! - Wendla!

WENDLA: (*appears in a petticoat and corset in the right side door*). What's wrong, Mother?

MRS BERGMANN: You're already up, child? That's good of you!

WENDLA: You were out so early?

MRS BERGMANN: Get dressed quickly! You need to go to Ina's straight-away, to give her this basket.

WENDLA: (*gets dressed completely during the following*).
You were at Ina's? How is she? Will she ever get better?

MRS BERGMANN: Wendla, last night the stork was with her
and brought her a little boy.

WENDLA: A boy? A boy! Oh that's wonderful! That explains
the chronic flu!

MRS BERGMANN: A splendid young boy!

WENDLA: I must see him, Mother! Now I'm an aunt for the
third time, an aunt to one girl and two boys!

MRS BERGMANN: And what boys! That's what you get when you
live so close to the church! Tomorrow it'll be two years
since she walked down the aisle in that beautiful white
dress.

WENDLA: Were you there when the stork brought him?

MRS BERGMANN: He had already flown off. Don't you want to
pin a flower on your dress?

WENDLA: Why didn't you get there a bit earlier, Mother?

MRS BERGMANN: I believe he may have brought you something
as well, a brooch or something.

WENDLA: It's such a pity!

MRS BERGMANN: I'm telling you, he brought you a brooch!

WENDLA: I've got enough brooches.

MRS BERGMANN: Then be content, child. What else do you
want?

WENDLA: I would so badly like to know, if the stork came
in through the window or the chimney.

MRS BERGMANN: You'll have to ask Ina. Ha, you must ask
Ina, my darling! Ina will tell you exactly what happened.
She spoke with him for at least half an hour.

WENDLA: I'll ask Ina when I get there.

MRS BERGMANN: Don't forget, my sweet angel! I'm
interested to know myself, if he came in through the
chimney or through the window.

WENDLA: Or, wouldn't it be better if I asked the chimney
sweep? The chimney sweep must know best, if he flew in
through the chimney or not.

MRS BERGMANN: Not the chimney sweep, child, not the chimney sweep. What does he know about the stork! He'll tell you all sorts of stupid things, that he doesn't believe in himself... Wha- what are you staring at down in the street?

WENDLA: A man, Mother, three times as big as an ox! With feet like paddle steamers!

MRS BERGMANN: (*running to the window*). Impossible! Impossible!

WENDLA: (*at the same time*). He was holding a bedstead under his chin, and playing „Watch on the Rhine“ on it- now he's turning round the corner...

MRS BERGMANN: You're such a silly child! Frightening your poor old Mother. Go, take your hat. I wonder if you'll ever get some sense in your head. I've given up hope.

WENDLA: Me too, Mummy, me too. There's not much hope for my head. I have a sister, who's been married for two and a half years, and I'm an aunt three times, and I still don't have the slightest idea, how it all happens... Don't be cross, Mummy, don't be cross! Who else in the world should I ask but you? Please, dear Mother tell me! Tell me, Mummy! I'm ashamed of myself. I beg you, Mother, speak! Don't scold me, for asking such a thing. Answer me- what is it? How does it all happen? You can't seriously think that at fourteen I still believe in the stork.

MRS BERGMANN: Good God, child, you are a strange thing! What ideas you have! I really can't tell you that!

WENDLA: Why not, Mother! Why not! It can't be such an ugly thing, when it makes you all so happy.

MRS BERGMANN: Oh, oh God, help me! I deserve... Go and get dressed, girl; get dressed!

WENDLA: I'm going... And what if your dear child ends up going to the chimney sweep and asking him?

MRS BERGMANN: That would be a foolish thing to do! Come, child, come here, I'll tell you. I'll tell you everything... Oh, almighty God! Only not today, Wendla! Tomorrow, the next day, in the coming week... whenever you like, my darling...

WENDLA: Tell me today, Mother, tell me now! Right now! Now that I've seen you so upset, I can't calm down.

MRS BERGMANN: I can't, Wendla.

WENDLA: Oh, why can't you, Mummy! I'll kneel by your feet and put my head in your lap. You can put your apron over my head and talk and talk, as if you were completely alone in the room. I won't wince, I won't scream, I'll be patient and endure whatever it is.

MRS BERGMANN: God knows, Wendla, none of this is my fault! Come here, in God's name! I'll tell you, girl, how you came into this world. So listen to me, Wendla...

WENDLA: (*under her apron*). I'm listening.

MRS BERGMANN: (*ecstatically*). I can't do it, child. I can't be responsible. I'd deserve to be put in prison, or have you taken away from me...

WENDLA: (*under her apron*). Be brave, Mother!

MRS BERGMANN: Well, listen!

WENDLA: (*under her apron, shaking*). Oh God, oh God!

MRS BERGMANN: To have a child, you understand me, Wendla?

WENDLA: Quick, Mother, I can't take it anymore.

MRS BERGMANN: To have a child, the man- the man you're married to... you must love him- love- love I tell you- as you can only love your husband. You must love him very much, from your whole heart, in a way that can't be put into words! You have to love him, Wendla, in a way that you certainly can't at your age... Now you know.

WENDLA: (*getting up*). Good- God- in heaven!

MRS BERGMANN: Now you know, what challenges lay before you!

WENDLA: And is that all?

MRS BERGMANN: Help me, God! Now take this basket and go to Ina. She'll give you some chocolate and some cake. Come, let me look at you again, your boots, silk gloves, sailor suit, the rose in your hair... your little skirt is really getting too short for you, Wendla!

WENDLA: Did you get the meat for lunch, Mummy?

MRS BERGMANN: Oh bless you for reminding me!- I must sew another flounce around the bottom of your dress there.

Scene Three

LITTLE HANS RILOW: (*in the bathroom at home, holding a bust of the Venus of Palma Vecchio*). Did you pray at night, Desdemona?

You don't look like you've been praying, my sweet. You are contemplating what is to come, the arrival of a lover, the sweet moments of bliss. You're still just as I first saw you lying in the window of Schlesinger's shop, so alluring, with your supple limbs, the soft curve of your hips, those firm, youthful breasts. Oh, the Great Master must have been drunk with happiness, as the fourteen year old original lay stretched out on the couch before him!

Will you come and visit me in my dreams from time to time? I'll greet you with open arms and my kiss will take your breath away. You'll possess me like an heiress moving back into her deserted palace. Gates and doors will fly open unexpectedly, and we'll hear the fountain in the courtyard splashing happily..

It is the cause!- It is the cause! This awful beating of my heart proves I'm not murdering you on a whim. My throat goes dry thinking of the lonely nights ahead. I swear I am not doing this out of boredom or disgust, my sweet. Who could ever feel that way when they're with you? But you have sucked the marrow from my bones and taken the youthful sparkle out of my eyes. Your inhuman modesty and motionless limbs are too demanding, too exhausting, one of us has to die! It's me or you, and I've won.

How many beauties have gone this way before you? Giorgione's *Sleeping Venus*, a gift from my witch-like governess Mademoiselle Angeline, the rattlesnake disturbing the Garden of Eden that was my childhood. Corregio's *Io, The Source* by Ingres, two bathing Susannahs, one of them that I stole for my harem from Papa's secret drawer. A quivering, trembling, Leda that I came across in my brother's exercise books, and Titian's *Profane Love*. Let the fate of those seven console you, my sweet with your rosy-cheeks, and don't make my torments unbearable with those imploring looks!

