

Franz Kafka's

Love Life,



Letters,



and

Hallucinations



*in Short Scenes
with Live Actors
a stage play in two acts*

by

Mae Ziglin Meidav

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Mae Ziglin Meidav
40 Brookside Avenue
Berkeley, California 94705
Email: mmeidav@brooksiderep.org
Tel: 510.652-2071
Cell: 510.499-2855

ACT 1, SCENE 1

[HALLUCINATION, BEFORE THE LAW Lights up on Doorkeeper standing in front of an open door with a brilliant light coming from within. FRANZ tries to peer across the Doorkeeper.]

FRANZ: "Before the Law stands a doorkeeper. To this doorkeeper there comes a man from the country and prays for admittance to the Law. But the doorkeeper says that he cannot grant admittance at the moment. The man thinks it over and then asks if he will be allowed in later."

DOORKEEPER: "It is possible, but not at the moment."

FRANZ: "Since the gate stands open, as usual, and the doorkeeper steps to one side, the man stoops to peer through the gateway into the interior."

DOORKEEPER: "If you are so drawn to it, just try to go in despite my veto. But take note: I am powerful. And I am only the least of the doorkeepers. From hall to hall there is one doorkeeper after another, each more powerful than the last. The third doorkeeper is already so terrible that even I cannot bear to look at him."

FRANZ: "These are difficulties the man from the country has not expected; the Law, he thinks, should surely be accessible at all times and to everyone, but as he now takes a closer look at the doorkeeper, he decides that it is better to wait until he gets permission to enter. The doorkeeper gives him a stool and lets him sit down at one side of the door. There he sits for days and years ... and years...And years."

End of Scene**ACT 1, SCENE 2**

[SCENE: PRAGUE, 1888. BOHEMIA, PART OF THE HAPSBURG EMPIRE. HERMANN AND JULIA KAFKA'S BEDROOM.

[Stage is set with a double bed and comforters. HERMANN and MOTHER sleeping under the comforters. FRANZ@5 is V.O.]

FRANZ@5: Momma! Poppa! Poppa! Poppi-eeeeee! [Silence. Long pause.] Mommie! Poppi-eee!

HERMANN: Oh my god, he's calling again. Can't you go?

MOTHER: What?

HERMANN: Can't you go?

MOTHER: Can't you, I'm so tired.

HERMANN: He might fall asleep again.

FRANZ@5: Mommie! Poppie! I want some water.

HERMANN: He's calling for you.

MOTHER: You go -- please. [She buries herself in the covers.]

HERMANN: For god's sakes. You can't get a decent night's sleep around here.

MOTHER: Just go see what he wants.

[HERMANN moves out of the bed in his night shirt,, shuffles over to Young FRANZ' s in the dark.]

HERMANN: Here, lie down! There -- go to sleep! [Hermann starts back to bed.]

FRANZ@5: I want some water. Poppie! I'm thirsty.
 HERMANN: I said: No, go to sleep!
 FRANZ@5: Please! Please! Please!
 HERMANN: No, for crying out loud! ! [Hermann shuffles back to bed.]
 MOTHER: Is he alright now?
 HERMANN: He's quiet now, isn't he?
 MOTHER: What did he want?
 HERMANN: Nothing.
 MOTHER: Did you get him water? Did you lay him down?
 HERMANN: He's quiet. Now, go to sleep.
 MOTHER: Was he cold? Did you cover him?
 HERMANN: If you're so worried about him, why didn't you go!
 FRANZ@5: Poppie! Please! Please let me come in. Please I promise to be good. I don't need the water. I'll go to sleep. I promise.
 [FRANZ@5 continues knocking and crying out. The knocking becomes pounding.]

End of Scene

ACT 1, SCENE 3

[SCENE. PRAGUE 1896. KAFKA'S FAMILY HOME. HERMANN AND MOTHER'S BEDROOM. Nanny is making up the bed with huge down pillows and down comforter.]
 NANNY: Get off, get off you little devil!
 FRANZ@13: You can't see me!
 NANNY: Oh, damn, you little, little -- oh, what is it that your father calls you?
 FRANZ@13: Pisher-ke -- that's the word you're looking for.
 NANNY: That's the word. Little pisher-ke.
 FRANZ@13: No, you can't use "little" with "pisher-ke" because the "ke" already means "little" and you're just repeating yourself.
 NANNY: You're so full of mischief. And the "pisher" part, huh, what does that mean, little smarty, huh?
 FRANZ@13: It means "urinator."
 NANNY: You're so bad. Give me that!
 FRANZ@13: Tell me, Nanny, what do Mother and Father do under this big pile of feathers?
 NANNY: I'm not the one to say.
 FRANZ@13: [He grabs her waist.] Tell me or I won't let you go!
 NANNY: It's not my place.
 FRANZ@13: [scrutinizing her] You were my mother, weren't you?
 NANNY: No -- your mother's your mother.
 FRANZ@13: They say you suckled me.
 NANNY: You're not to say that in that way.
 FRANZ@13: What way should I say it?
 NANNY: I was your wet nurse.
 FRANZ@13: You were my wet nurse! Does that mean I held your -- your -- your -- in my mouth?
 NANNY: You were a baby and didn't know what it was.
 FRANZ@13: Yes I did.

NANNY: Babies can't think. All they know is how to search and find the breast when I hold them in my arms.

FRANZ@13: Show me, again -- will you?

NANNY: You're silly and crazy and besides out of your mind.

FRANZ@13: Did you like when I found your breast, and sucked on your -- your -- your --?

NANNY: I had my own baby as well.

FRANZ@13: Was it special because I wasn't your baby?

NANNY: I always was fond of you, Master Franz.

FRANZ@13: Because of that?

NANNY: Because I like this family, your little sisters, -- your Mother -- and especially your father.

FRANZ@13: You like my father?

NANNY: He's a good family man and he's gentle, he's --

FRANZ@13: How do you know he's gentle?

NANNY: By how he acts.

FRANZ@13: With Mother? He doesn't act very well with Mother, does he?

NANNY: With your little sisters he does.

FRANZ@13: Then you must see Father when none of us do!

NANNY: I do.

FRANZ@13: When?

NANNY: When I'm doing my duties. Now that's enough talk.

FRANZ@13: When he's downstairs, Mother and my sisters are with him. You mean when you're doing your duties upstairs? You don't have duties upstairs, except to straighten the bedroom when they're out.

NANNY: Sometimes there are times --

FRANZ@13: Has Father ever held you like this?

NANNY: Will you stop this! I don't like it. You all talk very nice, sweet words, troubled souls. I'm a good-hearted person, and I let myself be dragged into sympathy.

FRANZ@13: Did he ever snuggle up to you like this? [He buries his head in her breasts.]

NANNY: You're going to get me into a pack of trouble.

FRANZ@13: I'm not telling a soul.

NANNY: I'll be let go, lose this job, won't be able to get another, and be sent back to the country, [begins to cry] and my father will beat me again for being a whore and working for "those Jews."

FRANZ@13: Please don't cry. I like you, Nanny. I don't want you to cry. Here, wipe your eyes. Let me help you.

NANNY: You're kind, Master Franz. Kinder than your father. He doesn't care that I cry after -- when we --

FRANZ@13: When you, when you -- ?

NANNY: Master Franz, I'm so sorry. Thank you. You're a good, kind person. I just don't know who to turn to --

FRANZ@13: It's alright, Nanny. I'll help you with the chores.

NANNY: You don't understand. You're too young and innocent.

FRANZ@13: I'm not. I know a lot. I read a lot.

NANNY: I know you do. Do you know about women?

FRANZ@13: Yes.

NANNY: I mean about women's stuff?

FRANZ@13: Yes.

NANNY: Can you keep a secret?

FRANZ@13: Yes.

NANNY: Do you know what men-stru-ation is?

FRANZ@13: It's a process that men go through to extrude the truth.

NANNY: [bursts into laughter] No, Master Franz. Women get it every month. It tells them whether they're going to have a baby or not. And I've been told for two months now.

FRANZ@13: You're going to have a baby?

NANNY: Yes.

FRANZ@13: That's wonderful. You'll be able to suckle -- to be a wet nurse like you like to.

NANNY: No, my little darling. I can't be a wet nurse to my own child. I am the total fool for you and your father, the total and complete fool.

[She rocks and cradles FRANZ@13 in her arms. Hermann enters. They freeze.]

End of Scene

ACT 1, SCENE 4

[SCENE: PRAGUE. 1901. KAFKA FAMILY HOME. MOTHER AT THE TABLE PLAYING CARDS. FRANZ ENTERS.]

FRANZ: Mother -- Look what I have here! [He tears open the package.] My story --

MOTHER: Franz, let me see --

FRANZ: The print is beautiful! [He shows book to MOTHER.] It's different, isn't it?

MOTHER: Different?

FRANZ: The continuity -- the flow of mind to hand, hand to pen, and pen to paper, is not evident in the print. Would you care to read it?

MOTHER: Of course.

HERMANN: [enters with a drink in his hand] Have you played your card, Mother?

MOTHER: Franz has a story published. He's been telling me how different the print is from handwriting --

HERMANN: Any school boy of twelve would know the difference.

MOTHER: I need to attend to Nana's duties for tomorrow.

FRANZ: Mother, don't go --

MOTHER: Show Father the story now. [to HERMANN] I was telling him how concerned I've been about his health. [to FRANZ] Franz dear, you don't eat right. You stay up late every night, not like normal people do. Good night. [MOTHER EXITS]

FRANZ: Father, this story -- I -- I'm wavering and doubtful in my own endeavors, that as someone who writes --

HERMANN: One story does not a life's success make. Could be a failure -- too many sacrifices to produce it.

FRANZ: Please don't say "failure." Your words have an inevitability. I show you this because --

HERMANN: Put in on my bedside table. I'll look at it before I go to bed.

FRANZ: You'll fall asleep, and then --

HERMANN: What of it? Who'll earn the bread for this household if I don't sleep? Who'll earn the money to keep the stove warm, the lights on, so you can stay up all night and write? When I was a boy, I was sent to Pisek to work.

FRANZ: It's a struggle for me to spend any endeavor other than writing.

HERMANN: I pushed a wheelbarrow of potatoes from village to village, with sores on my legs, no woolen stockings to keep me warm.

FRANZ: You have told us the story -- many times.

HERMANN: You never listen! We slept in one room, glad when we got one potato. I got: nothing from home, not even when I was in the army. I sent money home to support my family. But for all that, a father was always a father. Aach, what do you know!!

FRANZ: I have tried.

HERMANN: You are the oldest but you never take responsibility.

FRANZ: Father, I want to show you this book --

HERMANN: I said: "Put in on my bedside table!"

FRANZ: It confirms for me that I -- I want to show you this, in the publication. Look, look here, see what it says.

HERMANN: I cannot read it, I don't have my glasses.

FRANZ: I'll fetch them. Where are they?

HERMANN: No, don't!

FRANZ: Shall I read it to you?

HERMANN: Not now.

FRANZ: Good night, Father. [HERMANN exits. FRANZ reading from the book] "I dedicate this story to my father."

End of Scene

ACT 1, SCENE 5

[SCENE. PRAGUE. 1912. FRANZ'S OFFICE AT THE WORKMEN'S ACCIDENT INSURANCE INSTITUTE. SUPERVISOR and CLERK enter heatedly. SUPERVISOR carries crumpled sheets with figure drawings, thrusts drawings under FRANZ's nose.]

SUPERVISOR: Have you seen these?

FRANZ: Yes, most recently in a waste paper basket.

SUPERVISOR: Whose, may I ask?

FRANZ: They could, in another realm, be mine. I don't claim any talent as an artist and would hesitate to pass judgment on them. It is not without a twinge of dismay that I see they have appeared again.

SUPERVISOR: Clerk in your division brought them to my attention.

FRANZ: Recall, my dear friend, I did not bring them to your attention.

CLERK: They were in this shared waste paper basket. My duty is to bring infractions to the attention of our superiors.

FRANZ: Why not to me?

CLERK: More appropriate to bring them to the attention of superiors.

FRANZ: You knew they were mine?

SUPERVISOR: Are they yours!??

CLERK: [to Supervisor] If I may, Sir, I thought I should bring them to you, Sir.

SUPERVISOR: You did the right thing. It is in our interest is to build the future of this organization, to promote social services, yielding an increase in income for the swelling population, improving the safety and aesthetics of public facilities, and adding to the local, provincial and national economies to be realized through the development of our resources. We must contribute to the honor and prestige of our modest company, at the same time, furthering its highest social goals. [CLERK applauds. FRANZ bursts into laughter.]

FRANZ: Pardon me -- such lofty goals compared to the reality of what we actually do -- selling insurance at inflated premiums, then turning over every clause to justify refusing to pay claims.

SUPERVISOR: Herr Doctor Franz, you will contain yourself.

FRANZ: I did not intend to offend you, Herr Fuchtenwalden.

CLERK: Herr Fuchtenwalden, my duties have been neglected for the past ten minutes. I would feel obliged to remain after hours, except that my mother is alone, and she's requested that I return in time for the dinner hour.

SUPERVISOR: Too much jabber. Return to your duties.

CLERK: Thank you, Herr Fuchtenwalden. You see, I am most appreciative of my position in this company. It's just my mother needs --

SUPERVISOR: Can't you leave without excuses? [CLERK exits.] I am shocked by your outburst, Herr Doctor Franz. Employees have been dismissed for lesser infractions.

FRANZ: My apologies for this incident.

SUPERVISOR: What are you apologizing for? The stick figure drawings? Your insubordination in front of inferiors? Or your laughter ridiculing the company? Hmmm?

FRANZ: I shall prepare a memorandum of apology followed by a memorandum of compliance. I shall carefully explain to you, as Herr Supervisor, with a copy to your supervisor, and with a copy to Clerk, that I had no intention of ridiculing the company by drawing stick figures, nor of cheating the company out of my invaluable time. I shall add a note of thanks to Clerk for his diligence in surveillance of other workers. In the memorandum of compliance, I shall indicate my willingness in the future to adhere to company directives.

SUPERVISOR: No need for all that. Clerk suffered enough from the pangs of his snitching. [pause] Instead of writing those memoranda, prepare a speech representing the good works of the company.

FRANZ: Along the lines of your speech just now?

SUPERVISOR: Yes, but make it better. You're the word-smith in this company. Craft the speech with some of your literary words. Prepare it for the High Commissioner to be delivered in Berlin to representatives from the Bundestat. Write it in German -- and of course, indicate the speech's punctuation clearly so the High Commissioner get the oral delivery right. And write the side-by-side translation in Czech so he understands what he's saying.

FRANZ: Thank you, Herr Supervisor.

SUPERVISOR: Then type the speech, and I'll review it. I'll pass it along to the High Commissioner -- of course, with my signature. [FRANZ takes his coat.] Where are you going?

FRANZ: If you will excuse me, I have an obligation, Herr Supervisor.

SUPERVISOR: An obligation that is more important than your work here?

FRANZ: I have an appointment.

SUPERVISOR: What about the speech? I need it in two days.

FRANZ: I shall have it for you tomorrow.

SUPERVISOR: Good! [pause] The incident with Clerk about your stick figures drawings was quite humorous, wasn't it?

FRANZ: Yes, it was. [FRANZ laughs. SUPERVISOR laughs. FRANZ's laughter gets louder. SUPERVISOR looks disapprovingly at FRANZ. FRANZ stops laughing immediately.]

End of Scene

ACT 1, SCENE 6

[SCENE. PRAGUE. 1912. MAX'S FAMILY HOME. MAX and FELICE sit at a table drinking coffee. FRANZ enters.]

FRANZ: I have the manuscript of Meditation. Tomorrow it goes to the publisher.

MAX: Your first "real book"! The fate of your work is such a matter of indifference to

you. [to FELICE] We had some arguments about what to do. Franz has always

--

FRANZ: Max! To share the intimate details of our discussions with a "stranger",

especially those that relate to personal matters such as --

MAX: Franz, I'd like you to meet Felice. Felice, this is Herr Doctor of Jurisprudence, Franz Kafka.

FRANZ: How do you do!

FELICE: How do you do!

FRANZ: One could say: it might be a pleasure to meet you! [to MAX] I do not like the title.

FELICE: I think one might be impressed.

MAX: Not with his profession -- with the title of his manuscript.

FRANZ: That is one reason I dislike company. One is always being introduced.

MAX: Franz is a person who is always --

FELICE: I apologize, I thought that he was --

FRANZ: What do you think? [FRANZ hands MAX the manuscript.] In spite of your modesty, I wrote "To Max Brod " on the dedication page.

MAX: I am very flattered.

FRANZ: Please answer the question.

MAX: Some of the most classically beautiful prose I've ever read.

FRANZ: Objective critique is needed, not glorification of the mundane.

MAX: [to FELICE] We have these "discussions" often.

FRANZ: And your opinion?

MAX: Shall I quote the publisher on the previous manuscript: "language crystal clear, yet underlying this mirror of pure language are dreams and visions, individuality, the cadence follows his own mysterious laws --"

FRANZ: Please, do not embarrass me.

FELICE: [stands] I'll return to the hotel.

FRANZ: Have we offended you?

FELICE: Well, no --

FRANZ: You are not from Prague?