You don't die for your sins, but for mine. With a bleeding heart I've murdered seven beauties in self-defence. But my conscience will be at peace, my body will get stronger, once you, she-devil, no longer dwell in the red silk cushions of my jewellery box.

I feel something rising inside me! My sweet, why do you press your knees together? Even now, as you stand before eternity? One movement, and I'll set you free. One womanly gesture, one flicker of lust. Don't you know that it's your chastity that drove me to this? Cold-hearted woman. It's clear that you had an impeccable upbringing, just as I did.

Have you prayed tonight, Desdemona?- One last kiss on your youthful body, your young, growing breasts, your sweet rounded... your cruel knees... (*With mounting excitement*).

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

It is the cause!

At the climax he drops the picture into the depths and closes the lid.

Scene Four

A hayloft. MELCHIOR is lying on his back in the fresh hay. WENDLA comes up the ladder.

WENDLA: You hid yourself here? Everyone is out looking for you. The hay wagon has had to go back to the field. You have to come and help. There's a big thunderstorm coming.

MELCHIOR: Get away from me! Get away from me!

WENDLA: What's wrong with you? Why are you hiding your face?

MELCHIOR: Go away, go away! I'll push you down the ladder if not.

WENDLA: Well, now I'm definitely not leaving. (*Kneels down next to him*). Why don't you come out to the field with us, Melchior? It's so stuffy and dark in here. And who cares if we get soaking wet in the rain?

MELCHIOR: The hay smells so heavenly. The sky looks so dark outside. I can just see the poppy on your breast- and I can hear your heart beating...

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

MELCHIOR: Your heart... I can hear it beating-

WENDLA: You love someone, when you kiss them... Don't, don't!...

MELCHIOR: Oh believe me, this isn't love! This is all selfishness, all egoistical. I love you as little as I love myself.

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

MELCHIOR: ...Wendla!

WENDLA: Oh Melchior!..... don't..... don't...

Scene Five

MRS GABOR: (*sitting at a desk, writing*)

Dear Mr Stiefel,

After reflecting for 24 hours on your letter, I write to you with a heavy heart.

I cannot provide you with the costs for travel to America. Firstly, I don't have such funds available, and secondly, even if I had them, it would be the greatest sin imaginable, to give you the means to carry out such a careless plan. You would do me a bitter injustice, Mr Stiefel, if you saw this refusal as a lack of love. It is quite the opposite, it would be the greatest violation of my duty as a motherly friend, if I allowed myself to be influenced by your momentary confusion, and to give in blindly to an impulse.

I would happily write to your parents, if you gave me permission. I would try to convince your parents that during this term you have done everything you can and that you have exhausted yourself to such an extent. A rigorous assessment of your fate would be unjustified, but, first and foremost, it would be extremely detrimental to your physical and mental health.

To speak frankly, Mr Stiefel, I was shocked by the threat that you would take your own life if I did not provide the fees for your passage to America. The way in which you try to hold me responsible for what would be such a terrible crime, could, in the eyes of a bad-natured person, be construed as an attempt at blackmail. This upset me, as I have always been kind to you. However, I am convinced that you were in too much shock to be fully conscious of what you were doing.

I am confident that you will be reading this letter in a calmer mood. In my opinion, it is not right to judge a young man by his academic results. There are too many examples of those who struggled in school but became first-rate men later on in life, and also of excellent students in school who never achieved their full potential later in life. In any case, I give you my word that your current difficulties will not, as far as I am able to control, affect your friendship with Melchior. It brings me great joy to see my son in the company of a young man who- despite however the rest of the world will judge him- has gained my utmost affection and support.

Hold your head high, Mr Stiefel! We all face crises like these at some point in our lives, and we must try and overcome them. If we all turned to a knife or poison in times of hardship, soon there would be no-one left in the world. Please write and let me know how you are doing.

With fondest greetings from your dear maternal friend,

Anna Gabor

Scene Six

The Bergmann's garden in the morning sunshine.

WENDLA: Why did I sneak out of the room?— To pick some flowers!— Because Mother keeps seeing me smiling.— Why can't I keep my mouth shut?— I don't know.— I don't know, I can't find the words...

This path feels like a red carpet, there's no stones, no thorns. — My feet don't even touch the floor... Oh, I slept so well last night!

Ah, this is where they are!— I feel so solemn, like a nun at mass.— Pretty flowers!— Calm down, Mummy, I'll wear that stupid sackcloth from now on. — Oh God, I wish there was someone here who could come and give me a cuddle and I could explain everything to.

Scene Six

Dusk, the sky is dark and full of clouds, a path winding through reeds and bushes. In the distance the sound of the river can be heard.

MORITZ: It's the only way. I don't fit in. They can fight it out between themselves. I'm sick of being messed around with. I didn't ask to be born, and I don't have some weird contract with God.

I don't blame my parents. Still, they were old enough to know what they were doing. I was just a baby, I didn't have the sense to be anyone else! I must've fallen on my head when I was a kid...

At least the weather is considerate. It looked like rain the whole day and now it's cleared. There's this strange stillness about today. Nothing loud, everything so calm and still. The Earth is like a fine cobweb. Everything breathes contentment. It's as if the world is singing me a lullaby, „Sleep little prince, sleep...”

I don't want to cry anymore. Or think about my funeral. Melchior will lay a wreath on my grave. The Pastor will comfort my parents. The Head will say something about history.

I don't suppose I'll get a tombstone, I'd have liked a pure white marble urn on a black granite plinth. But memorials are for the living, not the dead.

I'd need a whole year to go through everyone in my head and say goodbye to them. I don't want to cry now, I want to look back without bitterness. All those wonderful evenings spent with Melchior! Under the willows by the river, by the forester's lodge, up by the castle...

When the time comes, I'll think of it as if I'm filling myself up with whipped cream. It's easy to swallow, it has a pleasant aftertaste...

I go to the altar like an ancient Etruscan youth. Life's given me the cold shoulder. From the other side, friendly faces beckon me, the headless queen, the headless queen, waiting with open arms...

The laws of this world are for children, I've earned my pass. The chrysalis opens and the butterfly flies away. This life is a question of taste.

ILSE (*in ripped clothes, a colourful headscarf wrapped around her head, sneaks up on MORITZ and taps him on the shoulder*).

MORITZ: Ilse?!

ILSE: What are you doing here?

MORITZ: You scared me!

ILSE: What are you doing out here? Are you looking for something?

MORITZ: You gave me such a fright!

ILSE: I'm on my way home from the city.

MORITZ: I don't know, what I'm looking for. Or what I've lost.

ILSE: That doesn't help if you don't know what you're looking for. I haven't been home in four days.

MORITZ: Where have you been all this time?!

ILSE: With the artists. Nohl, Fehrendorf, Padinsky, Lenz, Rank, Spühler..

MORITZ: Do you sit for them?

ILSE: Fehrendorf is painting me as a saint, on top of a Corinthian column. He's mad. The last time he painted me, I accidentally stepped on a tube of paint. So he decided to wipe his paintbrush in my hair. We ran around his room fighting for a while. By the fire there was a sketch, I grabbed it and said I would destroy it if he didn't behave! He swore a truce and then kissed me with such passion you would have thought his life depended on it.

MORITZ: Where do you sleep when you're in town?

ILSE: Yesterday I stayed at Nohl's, the night before I was at Bojokewitsch and on Sunday I was at Okonomopulos'. Padinsky bought champagne to celebrate, he'd just sold a piece. Fehrendorf drank it out of the ashtray, Schiller was singing old ballads and Adolar nearly broke his guitar. I was so drunk they had to put me to bed.- Are you still at school, Moritz?

MORITZ: No, this is my last term.

ILSE: Oh, wow. Time passes so fast when you're out in the world earning your own money. Do you remember, how we used to play cops and robbers? You and me and Wendla Bergmann and the others, you used to come over in the evenings and we drank goat's milk straight from the teat? - What's Wendla up to? And Melchi Gabor? Does he still look so serious all the time? I used to sit opposite him in music.

MORITZ: He's a philosopher.

ILSE: Wendla came to visit us a little while back and brought Mother some homemade jam. I was sitting for Isidor Landauer, so I missed her. He wants me for the Virgin Mary, the mother of God with the baby Jesus. He's such a wimp. - Have you got a hangover?

MORITZ: From last night. We were knocking it back like there was no tomorrow. I staggered home at five this morning.

ILSE: No wonder you look rough. Any girls?

MORITZ: Arabella. The Spanish barmaid. The landlord left her alone with us all night.

ILSE: No wonder you look like death. I don't even know what a hangover is! Last carnival I didn't make it to bed for three nights. After three days I was picked up by Heinrich, I was passed out in the snow in the middle of the street! I went back to his and couldn't leave for two weeks, it was awful! In the days he would make me wear this Persian dressing-gown, and parade around in a page-boy costume in the evening, with white lace all around the collar and cuffs. He would photograph me in a different pose each day, Ariadne, Leda, once on all fours as a female Nebuchadnezzar. This whole time he wouldn't shut up about guns and murder and suicide. Early one morning, he climbed into bed with a loaded revolver! He pressed it against my breast and threatened, "If you blink, I'll press the trigger!" Moritz, I know he would have actually done it! Then he put the thing in his mouth. Ugh! He said it's important for your survival instinct. It still gives me the shivers- the bullets would have gone right down my spine.

MORITZ: Is he still alive?

ILSE: I don't know! Above the bed there was this mirror on the ceiling. I would wake up and imagine myself hanging from the ceiling. I had such awful nightmares, he would kiss me goodnight and say "Goodnight, Ilse. When you sleep, you are too beautiful to live."

MORITZ: So is he still alive, this Heinrich?

ILSE: I hope not. One day he was out getting absinth, so I stole his coat and left. The carnival was over, so the police picked me up, because I was dressed in a man's clothes. They took me to the station, and who should come to bail me out; Nohl, Fehrendorf, Padinsky, Spühler, Okonomopulos, the whole crew. I've stayed loyal to them ever since.

MORITZ: I've got to go, Ilse.

ILSE: - Come home with me!

MORITZ: Why? What for?

ILSE: To drink some fresh goat's milk! I'll curl your hair and hang a little bell round your neck. We still have a rocking horse that you could play with.

MORITZ: I've got to go. I've got Greek philosophers and math equations on my mind. Good night, Ilse!

ILSE: Sweet dreams! Did you ever go back to that wigwam where we used to play as kids? - By the time the rest of you have grown up, I'll be in the gutter. *(She runs off)*.

MORITZ: (alone). One word is all I needed! - (He calls to her). Ilse!- Ilse! - Thank goodness she can't hear. I'm not in the mood. You need a clear head for this. A pity, though.

... I'll tell them I had a huge crystal mirror hanging above my bed. I'll tell them that I had a young girlfriend, who I made prance around in my bedroom in black silk stockings, long black suede gloves and with black velvet ribbon around her neck... and that in a fit of madness I smothered her with a pillow. I'll smile whenever they talk of lust... I'll pretend I did it all... Oh, to be you Ilse! Such a happy child, a child of nature...

Here it is, my riverbank. The reeds have grown since yesterday. But the willows look the same. The river's starting to flood... I must't forget...

(He takes MRS GABOR's letter out of his pocket and burns it).

It's starting to get dark. I shan't go home now.

Act Three

Scene One

School staff meeting. At the conference table, HEADMASTER and PASTOR, as well as four professors, PROFESSORS PERNICKETY, TONGUE-TIED, GROUCH and GUT-BUCKET. The JANITOR loiters by the door.

HEADMASTER: Do any of my colleagues wish to comment?- Gentlemen! We cannot abstain from recommending to the Ministry of Education the immediate expulsion of a pupil from this institution. Firstly, we must do so in an attempt to atone for the disaster which has already occurred. Secondly, we must try to protect this establishment from similar incidents in the future. Also, we must punish the delinquent for corrupting a vulnerable fellow pupil, and to protect the rest of his fellow pupils from said delinquent. And lastly, most importantly, we must take action to protect this institution from the suicide epidemic that is currently raging through similar educational establishments. This suicide epidemic defies the effort of the educator to educate, and an attempt to contain the contagion that renders those we seek to educate, ineducable. -Do any of my colleagues wish to comment, so far?

PROFESSOR PERNICKETY: I cannot hold back my conviction anymore, that we must open a window. The atmosphere in this room is unsuitable.

PROFESSOR TONGUE-TIED: Th-th-there is an a-a-atmosphere in this room like in the ceta-catacombs, or the archives of the Courts of Justice in W-W-Wetzlar as immortalised by G-G-G-G-G...

PROFESSOR GROUCH: Goethe.

PROFESSOR TONGUE-TIED: in *The Sorrows of Young W-W-W-W-W...*

PROFESSOR GROUCH: Werther.

HEADMASTER: Janitor!

JANITOR: Yes, headmaster.

HEADMASTER: Open the window. Thankfully, we have a plentiful supply of atmosphere outside. Does anyone else have any comments to make?

PROFESSOR GROUCH: I have no objection to opening the window. However, I would ask that the window that is opened is not immediately in my vicinity.

HEADMASTER: Janitor!

JANITOR: Yes, headmaster.

HEADMASTER: Open the other window.- Does anyone else have anything they wish to say?

PROFESSOR GUT-BUCKET: I don't wish to complicate the issue in any way, however I would like to remind everyone that, unfortunately, the other window has bricked up since the holidays.

HEADMASTER: Janitor!

JANITOR: Yes, headmaster!

HEADMASTER: Leave the other window closed! Gentlemen, I am obliged to put this matter to a vote. Those who are in favour of opening the one window that is relevant to this debate, please rise from your seats. *(He counts)*. One, two, three. One, two, three. - Janitor!

JANITOR: Yes, headmaster.