MAX: Felice is related to Sophie's husband, who is related to ...

FRANZ: Don't explain your relatives. I hardly can understand the intricacies of my own relations -- who belongs to whom -- and why. Their joys and sorrows bore me to my soul.

FELICE: Relatives exist -- side-by-side, they have no choice. I am en route to a wedding.

FRANZ: Marriages! Ah, to find a lifelong partner! To have little children running around, sitting across from you at the dinner table, I might try it -- one of these days. A great accomplishment -- of the bourgeoisie.

FELICE: If two people love each other, why shouldn't they marry?

FRANZ: Yes, my sister Ottla said: "All the married people we know are happy. I don't understand it." Marriage is the result of the inability to bear life's assaults alone. [FRANZ pulls out some manuscripts.] Max, here, look at these. [MAX sits at the table, then notices FELICE still standing.]

MAX: [to FELICE] I'm sorry! Please, have a seat. Franz is not usually so anxious about me reading his work. [FRANZ moves past FELICE, glances down at her hair, bends over the table, and pauses midway hunched over the table.]

FELICE: What is it?

FRANZ: What is what?

FELICE: The manuscript..

FRANZ: Short prose pieces --

FELICE: I would be interested in reading them.

FRANZ: I do not let anyone see my writing, especially someone whom I have just met, but in your case, I sense a genuine interest, a curiosity, a desire to know, and I might say that although I sensed your participation on many levels, I have enjoyed your relative silence up to this point,

FELICE: Thank you.

FRANZ: For what?

FELICE: For expressing such sentiments.

FRANZ: Did I?

FELICE: Pleasantly so.

FRANZ: Unintentional.

FELICE: You will excuse me. [stands] Your conversation is more than I expected.

FRANZ: More than a polite foray into the status of the weather and Austrian politics?

FELICE: Yes. [FELICE starts to exit. She's wearing flat house slippers.]

FRANZ: I hope you'll become accustomed not only to listening but to responding. [FRANZ moves to her, stumbles over her slippers.] Pardon me.

FELICE: No. Pardon me.

FRANZ: What are those?

FELICE: My shoes were soaking wet when I arrived. I am used to slippers with heels.

FRANZ: [staring] Yes, women's feet in flat slippers, it appears to me as if -- [FELICE exits] Who is that?

MAX: A cousin of my brother-in-law.

FRANZ: I mean -- Who is she? Something about distant women relatives.

MAX: Can I see the other pages?.

FRANZ: Something about that bony, empty face that wears its emptiness openly.

MAX: Have you looked at these?

FRANZ: That bare throat, and that blouse just thrown on. Looked very domestic in her dress. Is she domestic?

MAX: Can we continue with the editing!

FRANZ: Do you think I alienated myself from her by inspecting her a little too closely?

MAX: From what I gathered, you didn't inspect her at all, but you did alienate her with your contentiousness. Can we get on with the work?

FRANZ: Shall I apologize?

MAX: Will you stop?

FRANZ: I didn't carry the presentation well, did I? [pause] That almost broken nose. Was her nose ever broken?

MAX: I don't know, and I don't really care.

FRANZ: Blond, but straight and somewhat unattractive hair. Strong chin, though. You know, as I was standing there, I looked at her closely and I noticed that as I was leaning over, I already had a strong opinion about her, although I have no interest in her.

MAX: For someone who doesn't interest you, you've gone on and on about her. [FELICE enters in street shoes. She carries a platter with pieces of cake.

MAX picks up a piece of cake, and takes a bite.]

FELICE: Your mother needs assistance. She asked me to tell you.

MAX: Tell him about your plans for Palestine. Don't neglect your dessert.

[MAX exits]

FELICE: There is nothing more abhorrent than people who are constantly eating.

FRANZ: My sentiments as well. So -- what are your plans for Palestine?

FELICE: I study Hebrew.

FRANZ: I studied Hebrew too -- for my Bar Mitzvah.

FELICE: One's sacred duty -- and a simple hurdle to pass.

FRANZ: I am interested in Jewish mysticism. Here -- I have an issue of Palestina. [He pulls the magazine from his case.]

FELICE: [beginning to read] "Kvutzá shel na-a-rím az-vú ha-yóm be-dar-kóm le-Tal-Abíb. "A group of young people left today on their way to --"

FRANZ: It is pronounced "Tel-Aviv" a new city in Palestine. Not " Tal-Abib."

FELICE: Yes. [She laughs.] Hebrew, you know--written without the vowels, very difficult pronunciation.

FRANZ: The Scrolls are written without vowels.

FELICE: You're a man, they let you read it aloud.

FRANZ: Do I sense a point of contentiousness with tradition?

FELICE: Possibly. I think it is idealism that motivates people to go to Palestine.

FRANZ: Are you a Zionist?

FELICE: I have followed Theodore Herzl's politics since his declaration at the first Zionist Congress.

FRANZ: Do you plan to go to Palestine?

FELICE: One day. And you?

FRANZ: I too plan to go to Palestine. It would be fulfillment to be able to accompany you. Let us shake hands on that. [She puts out her hand. FRANZ takes her hand.] On a journey to the Promised Land!

FELICE: To the Promised Land. I must go now. It has been -- intriguing.

[FELICE starts to leave. FRANZ picks up his manuscript., blocks her exiting.]

FRANZ: Intriguing? Tell me something about yourself. Where did you grow up?

FELICE: In Berlin. I forgot, you don't like to hear about relatives.

FRANZ: No, please. Would you care for another coffee? Let me have a cup with you. : Shall I bring some of the other cakes from the kitchen?

FELICE: Why are you making a fuss?

FRANZ: I am trying to be polite. Now, tell me -- what do you do?

FELICE: I am a secretary in a company that manufactures dictating machines and sound recording equipment.

FRANZ: Ahh, the modern, technological age!

FELICE: I knew it wouldn't be interesting for you.

FRANZ: I work at a place that could not be any less interesting than yours -- the Workman's Accident Insurance Institute. And I confess -- office work is completely foreign to me and bears no relationship to satisfying my real needs. And your family?

FELICE: A large family, many cousins. When we played together, I was often the only girl. And ... well... I was beaten by my brothers and cousins.

FRANZ: How ghastly!

FELICE: I was defenseless against such beatings. I remember my left arm being covered with bruises. My apologies -- no reason to be telling these things to you.

FRANZ: You do not look like a person who is every sorry for oneself. I marvel at that.

FELICE: It is past. Of no concern now.

FRANZ: How would anyone dare strike you?

FELICE: Cruelty comes from unexpected places.

FRANZ: [taking her arm and examining it] Your arm -- I marvel at its seeming strength. Its present strength. No hint of childhood weakness.

FELICE: And you?

FRANZ: [still holding her arm] Frail in childhood -- I am not certain how much is self-pity. [MAX enters. He sees Franz holding her arm.]

MAX: Don't let him fool you.

FELICE: I would enjoy seeing your writings. I enjoy copying manuscripts.

FRANZ: You do? That's amazing.

FELICE: Send me your manuscripts if you need someone to copy them.

MAX: I will. You have lovely handwriting.

FELICE: Max, sorry, I was not addressing you.

MAX: What has happened to my polite, mild-mannered Felice?

FELICE: You will have to excuse me. I have an early train. I still need to pack and read.

FRANZ: In bed? Do you read in bed?

FELICE: Yes.

FRANZ: All night?

FELICE: Sometimes until four in the morning.

FRANZ: Until four in the morning ?

FELICE: It is a habit -- and not a very good one.

FRANZ: And during the day -- are you not totally fatigued?

FELICE: No, reading at night is compelling, it does not affect me during the day.

FRANZ: I feel a great affinity with you, for you -- with what you do.

MAX: Franz stays up late at night too -- writing.

FELICE: When else could one read? Or write? Please excuse me, I need to go.

MAX: When shall we see you again?

FELICE: I don't know.

MAX: I will get your coat.

FRANZ: No, I will get her coat. [FRANZ bumps into MAX, turns and bumps into FELICE. He grasps her hand.] Excuse me.

FELICE: It does not matter who gets my coat.

MAX: To Franz, everything matters.

FRANZ: Did you have an umbrella?

FELICE: I left it on the train.

FRANZ: That is significant.

MAX: Come on, Franz. Let's walk her to the hotel. You get her coat -- in the hall closet. Otherwise, we shall stand here all night discussing the philosophical points about who gets the coat and the psychological points about forgotten umbrellas on trains.

FRANZ: May I? [FRANZ gestures with his arm touching FELICE's waist lightly. He bends his elbow, FELICE slips her arm into his and they march in matching steps out the door, followed by MAX.]

End of Scene

ACT 1, SCENE 7

[SCENE. PRAGUE. 1912. FAMILY HOME. HERMANN is sitting at the dining room table. FRANZ walks into the hallway and drops his satchel.]

HERMANN: Franz? Is that you? Is that you? Why don't you answer when I call!

FRANZ: Yes Father. It's me. I just came in.

HERMANN: Sorry. Where were you?

FRANZ: Cafe Arco.

HERMANN: Come in here -- please. Come have a cup of tea and a rugelach. Come.

FRANZ: Sorry Father. I'm not hungry.

HERMANN: You don't have to be hungry for dessert.

FRANZ: No, I don't want dessert.

HERMANN: You're getting thin.

FRANZ: I don't eat if I'm not hungry.

HERMANN: Eat when you can. You never know.

FRANZ: Excuse me, I'm very tired -- I need to sleep. I need to get up early.

HERMANN: That's what I want to talk to you about.

FRANZ: About sleep?

HERMANN: No.

FRANZ: About getting up early?

HERMANN: No -- where you sleep. Come sit down.

FRANZ: I don't understand this --

HERMANN: Why don't you move into the spare room to the East -- a couch, a desk, it gets the morning light.

FRANZ: I didn't complain about my room.

HERMANN: Here! I offer you something that would make living here more pleasant.

FRANZ: Why?

HERMANN: I haven't always been the best kind of ... of ... Father.

FRANZ: What makes you say that/

HERMANN: I've been thinking ...

FRANZ: Out of the clear blue horizon? ... a thought? About me?

HERMANN: Yes. I thought about you.

FRANZ: I did something? Something you will despise me for -- something you will berate me for in front of my sisters. Without pressing on that tender nerve that connects father to son, I will assume it was either a minor event with major consequences, or it was a major event with minor consequences. Either way it's difficult to imagine that you have found the inner resource to give thought to me.

HERMANN: Wait! That's just how you are! Going on and on with words. But you don't fool me.

FRANZ: No Father, I've never fooled you into believing that I am a trifle more worthy of your attention, your encouraging words that ...

HERMANN: Stop!! I was offering you something that I thought you'd like -- the room to the east and you didn't answer me.

FRANZ: What do you want me to say? To do? To fall on my knees? Grovel with thanks? Why don't you answer me -- what happened to make you into a thinking machine about your only surviving son. Why weren't you thinking about your daughters? In sheer quantity -- three to one -- thinking about your daughters -- In sheer weight, is more logical than thinking about me.

HERMANN: I am trying to make it pleasant for you at home.

FRANZ: Why?

HERMANN: Because you are my son. Your speech is so ... twisted. I can't understand what you're saying. You write just like you talk -- in riddles.

FRANZ: I write in a labyrinth.

HERMANN: That book with your essay in it to my bed table? I opened it. I only was able to read the first page ...

FRANZ: The next time, I'll translate it into Czech.

HERMANN: Mother told me you were up all night and wrote a letter to me -- saying the most disgusting things about the family, about your sisters, about me, and even about Mother. I insisted she show it to me. She insisted to keep it quiet, to keep it hidden.

FRANZ: Did she?

HERMANN: She kept it but wouldn't give it to me. Thank God, no one other than this family will see it. Thank God that it won't ever see the light of day.

FRANZ: Where is it?

HERMANN: I don't know. I didn't care to read it.

FRANZ: My letters are my writing.

HERMANN: Letters are idiotic.

FRANZ: Letters are the saliva of an unsatisfied mouth The personal, intimate drippings from one's own unsatisfied desires. What else did you want to tell me about my writings -- You don't read them, and you don't know them.

HERMANN: I want to give you a better place for you to do your writing here -- at home.

FRANZ: I don't need a more pleasant place at home -- I don't need this home, or you, or Mother, or anything in it. I don't need your offerings of crumbs from a beggar to a starving beggar.

HERMANN: Don't be angry. I want us to be friends. I want peace between us. I'll take you for a vacation to the health spa in Moritz -- build up your body.

FRANZ: I don't care to go.

HERMANN: Why not?

FRANZ: I don't want to be in a group of old naked men playing volleyball.

HERMANN: You don't have to play volleyball.

FRANZ: I find difficulty in my breathing when I walk naked alongside of you.

HERMANN: Why? We're two men.

FRANZ: Yes ... I find difficulty in saying this.

HERMANN: Say it!

FRANZ: The setting of mountains, forest -- beautiful. But my agony of having your body... along side mine, an intolerable way to ...

HERMANN: Alright, no, we won't go together! You're so angry. Why?

FRANZ: I can't look at your face...

HERMANN: How awful you are!

FRANZ: I am moving to Ottla's place.

HERMANN: In Berlin?

FRANZ: Yes.

HERMANN: And where is she?

FRANZ: She is in Berlin.

HERMANN: I am being lead out to the wilderness.

FRANZ: Don't be melodramatic. It only becomes Mother.

HERMANN: Have you told Mother?

FRANZ: No.

HERMANN: She won't like it.

FRANZ: The little birds leave the nest.

HERMANN: You'll break her heart.

FRANZ: She will get used to it.

HERMANN: I told you -- you can have the large room to the East. It gets the morning sun. You can have the second room there. Good for writing.

FRANZ: Yes Father, thank you.

HERMANN: You can have my new desk. I don't use it very much.

FRANZ: Ottla has already made several contacts for me. I'll send for my books. [FRANZ starts to ascend the stairs.]

HERMANN: Are you afraid of me?

FRANZ: You asked me that before -- why I maintain that I am afraid of you. At that time I was unable to think of an answer, partly for the very reason that I am afraid of you, and partly because any explanation of why I am afraid of you would mean going into far more detail than I could keep in mind while talking.

HERMANN: I want to know.

FRANZ: Mother has my letter.

HERMANN: Should I read it?

End of Scene

ACT 1, SCENE 8

[SCENE: BERLIN. 1913. FELICE AND FRANZ. PARK IN PRAGUE.]

FRANZ: So good of you to come. Did you receive all my letters?

FELICE: I did.

FRANZ: I couldn't know you received them, you didn't answer them.

FELICE: I started to answer the first, but the second, third and fourth arrived before I had a chance. Then others arrived before I even thought of an answer.

FRANZ: I waited for your answers.
FELICE: Did you get my letters?
FRANZ: Only two of them.
FELICE: That's what I wrote.
FRANZ: I read then over and over, then wrote to you.
FELICE: You analyzed every word.
FRANZ: I was inspired by their --
FELICE: Please --
FRANZ: -- brilliance. I've felt this yearning for these past months --
FELICE: I'm delighted.
FRANZ: It's the most passionate I've been -- dreams, food, life, love -- suddenly, I have a great appetite. That burning sensation in my lungs is really my heart – lungs and heart in the breast. Oh, my lovely, lusty charming Felice.
FELICE: No one has ever called me that.
FRANZ: I'm seething with a fire that could only be considered life's blood.
FELICE: Franz, have you lost all sense of propriety!
FRANZ: I feel a churning, a volcanic rumbling, in my depths ready to burst forth – and have the lava flow down our thighs.
FELICE: Franz, please! I'm distraught. You were so intelligent when I we met at Max's home, and now you're --
FRANZ: I was lost in your perfume.
FELICE: That's face powder.
FRANZ: Face powder! What a fascinating scent to lust after! A stimulus to the senses and a memory.
FELICE: You could drive me into hysteria.
FRANZ: Exactly what I wish to do.
FELICE: Franz, let's talk about how we're to manage.
FRANZ: What did you think of my letters?
FELICE: I agonized over them.
FRANZ: Why should you agonize over letters? Didn't I write how I felt? It's fate that wemet.
FELICE: I have only two hours.
FRANZ: Two hours? We can think an eternity in -- in two minutes.
FELICE: Mother wants me to decide on an apartment.
FRANZ: Already? So soon?
FELICE: When I was in Basle, you wrote that we would decide when I return --
FRANZ: I can't make those decisions now.
FELICE: When can you?
FRANZ: It interferes with my thinking.
FELICE: You mean "thinking about us" interferes with your "thinking"? Do I look for an apartment on the Central Square, or a house in the country?
FRANZ: The country is for visiting, not for dwelling.
FELICE: Then you prefer the city.
FRANZ: I didn't say that.
FELICE: Then what?
FRANZ: This topic disorients me.
FELICE: I looked at some furniture for us. The heavy oak buffet would match the woodwork, and Mother wants me to decide on the --
FRANZ: We're deciding on a lifetime together and all you can think of is furniture?

FELICE: We need it -- in the dining room.

FRANZ: For entertaining friends? For entertaining family? You don't know who I am. After all that I've written to you. You don't read my letters, do you?

FELICE: I read them. I treasure your letters.