HEADMASTER: Leave the other window closed, as well. I, myself, am convinced that this atmosphere is suitable for the matter at hand. Does anyone wish to comment? Gentlemen! Let us remember that if we do not recommend to the Ministry for the expulsion of this delinquent student, we may be held responsible for the fatality that has already occurred, and any subsequent fatalities of the same nature. Of the schools that have already been affected by the suicide epidemic, those where the casualty rate has exceeded twenty five percent have been temporarily suspended by the Ministry, pending an enquiry. It is our duty as custodians of this establishment to prevent such a calamity. Therefore, we are obliged to punish the guilty so that, we, the innocent, are not punished in his place. -Janitor!

JANITOR: Yes, headmaster.

HEADMASTER: Fetch the culprit!

(JANITOR exits).

PROFESSOR TONGUE-TIED: If the a-a-a-atmosphere in this room is considered p-p-perfectly adequate, might I suggest that during the su-summer holidays the other window might be b-b-b-b-b-bricked up?

PROFESSOR GROUCH: If our dear colleague Professor Tongue-Tied has such an issue with the ventilation in this room, might I suggest that he have a ventilator fitted in his frontal cavity?

PROFESSOR TONGUE-TIED: Your rudeness will not be t-t-tolerated! May I remind my colleagues in the Latin department that I am quite c-c-c-capable of commanding my f-f-f-f-...

PROFESSOR GUT-BUCKET: Faculties.

HEADMASTER: Since our culprit is on his way, might I remind Professors Tongue-tied and Grouch to behave as would be expected from a professor.

(JANITOR opens the door, and MELCHIOR enters. He is pale but composed).

HEADMASTER: Stand closer to the table! Poor Mr Stiefel, who had been informed of his late son's demise, went through his son's possessions to try and find a motive for this terrible crime. He came upon a handwritten document which does not make this crime at all comprehensible, but does provide an insight into the criminal's chaotic mental and moral state. I am referring to a document, twenty-pages long, composed in the form a dialogue, complete with life-size illustrations. It is full of such vulgar and shameless obscenities that would satisfy the most bestial and degenerate appetites, entitled „Copulation“.

MELCHIOR: I-

HEADMASTER: You will remain silent! Mr Stiefel then gave us the document, and asked us to ascertain who the author of this document was. We compared the handwriting of every fellow student in this school, and according to all of my colleagues, even my colleague the Professor of Calligraphy, it matched yours.

MELCHIOR: I-

HEADMASTER: You will remain silent! We will refrain from taking action until the perpetrator of this offence against morality can be identified beyond reasonable doubt, despite the damning nature of this evidence.

MELCHIOR: I-

HEADMASTER: You are required to answer the questions we put to you with a straightforward yes or no. Janitor!

JANITOR: Yes, headmaster!

HEADMASTER: The files!- I ask my dear colleague Professor Grouch to act as secretary. - *(To MELCHIOR)*. Do you recognise this handwriting?

MELCHIOR: Yes.

HEADMASTER: Do you know what this document contains?

MELCHIOR: Yes.

HEADMASTER: Is the handwriting in this document yours?

MELCHIOR: Yes.

HEADMASTER: Was this obscene document written by you?

MELCHIOR: Yes. Sir, I ask you to show me one obscenity in this document...

HEADMASTER: You were instructed to answer these questions with a simple yes or no!

MELCHIOR: The document contains only simple facts which all of you can verify.

HEADMASTER: You insolent boy!

MELCHIOR: I ask you, show me one offence against morality in that document!

PROFESSOR TONGUE-TIED: Do you th-th-think we are id-id-idiot?

HEADMASTER: You have as little respect for your professors as you do for the gifts of modesty and decorum that dictate man's acquiescence of moral order! -Janitor!

MELCHIOR: I ask you, again, to show me one obscenity in it!

HEADMASTER: It is an amalgamation of obscenities, a veritable manual of abominations! It is How to Learn Esperanto in Three Easy Lessons!

MELCHIOR: I-

HEADMASTER: I call upon our secretary to close the meeting.

MELCHIOR: Sir-

HEADMASTER: You shall remain silent! Janitor!

JANITOR: Yes, headmaster.

HEADMASTER: Take him away!

Scene Two

Graveyard in the pouring rain. The PASTOR stands before an open grave, holding an umbrella. The HEADMASTER, PROFESSORS, RELATIVES and MR STIEFEL, all with umbrellas. From the school, GEORGE, OTTO, LITTLE HANS, ERNST, ROBERT. In the distance, MARTHA and ILSE.

PASTOR: Whoever rejects the grace with the Eternal Father blesses us all who are both in sin, he shall die the death of the spirit. But whosoever in flesh and pride denies the worship owed to God and lives and serves evil, he shall die the death of the body. However, whosoever casts aside the cross that the God Almighty lifts up for him for the sake of sin, verily, verily, I tell you, he will die an eternal death. *(He throws a shovel of dirt into the grave)*. But we who walk along the path of thorns, let us praise the Lord, the God Almighty and thank hi for his unsearchable grace. For as surely as he died a threefold death, as surely will the Lord God lead the righteous to salvation and eternal life. Amen.

MR STIEFEL: *(tears choking in his throat, as he throws a shovel of dirt into the grave)*. The boy wasn't mine! The boy wasn't mine! I knew something wasn't right, ever since he was a baby.

HEADMASTER: *(throwing a shovel of dirt into the grave)*. Suicide is the worst conceivable offence against the moral world order. It's the most questionable evidence of the moral world order, and thereby proves its existence.

RELATIVE 1: I wouldn't have believed my own mother if she would have told me a child could treat his parents so horribly.

RELATIVE 2: *(throwing a shovel of dirt into the grave)*. What a horrible way to treat your father, who's spent the past twenty years thinking only of the welfare of his son!

MR STIEFEL: *(his nose running)*. The boy wasn't mine... the boy wasn't mine...

(MR STIEFEL is lead away by the PASTOR, HEADMASTER, PROFESSORS and RELATIVES. The rain lessens).

LITTLE HANS RILOW: *(throwing a shovel of dirt into the grave)*. Rest in peace, mate. Say hello to my dead brides, and put in a good word for me with God, you old sod. You're so innocent, they'll have to put something on your grave to scare the birds off.

GEORGE: Did they find the pistol?

ROBERT: There's no point looking for a pistol!

ERNST: Did you see him, Robert?

ROBERT: Shut up! Who saw him? Who?

OTTO: I don't know! They covered him up with some cloth.

GEORGE: Was his tongue hanging out?

ROBERT: His eyes! That's why they put the cloth over him.

OTTO: Ew!

LITTLE HANS RILOW: Do you guys know for sure, if he hanged himself?

ERNST: Someone said he doesn't have a head anymore.

OTTO: Bullshit!

ROBERT: I heard that they always cover up a hanged man.

GEORGE: He couldn't have done it in a more stupid way!

LITTLE HANS RILOW: What the hell, I thought hanging was supposed to be a good way to go!

OTTO: What pisses me off is he still owes me five pounds. We had a bet, he swore that he was going to pass into the next class.

LITTLE HANS RILOW: It's your fault he's in that grave there. You said he was bragging.

OTTO: Shut up! I had to stay up all night studying as well. If he'd learnt all that Greek literature, maybe he wouldn't have had to hang himself!

ERNST: Have you done the essay, Otto?

OTTO: Just the introduction.

ERNST: I've got no idea what to write.

GEORGE: Weren't you there when it was given out?