FRANZ: You tie my letters with a blue satin ribbon like -- like Ophelia , stash them away, only to throw them into my face, or to retrieve them to read when we are no longer together.

FELICE: I cherish what you write. At times I don't understand --

FRANZ: Perhaps there will come a time when you do understand, when you do value my letters, value them as much as my stories. My letters are my life's work as much as my stories. I would feel no sense of betrayal if you ever publish my letters -- of course long after I can no longer be embarrassed by them. I work grudgingly during the day at a meaningless job. I come home, take a nap, eat, take an hour walk, and then work until four in the morning. Letters are the sole basis of our knowledge of each other, the way I make myself known to you, my physical self, my attitudes towards art, life, writing and -- moments when --in reality or from my recollection -- your way of looking at me -- something more than what your are, something higher seems to break through.

FELICE: Yes, you say you love me, but in your letters you seem to say one thing, and then in the next sentence, change your mind.

FRANZ: If you don't understand, who will? That is the life I lead -- that is the life I need --

FELICE: My intention is not to hurt your feelings.

FRANZ: I do not need some false sense of politeness -- that merely cracks through my senses and absorbs my energies.

FELICE: I don't understand --

FRANZ: Letters are a dialogue, with you, with myself, with the person who's writing, with the person who's listening, with the one who's not writing.

FELICE: Your letters say you love me, and now my family --

FRANZ: Forget your family!

FELICE: We have talked enough, written enough --

FRANZ: You are no judge of what is "enough". I wait for your answers. Your letters do not arrive.

FELICE: I cannot write as often as you do. I have another life.

FRANZ: What did you say?

FELICE: About our lives?

FRANZ: No, about your life. Another life! You cannot have another life. I do not. And you will not.

FELICE: It is no use to continue --

FRANZ: I want you to say it again.

FELICE: What?

FRANZ: "I have another life."

FELICE: Please be sensible.

FRANZ: [agitated and shouting] Don't you understand? I am AFRAID that will happen!

[Lights change to Hallucination. FRANZ moves about like an animal, scurries about on all fours. A thud, the noise of a clod of dirt falling, FELICE knocks.]

FRANZ: Who's there!! You can't come into this labyrinth without my permission! Speak! You can't burst through and roam through my burrow with your sneaky paws. [Another knock. He runs towards the noise. Felice enters

wearing a mask of a mouse. She too moves like an animal. She holds her hands together like paws, and nibbles.] Ah-ha!! -- you're tenacious. Get out! You can't eat my stores. It will make you sick.

FELICE: I was searching for food.

FRANZ: Why search here?! Here -- take this with you. [He gives her a sheet of paper. She nibbles on the paper like a piece of cheese.] But leave me alone.

FELICE: Can't I stay?

FRANZ: I don't permit it -- it's my castle, my domain. I can't digest my food when anyone is watching. If you stay, I'll starve to death.

FELICE: Please, please, please -- [She tries to nibble his ear.]

FRANZ: Keep away! Your furry, wet muzzle against my ear -- I will go deaf if you touch my ear-- blind if you touch my eyes-- lame if you touch my feet-- stupid if you touch my brain-- dead if you touch my heart. Keep away! Please! [Hallucination fades out. Felice doffs mask.] I will take the train back to Prague tomorrow. When I return to Berlin, we shall know whether we can be happy together.

FELICE: I know we can be happy. We are engaged -- Will you be back in time for our photograph together?

FRANZ: Yes, when I return, I shall know. [FELICE walks on ahead and exits. FRANZ sits for awhile alone.] I must quickly write my thoughts -- I will make a list -- a balance sheet of the positives and negatives of marriage.

End of Scene

ACT 1, SCENE 9

[SCENE: PRAGUE 1914. FRANZ' APARTMENT.

FRANZ sits at a writing desk. MAX enters.]

MAX: Life is reasonably good!

FRANZ: How can you speak so?

MAX: Law intrigues me, music delights me, women fascinate me.

FRANZ: Your optimism is boundless.

MAX: Optimism serves as an attraction -- for women.

FRANZ: At least you haven't come bursting in today to argue about Nietzsche.

MAX: We settled that last week. "Evil and good -- simply the same." Have you reviewed my essay?

FRANZ: My concentration has left me. The noise of the children in the street disturbed me. The need to review your work is not as compelling as listening to their mindless play. Detestable!

MAX: So you still believe we are part of that super-lofty race of intellectuals situated on Mount Parnassus?

FRANZ: Our gifts are not entirely contemptible. We have small talents but squander them.

MAX: I'm not here to talk philosophy. I sent your three stories to the publisher.

FRANZ: Why ? Why did you send them? I gave them to you to read and comment on!

MAX: I thought they were good enough.

FRANZ: Good enough? [FRANZ throws papers to the floor, stomping on them.] Why did you send them to a publisher? They were unfinished pieces of drivel like these.

MAX: Will you stop?

FRANZ: I want you to give me back all my stories.

MAX: I don't think I can do that.

FRANZ: Why not?

MAX: I've sent the rest out as well.

FRANZ: [FRANZ scoops up the papers and carries them to the fireplace.] I am burning these! Until I have a chance to produce something other than senseless, pointless anecdotes, I will not have these around.

MAX: [holding FRANZ back] If you can't restrain yourself, I will.

FRANZ: [in tears] I want you to promise me to burn my writings after my death.

MAX: I can't promise that.

FRANZ: You must.

MAX: Please. You have written great stories and will continue to do so. These stories are your legacy.

FRANZ: Why can't I have children -- like you do?

MAX: These writings are your "children."

FRANZ: Raising children is an adult conspiracy against the little ones.

MAX: It is you who puts the holy script under the tongue of the Golem, the sacred paper. Then this inert clay-molded human likeness comes to life.

FRANZ: The holy script under the tongue? Just scraps of paper!

MAX: You are engaged to Felice. You need to stop discouraging yourself about your writing.

FRANZ: I lie stretched out on the floor sliced up like a roast, and with my hand I am slowly pushing a slice of my meat towards the dog.

MAX: What do you want?

FRANZ: I want you to promise to burn my unpublished writings after my death.

MAX: Don't be so fatalistic!

FRANZ: Max!!! Can you promise! [He grabs Max's jacket.]

MAX: I promise.

End of Scene

ACT 1, SCENE 10

[SCENE. BERLIN 1914. PHOTOGRAPHER'S STUDIO. ENGAGEMENT PHOTO, FELICE sits and FRANZ stands at her side for photograph. Photographer positions FELICE and FRANZ during their conversation. FELICE tries not to move her head or hands.]

FELICE: How was your trip?

FRANZ: Fine.

FELICE: You look well.

FRANZ: We're still engaged, aren't we?

FELICE: Yes, except for --

FRANZ: Don't frown. You'll ruin the photograph.

FELICE: I'm not frowning. Mother says that it's not good for a couple when the man stays up writing until four in the morning. Those early hours are for the couple, for the marriage bed, for love -- for children.

FRANZ: You make my heart swell with your talk of love. Little children playing at your feet. I come home from the office, I call out, "Felice dearest, where are you?" And you run to me, smelling of rose-water and lavender. I put my arms around your waist and, and --

FELICE: -- and one of the children begins to cry, tugging at my skirt. The child is hungry and wet and wants its mother.

FRANZ: The child will want its father too. I will change and do my writing in the morning. That is how I keep my head clear. But I would not mind.

FELICE: [stands agitated] I mind that! You closet away what you write -- no one sees it. Who will ever see it? You are a Doctor of Jurisprudence. My family admires you for that. You need to continue working at the Institute. What a lawyer writes is important. People pay money for every precious word you write.

FRANZ: I do not wish to clutter my mind with other people's legal matters.

FELICE: You will be able to support a family. [Photographer seats FELICE again.] Say you'll do it, please?

FRANZ: Can I think about it?

FELICE: That's what you said months ago.

FRANZ: On Sunday, I will let you know.

FELICE: We're having dinner with my parents tonight.

FRANZ: It is too quick for me to make a decision.

FELICE: It's always been difficult for you to make decisions.

[Photographer escorts FRANZ to stand besides FELICE. He places his arm to her side, back of his hand almost touching her hip. FELICE looks up at FRANZ.]

PHOTOGRAPHER: Look forward, please! Hold it! With a smile!

[Photographer shoots the photograph.]

End of Scene

ACT 1, SCENE 11

[SCENE: BERLIN. 1915. A PARK. FELICE AND FRANZ ARE SEATED ON A PARK BENCH.]

FRANZ: Can you sit on my right side?

FELICE: If it pleases you. Whatever makes you so particular about how we sit together?

FRANZ: I want it to seem -- to feel that we are engaged -- as lovers -- young -- soul mates sharing intimacies freely.

FELICE: Don't we?

FRANZ: I want to bare my soul -- bare my chest -- physically. [He takes off his jacket and opens his shirt.]

FELICE: You'll get deathly sick!

FRANZ: Only if the physical is totally aligned with my thoughts can I say what I'm going to say.

FELICE: Say it quickly before you start coughing. You'll be laid up for the engagement reception tomorrow.

FRANZ: You remember my trip to Thalia?

FELICE: You wrote me about it.

FRANZ: What did you think?

FELICE: About what?

FRANZ: Can you remember what I wrote?

FELICE: You mentioned the isolation.

FRANZ: The lovely view from the window -- I would stand for hours and gaze out the window -- and stare at the small cottages. The only break in the landscape would be the innkeeper pitching hay to the horses, and his daughter helping him.

FELICE: It's late. We should be going back. [She tries to take FRANZ by the arm.]

FRANZ: It was about attractions -- the magnetic draw of the place and the people, the clouds touched the mountains. Everyone at the inn touched everyone, and I was drawn --

FELICE: Can we go please?

FRANZ: There was a mist like the one penetrating the forest now. She had an uncommon name "Miranda", reminiscent of *The Tempest*. I was more her Prospero than her Ferdinand. The evening proceeded in a manner that might have taken place on an island. I want you to forgive me.

FELICE: For what? You haven't asked my forgiveness.

FRANZ: That's true, my darling, for the past I have not asked forgiveness, but in the moment now I am in the process of asking --

FELICE: [shouting and in tears] You don't think that you did anything wrong. You're a monster!

FRANZ: You are shouting -- contrary to what one would expect of an engaged couple.

FELICE: I won't have you back until you come crawling on your knees, and beg forgiveness.

FRANZ: Yes, yes, I can do that. Not that the sacrifice is not worth it, but it is this shouting, this public display -- if only you would stop, I would crawl and grovel, I know how to do that well. How could this marriage ever work?

FELICE: [in tears] I'm breaking our engagement.

FRANZ: I will take the train back tonight.

FELICE: You're not angry at what I said?

FRANZ: As angry as I ever could express -- face-to-face. [She runs off. He lies back on the park bench and contemplates.] What is it about me that I cannot wait to return to Prague to write this experience, recounting it in a letter, or perhaps an allegorical story.

End of Scene

ACT 1, SCENE 12

[SCENE. BERLIN. 1916. FELICE'S BEDROOM. FELICE sits at a vanity bench. She's in a camisole, brushing her hair, preparing for bed. GRETE stands above her looking into the mirror.]

GRETE: I apologize for coming so late.

FELICE: Franz's health has deteriorated.

GRETE: You're quite lovely when your face is flushed.

FELICE: Franz has become more estranged from me. He wrote to my mother -- not to me -- but to my mother about his feelings.

GRETE: But how do you know that he's estranged?

FELICE: He's taken an apartment in Prague without telling me. Can you help me make amends?

GRETE: I don't know if you really want me to intercede.

FELICE: You can go to Prague, explain the situation to him -- in person.

GRETE: What shall I say?

FELICE: You might tell him that I want to convince him, that we should keep our engagement.

GRETE: I can't say that I know him that well to relay such intimacies. I don't know what sort of person he is.

FELICE: He's a thoughtful, considerate person. He comes from a normal family. His father's concerned about his future, wants him to go into his business. Franz can express himself well, but for some reason, he expresses himself better in letters than face-to-face. He sometimes presents these lengthy explanations that could be boring if you don't understand him. But he has a graciousness, a charm and a politeness about him, it can be enchanting.

GRETE: It is not good to have a third party intervening.

FELICE: You are a very special friend.

GRETE: And you love him?

FELICE: I would not be trying for this reconciliation if I didn't love him. So will you go?

GRETE: I will consider it.

FELICE: Then it is "yes"?

GRETE: Yes.

FELICE: Thank you, dear friend. [FELICE gives GRETE a kiss on the cheek. They hug each other.]

End of Scene

ACT 1, SCENE 13

[SCENE. PRAGUE. 1916. FRANZ'S APARTMENT. FRANZ, barefooted, in a state of agitation, crumples papers. He sits on the floor, leans against his bed, stands, sits at his desk and starts to write. A Giant Insect in jerky movements crawls across the floor. FRANZ is aware of its presence, but becomes absorbed in writing. The doorbell rings. FRANZ signals silently with his head for the Giant Insect to leave. The doorbell rings. The Giant Insect scampers out of the room. FRANZ finally opens the door. GRETE enters.]

FRANZ: Fraulein Bloch?

GRETE: Yes.

FRANZ: Why did you come?

GRETE: Felice is my friend. I came because I was curious to see the man who produces such torment in her, so extravagant in his letters, reaching through the page to the folds of a woman's heart.

FRANZ: You might have a poetic sense.

GRETE: I've come to ask if there is a way for you to reconcile with Felice --

FRANZ: You do not believe it's my fault?

GRETE: You need to write to her.

FRANZ: Our letters to each other have dealt exclusively with -- the act of writing letters to each other. It is not my letters she wants, it is her inordinate craving for some word to alleviate her apprehension.

GRETE: Your letters tear at her.

FRANZ: Were you ever engaged to anyone?

GRETE: Once. It disintegrated.

FRANZ: A charming girl like you could have your choice. You need not wait for your parents to make the match.

GRETE: For me, the marriage question is not a burning issue. [GRETE starts to leave.]

FRANZ: Please stay awhile. I have not had this much contact with a human being in months.

GRETE: I have come to ask you to return to Berlin to renew your betrothal to Felice.

FRANZ: I could not tolerate another visit with her family. I could not tolerate another afternoon's walk with her.

GRETE: It is cruel. You are destroying another human being. Your Felice is wasting away at home, waiting for a word from you.

FRANZ: If only she could convey that in letters. You appear to be a generous person -- warm. You give of yourself for the happiness of your friends.

GRETE: No one sympathizes with you. No one.

FRANZ: No one, no one ever, you are right! no one! I am a totally depraved human being, a wasted life. It is not possible for me to exist, not worth it for me to continue -- [FRANZ starts crying, coughing and choking.. FRANZ points to a bottle, GRETE gives him a spoonful. He signals for a second one, and she feeds him another. He's crying. GRETE holds his head in her arms, and rocks him.]

Ever since I was a boy, it was like this --

GRETE: [stroking his head and face] Calm down. Please. Please see if there is a way for you to visit Felice.

FRANZ: It was always like this. Only the writing saved me. I never was attractive enough for girls, clumsy and ugly.

GRETE: Franz, please. You are a fine person.

FRANZ: Women never liked my eyes. Once a young girl laughed at me, hooted, they all laughed, she told me I had owl eyes.

GRETE: You are attractive to Felice. You are the only person in the world she desires. She loves you, wants you, needs you to return. She thinks you are wonderful.

FRANZ: Do you think I am "wonderful"?

GRETE: You have a delicate manner.

FRANZ: Answer my question. Do you think I am "wonderful"?

GRETE: I think that you're a --

FRANZ: Answer -- yes or no.

GRETE: Well I --

FRANZ: You are skirting the question. Do you think I am handsome?

GRETE: Don't talk about those attributes.

FRANZ: I am ugly. Is that not true?

GRETE: Don't denigrate yourself. You're attractive, in your way.

FRANZ: I do not understand what Felice was attracted to.

GRETE: You're a loving person, but it is all buried. Felice fell in love with your -- sensitivities.

FRANZ: This is the first time in my life that a woman -- could bring herself to care for me.

GRETE: No, it is not.

FRANZ: Are you creating a fiction to soothe the reality?

GRETE: I can -- feel something about you.

FRANZ: Please --

GRETE: I do. It's the truth. That's the reason I'm here.

FRANZ: How do you know?

GRETE: Would I have traveled all this way? Would I have come if I didn't think there was something special about you. Felice is dear to me. You're dear to me because you're dear to Felice. I would do anything to make you two happy.

FRANZ: You said you saw something special? Can you describe it?

GRETE: I express myself simply. I'm not the writer, Franz.

FRANZ: I need you to say what you see. For my sake.

GRETE: Not for Felice's sake?

FRANZ: Why are we dwelling on Felice? Felice is a time-wasting obsession. She can neither fill my mind nor my --

GRETE : Your heart?

FRANZ: I was going to say "days."

GRETE: I'm returning to the university. It's fascinating beyond anything I've ever experienced.

FRANZ: Anything?

GRETE: I don't know if Felice wrote you about me.

FRANZ: I know nothing about you except what I learned tonight. When you walked in, I was conscious only of your sympathy and the touch of your hand. How your eyes light up!

GRETE: At the university I'm studying Jungian psychology. It tells me much about life. "... woman builds bridges for the masculine mind over which he can safely guide his feelings to the opposite shore." The subject is -- stimulating -- intellectually.

FRANZ: Yes, stimulating -- intellectually. Doesn't that tell you more about the nature of men and women? [He passes his hands across hers.]

Your hand. The moment I first touched that hand. Tonight. [They kiss.] It is what we felt all along. [He embraces her, she yields, he leads her to his bed.]

End of Scene

ACT 1, SCENE 14

[SCENE : BERLIN. 1917. A ROOM AT THE ASKANISCHER HOF HOTEL. MAX lounges on the bed. FRANZ in undershirt does several push-ups, then starts to dress.]

FRANZ: Prior arrangements are doomed to fail. Grete was sent as an intermediary to convince me to meet with Felice. I wanted to meet with Felice alone.

MAX: What convinced you?

FRANZ: Her perfume -- deep, dark, penetrating, musky.

MAX: Felice's?

FRANZ: No, Grete's. Felice and I will attempt a reconciliation,

MAX: You don't want to get married.

FRANZ: I revere the institution of marriage. I will create normality.

MAX: Felice is not the person you want to be tied to for life. You need artistic inspiration.

FRANZ: She has given me that -- in her way. In letters.

MAX: In your letters to her. She'll attach those bourgeois chains -- and you'll go "clink, clink" around the house.

FRANZ: Stop! She will be a helpful companion.

MAX: In your own self-deluding, and her own self-aggrandizing way?

FRANZ: Is it any different from your existence with your Rachel?

MAX: Rachel's an actress, an artist. Internally and eternally she feels what an artist needs.

FRANZ: You two fight incessantly -- and viciously.

MAX: Deliciously. Aaah , [he hugs himself] but I love our reconciliations. Wouldn't you like to sink your teeth into Felice?

FRANZ: You are incorrigible! We do not have that type of relationship. I prepared a list of possible, but insipid marriage disagreements.

MAX: Already in the throes of her organization and -- domination. You said once --you would suffocate from the bourgeois disease of boredom.

FRANZ: Do not judge us before we try.

MAX: You've already tried. Biology is against you. She's a woman.

FRANZ: I cannot bear sarcasm.

MAX: Hypocrisy then? She doesn't have breasts, and you need breasts.

FRANZ: One was supposed to be weaned in the early years.

MAX: We always want to set the nipple back in our mouth -- between our teeth.

FRANZ: Max! You are not to say those things about Felice. You understand the intellect, the companionship, the continuity of life in creating a home. Physicality is not important.

MAX: Her physicality? Then why do you have that frequent need to visit the "corner house on the square." She's ugly.

FRANZ: You are talking about my fiancé.

MAX: Didn't you say she had a long, long face?

FRANZ: You cannot tolerate Felice.

MAX: It's you who can't. You'll blame me for your unhappiness.

FRANZ: She is bringing Grete to help mediate.

MAX: Hah! What a joke!

FRANZ: Do not ridicule me.

MAX: You display a great deal of interest in Grete. You're on the verge of marriage with Felice, with Grete, your inamorata, as mediator between you and your future spouse. Why? Simply madness!

FRANZ: Grete is a friend now -- my friend, her friend.

MAX: A "very close friend" indeed. I'm leaving.

FRANZ: It is intolerable for me to have to choose between your friendship and Felice.

MAX: I lose.

FRANZ: Please do not push me. [Knock at the door.] Don't say anything to Felice that will set her off into tears.

MAX: You're the one who's the source of her agony. You set her off into making her face longer.

FRANZ: I cannot tolerate her agony.

MAX: Sorry, but "love me, love my agony" -- that's what my Rachel says.
 [Knock at the door again] You've already made her angry by having her wait.
 Answer the door. Love --and hate -- await.

FRANZ: Please, be quiet, will you! [FRANZ opens the door. FELICE and GRETE push their way in, with a swishing sound of their long skirts.]

FELICE: What was the delay?

FRANZ: I was talking to Max.

FELICE: About me?

FRANZ: Here, allow me to take your coat.

FELICE: I am capable of removing my coat -- alone.

FRANZ: I do not recall knowing whether Grete would be here. [to Felice] I had imagined this was going to be a private meeting.

FELICE: You, me, and Max? Oh no, that's not private.

FRANZ: You know how I hate a public display.

FELICE: This hotel room is not a public display -- my sister wanted to come too. She's engaged to be married..

GRETE: In some way, I represent Felice's family's and father's interest.

FRANZ: Your father's interest? Is he coming to this meeting too? Are we to discuss a second marriage?

GRETE: The discussion of your marriage has implications for Felice's father and sister.

FRANZ: I am not religious enough? Is that your father's concern? Your family is not religious.

GRETE: Their family is not religious, but when it comes to issues of birth, death and marriage, all the old commandments come into play. The Bible says that the oldest daughter must marry first.

FRANZ: What an odd way to represent our engagement.

FELICE: Our family follows traditional Jewish religious practice -- in birth, death and --marriage.

MAX: Regressive, and reactionary ones.

FRANZ: Jewish religious observance is total anarchy -- there is no logic to it.

FELICE: Is Max staying?

FRANZ: Yes. Is Grete staying?

FELICE: I wrote you.

FRANZ: It slipped my mind.

FELICE: You were bringing Max. I might have to face a barrage of questions -- I might need support.

FRANZ: Grete? Your support?

FELICE: Grete's going to act as mediator.

FRANZ: I do not like how we started this meeting.

FELICE: How shall we start it, dear Franz? With you hesitating before the closed door?

FRANZ: I will try to explain how the closed door, just a moment ago, was a decision point in my life, that I might have to choose between "the lady or the tiger", that --

FELICE: I don't want to stand here and be subjected to --

FRANZ: You're wounding me dearest, and I don't know why. Why? These months, this year? Your sentiments? -- first one way, then another. You don't know why?

FRANZ: We need to be patient and loving as we are in our letters.

FELICE: Those are letters, Franz. This is real life. Understand? Letters! Paper, words, ink! Nothing! Absolutely nothing. [FELICE has approached the table with FRANZ's papers. She grab some of these, shuffles them around, some fall to the floor.]

MAX: I told you she was too Philistine.

FRANZ: Max, please! Of course, my darling -- Life is important, but what we say now is unimportant compared to all that we have shared in letters.

FELICE: I wish to say something about the letters that I --

GRETE: My dears, please stop for moment. Let consider all sides of the questions, we can turn the discussion into another other direction --

MAX: Fascinating! The fox mediating among the chickens.

GRETE: Perhaps we should start this with a cordial embrace? [GRETE indicates that FRANZ and FELICE should hug. FELICE resists.]

FELICE: This is for me to manage.

FRANZ: I am already on the defensive by not conforming to her expectations of when to open the door.

FRANZ: I see her spying on me even through the door, running through my papers. Everything gives me pause. That's why even the simple act of standing before a door and deciding whether to open it, fills me with trepidation.

FELICE: I don't want to be an introduction to a short story. We need to discuss our engagement, Franz, and to consider whether there is any hope.

GRETE: Perhaps we should all sit down. It will be easier.

[MAX and GRETE arrange chairs in court-like fashion. GRETE sits in the middle, indicates for FRANZ to sit next to her, then MAX on one side.

FELICE sits next to GRETE FRANZ doesn't sit but moves around the room, agitated.]

MAX: A sensible woman -- Felice. Is she not, Franz? [pause] Franz, say something, will you?

FRANZ: I either say too much or too little. The result is the same.

GRETE: Franz, we are here to express opinions, give our support, to right anything wrong between you and Felice.

FRANZ: Grete, and others, in these matters opinions differ so much, that the confusion is impenetrable.

FELICE: [stands, pleading her case] I have many things to say. I can no longer tolerate your excursions into the countryside, for your supposed health reasons. I can no longer tolerate your long letters to others, pouring out your heart and soul to others -- and to Grete.

FRANZ: Grete is a loyal friend, to us both.

GRETE: I love you both, that's why I'm here.

FELICE: I don't want this meeting to revolve around you and Franz.

GRETE: This is a surprise. I have the best interests of both of you at heart.

FELICE: Dear Grete, you are fueling this intolerable relationship.

GRETE: Felice, it is you he loves. Isn't that true, Franz? Tell her.

FELICE: Don't force expressions of love for me -- from him. He needs to say it for himself.

FRANZ: You both talk about me as if I were not present. You are sitting in judgment over me -- it is horrible for me, for you, for everyone -- but it only appears to be so. In fact, I am sitting in your place -- in judgment over myself, and I shall never leave it.

FELICE: Franz, you will not place me in that untenable position of being engaged, yet never seeing me, visiting me --

FRANZ: We have visited -- together -- remember the stroll in the park.

FELICE: Once, twice. This is no engagement. There is no one engaged in anything but fantasies, illusions, words -- in letters, more and more letters, I am being buried in letters!. [FELICE, agitated, moves to the desk, gathers up the papers, crumbles them, throws them to the floor. She picks up the pens on the table, including the smashed pen, throws the pens to the floor.]

GRETE: Felice, dear, please calm yourself.

MAX: My dear, that is his life's blood.

FRANZ: Please stop commenting on my life.

FELICE: [in tears] Yes, let him comment, and let him publish those comments!

GRETE: Felice, be the good, generous person that we know you to be. Remember on the trolley here how you praised his qualities -- intellectual, sensitive, loving --

FELICE: I didn't say "loving."

FRANZ: What you say is so clear that I have no wish to respond. It ought to be impossible for one person to say to another.

FELICE: Say it straight away! Not with all your hesitations -- your ambivalence, first one way, and then another. Say it, for God's sake! You hate conflict!

FRANZ: I am totally shamed by the public nature of your remarks.

FELICE: When and how should they be said?

FRANZ: I am so humiliated that these accusations, the animal nature of those, sprayed over the present company.

FELICE: [in tears] I am no longer your betrothed, Franz. Come, Grete, We will send the announcement of the cancellation in the morning.

[FELICE rises to leave. GRETE hesitates.]

FRANZ: Felice!

GRETE: Oh, my dear Franz, I am so sorry.

FELICE: Are you coming?

FRANZ: I will write to you.

GRETE: Yes, do. Please do.

FRANZ: No, I mean to you, Felice.

FELICE: No, please don't.

[With a swish of the skirts, the women leave: FELICE first in anger, then GRETE throws FRANZ a loving look and exits. FRANZ collapses to his knees.]

FRANZ: It is broken.

MAX: You should be the happiest man alive.

FRANZ: Should I?

MAX: You would have lost yourself.

FRANZ: Would I? [pause] I should feel a sense of sadness, remorse, all I feel is a sense of exhilaration. I am frightened by the disparity between what I should feel and what I do feel. These eyes that have not had anything to write for the past months. A pounding heart, tense, and now no eyes for anything else, but my writing. [FRANZ's face grows still; his eyes bleary. MAX exits. FRANZ picks up the smashed pen, the crumpled papers, shuffles papers, crawls to the desk, lifts himself up, and begins writing.]

DOORKEEPER: The unresolved verdict. The mysterious sentence and false assumptions -- that one without complete knowledge of the events, not knowing anything of the implications, deeper meaning of one's actions -- this

was the fate of -- [GRETE and FELICE enter. They have donned long black cloaks, masks, and top hats. The two women walk in stylized step towards FRANZ. They put a black top coat over his waist coat and seat him.]

FRANZ: You were meant for me? [They don't answer.] What theater are you playing at?

GRETE AND FELICE: Theater? [The two women nod to each other and lift him up. They place him between them, elbows straight, arms entwined. They march in rigid steps to a place outdoors. He resists, they push him. He gives up resistance, then he leads, they follow in tight formation. FELICE, in a mist enters in slow motion, passes across his view, walks across in the distance, and passes out of his sight.]

FRANZ: As long as I keep my intelligence intact and analytical faculties, everything will be alright.

[The two women and FRANZ continue walking. They stop at a pile of stones and a stream. They remove his overcoat, his waistcoat and his shirt. He stands shivering. They walk him again, sit him down leaning his head against some stones. His head hangs in an awkward position. They adjust it.]

FRANZ: But where is the Court? The Judge? Where is the Jury? [One of women opens her cloak, pulls a long knife from a sheath. They bend over on either side of Franz. They pass the knife back and forth across his chest in pseudo-politeness, indicating that FRANZ is to grab the knife and plunge it into his chest. When he refuses to do that, they pass the knife to one another -- again in mock politeness -- first one refusing, and then the other refusing, each trying to decide who will do the deed. One of the women grabs his throat, pulls his head back. The other cuts his throat... FRANZ stares for a moment and then topples over backwards, The two women put their cheeks together, watching.]

GRETE AND FELICE: Like a dog!

FRANZ: Like a dog!

BLACK OUT

END OF ACT 1

---INTERMISSION---

ACT 2, SCENE 1

[PROLOGUE TO ACT 2. BEFORE THE LAW WITH DOORKEEPER.

Doorkeeper stands guard at door. The door is slightly ajar, and a brilliant light comes from behind it. FRANZ stands before the door. While DOORKEEPER speaks, FRANZ pulls a stool up close to the gate, and sits.]
 DOORKEEPER: You've sat here for years.
 FRANZ: I've made many attempts to be admitted.
 DOORKEEPER: Why don't you go? Your importunity wears me.
 FRANZ: My attention is fixed only on you.
 DOORKEEPER: Do you forget the other doorkeepers?
 FRANZ: You are the first doorkeeper. You appear to be the sole obstacle preventing my access to The Kaballah. Or, is my eyesight beginning to fail?
 DOORKEEPER: Your eyesight seems to fail because you do not know if the world is really darker or if your eyes are deceiving you.
 FRANZ: You treat me as subordinate, but you are the one who is deceive
 DOORKEEPER: Deceived or clear-sighted -- no matter. I am your doorkeeper, and yours alone. My eternal service is to guard the entrance, to prevent your entry. You wait here by your own free will.
 FRANZ: Your service is tied to my free will.
 DOORKEEPER: Well argued. You maintain your free will; you thus are superior to me. Still you gain no access to The Kaballah.
 [FRANZ tries to peer over and around the DOORKEEPER at the light.]

End of Scene

ACT 2, SCENE 2

PRAGUE. 1918. KAFKA FAMILY HOME. FRANZ'S BEDROOM. NEAR DAWN.
 [FRANZ is at his writing desk. Piles of sheets of papers with scribbled handwriting scattered on the desk and floor. FRANZ writes hurriedly, clutching his head, coughing, picking up a date to eat, drinking milk. MOTHER enters.]
 MOTHER: What a mess! Franz! Have you been up all night writing?
 FRANZ: I was dreaming. I was standing in front of a doorway. The doorkeeper wouldn't let me in. So foggy I couldn't see beyond. I tried to push past him to the light beyond the door. He pushes me back. My body itchy, cold, stiff, crawling on my belly towards the door --
 MOTHER: You talk in riddles. If you don't get up from your desk and stop writing, you'll be late for work.
 FRANZ: If I rise from the desk, I must stop writing!
 MOTHER: You twist me up with words. [She moves around the room, folding clothes, looking around.] I thought we might try to brighten up your room -- put up nicer curtains, change the wallpaper -- and the pictures. I was talking to Father. It might put more color in your cheeks.
 FRANZ: My cheeks are fine -- they're yours and father's. A mixture of genes, mind, and temperament that didn't quite blend.
 MOTHER [MOTHER opening the curtains.] Let's let the morning light in—
 FRANZ [shielding his eyes] Ooooh! Mother, please. Mother, come here! I want to know something.
 [MOTHER moves to where FRANZ sits. He puts his arms around her waist.]
 MOTHER: What?

FRANZ: I like it here in the morning with you -- .

MOTHER: You're suddenly grateful? Let me go, I need to go early to the warehouse.

FRANZ: Where's Father?

MOTHER: He's already gone.

FRANZ: I don't want anyone bursting in here.

MOTHER: The Clerk will report you coming in late.

FRANZ: The Clerk? -- that spineless low-form-of-animal life. Either way I'm done for. If I arrive early, I'll argue with the Clerk. If I arrive late, I'll argue with the Chief. I could say that I'm sick today, which is not far from the truth.

MOTHER: You'll be sacked by your Chief!

FRANZ: No matter. When I arrive, I could throw my work out the window, and jump after it, then let him sack me. [pause] Tell me something.

MOTHER: What?

FRANZ: Look me in the eyes! Now tell me --

MOTHER: I am happy you're back home.

FRANZ: Thank you, Mother -- that's not it. Do you love me?

MOTHER: Of course I love you. Now I want you to --

FRANZ: No, do you really love me?

MOTHER: I said: yes.

FRANZ: No you didn't. You said: "Of course I do." You didn't say: "I love you."

MOTHER: I said what I said. Now let me go.

FRANZ: I want you to do something for me.

MOTHER: What is it?

FRANZ: Say "yes" you'll do it.

MOTHER: How can I say "yes" before I know what it is.

FRANZ: Say "yes" - please.

MOTHER: Yes -- alright -- I'll do it.

[FRANZ rushes around the room, collecting all the sheets of handwriting.]

FRANZ: I want you to deliver this letter --

MOTHER: This!!??? This is a letter??? It looks like a pile of -- of - nothing!