LITTLE HANS RILOW: I'll find something from Democritus.

ERNST: I'm gonna try looking in the encyclopaedia.

OTTO: Have you guys done the Virgil for tomorrow?

(The BOYS leave. MARTHA and ILSE approach the grave).

ILSE: Quick, quick! The gravediggers will be here soon.

MARTHA: Should we maybe wait?

ILSE: Why? We'll bring new ones tomorrow. And all the days after that. There's enough growing here.

MARTHA: You're right, I'll dig up some roses from home. I get beaten anyways, they might as well beat me for a reason. They'll grow better here.

ILSE: I'll water these, whenever I walk past. I'll bring some forget-me-nots from the stream over there, and some irises from home.

MARTHA: I want it to look like a garden, a beautiful garden.

ILSE: I'd just crossed the bridge when I heard the shot.

MARTHA: Poor boy!

ILSE: And I know why he did it, Martha.

MARTHA: Did he tell you?

ILSE: Yes, but you can't tell anyone.

MARTHA: I swear.

ILSE: *(pause)*. Here's the pistol.

MARTHA: That's why they couldn't find it!

ILSE: I took it right out of his hand, when I found him.

MARTHA: Give it to me, Ilse! Please, give it to me.

ILSE: No, I want to keep it as a souvenir.

MARTHA: Is it true, Ilse, that he's lying in there without his head?

ILSE: He must have filled it with water! The flowers nearby were all spattered with blood. His brains were hanging in the willow tree.

Scene Three

MR and MRS GABOR.

MRS GABOR: ... The school needed a scapegoat. There were too many accusations to brush under the carpet. And my child had the misfortune to get caught up in it at the wrong time, and now I, his own mother, am expected to help the people who want to destroy him? God forbid!

MR GABOR: - I watched you in silence for fourteen years as you brought up our boy with your imaginative child-rearing methods. They went against my own ideas. I've always been convinced that a child isn't a toy; a child has a right to our attention. But, I told myself, if spirit and grace can replace these serious principles, then it's maybe better that they do. I'm not blaming you, Anna. But don't stand in my way for now trying to make amends for the damage we have done to our son!

MRS GABOR: I'll stand in your way as long as there's a drop of human blood left in me! My son would be lost in a correction facility. A criminal nature can be improved in these kinds of institutions. I don't know. But a decent boy would become criminal in a place like that, just as a plant dies when it's taken out of the sunlight. What damage have I done to Melchior? I thank God today and always, that he has shown me how to make my son grow into a decent and honest man. What has he done that's so terrible? I'd never make excuses for my son, but it's not his fault that he's been hounded out of school! And even if he were to blame, he's suffered enough for it. You should know that better than anyone. Theoretically speaking, you may be right. But I'm not going to let my only son be violently hounded to death!

MR GABOR: That doesn't depend on us, Anna. That's the risk we took when we became parents. Those who are weak will stumble and fall. And it's not the worst thing, if the inevitable happens sooner rather than later. May Heaven protect us! Our responsibility is to support our son, so long as reason shows us how. You're too indulgent. You women can't judge these kinds of things; you see a harmless joke, when it's actually a fundamental character defect. Whoever wrote what Melchior can, must be contaminated in his innermost being. Someone who had a somewhat decent and sound mind couldn't write a letter like that. No-one is a saint, we all stray from the path. However, his letter exemplifies a *principle*. We can't dismiss it as a bit of false judgement. It documents with terrifying clarity a natural disposition, a tendency towards the immoral for immorality's sake. It shows a rare spiritual corruption, that we lawyers call „moral insanity“. Whether anything can be done about his condition, I can't say. But if we want to keep that glimmer of hope, and first and foremost, to preserve our consciences as the parents of the culprit, then we must act with determination before it's too late. - Let's not argue anymore, Anna! I know how hard this is for you. I know you worship the boy because he shows your own generous nature. But you need to get over this! For once, don't be selfish when it comes to your son!

MRS GABOR: Help me God, how am I supposed to answer to that? You have to be a man in order to speak like that. Only a man could be so blinded by that letter, so he couldn't see what's staring him right in the face! I've always been careful and responsible with Melchior from the very beginning, he's always been a sensitive child. Are we responsible for this coincidence? You could be hit by a bus *tomorrow*, for example, and a friend comes along—your father, and instead of trying to help you he steps over you. I'm not going to let my child be murdered before my eyes! That's a mother's duty. I can't believe this, it's unbelievable. What in the world did he even write? If anything, doesn't this letter just prove his harmlessness, his silliness, his childlike innocence, that *he* could write something like this? You don't have to know much about people, but you have to be a completely soulless human being or totally close-minded, to call this „moral corruption“! If you put Melchior in a correction facility, I *will* divorce you. And then I'll find somewhere in the world where I can save my son from destruction.

MR GABOR: You'll have to give in, if not today, then tomorrow. It's not easy for anyone to deal with this. I'll stand by you throughout this, throughout everything. The future seems so dark, so bleak. I couldn't bear to lose you as well.

MRS GABOR: I'll never see him again, I'll never see him again. He can't deal with meanness, he can't live with filth. He'll completely lose it, this terrible example is right in front of his eyes! And if I saw him again, oh God, God, his kind heart, his laugh, everything, everything, his childish determination to fight for everything good and just... I cherished everything in him. Whatever he's done, I'll bear the guilt for it, let me be the guilty party. Do whatever you want with me. But don't you dare lay a hand on my child.

MR GABOR: He's done something wrong!

MRS GABOR: He hasn't done anything wrong!

MR GABOR: He has done something wrong!— I would have given anything to spare the unconditional love you have for him. But this morning a woman came to me, so upset that she could barely speak, with this letter in her hand, a letter written to her fifteen year old daughter. She opened the letter out of silly curiosity as her daughter wasn't home. In the letter, Melchior explains to this *fifteen year old girl* that his conduct gives him no peace, he has wronged her *et cetera, et cetera*, and that he will stand by her no matter what. She shouldn't worry, even if there'll be consequences. He's already taking steps get help, and his expulsion from school makes this easier. His earlier misconduct could lead to their future happiness, and more nonsense.

MRS GABOR: Impossible!

MR GABOR: The letter must have been forged. Someone is trying to use our son's expulsion to their advantage. I haven't spoken to Melchior yet- but look at the letter! Look at the writing!

MRS GABOR: This is unheard of! The boy has no shame.

MR GABOR: I'm afraid so.

MRS GABOR: No, no, never!

MR GABOR: This makes our decision a little easier, at least. The woman was wringing her hands, wondering what she should do. I told her not to let her fifteen year old daughter climb about in haylofts. Luckily she left the letter with me.- If we send Melchior to another school, we'll just have another incident like this on our hands in the next three weeks- another expulsion- his „kind“ heart is already getting used to it. - Tell me, Anna, what should we do with the boy?!

MRS GABOR: Put him in the correction facility.

MR GABOR: In the...?

MRS GABOR:... Correction facility!

MR GABOR: Without a doubt, he'll find there what he was unjustly denied at home: strict discipline, rules, and moral constraints which he must abide by. The correction facility isn't the hell-hole you think it is. It focuses on Christian thinking and sensibility. The boy will finally learn to put the good before what intrigues him, and to act according to the law, rather than his own simple decisions. - Half an hour ago I received a message from my brother that confirmed this woman's story. Melchior confided in him and asked him for money in order to travel to England..