FRANZ: I want you to give it to Father.

MOTHER: But it's just a pile of -- scraps of papers, and it's in handwriting. You know he doesn't like to read handwriting. He only likes to read printing. If he can't understand something, he loses patience.

FRANZ: 'My handwriting' -- or 'my printing' yields the same results.

MOTHER: What shall I say to him?

FRANZ: Tell him -- it's a letter from me.

MOTHER: But you're here. Why write a letter to someone you live with and see everyday?

FRANZ: I'm going out this evening.

MOTHER: You know what he'll shout; he'll shout: "how stupid!"

FRANZ: The letter is a burden lifted from my chest. I haven't coughed at all this morning.

MOTHER: I noticed. You're recovering nicely.

FRANZ: Will you do it?

MOTHER: I'll talk to Father about decorating your room, about making it more comfortable, brighter.

FRANZ: You promise to deliver the letter?

MOTHER: It's absurd. I'll do it. But will you promise to take all this -- trash -- off your walls.

[MOTHER kisses him. She gathers the huge pile of papers to her bosom.]

FRANZ: Thank you, Mother. I knew you still loved me --

MOTHER: [She walks towards the door, looks at his walls and a picture.]

Here -- this little picture -- shabby and -- [The picture is a cut-out from a magazine. It shows a woman with a blurred face, standing in the Prague town square, wearing a long fur coat, a fur hat and matching muff. MOTHER starts to pick at the edges of the picture.]

FRANZ: Don't touch her!

MOTHER: Franz!

FRANZ: It can't be touched.

MOTHER: Why, it's just a cut-out from a magazine of a shameless hussy, a loose woman looking for a man -- it's like a --

FRANZ: Don't say that!

MOTHER: I'll put that nice engagement portrait of you and Felice in its place.

FRANZ: There is no engagement portrait. There is no engagement.

MOTHER: We'll find other pictures. New curtains, new wallpaper, then you'll start the day right. [She starts to pick at the picture, trying to get it off the all.]

FRANZ: Mother, I'm perfectly fine. The picture inspires me. So please -- don't pick at the corners. It's glued to the wall.

MOTHER: How foolish! You ruin the wall just like that?

FRANZ: I wanted the picture to always be there for me.

MOTHER: Well it won't be. I'll bring a knife - to scrape it off the wall.

[MOTHER exits. WOMAN steps out of the frame -- her face is a blur but illuminated. She approaches FRANZ with graceful steps, and royal carriage.]

FRANZ: Who are you? I don't recognize you. You didn't say who you were.

Are you the barmaid at the Inn? -- the Inn near the Castle in the story I'm writing? You didn't say who you were. Are you Klamm's mistress? Did you hide me under the counter, did we make love under the counter after Klamm left? Are my stories my reality, or is my reality my stories?

[WOMAN continues gliding towards FRANZ, indicating she wants to embrace him. She puts her arms around his neck. She covers his face with her muff and smothers him into silence, as he falls to the floor.]

End of Scene

ACT 2, SCENE 3

SCENE: FRANZ'S OFFICE AT THE WORKMEN'S ACCIDENT INSURANCE INSTITUTE.

SUPERVISOR: [officially] "Pursuant to Section 4939 of the Assicurazioni Generali Company, management has no intention of accepting the work patterns of the usual Schlumperei, the sloppy indolence and comfortable inefficiency prevalent in public and private bureaucracies. A ten-hour normal workday with two hours for lunch, six days a week minimally with mandatory overtime without compensation, plus additional Sunday work unpaid, whenever needed, unconditional promptness, every second year fourteen days vacation at the convenience of the company, no resignation without three months' notice, and no private property in office desks. The employee shall not

have any ex parte communications with contracted persons except in customs as sanctioned by tradition, hallowed by class privilege, and codified by society as a means of insuring superiority, subject to the Court's public access policy in the Kingdom of Bohemia, Prague.

[While the above is being stated, FRANZ sits at his desk, with piles of folders on both sides of the desk. People in office smocks move briskly in and out of the office. People mime office work entering, bringing open folders to his desk. He writes something and stamps the pages quickly. The people exit in rapid succession. The office is permeated with a bustling sound and the sound of many typewriters and machines starting -- slow at first and then speeding up. FRANZ starts acting as if he's working furiously. He opens folders, looks inside, places papers in, discards the folders. He reads and works like a robot, reacting to each person and piece of work laid on his desk. The pace of each worker, entering and exiting, increases, reaching a furious, climactic pitch. [FRANZ screams and collapses over his desk.. Silence. The workers freeze where they stand, glance disapprovingly at FRANZ, then exit.]

End of Scene

ACT 2, SCENE 4

SCENE: PRAGUE. 1918. KAFKA FAMILY HOME. FRANZ'S BEDROOM. METAMORPHOSIS.]

[Early morning. Fog comes into FRANZ's bedroom from the window. FRANZ lies under the huge comforters and covers. His face and body are completely covered. He moans, moves and fidgets endlessly under the covers trying to find a comfortable position. Scene takes place with door between the two rooms. MOTHER knocking at the door.]

MOTHER: Franz! It's half-past six. Haven't you a train to catch?

FRANZ: [moaning and groaning from under the covers] This getting up early makes one stupid! A man needs sleep.

MOTHER: Your breakfast is ready. Shall I bring it in?

FRANZ: If I didn't have to hold this job, if my family wasn't dependent on me, I'd have gone straight to my supervisor's supervisor's supervisor, and tell him what I think of him.

HERMANN: Franz! What's the matter with you?

[SUPERVISOR enters.]

HERMANN: [excited and deferential] Herr Fuchtenwalden !!! What a surprise! What, in all due respect, brings you to our house.

SUPERVISOR: Already the office has been open for hours. Most alarming for us that Herr Dr. Franz is not at his desk.

FRANZ: [shouting through the door] I'm getting out of bed now. Be patient please.

SUPERVISOR: Recently, his work has been most unsatisfactory.

HERMANN: He has not been himself lately, preoccupied with ... with ... finalizing his Doctor of Jurisprudence. And he has been ill.

SUPERVISOR: At least it's something useful. He has not in all his time with the firm been late to work. We expect our employees to --- [FRANZ rolls off the bed onto the floor with a loud thud.] What in God's name was that?

MOTHER: Nothing at all!

SUPERVISOR: That was a sound! He is in there! If he doesn't appear before I leave here, he will be docked a day's pay!

MOTHER: Franz dear, your Supervisor, Mr. Fuchtenwalden is here. He's concerned that you're not at work.

FRANZ: Holy Mother of Christ! and vultures flying over my head! [shouting through the door] I'll be ready in no time. Mother, tell the beast I'll meet him at the office.

SUPERVISOR: What's that?

MOTHER: He says; it's best he meet you at the office.

HERMANN: Franz, Herr Fuchtenwalden would like to know why you didn't catch the early train. We don't know what to say to him. [Throughout this exchange FRANZ has moved about the room still under covers, struggling with the bedclothes, while trying to listen to all the conversation behind his locked door.]

FRANZ: I am not so well as I thought, but I'm alright. I had a presentiment last night that something like this could strike me. A slight illness, an attack of giddiness, I was still lying in bed when this overcame me...

MOTHER: Franz, he wants to talk to you in person. [to SUPERVISOR:] Lately he's been slightly ill.

SUPERVISOR: Your husband said that already -- I hope it's nothing serious, although we men of business -- unfortunately -- must ignore such indisposition, business must be attended to.

HERMANN: [shouting and banging on the door] Franz!! Can your Supervisor come in now? Open the door!!! I say: Open the door!!! You'll be sacked!

[FRANZ scurries around the room searching in drawers and everywhere for something. He pulls out a mask of a beetle, and dons it. He crawls towards the door. He listens as whispers are heard from the other side. He waits a moment.]

FRANZ: [shouting through the door] Mother, tell him to go back to the office, and tell them that I shall be arriving shortly. I am getting dressed. Tell him to tell, Herr Slovenska that I am ever so...gggrrrrate...gggrrrrate...grateful for the position

MOTHER: Herr Fuchtenwalden, please tell Herr Slovenska that --

FRANZ: [shouting through the door]-- that we are grateful, that the family is grateful, that... gaaaahhhh, gahhhaahhh. [FRANZ is losing the ability of clear speech. He utters garbled, guttural sounds.]

MOTHER: Franz! Are you ill? Is it your throat? Hot tea? Yes? Do you want hot tea? [to Supervisor:] Herr Fuchtenwalden, I will bring him hot tea, it's just a sore throat, a little bit of a sickness. No need to worry.

SUPERVISOR: Not to worry? If he's sick, he will be docked a days' pay.

HERMANN: Mother!!! Please Herr Fuchtenwalden, return to the office. Our son is a good son, a good worker. He will be there -- I promise you -- [sotte voce] If it has to be over my dead body -- he'll be there.

[FRANZ struggles dragging the bedclothes along and crawls along the floor to reach the latch and the doorknob. He opens the door with his jaws and goes from a crouched position to a standing flailing his arms, to the surprised looks of MOTHER, HERMANN and SUPERVISOR. In the foggy light, and under the bedclothes, only an outline of FRANZ's body is visible to them.]

MOTHER: Franz! You're not even dressed ... [FRANZ throws off the covers to reveal his face like beetle, and a large cockroach's body. SUPERVISOR runs out the door. MOTHER screams and falls to the floor, her skirts fly up over her waist. HERMANN embraces her for a moment. FRANZ struggles to

breathe. HERMANN picks up an apple, and throws it at FRANZ. FRANZ falls lifeless. HERMANN drags the lifeless out and closes the door.]
 HERMANN: Mother, Franz will need to ask for sick leave from the Arbeiter Unfall-Versicherrungs-Anstalt!

End of Scene

ACT 2, SCENE 5

[SCENE: SCHELESEN, NEAR TEREZIN. 1919. DINING HALL IN STUDLE'S BOARDINGHOUSE AND SANATORIUM.

JULIE WOHRYZEK, a young woman, sits at a long table, eating. She's gaudily dressed, wears a large puffed-sleeve blouse, makeup and a small hat with cherries and a veil. FRANZ approaches with his tray of food.]

FRANZ: May I join you? [She bursts into loud laughter. Her laughter echoes throughout the room. He laughs.] I asked: may I join you here?

JULIE: Certainly, sit wherever you like.

FRANZ: Thank you. [FRANZ sits.]

JULIE: Don't thank me. I don't own the table -- or the chair. [JULIE begins to laugh. Her laughter echoes. FRANZ laughs. They eat in silence.]

FRANZ: You're so nicely attired; it must be boring for a young lady like you to be here.

JULIE: I won't be here for long; I only have a mild case of tuberculosis. As soon as I recuperate, I return to Vinohrady.

FRANZ: Near Prague?

JULIE: How did you know?

FRANZ: I know the villages.

JULIE: Oh, a fine city man like you? What would you be doing in the villages? I think I know the answer. [She laughs. Her laughter echoes throughout the lunchroom. He laughs.]

FRANZ: That's a cheerful little hat.

JULIE: I made it myself. I'm a dressmaker -- at a shop, and I like to make hats.

FRANZ: You made that hat with those cherries?

JULIE: Oh, they're not real.

FRANZ: And with that veil?

JULIE: With the veil.

FRANZ: What an amazing feat! [He fingers the veil.] How did you make this hat?

JULIE: It's simple. You take bits and pieces and sew them together.

FRANZ: Amazing! You look like an apparition with that veil.

JULIE: Thank you. I'm not used to fine words.

FRANZ: The veil gives your face an ethereal quality.

[She laughs. Her laughter echoes throughout the lunchroom. He laughs.]

FRANZ: I apologize for my laughter, it's not pleasant, it has no rational cause.

JULIE: It's alright. I like to laugh.

FRANZ: You have amazing vitality for someone here.

JULIE: I won't be here long. I came here to recover from my sickness and from well --a broken heart.

FRANZ: Were you engaged?

JULIE: I had a fiancé, he was a Zionist, we planned to go to Palestine. He was killed in the war.

FRANZ: My sympathies. What will you do when you return to Vinohrady?

JULIE: I'll go to the movies. I like musicals and comedies, too. The other shop girls and I like to see them. We can sing all the songs.

FRANZ: Would you sing one for me?

JULIE: You are silly. [Laughs, then sings "After the Ball is Over" with Yiddish lyrics (translation to come).]

"After the ball is over / After the break of morn / After the dancers' leaving;
After the stars are gone / Many a heart is aching / If you could read them all;
Many the hopes that have vanished / After the ball."

FRANZ: That was charming. Could we have lunch here again?

JULIE: They serve it every day.

FRANZ: I mean, could we have lunch here together, at this table.

JULIE: It is not something that I would want to promise.

FRANZ: I would like that very much.

JULIE: Alright. Then we'll see each other tomorrow. She stands.

FRANZ: Where are you going now?

JULIE: For a walk.

FRANZ: Why that was my idea exactly. Where?

JULIE: Somewhere around here. [laughs]

FRANZ: That was my idea too. [laughs]

JULIE: Not really! She laughs. Her laughter echoes throughout the lunch room.

FRANZ: We can do that together if you like.

JULIE: It is not something that I would want to promise.

FRANZ: Do you always respond like that?

JULIE: The first time I do.

FRANZ: Can we count this as the second time, and take the walk?

[She laughs. He laughs. They pick up their trays, and exit the dining room, laughing together.]

End of Scene

ACT 2, SCENE 6

[SCENE : PRAGUE. 1919. KAFKA FAMILY HOME. HERMANN and FRANZ sit alone at the dinner table. HERMANN starts to leave. HERMANN picks his teeth, then his ears. FRANZ tries not to notice.]

FRANZ: Father, stay a moment, please.

HERMANN: What is it -- this time?

FRANZ: During my stay at Schelesen, at the sanatorium, I --

HERMANN: You're not complaining but the food there?

FELICE: No, the food --

HERMANN: The doctors? You still think they're all quacks?

FRANZ: It's not about doctors. You should be the first person to know that -

HERMANN: You got another story in a magazine?

FRANZ: It's not about that --

HERMANN: By the way you speak, you can't tell you write anything worthwhile.

FRANZ: I've met someone.

HERMANN: I meet someone everyday.

FRANZ: I met a woman at the sanatorium.

HERMANN: Social life's important.

FRANZ: Her name is Julie Wohryzek.

HERMANN: Wohryzek? There is a Wohryzek who is the *shames* at the synagogue?

FRANZ: That's her father.

HERMANN: He's the shoemaker in the little shack?

FRANZ: That is his livelihood.

HERMANN: I know all those families, those Jewish hussies with big eyes and big breasts, wearing those fancy puffed-sleeved blouses all to ensnare young gentlemen like you.

FRANZ: She did not ensnare me. We want to become engaged.

HERMANN: Engaged? I will not have this family slipping into sewers. I won't have your sister marrying a goy with no money and no future, shoveling manure and raising pigs. I won't have you marrying into a low-class family who live like dogs -- they don't have a pot to piss in!

FRANZ: Father, too crude. Julie is --

HERMANN: Crude --? If you need to schtupp someone -- you go to the brothel and get a good one to schtupp. You should ask me. I'll take you there.

FRANZ: Julie is a warm-hearted, brave girl. I am going to marry her.

HERMANN: Love! You're just aching to schtupp some woman with big breasts. For that you don't need marriage.

FRANZ: She is a good person. She's interested in movies and comedies. She has a number of brash Yiddish expressions, not unlike yourself. In some things, you wouldn't call her Jewish, although she's not not-Jewish, and part German, although not truly German. She's a bit ignorant, more cheerful than sad, ethnically, she belongs to the race of shop-girls. In her heart she is brave, honest, unselfish--great qualities in a creature physically not devoid of beauty.

HERMANN: It is: No! No! No! When you lie down with dogs, you come up with fleas!

FRANZ: I regret you feel that way.

HERMANN: She's a money-grabbing whore who set upon you with the urging of her pathetic father.

FRANZ: She's a charming, beautiful woman who makes me laugh. I've never laughed so much in my life.

HERMANN: Laugh your stupid head off -- she's stupid and you're stupid. No. She's smart and you're stupid.

FRANZ: She knows how to talk.

HERMANN: If she grabbed you, she does.

FRANZ: I am going to become engaged to her.

HERMANN: Over my dead body.

End of Scene

ACT 2, SCENE 7

[SCENE: PRAGUE. 1919. THE PUBLIC SQUARE. COLD SPRING DAY. 7
FRANZ and JULIE are walking arm-in-arm.]

JULIE: You should wear your scarf -- especially the one I gave you. I picked it from the new ones that came in -- you remember, don't you?

FRANZ: I do not like standing here in the wind, it is windy -- you have a muff.

JULIE: Here, you like it? You take it. [She brings the muff up to his nose, he starts to sneeze.]

FRANZ: I'm allergic to animal fur.

JULIE: It's just a muskrat.

FRANZ: I don't like the thought of animal skins pulled from animals.

JULIE: Did your father agree to our engagement?

FRANZ: He expressed some anger.

JULIE: What did he say?

FRANZ: You don't want to know. He disapproved.

[JULIE snuggles up to him and lifts her face for a kiss. She hugs him around the waist.]