MRS GABOR: *(covers her face)*. God help us!

Scene Four

A corridor in the correction facility. DIETHELM, REINHOLD, RUPERT, HELMUT, GASTON und MELCHIOR.

DIETHELM: Look, there's 20 cents on the floor!

REINHOLD: And? Who cares?

DIETHELM: I'll put it on the floor and we'll make a circle around it. Whoever hits it, gets it.

RUPERT: You not gonna join, Melchior?

MELCHIOR: No, thanks.

HELMUT: Ass.

GASTON: He can't get it up. He's only here for the cure.

MELCHIOR: *(to himself)*. It's not smart, to keep separating yourself from the other boys. They're all watching me. I have to join in- or I'm done for.- Being shut in makes them suicidal.- Rupert'll be my friend, he knows how things work around here. - I could tell him a couple of stories from the Bible, how Loth got drunk and fucked his own daughters, David screwing a soldier's wife.

RUPERT: I'm coming!

HELMUT: Me too!

GASTON: Sometime next week, you mean!

HELMUT: Coming!- Now!- Oh God, oh God...

ALL: Altogether now- ten out of ten!

RUPERT: *(picking up the coin)*. Thank you very much!

HELMUT: That's mine, you twat!

RUPERT: You bastard!

HELMUT: Arsehole!

RUPERT: *(hits him in the face)*. There you go! *(Runs off)*.

HELMUT: *(running after him)*. I'll kill him!

ALL: *(running after them)*. Get him, go, go, go!

MELCHIOR: *(alone, turns to the window)*. There's a lighting conductor there. I think I'd better wrap a handkerchief around it. It's a sixty feet drop and the plaster's coming away from the brickwork. I'll try the newspapers, they pay so much for each line, I'll write whatever, daily news, gossip, advice columns. And I won't go hungry, there are soup kitchens, hostels. -Whenever I think of her, all the blood rushes to my feet. She hates me- she hates me, because I've taken her freedom. Whatever I do now, it's still rape. I can only hope, that in a year or two... Tomorrow night I'll oil the hinges, and by Saturday night I'll figure out who has the key. Sunday evening during prayers I'll fake an epileptic fit, oh God, I hope no-one else is sick! I can see it all panning out just how I've planned it, slip over the sill, swing, grab the cable. But better wrap a handkerchief around it. ... Here comes the Warden. *(Exits left)*.

(Enter WARDEN and a LOCKSMITH from stage right).

WARDEN: ... The windows are on the fourth floor and right underneath it we've planted stinging nettles. But what are stinging nettles to these boys? Last winter one of them climbed out the skylight. Then we had all the fuss of getting the body and organising the burial...

LOCKSMITH: Would you like the grating made of wrought iron?

WARDEN: Yes, and as you can't build into the wall, rivet it in.

Scene Five

Bedroom. MRS BERGMANN, her married daughter INA and DOCTOR. WENDLA lying in bed.

DOCTOR: How old are you actually?

WENDLA: Fourteen and a half.

DOCTOR: I've been prescribing Blaud's purgative pills for fifteen years, which have been very successful in most cases. I much prefer them to cod liver oil. Start taking three to four pills a day and increase them as soon as you feel able. I advised the young Baroness von Witzleben to increase her dose by one pill every three days, but she misunderstood me and increased by three pills every day. In only three weeks' time she felt well enough to accompany her mother to the spa at Pyrmont. - I'll spare you the tiring walks and special diets. But you must promise me, dear child, to keep moving, and to ask for food when your appetite returns. Then the heartburn will go away, and the headaches, the shivering, the dizziness, and this terrible indigestion. Only eight days after taking these pills, the young Baroness managed a whole roast chicken with boiled potatoes for breakfast.

MRS BERGMANN: Can I offer you a glass of wine, doctor?

DOCTOR: No, but thank you, Mrs Bergmann. My car is outside. Don't take it too much to heart. In a few weeks our dear little patient will be back on her feet again. Rest assured. Good day, Mrs Bergmann. Good day, dear child. Good day, ladies. Good day.

(Mrs Bergmann shows him out).

INA: *(by the window)*. The leaves are already starting to change colour. Can you see it from your bed? A brief happiness, they come and go so quickly, hardly anything worth being happy about. I need to get going as well. Müller's waiting for me by the post office, but before that I need to go to the dressmaker. Mucki's getting his first trousers, and Karl needs some new winter clothes.

WENDLA: Sometimes I feel so happy, the sunshine brings so much joy. I never thought I could feel like this. I want to go out, I want to walk in the fields at dusk, and look for primroses and sit by the river and daydream. And then this toothache starts, and I think that by tomorrow I'll be dead. I feel so hot and cold, everything goes dark, and I think a monster's coming into my room... Whenever I wake up, Mother's crying. Oh Ina, I can't tell you how much it hurts me to see her like that!

INA: - Should I adjust your pillow for you?

MRS BERGMANN: (*returning*). He thinks the vomiting will stop soon, and then it will be okay for you to get up... I also think you should get up sooner rather than later, Wendla.

INA: Next time I come, I'm sure you'll be up and about again. Take care, Mother. I've got to go to the dressmakers. Bless you, Wendla. (*kisses her*). Get well soon!

WENDLA: Take care, Ina.- Bring me some flowers next time you come. Bye, say hello to your boys from me.

(*INA leaves*).

Did he say anything else, Mother, on the way out?

MRS BERGMANN: He didn't say anything.- He said that the Baroness von Witzleben also had a tendency to faint, it's quite common with anaemia.

WENDLA: Did he say that I have anaemia, Mother?

MRS BERGMANN: You need to drink milk and eat lots of meat and vegetables, once your appetite's back.

WENDLA: Oh Mother, Mother, I don't have anaemia...

MRS BERGMANN: You do have anaemia, child. Calm down, Wendla, calm down; you have anaemia.

WENDLA: No, Mother, no! I know it, I can feel it. I don't have anaemia, I have tuberculosis...

MRS BERGMANN: You have anaemia. He told us that you have anaemia. Calm down, Wendla. It'll get better.

WENDLA: It won't get better. I have tuberculosis. I'm going to die, Mother.- Oh Mother, I'm going to die!

MRS BERGMANN: You're not going to die, child! You're not going to die... Oh merciful God, you're not going to die!

WENDLA: But then why do you cry so much?

MRS BERGMANN: You're not going to die- child! You don't have tuberculosis. You're going to have a baby, child. You're expecting a baby! How could you do this to me?

WENDLA: - I haven't done anything to you...

MRS BERGMANN: Don't deny it, Wendla. I know everything. I just couldn't bring myself to speak to you about it. - Wendla, my Wendla!

WENDLA: But that's not possible, Mother. I'm not married yet!

MRS BERGMANN: Dear God in heaven, that's just it, you're not married! That's what's so awful. Wendla, Wendla, Wendla, what have you done?

WENDLA: I don't know, I don't know anymore! We were laying in the hay... I've never loved anyone else in the world except you, Mother.

MRS BERGMANN: My sweetheart-

WENDLA: Oh Mother, why didn't you tell me everything?

MRS BERGMANN: Child, child, let's not make each other upset. Keep calm and don't give up hope. Tell all that to a fourteen year old girl? No, I'd sooner be prepared for the sun to stop shining. Let us put our trust in the Lord Wendla. We must pray for his mercy and do our part. Nothing's happened yet, and if we keep our courage the Lord will not abandon us. Be brave, be brave, Wendla... Once before I sat and stared out of this window, because everything seemed to be turning out for the better, and then now it feels like everything is crashing down around us... Wh, why are you shaking?

WENDLA: Someone knocked.

MRS BERGMANN: I didn't hear anything, my darling. (*Goes to the door and opens it*).

WENDLA: I heard it so clearly, who is it?

MRS BERGMANN: No-one. It's just Mother Schmidt from the Gartenstrasse. You're just on time, Mother Schmidt.

Scene Six

Men and women at work in a hillside vineyard. The sun is setting. Church bells can be heard from the valley below. In the highest vineyard, under overhanging rocks, LITTLE HANS RILOW and ERNST RÖBEL are rolling in the dry grass.

ERNST: - I've overworked myself.

LITTLE HANS RILOW: Let's not get upset. Waste of time.

ERNST: I can see the grapes hanging there, but can't be arsed to reach up and grab them. Tomorrow they'll all be gone.

LITTLE HANS RILOW: I hate feeling tired as much as I hate feeling hungry.

ERNST: Ugh, I can't do it anymore.

LITTLE HANS RILOW: If I move this branch, and swing it from my mouth to yours, neither of us actually has to move. We'll just bite the grapes off.

ERNST: You think you're completely done but then lo and behold your strength comes back again.

LITTLE HANS RILOW: The sunset, and the bells... I can't see life getting any better than this.

ERNST: Sometimes I see myself being a parson in the future, with a homely wife, a well-stocked library and a good share of duties to attend to. You'd have six days to think of something to say in church, and then on the seventh day you finally open your mouth. When walking around the village schoolchildren would greet me, and when I got home to the parsonage, there would be steaming hot coffee and freshly baked cake waiting for me. Can you think of anything better?

LITTLE HANS RILOW: I dream of half-parted lips, half-closed eyelids fluttering at me, a Turkish boudoir. I don't believe in religious sentimentality. Grown ups act all solemn around us to make us look stupid, but when we're not around they call each other idiots like us.- When I'm a millionaire I'll set up a memorial to God. -I like to think of the future as a milk pudding with sugar and cinnamon. You can throw the plate on the floor and throw a tantrum like a baby. Or you can throw your back out stirring it into a big old mess. Why shouldn't we skim the cream off the top, instead?- Do you think we could learn to do that?

ERNST:- Let's skim the cream.

LITTLE HANS RILOW: The chickens will eat the rest.

ERNST: Let's skim the cream off, Hans! What are you smiling at?

LITTLE HANS RILOW: Are you starting that again?

ERNST: Someone's got to start it.

LITTLE HANS RILOW: In thirty years' time, when we both look back at this evening, it will seem unbelievably beautiful!

ERNST: Everything feels so spontaneous and effortless.

LITTLE HANS RILOW: And why shouldn't it?

ERNST: If I was alone, I might even shed a tear.

LITTLE HANS RILOW: Let's not be sad! *(He kisses him on the lips)*.

ERNST: *(kissing him)*. I came out intending just to speak to you, and then to go straight back home.

LITTLE HANS RILOW: I was expecting you. Virtue is such an elegant suit of clothes, but you have to have the right figure for it.

ERNST: It's a size too big for us two. - If I hadn't met you, I wouldn't have had any peace.- I love you, Hans, the way I've never loved anyone else before..

LITTLE HANS RILOW: Let's not be sad!- When we look back in thirty years' time, we might laugh. But for now, this is heaven. The mountains aglow with the sun, the grapes hanging in our mouths, and the evening wind shrouding the cliffs like a veil..

Scene Seven

Bright November night. Scattered clouds hang in the sky. MELCHIOR climbs over the wall of the churchyard.

MELCHIOR: *(jumping down into the churchyard)*. I'll throw them off the scent here.- Whilst they search the brothels, I can take a breath and figure out what to do... This jacket in pieces, pockets empty, I'm vulnerable to whoever I meet. Tomorrow, I'll escape through the woods. - I knocked a cross over back there. - The frost will kill the flowers tonight. - Nothing but bare ground. The land of the dead.

Climbing out of the skylight wasn't as hard as this! I wasn't prepared for this. Everything is gone, nothing as it was before. I should have stayed where I was!

Why her? Why not me, the guilty one? I would have worked so hard, I would have starved...

How can I even keep going? One crime leads to another. I deserve to be dead, but I don't have the strength to finish it...

I didn't do anything wrong!- I didn't do anything wrong!- I didn't do anything wrong...

No one's ever walked over graves and been so full of envy. But I don't have the courage! Oh, it would be easier if I went mad tonight.

The freshly dug ones are over here. The wind whistles a different key on each gravestone, so much pain in these notes! -

All these wreaths are rotting and falling to pieces- a forest of scarecrows that guard each grave. The willows groan and run their branches over the inscriptions... A stone angel. A tablet.

That cloud's thrown a shadow over everything! That wind is racing and howling, like an army marching to the east! No stars in the sky, either. There's evergreen on this one?- Evergreen?- It must be a girl...

Here rests in Peace
Wendla Bergmann
Born on the 5th of May 1878
Died of anaemia
The 27th of October 1892

And I am her murderer- I murdered her! There's no doubt. I can't cry here. I need to leave. -Now-

MORITZ STIEFEL: (*his head under his arm, comes stamping across the graves*). Wait a minute, Melchior! It might be years until we get another chance. If you knew how much depends on the right time and place...

MELCHIOR: Where did you come from?!

MORITZ: From over there, by the wall. You knocked over my cross. I lie by the wall- Shake hands, Melchior...

MELCHIOR: You can't be Moritz Stiefel!

MORITZ: Shake hands. I'm sure you'll thank me for this later. It won't be so easy another time. This is a strange meeting. I came here especially-

MELCHIOR: Don't you sleep?

MORITZ: Not in the way you guys do. We sit on church towers, rooftops, wherever we want...

MELCHIOR: At peace?

MORITZ: For fun. - We dance round the maypoles in villages, float round empty churches. We fly over huge assemblies of people, scenes of disaster, festivals, garden parties. Sometimes we sneak into people's houses and wait by their beds. - Let's shake hands. - The dead are alone, we don't interact with each other, but we see and hear everything that goes on in the world. We know what human stupidity is, and we laugh at it.

MELCHIOR: What use is that?

MORITZ: Why should it be of use? Nothing is of use to us, we're beyond earthly things, the good and the bad. We don't interact with each other, because that's boring. None of us have anything to lose. We're content within ourselves.

If we didn't pity the living so much, we'd despise them.

They amuse us with their pretensions. We laugh at their little tragedies and make our own observations. You know, I stood at my own funeral and watched you all. It was sublime, I really enjoyed myself. At first, I cried my eyes out but then I couldn't speak for laughing. - Let's shake hands! You'll laugh so hard at what happens next...