JULIE: Franz, we talk about marriage and children, but it's alright with me if we just: continue our friendship -- without an engagement.

FRANZ: My father's resistance only strengthens me in the belief that we are doing the right thing. [pause] Did you pay the first month's rent on the apartment?

JULIE: Three weeks ago.

FRANZ: We could move in next week-end.

JULIE: I don't know.

FRANZ: First you're all bubbling and talkative and eager to move in, and now you don't know.

JULIE: I have something to tell you.

FRANZ: You always have something to tell you.

JULIE: It's important.

FRANZ: My little chickie, everything you say is important.

JULIE: It's about the apartment.

FRANZ: Shall we go see it?

JULIE: I already did.

FRANZ: Don't be so downcast. We're starting a new life together.

JULIE: Yes, my darling, we are -- but it won't be in that apartment.

FRANZ: You put the first month's rent down on the apartment? You said you did, didn't you?

JULIE: I need to tell you something.

FRANZ: I detect hesitation. Hesitation is the most contagious disease I know. Insidious, invidious. Hesitation seeps into me, even into my groin.

JULIE: Franz!

FRANZ: Forgive me. I don't mean to be -- crude.

JULIE: Calm down. [pause] The landlady came into the apartment while I was looking.

[JULIE moves to part of stage that resembles the apartment. LANDLADY enters.]

LANDLADY: Where do you come from?

JULIE: Polanski Street.

LANDLADY: Where the Jew shops are?

JULIE: Yes.

LANDLADY: I don't like Jews, they're loud, and their streets are dirty.

JULIE: We're very quiet and very clean. I could wash down the hall floors.

LANDLADY: Are you married? --'cause I don't want any Jew whores living in my building. I had to throw one out once. I felt sorry for her, but my tenants complained.

JULIE: We're getting married on Sunday.

LANDLADY: Does your family know?

JULIE: My father is the *shames*, err...the sexton at the synagogue.

LANDLADY: [shouting] I can't have Jews praying here and desecrating the place.

JULIE: We're not religious.

LANDLADY: It's off! I rented the apartment to someone else!

JULIE: But I paid a month's rent!

LANDLADY: Here's your money back!

[LANDLADY slaps money into JULIE's hand.]

JULIE: I gave you sixty *kroner*. This is only fifty.

LANDLADY: Ten for all the trouble you caused. Now get out!

JULIE: But we rented it.

LANDLADY: [shouting from the apartment] Don't you dare come back here. I'll call the police if you ever set foot in my house again.

[LANDLADY disappears. JULIE moves to FRANZ.]

JULIE: I couldn't do anything.

FRANZ: I'll go back with you. We'll hold her to her word. It was an agreement. We'll bring the case to court. I know the law.

JULIE: I'm so sorry. It's all my fault.

FRANZ: It's not your fault. It's probably for the best -- our daily existence would infuriate her.

JULIE: Where shall we live?

FRANZ: We could stay with your family until we find a place.

JULIE: We'd have to sleep in the kitchen. What about yours?

FRANZ: Even if I were dying, my father wouldn't let me in the house with you.

JULIE: Is that a joke?

FRANZ: A comedy. A gut-tearing comedy!

[FRANZ starts to laugh, coughs, chokes up, and doubles up on the bench.]

JULIE: It's alright. We'll find a place to live.

FRANZ: It's not alright... [He bangs his head continuously on the bench and begins to sob and shout.] I don't want to be sucked into a vortex of noise and commotion. I need my peace and quiet!

JULIE: But don't you need me?

FRANZ: Nothing, nothing, nothing -- no, nothing -- never --

JULIE: Franz, darling look at me. I love you. We're getting married.

FRANZ: No -- you're getting married. I'm not. We're not. No more marriage. It makes me sick, I cannot breathe -- the words puncture my skin, I'm already a condemned man and don't know why.

JULIE: Oh, my god, it's my fault. You're choking. You're dying.

FRANZ: No, no [in tears], please go, it's not your fault.

JULIE: It's the landlady. We'll go back and beat her up.

FRANZ: No, it's not her fault. It really has nothing to do with her -- or with you.

JULIE: Do you still love me?

FRANZ: Please, please go. [FRANZ stays sobbing on the bench. JULIE runs down the street.]

End of Scene**ACT 2, SCENE 8**

[SCENE: PRAGUE. 1920. HERMANN'S BEDROOM. HERMANN lies sick, coughing and talking in a thick whisper. FRANZ and MOTHER are standing by HERMANN's side.]

MOTHER: We won't disturb him.

HERMANN: Disturb me?! [speaking with difficult] I'm lying on my death bed and worrying about the warehouse.

MOTHER: You don't need to worry.

HERMANN: I need him to go to the warehouse every day.

FRANZ: I work until two at the Insurance Company.

HERMANN: The rest of the time you're living under my roof.

FRANZ: I cannot manage going to go every day.

HERMANN: Why not?

FRANZ: I have to take my daily walk, then I have to prepare.

HERMANN: For what? shouts, starts coughing]

MOTHER: Hermann, please don't be upset. He'll manage to go to the warehouse.

HERMANN: It's not too much to ask my son? To take my place?

[FRANZ remains silent. HERMANN turns over and buries his head so that he doesn't see them. MOTHER ushers FRANZ away from the bed.]

MOTHER: He's unhappy when you refuse to help him. You're free in the afternoons.

FRANZ: I spend that time recuperating from the office, so I can start my writing in the evening and work through the night.

MOTHER: He'll be angry.

FRANZ: I am accustomed to that.

MOTHER: You'll gain his respect.

FRANZ: I cannot do what he does.

MOTHER: You disapprove of him. He knows it.

FRANZ: I just cannot manage his employees the way he does. Even if I go every day, know that there will be some little incident that will go wrong, and I'll be criticized for it.

MOTHER: He feels you owe him this.

FRANZ: He will jump up and down if an order is not delivered. He will fault both me and the employee.

MOTHER: You want him to respect you, don't you?

FRANZ: I do.

MOTHER: You want him to love you, don't you?

FRANZ: Do you think he ever could? Did you give him the letter?

MOTHER: Not yet.

FRANZ: When? I thought you gave the letter to him and that was why he's sick.

MOTHER: All in good time.

HERMANN: [shouting from the bed] Can't you ever do it my way? That's too hard for you?

MOTHER: You'll go, won't you?

HERMANN: [shouting from the bed] Stop begging him to do his duty! That's too much to expect of our worthy son! Shame him into doing it! Shame him! He is the worst piece of dreck that ever entered my life!

MOTHER: Hermann!

FRANZ: Father, I will try --

HERMANN: I can't talk to you. You fly straight in my face. What a schtick dreck you are -- I'd like to tear you apart like a fish!

[In part, an Hallucination: FRANZ in a fury tries to cover HERMANN's mouth, trying to prevent the words from escaping his mouth. HERMANN screams. FRANZ stuffs the edge of pillow into HERMANN's mouth, and slams the Harrow [a torture contraption] several times down onto HERMANN, clamping him in. MOTHER screams. Hallucination fades.]

MOTHER: Franz! Answer me!

FRANZ: Yes, I'll do it

MOTHER: [reaching up and kissing FRANZ] You're a good son. You always do the right thing.

End of Scene

ACT 2, SCENE 9

[SCENE : PRAGUE. 1919. MAX'S HOME. MAX pours wine for FRANZ and himself.]

FRANZ: They're real bastards at work. I wrote a speech for the High Inspector to deliver at a conference. Pompous, officious, without gratitude.

MAX: You don't need their gratitude.

FRANZ: To write it made me feel like Shylock --wanting to tear a pound of flesh - but my own flesh from my own body.

MAX: God knows, you can hardly afford to lose it.

FRANZ: Now my father's request -- running the warehouse in the afternoon - I can't do it! I'll go insane!

MAX: Tell your father that Mozart's father wanted him to teach students in the afternoon. Mozart said "no."

FRANZ: He'll say I'm no Mozart. [pause] I stay up all night long writing. In the morning, I'm able to go to work - I'm lightheaded , but I still can get there. The last straw was writing the speech. Me? Writing absolute drive!

MAX: You'd go insane.

FRANZ: It's not the writing at the office. I can't take on my father's request. Last night, I stood by my window ... it could have been three in the morning. I couldn't tell by the shadows near the lamppost. I pressed my head against the pane to let the cold relieve the throbbing. I thought how it would look to the toll taker on the bridge to see my body falling out the window. I wanted to do it -- burst through the glass. I thought of the story. I thought of you...that I couldn't do this before writing a farewell note to you. I pulled my head from the pane, and sat at my desk to write a farewell note to you. I was so exhausted that I fell asleep. I awoke with the light. Then it was too late to kill myself. So, I washed, dressed and went to the office.

MAX: This is no life for you. I'll talk to your father.

FRANZ: That would be punishment.

MAX: You'll talk to your father.

FRANZ: That would be worse.

MAX: You're staying here with me tonight. Promise you'll talk to him.

FRANZ: I cannot think about one more thing.

End of Scene

ACT 2, SCENE 10

[SCENE: PRAGUE. 1920. A SHABBY CABARET, CROWDED WITH PEOPLE AT TABLES EATING AND DRINKING. FRANZ sits at a table, watching a performance of a Jewish Theater group from Eastern Europe. The star actress/singer, Mrs. Tschissik is center stage.]

MRS. TSCHISSIK: [singing the last lines of the Jewish National Anthem] "L'hiyot am chofshi b'artzenu / Eretz Tzion v'Yerushalayim" {translation: "To be a free nation in our land / In the land of Zion and Jerusalem." [She finishes to applause, crosses in front of Franz's table.]

FRANZ: Mrs. Tschissik, please come sit with me a moment.

MRS. TSCHISSIK: Certainly.

FRANZ: I brought you these. Allow me to introduce --

MRS. TSCHISSIK: I know who you are. Thank you, these are lovely!

FRANZ: You know me?

MRS. TSCHISSIK: My friends pointed you out and told me about you. You are a writer who writes this phantasmagoria.

FRANZ: Have you read anything of mine?

MRS. TSCHISSIK: No, perhaps I should. Perhaps we could adapt one of your stories to the stage.

FRANZ: My writings wouldn't lend themselves to dramatization. The stories take place in the reader's mind.

MRS. TSCHISSIK: Perhaps your life belongs on stage.

FRANZ: That would bore the audience.

MRS. TSCHISSIK: Nonsense--an artist like you with such -- exotic masculine features. [She caresses his cheek with her finger.]

FRANZ: I enjoyed watching you on stage. I confess I like watching actors, especially you. You have a bony, but moderately robust body, tightly laced.

MRS. TSCHISSIK: And about my acting?

FRANZ: When you sang the Jewish national anthem, your hips moved to and fro, your arms were lifted and exposed, completing the picture.

MRS. TSCHISSIK: Your dramatic taste has been compromised to indulge your appetite.

FRANZ: Never. My aesthetics are everything to me. It has been my burden all my life. It was that your arms hinted at the wonders of -- but did not make one think directly -- of the rest of your body.

MRS. TSCHISSIK: What did you think of the play?

FRANZ: I've seen this play before.

MRS. TSCHISSIK: What did you think of this version?

FRANZ: Second rate.

MRS. TSCHISSIK: So now you feel you must prove to me that your aesthetics trump your appetite? There is nothing wrong with appetite. The stage exists to vicariously indulge the appetites. You may sit in the chair and

imagine without risking anything. I fear what will happen to me when I don't excite appetites in the audience any more. The flowers are wilting, I'll have the waiter put them in water?

FRANZ: Don't do that! Have him touch those petals with his dirty hands! Have the kitchen help stick their dirty noses into the bouquet!

MRS. TSCHISSIK: You are delightfully eccentric! So, plays about Eastern Europe's Jews intrigue you? You've come here like an anthropologist to study this exotic life-form. Are you not a Jew? Don't you feel you have anything in common with the themes and characters in such a play as this?

FRANZ: I don't know. I don't know if I have anything in common with Jews. I hardly have anything in common with myself

MRS. TSCHISSIK: [laughs] That sort of self-deprecation is exactly how I know you everything in common in Jews. I wager you are a very amusing man...when you are not busy impressing the ladies with your aesthetic sensibilities.

FRANZ: A toast to you, Mrs. Tschissik! To your lovely body as I see it here above the table -- to the fullness of your shoulders, your mouth, your back. They burst into laughter. She lets him embrace her.

MRS. TSCHISSIK: Don't you have any women friends to embrace you?

FRANZ: Embrace a shadow? At one time I had hoped that writing letters could assuage my emptiness

MRS. TSCHISSIK: I am certain you are more than a shadow.

[She reaches under the table, fondles him] What is above the table on display is always less interesting than what is below the table. This is not a dying flower.

FRANZ: [reacting to her touch] Aah, this desire for an abomination! To assuage emptiness, it is only possible through --

MRS. TSCHISSIK Touch?

FRANZ -- 'taboo.' This rectitude -- though outwardly not necessary, is -- somehow connected very necessarily -- inwardly. [She undoes his pants under the table.]

MRS. TSCHISSIK: Passé the butter.

FRANZ: The butter? [reacting to her touch below the table] Oh, my God in Heaven! Whatever you wish. [passing the butter] What is the butter for?

MRS. TSCHISSIK: It is the only time that *milchig* complements *fleishig*. [She rubs her hand over the butter then reaching under the table again with a napkin in the other hand.] It makes everything go smoothly.

FRANZ: I am more sensible now, and know that happiness is possible through literature... that flowers could only bring... It's possible to come to truth through—coitus and literature. [Franz has an orgasm.]

MASTER OF CEREMONIES: Ladies and Gentleman!

[FRANZ recovers and buttons up.]

FRANZ: I finally have peace from the whining of my body

MRS. TSCHISSIK wipes off her hand with the napkin; they give their attention to the MC.

MASTER OF CEREMONIES: We are pleased to announce that our modest theatre group portraying Oest-Juden has been invited to perform in Vienna! Tonight is our last performance. We regret to say that the cast will head straight for the train station. Wish us success.

FRANZ: You are leaving? Stay with me! I have never met a woman like you.

MRS. TSCHISSIK: I am an actress. I never stay. I hope this made up for the second-rate version of the play you had to sit through.

FRANZ: I am sorry, I did not intend to--

MRS. TSCHISSIK: I'm just teasing you. Don't your women tease you? It's a very Jewish thing to do. I must leave now for the train station.

FRANZ: Let me accompany you... take my last farewells with you there. We can have a goodbye kiss. We haven't even kissed yet. Then I can run alongside of the train, waving goodbye, calling out my love, cursing the train for departing on time, and staring after you as you hang out the window and disappear from my view.

MRS. TSCHISSIK: If that's what you want to do-- You are rare, dear man.
[MRS. TSCHISSIK takes his arm as they exit the cabaret.]

End of Scene

ACT 2, SCENE 11

[SCENE : PRAGUE. 1920. CAFE ARCO. A long the bar of the cafe, there are some political slogans pasted on the side "keep this cafe and the czech republic free of trash." Several empty vodka glasses line the bar. A fading photo hanging above the mirror is of the last czech monarch. Several small tables with chairs are arranged around the restaurant section. German soldiers fill several tables. Tables are loaded with beer steins. A glass door leading out to the street. A large frosted glass window faces the street -- shadows can be seen across the window. Pamphlets are stacked on the bar. MAX BROD sits at a table fingering a coffee cup, looking anxiously at the door, and at other tables with German soldiers. He reads a German language newspaper, but keeps laying it down and picking it up. Sounds of a rioting crowd, horses' hooves and crowds screaming are heard. some of the words that are made out are "Juden! Juden!" Some shouts of commands come through a bullhorn. FRANZ enters making his way through several crowded, noisy tables.]

FRANZ: I've been in the streets all afternoon. It's awash with Jew-hatred. People are calling Jews a "mangy race." One can hardly walk through the streets.

MAX: The revolution hasn't hit us yet, so the papers say, article after article. Adaptation to the new Republic will not easy -- not for the Czechs, not for the Germans -- not for us. The Czechs hate Germans -- they hate Jews -- they really hate German-speaking Jews.

FRANZ: Would you consider leaving this country? Palestine?

MAX: Forget that -- at least for a moment. Let's toast your good fortune.
[They toast and become conscious of German soldiers who have noticed them.]

FRANZ: What good fortune? I could hardly toast something as strange and as insidious as "good fortune." How did you make your way to Café Arco today? You saw what I saw. Three days of riots -- have you glanced through the frosted panes once you arranged yourself at this table in the comfort of café *mitschlagzahnem und kuchen*. Mounted police poised everywhere ready for a battery charge.

MAX: Yes, I was worried -- all side streets, shops boarded up, filled with enraged people --

FRANZ: It's not the people I'm afraid of ...

MAX: What then?

FRANZ: It's the horses -- they appear so little when one observed from the distance of: the bridge, and then as I come closer, they loom large, larger than the Trojan Horse, but alive with steamy flanks, steamy nostrils, and swishing tails, and the clank-clank of a thousand hooves on cobblestones, like an army in battle, charging down our streets, pushing up against buildings, crushing people between their flanks and the stone walls--

MAX: Franz!!! You're here! Aren't you?

FRANZ: I'm here -- you see me, don't you.