MELCHIOR: No, I don't feel like laughing at myself.

MORITZ: The living don't deserve our pity. I never thought I would think that, but I do. I see through all the deception, and I wonder how any of us could have been so naive. Why do you hesitate, Melchior? Let's shake hands! In a second you'll be high above yourself..

MELCHIOR: - Can you forget?

MORITZ: We can do everything. Let's shake hands! We can smile at the young, who mistake their frustrations for idealism, and the old, who bear so much heartbreak in dignified silence. We watch rulers quaking listening to a popular song. We see past the masks and the make-up of the comedian and the poet. We see in a beggar a contented man, and in a capitalist a burdened man. We watch lovers blushing making love, and we smile, knowing that each of them is deceiving the other. We watch mothers bring children into the world, just so they can shout at them and say „What lucky children you are, to have such parents!“, which is then repeated by the next generation, and the next. We know about the innocent and their lonely passions... and we hear Schiller in the mouth of a whore. And we smile most at the fight between God and the Devil, which is really nothing more than a brawl between two drunken idiots! It's a wonderful feeling... truly sublime. Give me your hand Melchior, you might not get this opportunity again...

MELCHIOR: - If I take your hand, Moritz, it's out of self-contempt. I'm an outcast. The hope that I once had, is buried here in a nearby grave. I'm unfit for human emotions, I see nothing between me and degradation anymore. I'm the worst, most contemptible, human being in the universe.

MORITZ: Why are you hesitating then?

(A masked man enters).

THE MASKED MAN: *(to Melchior)*. You're shivering with hunger. You're in no fit state to decide anything. *(To Moritz)*. Off with you.

MELCHIOR: Who are you?

THE MASKED MAN: You'll see. *(To Moritz)*. Off with you, I told you to disappear!- Why aren't you wearing your head?

MORITZ: I shot it off.

THE MASKED MAN: Get back in the ground where you belong and take your head with you. Get away from us with your stench of death! Look at those fingers, they're rotting away. Disgusting!

MORITZ: Please don't send me away...

MELCHIOR: Who are you, sir?

MORITZ: Please don't send me away. I beg of you. Let me stay for a while, I'll be quiet and listen. It's so gruesome down there.

THE MASKED MAN: So what was all that chat about the sublime?! You know that it's all nonsense. Why do you tell so many lies, you headless imbecile? Stay if you must, if you think it'll help you. But stay away from us with those gruesome hands of yours.

MELCHIOR: Are you gonna finally tell me who you are, or not?!

THE MASKED MAN: No. But I would recommend that you trust me. I've got to organise your escape.

MELCHIOR: Are you- my father?

THE MASKED MAN: Wouldn't you recognise your father's voice?

MELCHIOR: No.

THE MASKED MAN: Your father is currently seeking comfort in the arms of your mother. Let me open the secrets of the world to you. You're only in despair right now because of a temporary situation. Once you've had a good dinner, you'll feel a lot better.

MELCHIOR: *(to himself)*. He must be the devil! *(Out loud)*. I've done something so awful, it'll take a lot more than a hot dinner to resolve it.

THE MASKED MAN: That depends on the dinner, my friend. But I can tell you, that girl would have given birth beautifully. She was built perfectly for it. It was Mother Schmidt's abortion pills that killed her. - I'll take you back amongst the living, I'll broaden your horizons. I'll acquaint you with everything wonderful that the world has to offer.

MELCHIOR: But who are you? Who are you? I can't put my trust in someone that I don't know.

THE MASKED MAN: You will only get to know me, without trusting me first.

MELCHIOR: I can go and shake hands with my friend at any moment.

THE MASKED MAN: Your friend is a fake. No one who still has cash in his pocket smiles like that. There is no creature on the planet more miserable than the smiling observer.

MELCHIOR: Miserable or not, you tell me who you are or I'll shake hands with the smiling observer!

THE MASKED MAN: (to Moritz). Well?

MORITZ: He's right, Melchior. I was messing around. Take his advice and don't be put off by the disguise.

MELCHIOR: Do you believe in God?

THE MASKED MAN: Depends on the circumstances.

MELCHIOR: Can you tell me who invented gunpowder?

THE MASKED MAN: Berthold Schwarz- alias Konstantin Anblitzen - a Franciscan monk, at Freiburg in 1330.

MORITZ: I wish to God he hadn't.

THE MASKED MAN: You would have just hanged yourself instead.

MELCHIOR: What do you think about morality?

THE MASKED MAN: I'm not a student sat in school, stop asking me questions!

MORITZ: Don't argue! Please don't argue. Nothing good comes out of that. Why are we sat here in a cemetery at two in the morning, two of us living and one of us dead, if we're just going to argue like drunks?! I thought I would enjoy a little live debate. If you're just going to argue, I'm going to take my head and leave.

MELCHIOR: You're still as high-strung as ever, Moritz!

THE MASKED MAN: The ghost has a point. We shouldn't lose our dignity. Morality is the real product of two imaginary entities. The two entities are „Duty“ and „Free Will“. The result of those two together is called Morality, and its existence is undeniable.

MORITZ: Why couldn't you have explained that to me sooner? My morality led me to my death. I blew my brains out to spare my parents. „Honour thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long upon this earth.“ The Bible got it wrong in my case.

THE MASKED MAN: Don't delude yourself, my friend. Your parents didn't need to be spared. To be perfectly honest, they would have ranted and raged for a day or two, for health's sake.

MELCHIOR: That may be true. But I can tell you, if I had shaken hands with Moritz just now, that would have been because of my *morality*.

THE MASKED MAN: And you didn't, because you're not Moritz.

MORITZ: I don't think there's much difference between you and me, the only thing is that you didn't appear in front of me when I was by the river with a pistol in my pocket.

THE MASKED MAN: So you didn't recognise me? Even at the very last moment, you were poised between life and death. - Anyways, this isn't the time and place to have this kind of discussion, it's too cold.

MORITZ: You're right sir, it's getting cold. - They buried me in my Sunday suit, but they forgot my shirt and underwear.

MELCHIOR: Goodbye, Moritz. I don't know where this man will take me. But at least he's alive...

MORITZ: Please don't be angry at me, Moritz, for trying to take you with me. It was for friendship's sake. I would happily live a miserable life if I could accompany you out of this place.

THE MASKED MAN: In the end everyone gets their due: you, the comforting knowledge of having nothing, and for you, the agonising uncertainty of everything to come.

MELCHIOR: Goodbye, Moritz! Thank you for coming back to see me. How many happy days we spent together in only fourteen years! I promise you, Moritz, whatever happens in the future, I'll never forget you.

MORITZ: Thank you, thank you.

MELCHIOR:... And when I'm an old man with grey hair, I'll feel closer to you than anyone else.

MORITZ: Thank you. Have a good journey, gentlemen. Don't let me keep you.

THE MASKED MAN: Come, young man. (*He lays his hand on MELCHIOR's hand and leads him over the graves*).

MORITZ: (*alone*). I'll wait until they've left. The moon is hiding behind a cloud. It's time to go back to my spot, pick up my cross wherever that dumbass kicked it, and stretch out in my box, get used to the stench of rot, and smile...

Fin.