MAX: You made it here -- that's what matters. You weren't harmed.

FRANZ: Harmed? You mean in the body, in my limbs? That I didn't get a slash across an arm -- have my blood oozing, my arm hanging, the medical carriage picking me up?!! No, I wasn't harmed in that way -- but I was injured in a way that will take me days, years to recover.

MAX: What shall we toast?

FRANZ: You wanted to celebrate an anniversary but you didn't say what it was.

MAX: It's one year to the day since your story *Metamorphosis* was published.

FRANZ: Oh that.

MAX: And five years this month since *Hyperion* published your short story.

FRANZ: Oh that too.

MAX: You must remember how happy you were -- you brought your story to your father.

FRANZ: Did I?

MAX: Let's drink! [MAX opens the bottle, pours two glasses. They toast.]

L'Chaim! And Mazel Tov! To your success! To your publications!

FRANZ: To yours too.

MAX: Not so certain about that.

FRANZ: I'm nauseated.

MAX: What's the matter?

FRANZ: The smell of sausages are sickening me. I will have to leave. Can we get Victor to pull those plates away?

MAX: No! That will cause trouble -- a lot of trouble. [FRANZ pulls out a handkerchief, covers his nose.] Franz! Stop that. You're drawing attention to us.

FRANZ: What's the matter with me? Sausages? Why are they so repulsive? Is it only the smell?[German soldiers have noticed FRANZ's discomfort. They make obscene gestures, attacking the sausages. One cuts off the tip of one, simulating circumcision, laughing, jeering. FRANZ keeps his nose covered.]

MAX: Franz! Contain yourself! You're offending them.

FRANZ: I slid past their table -- not moving my head, or my arms, quietly placing one foot before the other.

MAX: It's the breakup of the Empire -- they're German, they're worried too as a minority in the midst of the Czech republic.

FRANZ: In your words then -- the Germans are disengaged, disliked, disparaged, dismissed, disenfranchised ...

MAX: Hierarchies of unfavored minorities, and the Germans are second to the bottom. That makes them dangerous.

FRANZ: Sausages are repulsive because -- because they are unclean -- not just *trayf*, but some deep symbolic taboo --

MAX: You don't keep Kosher.

FRANZ: --because they are my father's fingers -- because he's tried to shove little sausages down my throat when we were at Marinne together -- because they are my father's penis that I had to look at when we were at Baden-Baden, walking by his side, he would hold my hand, both of us naked as we walked to that compulsory, competitive, health-inducing, daily volley ball game --

MAX: Franz, you can't go on and on. Let's drink another, yes! To you, your life, your health, your success -- [MAX raises his glass.]

GERMAN SOLDIER: [shouting across from his table] Ah, two little Jews celebrating at a table! Here -- let's celebrate a circumcision -- a little cut here, a little cut there -- I show you how we snip off the tip. [laughter]

MAX: We need to leave here -- the Café -- before the soldiers respond anymore--forget the toast.

GERMAN SOLDIER: What's does that sign say? Can you read? Look above the bar! Only reading the German newspaper, yes? Can you read Czech? It says: [reading] "Keep this country free of trash -- and Jews."

MAX: Come on. Let's go.

FRANZ: You wanted to celebrate.

MAX: Now! Listen to me -- we must go!

FRANZ: I don't care about their vulgarity.

MAX: I know you don't, you don't have to care -- just get up! We're going. Don't say a word! [MAX tries to pull FRANZ out of the chair. FRANZ resists. MAX pushes him up and ahead of him, shielding him as they move between tables to the door amidst laughter of the soldiers.]

GERMAN SOLDIER: *Jüdisches Schwein, Gehen Bumsen Ihre jüdische Mutter.* {translation: "Jewish pig, go fuck your Jewish mother."}

MAX: [trying to cool him off] *Entspann dich! Komm mal wieder unter. Entspann dich!* {translation: Relax! Don't be so uptight. Relax!}

[MAX kicks the door open with his foot, pushing Franz with him.]

GERMAN SOLDIER: *Erhalten Sie ihm Recht, Juden, ir Ziehenhr Vorhaut hinab.* {translation: Get it right, Jew, or we'll pull your foreskin off.}[Sounds of shouting mobs, horses neighing, horses hooves. MAX and FRANZ move beyond the door.]

MAX: They're just a bunch of drunken thugs masquerading as revolutionaries. No worries, Franz. No revolution ever started in a beer hall.

End of Scene

ACT 2, SCENE 12

[SCENE: PRAGUE. 1920. ELEGANT RESTAURANT. 12

MILENA sits at a table. FRANZ enters.]

MILENA: Franz!!

FRANZ: Milena!!? When have we met before?

MILENA: At Café Arco -- don't you remember?

FRANZ: Possibly.

MILENA: Ernst Polak, my husband, introduced us -- briefly -- a few months ago.

FRANZ: Ah, yes.

MILENA: I've so looked forward to this occasion. Thank you for sending me copies of your books. I'm just delighted you've been able to meet with me. I want you to know that I look forward to many more meetings with you.

FRANZ: Thank you for the expression of pleasure in this meeting. It may be a pleasant frivolity. There is little reason to believe that there would be any need to continue -- after this evening.

MILENA: Oh, yes, there definitely is! I am a dedicated admirer of your work and would like to translate some of it from the German into Czech.

FRANZ: My work has an autobiographical significance, an aid to mastery of my soul. The substance is indistinguishable from my diary. I thus will never be certain who the ideal person is to translate my work.

MILENA: From your writing I sense that you understand people as only a person with great sensitivity can. One reviewer wrote: "The work embodies the struggle of today's generation, without pretensions, directly." Another reviewer wrote: "... significant works of modern German literature; their stark truth makes them seem naturalistic even where they speak in symbols. They reflect the irony and prophetic vision of a man condemned to see the world with blinding clarity --"

FRANZ: Please stop! This embarrasses me terribly -- with repetition of that type of flowery language, you need not trouble yourself further -- you are not the person to translate my work.

MILENA: My deep apology. I did not intend to start our conversation like this. But I do devoutly wish to translate some of your writings. I have read and re-read them and can devote time during the next months --- a contribution to understanding between Germans and Czechs, good for the Czech national character, good for the country.

FRANZ: A haphazard, frivolous supposition! I, a German-speaking Jew from an outcast society, living as member of a twice-despised minority, the hatred growing everyday like a contagious disease, could not possibly have his writings into which he has poured his dark soul, read by every Czech citizen -- to be laughed at, to justify their contempt.

MILENA: You wouldn't be laughed at. In these circles, you are one of the few who pays homage to their Czech nationality.

FRANZ: Why would you say that?

MILENA: You never mention your Jewishness in your writing, at least not directly.

FRANZ: How clever you are that you would notice!

Are you a religious Christian?

MILENA

No, I don't follow the rituals and tradition of the faith, but ...

FRANZ: But you are a Christian.

MILENA: That statue in the plaza is my great-great-great-grandfather. I am of an old patrician Czech family.

FRANZ: Why do you flaunt your class?

MILENA: I would never do that. I am simply proving to you that I can capture the meaning, the true depth and translate your work into Czech.

FRANZ: Adding disdain and snobbery that is bred with comfort and status?

MILENA: You are introducing class distinctions where none exist.

FRANZ: For those born into entitlement, how facile it is to dismiss privilege.

MILENA: You are mistaken, Franz, I work as a journalist -- trying to earn a wage by translating for Czech publications. I have a hard life, my friends tell me candidly, "Your face bears the scars of a woman twice your age."

FRANZ: My friends tell me, "Your face 'bears the scars' of a person half your age."

MILENA: I have no false pride, I am not a patrician, I am not one of the privileged.

FRANZ: What I meant to say is "your family."

MILENA: I understand what you meant. I no longer belong to my family. My father had me committed to an asylum for getting engaged to Ernst -- my father hates Jews. Familial decisions have always been made by my father. .

MILENA: When I was freed from the asylum, I married Ernst, my father disowned me. Sorry -- I didn't mean to go on like that.

FRANZ: You are estranged from your father? pause Do you know that we had such a brief encounter in Café Arco that I don't actually recall your face. I am usually an acute observer especially of faces. I only remember your figure and your dress receding between the tables.

MILENA: One could say that.

FRANZ: Say what?

MILENA: That I'm estranged from my father.

FRANZ: And your mother?

MILENA: She's dead -- she died when I was quite young. So patrician or not, I had to fend for myself most of my life.

FRANZ: Now it is my turn to apologize for placing you in a position of explaining.

MILENA: It doesn't matter. It was long ago.

FRANZ: Do you have brothers or sisters?

MILENA: I'm my father's only child. I was trained to be the son my father never had.

FRANZ: I also was trained to be the son my father never had. [laughs]

MILENA: [laughs] Then there is a commonality between us beyond your writing.

FRANZ: Possibly.

MILENA: Can we talk more your work?

FRANZ: No, boredom will set in and that will be the death knell of this meeting. When were you born?

MILENA: You're not going to launch into a tirade about the extravagances of youth?

FRANZ: I would like to know.

MILENA: In '96.

FRANZ: I have no defense against strangeness of circumstance! I was thirteen years old, up at the altar at the Alt-Neu Synagogue, making an awkward speech, garbled words that I learned by heart, and then you were born.

MILENA: Yes, I was born.

FRANZ: Yes, that's the strange circumstance! You were born on my bar mitzvah! I received many presents, but I was not satisfied, I imagined there was one present missing. It was you -- you were given to me as a bar mitzvah present!

MILENA: [laughs] Is there something then we could work on together?

FRANZ: Will you burden yourself with work from a sense of guilt or duty?

MILENA: What is your answer?

FRANZ: I wonder what purpose it would serve if we get dinner first, then I shall have an answer for you.

MILENA: I haven't been taking regular meals.

FRANZ: You haven't renounced food, have you?

MILENA: No.

FRANZ: Then we can come up with a bit of sustenance. [FRANZ and MILENA smile at each other.] You understand that you are bursting into a dead man's life.

End of Scene

ACT 2, SCENE 13

[SCENE : MERIENBAD. 1921. SANATORIUM. FRANZ is sitting bare-chested on the examination table. DR. KLOPSTOCK is examining his chest. There are towels on the table.]

FRANZ: What is the verdict?

KLOPSTOCK: The disease has gone from your throat to your lungs.

FRANZ: How do you know?

KLOPSTOCK: I want you to rest. I don't want you walking in the courtyard without a coat or sweater.

FRANZ: Is there someone reporting on me? Watching me?

[FRANZ laughs, and jerks into a coughing fit, coughs into a towel.

HERMANN -- as hallucination -- enters. FRANZ sees HERMANN; KLOPSTOCK doesn't see HERMANN.]

HERMANN: Mother insisted I come. [HERMANN exits.]

KLOPSTOCK: I insist that you follow what I prescribe. This is no laughing matter. Tuberculosis is a matter of treatment, it is a matter of life or--

FRANZ: Death! Heaven decrees! I never had that privilege -- to command others to do my bidding conjured up from the depth of reputation and profession. Is it arrogance or stupidity that makes one think they can control another's behavior?

KLOPSTOCK: In your case, it couldn't be merely arrogance. It seems to be stupidity, since you follow nothing that I say. I'm prescribing a sedative, you'll be able to sleep tonight.

FRANZ: Ah, sleep! [FRANZ is seized by a coughing fit. He coughs into a towel, spitting up blood, tries to conceal it.]

KLOPSTOCK: Let me see that! Give it to me! Blood? When did this happen?

FRANZ: It's all too little and too late.

KLOPSTOCK: Is this the first time?

FRANZ: No.

KLOPSTOCK: I'll have to throw a quarantine on your room if you go wandering about.

FRANZ: I'm to be caged? Stalking like a panther within, or moaning in a corner. [HERMANN enters and walks across stage, walks up to

KLOPSTOCK. He whispers something in KLOPSTOCK's ear, then continues walking across the stage and exits. FRANZ speaks as HERMANN walks.] An illusion -- like the surveyor on his quest to the castle, hearing the music in the

background when he telephones, he is told the most important thing he would ever hear from the castle would be that music.

KLOPSTOCK: I want you to start eating. I have prescribed a soft diet, rice, milk, broths, cooked vegetables. Talk as little as you can. The disease is going to your larynx.

FRANZ: How will I fare?

KLOPSTOCK: You are fortunate you can still talk. I'm sorry, but your voice may go soon.

FRANZ: I, of all people, with my mind, my heart, my throat! filled with words still to be spoken. The irony that I soon may not be able to utter the simplest of human phrases. How, dear Doctor, shall I express myself?

KLOPSTOCK: In writing.

FRANZ: In writing!!? To express the simplest of repugnant, physical needs? In writing? No editor, just writing? Madness, simply madness.

KLOPSTOCK: You will have a pad.

FRANZ: Please, please! Don't take my voice. Tell me, tell me doctor, that of all physical things, I will keep my voice! I need my voice!

KLOPSTOCK: Please do not strain yourself. Here, let us move you into the bed.

[KLOPSTOCK dresses FRANZ in his nightshirt, moves him towards the bed. HERMANN moves across the stage, looks at FRANZ. FRANZ slides to the floor, pulls himself along floor, reaches HERMANN's leg. FRANZ tries to crawl up HERMANN's leg. HERMANN shakes him off.

FRANZ: You have always treated me like vermin. [FRANZ tears off his shirt, baring his back.] Inscribe the verdict with the needles -- here on my back! Here! write it: "I have always hated him! I have always hated him!

[HERMANN stands motionless, then exits. FRANZ, in tears, strains to get the words out to KLOPSTOCK.] Kill me! Kill me now! Kill me now, or else you're a murderer!

[KLOPSTOCK picks up a vial, gives FRANZ a sedative, cradles FRANZ in his arms, and rocks him back and forth.]

KLOPSTOCK: You are distraught naturally. I will look in on you tomorrow. Please, try to rest.

KLOPSTOCK exits.

End of Scene

ACT 2, SCENE 14

[SCENE : PRAGUE. 1922. FRANZ'S FAMILY HOME. FRANZ is lying on a bed in the salon. He coughs intermittently.]

FRANZ: Yesterday I dreamt about you. I hardly remember the details, it's just that we kept merging into one another, I was you, you were me.

MILENA: I'm concerned for you.

FRANZ: You somehow caught fire. I seized an old coat and beat you with it. Then you were no longer even there, instead I was the one on fire and I was the one who was also beating the fire out with the coat.

MILENA: I wanted to thank you -- for opening your soul to me -- in your writing.

FRANZ: The firemen arrived and you were somehow saved. But you were different than before, ashen, ghostlike, drawn against the dark with chalk, and you fell lifeless into my arms, -- or perhaps you merely fainted with joy at being saved. But then the transmutability came into play: I was the one falling into someone's arms. Thank you.

MILENA: For what?

FRANZ: For opening my soul to me -- in my writing.

MILENA: Franz! That's lovely. I'm cynical but not immune to that fine compliment. [pause] I brought three translations. May we go over these?

FRANZ: We can -- if you'll come live with me in Prague. I have wanted to ask you --

MILENA: We should go over these -- the publisher gave a deadline of two weeks.

FRANZ: Marriage and my writing -- fused.

MILENA: I will not leave Ernst.

FRANZ: He is a philanderer -- an open prevaricator, a disreputable, dishonest, disagreeable, disregarding, despicable man -- you've said so yourself.

MILENA: I can say so, nobody else can.

FRANZ: Milena, if you leave him, you and I can realize our greatest dream.

MILENA: Your dream, Franz. I'll continue to translate your work, but I couldn't bear a day without Ernst.

FRANZ: You hate him -- he makes your life miserable. You are not saying that you cannot bear a day without Ernst! You're saying that you can't bear a day with me! You are afraid of the threat of a mundane marriage, sapping my strength and suppressing yours. We could live in Berlin or Vienna, away from the stifling provinciality of Prague.

MILENA: I fought my father to marry Ernst. He hates Jews. I've paid too high a price to: be with him.

FRANZ: You and I love each other. But you also love him -- in a different way. It is not your fault, or my fault, that language is too poor to describe love in this way.

MILENA: I came to see if you're well. [They stare at each other. FRANZ coughs.] Franz, what is it?

FRANZ: Nothing. It happens -- quite often now. I think my mouth is filled with saliva. I turn and blood is over the pillows. I cough again, absorbed in the game. I rise, wash my face. I fill a great release. This hemorrhage is going to save me from marriage. Don't you see? No woman would have me in this condition. Don't you see? I am saved!

MILENA: I am returning to Vienna.

FRANZ: Can you wait a moment? I have something to show you. [FRANZ pulls himself up.]

MILENA: You'll injure yourself. [He moves to the desk. He brings several notebooks and volumes. MILENA runs to help him.]

FRANZ: Can you bring the others? [MILENA opens the drawers, and removes more notebooks.]

MILENA: What are these?

FRANZ: I want you to have them.

MILENA: What are they?

FRANZ: My diaries.

MILENA: Oh my god, no. I couldn't.

FRANZ: Take them.

MILENA: Too personal, too private, I couldn't touch them.

FRANZ: After my death, I want you to --

MILENA: I'm not the one.

FRANZ: I've chosen you.

MILENA: You have a lot of life in you.

FRANZ: Take these to Max. Remind him of his promise.[MILENA begins to cry.]

MILENA: My dearest Franz, to be trusted by you.

FRANZ: You will do this for me, won't you?

MILENA: Yes, I will. [They embrace.] We were perfect companions -- once. Will Max know what these notebooks are?

FRANZ: He'll remember.

End of Scene

ACT 2, SCENE 15

[SCENE : HALLUCINATION: THE HARROW AND THE WOMEN.

FELICE, GRETE, WOMAN-IN-PICTURE and JULIE appear. They lead FRANZ to the Harrow, and stretch him out, face down, across the bench. FELICE and GRETE hold and clamp down his arms. JULIE stuffs a cotton gag in his mouth. WOMAN-IN-PICTURE lifts his shirt and inscribes on his back in red ink. FRANZ starts to cough. JULIE takes the gag out of his mouth.]

FRANZ: What is the verdict?

[WOMAN-IN-PICTURE inscribes on his back]

WOMAN-IN-PICTURE: "No More Marriages."

FRANZ: Thank God! I thought it might be "Condemned to Silence."

HALLUCINATION ENDS.

End of Scene

ACT 2, SCENE 16

[SCENE: MURITZ, RESORT. 1923. JEWISH CHILDREN'S CAMP. LARGE DINING HALL. BACKGROUND MUSIC AND NOISE OF COUNSELORS AND CAMPERS CELEBRATING THE SABBATH. WHITE TABLECLOTH AND SABBATH CANDLES, WINE, CHALLAH ON THE TABLE. Celebrating the Sabbath with someone singing and playing the guitar. People are moving around the dining hall. FRANZ watches, then moves to where DORA, a young woman of 10, is serving. He stares at her.

GROUP AND DORA

[singing] Hi-ne Ma-Tov-ue Ma-na-yim/ Shevet a-chim gam ya-chad.

Hi-ne Ma-Tov-ue Ma-na-yim/ Shevet a-chim gam ya-chad.

DORA: Would you care for one of these cakes?

FRANZ: Does it have milk or butter in it?

DORA: I help in the kitchen, but I'm not a very good cook.

FRANZ: Why is that?

DORA: I was never interested in kitchen work. Now I prepare for fifty, instead of five.

FRANZ: So -- does the cake have milk or butter in it?

DORA: What are you staring at! Let's say it does.

FRANZ: Did you bake it?

DORA: I don't cook well.

FRANZ: But if you would have baked it, I would have eaten it.

DORA: Would you be breaking a taboo?

FRANZ: Yes, I don't eat anything with milk or butter.

DORA: Are you religious? Did you have meat for dinner?

FRANZ: No. Are you?

DORA: Yes. Orthodox.

FRANZ: I don't believe you.

DORA: My family's one of the most religious ones in Galicia. My father's a follower of the Hasidic Rabbi of Gera.

FRANZ: An Orthodox girl out on her own?

DORA: This camp is supervised.

FRANZ: You mean the food is supervised for *Kashrut*. The camp personnel are unsupervised.

DORA: I asked you: Would you be breaking a taboo?

FRANZ: The taboo of ingesting food that was the creation of your hands, that had the droplets of your sweat. I would have felt that I had devoured a part of you. You might never forgive me, and I might never forgive myself.

DORA: [giggling] What are you talking about? Here, you can try a cookie?

FRANZ: Let's stay with the cake? May I see it? [DORA places the little cake on a napkin and holds out her hand with it. FRANZ bends over it, holds her hand, grabs the cake with his mouth, chews and swallows it down.]

DORA: [laughs] Oh no, why did you do that?

FRANZ: Impulse. To enact the very scene I feared. What do you have to drink?

DORA: Tea and fruit juice. The drinks are over there. I saw you playing on the beach.

FRANZ: It's been ten years since I've been to the seashore.

DORA: Were those your children?

FRANZ: My sister's. I'm at the pensione. I remember seeing you working in the kitchen--scaling fish. Such bloody work for such a gentle hand.

DORA: What do you do on the Sabbath?

FRANZ: Read -- and write.

DORA: You write on the Sabbath?

FRANZ: It's my pleasure.

DORA: There's a taboo being broken! I read, only read.

FRANZ: Read what?

DORA: From the Bible and the Haf-Torah.

FRANZ: Do you read Hebrew?

DORA: Of course.

FRANZ: Hebrew is a language that I've always wanted to learn -- would you be able to read to me sometime?

DORA: I would need to arrange my time.

FRANZ: Can you?

DORA: Alright, when would you like to start?

FRANZ: Tomorrow.

DORA: Tomorrow?

FRANZ: We'll be here three weeks. The sooner we start, the better. There's much to cover.

DORA: You came here for a piece of cake.

FRANZ: I got everything I desired -- including the cake.

End of Scene

ACT 2, SCENE 17

[SCENE : PRAGUE. 1923. JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY LIBRARY.

FRANZ and DORA are seated at a large table. They have large books opened in front of them, and camouflage their conversation. FRANZ coughs intermittently in the scene.

DORA: My father thinks I'm here in Prague studying the origins of his rabbi's city.

FRANZ: You don't regret meeting me here -- or at the Müritz Resort?

DORA: No. When I first saw you on the beach with your sister's children -- how sad I was.

FRANZ: Why?

DORA: I thought they were yours.

FRANZ: It makes me sad they aren't.

DORA: I followed you and the children into town for the celebration.

FRANZ: I feel like a man reborn. The second week at Müritz, I had the idea of moving to Berlin -- an antidote to Prague -- with the thought of doing that -- with you.

DORA: Why should I flee Prague? I fled the shtetl to live my own life.

FRANZ: A dream of mine has always been to make a home in Palestine. Now, all I can consider is a trip to Schlesen with my sister, or moving from Prague to Berlin. Soon I won't be able to make it up from the Old Town Square to my room. Would you consider it?

DORA: You have that freedom. For me it's a different story. When I finish my studies in Prague, I return to the shtetl. My father has arranged a marriage for me to a Yeshiva Bocher.

FRANZ: A Yeshiva Bocher? A man more interested in the fine points of the Talmud than in you. Why should you return?

DORA: I need the connection -- to my family. I need the connection -- to Judaism.

FRANZ: We'd continue the Hebrew reading.

DORA: It's not enough.

FRANZ: We'd attend lectures together at the Academy for Jewish Studies.

DORA: It's not enough. I need to know that I'm connected to -- to creation, to God.

FRANZ: That has evaded me all my life. Other forms of creation -- a family, a home--have evaded me too. Perhaps I would have them, one day ...

DORA: One day, what?

FRANZ: Perhaps one day we will have a family. Would you consider it?

DORA: I might.

FRANZ: Tell me why.

DORA: You have a lively way of talking.

FRANZ: Am I not an old man to you? Please, tell me the truth.

DORA: I think I already said "Yes."

FRANZ: You did? I'm sorry. Did you say why? I may have missed it.

DORA: You're my idea of an ideal human being, and -- and -- you have ethereal, long fingers which take on shapes that accompany what you say when you tell stories.

[They laugh quietly. They close the books and move from the Library.]

FRANZ: Are those not frivolous reasons?

DORA: Perhaps, sweet one, but they're my reasons.

FRANZ: We could make a new life together?

[They embrace and kiss. FRANZ coughs. DORA supports him.]

End of Scene

ACT 2, SCENE 18

[SCENE: BERLIN. 1924. FRANZ'S AND DORA'S SHABBY APARTMENT

FRANZ is sitting up in bed bolstered by pillows and writing on a board.

Mounds of pages with his handwriting are scattered across the bed. DORA, fully clothed, is resting by his side. She rises, goes to light the kerosene lamp, moves to the stove to stir the pot. FRANZ crumples the page he was writing, looks at the other pages and crumples more pages.]

FRANZ: Worthless, useless! [He throws the rumpled papers to the floor.]

Good! It's my last sheet.

DORA: I'll bring you another pad.

FRANZ: Will you take these papers to the trash?

DORA: I'll clean up in a moment.

FRANZ: Do you like this mess -- this confusion? Yes or no? Do you dislike me for this heap of papers?

DORA: The mess has nothing to do with the person I know, the man I love. His gentle touch.

FRANZ: I want you to take this pile it to the trash.

DORA: Later, I'll clean up later. Shall I bring you soup?

FRANZ: I cannot swallow anything now. Later please. [FRANZ starts to write again gaining his composure.] Did a package come today?

DORA: From Max, but nothing from your parents.

FRANZ: I wish Max wouldn't send food, besides, the contents never taste good -- some sort of stale flavor permeates the boxes as if he dug it out of a hole in the ground.

DORA: I made barley soup from his package.

FRANZ: Is that what made me vomit?

DORA: Your parents sent you the last one.

FRANZ: Full of sausages and dried meat. Just what my father eats for breakfast. Ascribing his Neanderthal tastes to everyone.

DORA: We have to use every little bit of food we get -- you need it to gain your strength back.

FRANZ: It is alright for my father to have his tastes, to drink his beer. I should have drunk with him when he wanted me to -- chilled wine, cold beer, icy lemonade. I'll write them another letter, tell them of my condition, tell them how well you care for me. I'll try to alleviate their guilt -- I've got to be careful to somehow dissuade them from visiting. My sister surely was the one who

persuaded them to send food packages. She probably wrote, "situation is drastic, packages make the difference between hunger and starvation."

DORA: I asked Dr. Klopstock to stop by tonight.

FRANZ: Don't trouble him --

DORA: He's better than any of the other doctors at the Sanitorium.

FRANZ: Certainly, in a place where statistically one has a ten percent chance of living. The doctors pass through the rooms, issue a verdict, and the patient turns over and dies.

DORA: Here -- I'll read to you from the Haf-torah.

FRANZ: Did you write to your father?

DORA: I didn't have the occasion.

FRANZ: I'll write him a letter.

DORA: Save your strength for your work.

FRANZ: I'll write him -- "although I have never been an observant Jew, and couldn't be considered one now, I am a repentant one. I wish to make amends and to embrace Judaism as a long lost lover. I would ask your permission to marry your daughter."

DORA: He already said "No"!

FRANZ: An Eastern European religious Jew does not know the agony of a modern, agnostic one -- I am now saturated in traditional beliefs just from being near you.

DORA: That is not enough for Papa. [pause] Max sent these from the publisher.

[She brings him an opened package.]

FRANZ: Aach, ineffectual attempts to -- I have no desire to look at them.

They slice into me, cut me off from what I valued. "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." I am the officer in the Penal Colony and have created my own torture machine.

DORA: Let me read to you?

FRANZ: My stories have trampled my belly, my lungs, my throat, my heart, my life. I have allowed them willy-nilly to cut to shreds all normalcy.

DORA: It's the medication. I'll go for Klopstock.

FRANZ: No, don't! Okay, go! Please go! Ask him when is he going to get me the morphine. He's promised me.

DORA: You do better with the camphor. I'll go for him.

FRANZ: No, don't leave me now. Alright, go! But tell him the pain is excruciatingly painful -- no, don't tell him that, he'll think I'm delirious. Tell him that if he doesn't come with the morphine, I'll never speak to him again. Wait! That may come true -- I'm not superstitious, but one never knows the power of the word.

DORA: Save your voice. I won't go for Klopstock.

FRANZ: If only I could pour cool, fresh water down my throat, or even dirty water! I loved fruit juices. Oh, God, my father, drinking that cold beer. I could watch him all day.

DORA: Franz, dearest, just rest up. I'll get a cloth.

FRANZ: Put your hand on my head. [DORA moves to the bed, sits on it.] No, don't sit here; I'm afraid the disease is contagious.

DORA: I've already passed that stage. [She puts her hand on his forehead.] Oh my god! You're burning up.

FRANZ: No, you don't know. It's not my head, it's my throat. Here, put your hand on my throat. [She put her hand on his throat.]

Stop! You're choking me!

DORA: Franz, dearest, please. I'll make you comfortable. She adjusts the cloth, straightens the pillows, puts several cloths on his throat and his head. How does that feel?

FRANZ: Better. Don't fuss about me. Thank you, dear Dora. Did any letters arrive?

DORA: No.

FRANZ: Nothing came? Why can't people write? I have waited for letters all my life.

DORA: A letter came from the Landlady.

FRANZ: She is so repulsed by me. If my body were cut up into a thousand pieces, and each piece were to lay dying on the floor, she would be repulsed by every little piece. What did it say?

DORA: Nothing that we don't already know. We have to move.

FRANZ: Her hatred of Jews knows no bounds.

DORA: She says it has to do with the rent.

FRANZ: Did my pension come this month from the Institute? Sixty krone?

DORA: Yes. But the rent is no longer twenty.

FRANZ: I'll write my parents, prostrate myself before them, grovel in the letter.

DORA: They sent three hundred krone last month.

FRANZ: Good dear parents!

DORA: I used most of it for the specialist.

FRANZ: Just call Klopstock next time, will you please!

DORA: The specialist relieved you -- didn't he? You felt better -- didn't you?

FRANZ: Yes, he relieved me. It didn't last. Worthless for one hundred sixty krone -- you used up all the money my parents sent us. Bring me those proofs of "The Hunger Artist," maybe the royalties will help. It would take three months. It's worthless to maintain this life. [He reads a bit, and bursts into heaving sobs.] I can't! I can't! It's all been in vain.

DORA: Don't say that. [DORA begins to sob.]

FRANZ: Except for you, dear Dora, you have not been in vain, and of course, Klopstock --but my parents -- my father -- my mother -- Felice -- Grete -- Julie -- Milena--the letters -- Max -- What is there left? Nothing! I tell you nothing. THERE IS NOTHING LEFT! [pause] Look in there! Is there a manuscript? [She hesitates.] Take it out! Take it out!

DORA: [She pulls out the manuscript and reads:] "The Blood Libel of the Beilis Trial"

FRANZ: Is there another one? Take it out!

DORA: [She takes out more papers and reads:] "The Burrow - last chapter."

FRANZ: [He shouts.] Take it to the fire -- burn it like a sacrificial offering. Go ahead! Do it!

DORA: I can't!

FRANZ: It's easy. Do it!

DORA: I can't do it. Max will be angry.

FRANZ: Then I'll do it myself. [He throws off the covers.]

DORA: You'll catch your death of cold.

FRANZ: Do you love me?

DORA: Yes.

FRANZ: You pledged total loyalty and faith in me, haven't you?

DORA: Yes.

FRANZ: Then you must understand and do this for me.

DORA: Oh, my dear Franz. [She rushes up to him, hugs him and kisses him. Then she rushes to the fire, opens the grate, and pushes the manuscript in. The fire blazes.]

FRANZ: Now look in there. Get the other manuscripts!

DORA: [DORA in a hypnotic state walks to the desk, opens the drawer, pulls out many loose pages. FRANZ sits upright in bed, tears streaming down his face. DORA feeds pages into the stove. The fire blazes DORA reads the words on the page]"...while he was peering into the distance, he suddenly saw a grave mound in his path.."

DORA: [DORA feeds another page into the stove.] "...with astonishing skill he was able to produce golden letters from his ordinary pencil..."

DORA: [DORA feeds another page into the stove.] "...he jumped with both feet on the middle of my body. I shuddered with wild pain, not knowing what was happening..."

[DORA staggers to FRANZ's bed. They embrace, then with cheeks together, they watch the fire blaze. DORA breaks from the embrace.]

[FRANZ crawls out of bed to face the DOORKEEPER.]

MAX: [DORA feeds a page into the fire] "Now he hasn't very long to live. Before he dies, all his experiences in these long years gather themselves in his head to one point, a question he has not yet asked the doorkeeper."

FRANZ: "Everyone strives to reach The Kabbalah, so how does it happen that for all these many years no one but myself has ever begged for admittance?"

DOORKEEPER: "I am going to shut the gate. No one else could ever be admitted here, since this gate was made only for you."

[Doorkeeper strides back into the doorway, and with a heave, slams it shut.

FRANZ moves to the door, bangs on the door, then moves to center of stage.

Characters enter and speak lines as Dora reads and feeds pages into the fire:]

MILENA: "Honored members of the Academy! You have done me the honor of inviting me to give your Academy an account of the life I formerly led as an ape."

GRETE: "I'm just going to open the door this very minute. A slight illness, an attack of giddiness, has kept me from getting up."

CLERK: "During these last decades the interest in professional fasting has markedly diminished."

SUPERVISOR: "I have completed the construction of my burrow and it seems to be successful."

FELICE: "'It's a remarkable piece of apparatus,' said the officer to the explorer and surveyed with a certain air of admiration the apparatus which after all was quite familiar to him."

MAX: "Someone must have been telling lies about Joseph K., for without having done anything wrong he was arrested one fine morning."

MOTHER: "They shot at us; I was the only one that was hit... once in the cheek; a slight wound; but it left a large, naked, red scar which earned me the name of Red Peter ..."

NANNY: "And two horses, enormous creatures with powerful flanks, one after the other, legs tucked close to their bodies, each well-shaped head lowered like a camel's by sheer strength of buttocking squeezed out through the door hole..."

HERMANN: "As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect."
[Repetition builds into a crescendo. FRANZ covers his ears; his face contorts into a silent scream.]

END OF PLAY