

ACT II

SCENE: *In the cellar-brothel. A spacious basement in an old building; low-arched ceiling; high up on the wall, close to the ceiling, two deep, narrow windows, hung with curtains. On the sill, flower-pots. The rain is coming in through the windows. A flight of stairs leads to the door above, which is constructed like that of the entrance to a cabin on board ship. Half of the door is ajar, revealing the gloom of the night. Rain drips down. In the background of the cellar, several small compartments, separated from one another by thin partitions, and screened by thick black curtains. One of the curtains has been drawn aside; in the compartment are seen a bed, a wash-stand, a mirror and various toilet articles. A colored night-lamp sheds a dim light over the tiny room. The furniture of the cellar itself consists of several lounges, a table, benches and card-tables; on the walls, looking-glasses bedecked with gaudy ornaments; chromos representing women in suggestive poses. . .*

On one of the lounges sleeps Shloyme; his long boots reach to a nearby bench. It is a night in spring.

The room is lighted by a large hanging-lamp.

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Act II

HINDEL

Enters. Halts for a moment upon the top stair and looks down at Shloyme. She is wrapped in a thin shawl, coquettishly dressed in a skirt much too short for her age. Descends into the cellar, stepping noisily so as to wake Shloyme.

SHLOYME, awakes. Looks around.
It's you, is it? Why aren't you outside?

HINDEL

It's begun to rain.

SHLOYME, sitting up.

So you deign to answer me, milady? Have you, then, forgiven me?

HINDEL

I wasn't angry in the first place.

SHLOYME

So. . . Well, if you wish, you can get angry again, for all I care. (*Lies down.*)

HINDEL, looks around. Runs over to one of the screened compartments and listens, then runs back to Shloyme.

Shloyme, I don't want to leave this place.

See, now we're all alone and nobody can hear us. Tell me, as truly as there is a God in heaven, — tell me, do you really mean to marry me?

SHLOYME

Go, my grand dame. Make knots in your shirt and hide your money there, and then run to "Uncle" Yekel and complain that I take all your earnings, — that you haven't even enough to buy yourself a hat. . .

HINDEL

Yes, I did tell him that. It made me furious and cut me to the quick, — to have you tear the very clothes off my back and then go and make eyes at that yellow bitch. . . I'll dash vitriol into her face. Why, her breath smells terribly. How can anybody get near such a thing? A fine young lady he's hunted out!

SHLOYME

Away from me! I'll give you such a crack between the eyes that you'll see your great-great-granny's ghost!

HINDEL

Crack away! Tear strips of skin off my body . . . (*Pushing up one of her sleeves and showing him her arm.*) You've covered me with black and blue marks. (*Baring her other arm.*) Here, pinch, slash, whatever you will. But tell me, here on this very spot, by the memory of your

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father and as truly as you pray for the repose of his soul, — will you really marry me?

SHLOYME, *still stretched out.*
Once I wanted to. Now I don't.

HINDEL

Then it's no. That's the way I like to do things. Only no deceit. Do you want money? — Say the word. A coat? — Here's the price. Only no fooling me. (*Walks off.*)

SHLOYME

That's all right. There are plenty of sweet-hearts. You'll catch your fish, all right.

HINDEL, *drawing aside the curtain of her compartment.*

Don't give yourself any worry on my account.

SHLOYME

You object, do you? Have it your way. (*Pause.*) But you're not too angry to pour a fellow a glass of tea, are you?

HINDEL, *fetches him a glass of tea from her compartment and places it upon the cellar table. She then returns to her place and sits down before her trunk of clothes, as if looking for something. After a brief silence she addresses Shloyme, from her compartment.*

So you like her, eh? . . . Well, well. . . You'll soon be busy, all right, — buying towels to pad

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out her flat bosom, paying dentists for putting a set of teeth into her jaws, and getting her a pair of stilts to make her look human size. Then you can hire a barrel-organ and take her around people's backyards. A fine hurdy-gurdyman you'd make, upon my word. I'll throw you a two-kopeck-piece from the window, I promise.

SHLOYME

Hold your tongue, I tell you!

HINDEL

And what'll you do if I don't?

SHLOYME

I'll beat you black and blue.

HINDEL

Ho, ho! There's no beating folks these days. Nowadays a beating is answered with a knife.

SHLOYME, *springing to his feet.*

And who'll do that? (*Striding into Hindel's compartment.*) Who'll do the knifing, eh? (*He struggles with her, tearing from her grasp a red waist. He returns to the cellar.*) Now we'll see. (*He rips the waist open eagerly. A photograph falls to the floor.*) Aha! Moyshe the locksmith! So that's your champion, is it? And since when have you become so thick with him? (*Goes back to her room.*)

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HINDEL

What business is that of yours?

SHLOYME

This is what business it is of mine! (*He gives her a hard slap; she falls upon her bed and begins to weep.*) So you're going around with Moyshe the locksmith, are you? Exchanging photographs, eh? A regular pair of sweet-hearts! And all behind my back? (*Silence. He returns to his table.*) And I knew nothing about it. . . (*Drinks more tea, arises, and mounts the stairs.*) And I knew nothing about it. . . (*He stops at the door.*) Hindel! (*She does not answer.*) Hindel! Come here this instant! (*No reply.*) Hindel! (*He stamps his foot, then runs down the flight of stairs in a rage.*) Come here, I tell you! Do you hear what I say!

HINDEL

Arises from her bed and walks over to him, hiding her face in her handkerchief.

SHLOYME

Have you spoken to Manke?

HINDEL, *whimpering.*

Yes.

SHLOYME

Well, what does she say?

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HINDEL, *still crying.*

If we'll have our own "house," she'll come to us.

SHLOYME

Sure?

HINDEL, *drying her eyes.*

Yes. But she doesn't want to come alone. She wants to bring a chum.

SHLOYME

Certainly. Do you imagine you can make any money on one girl, — even enough to pay the rent?

HINDEL

We ought to have a fresh young girl. . .

SHLOYME

Upon my soul! Then we'd do business! But where can we get her?

HINDEL

I've got my eye on one — as beautiful as the day,* and still untouched.

SHLOYME, *curious.*

Can we get her for the business?

HINDEL

I should say! . . .

* Literally 'as beautiful as a tree.'

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SHLOYME
A girl. . . from a "house"?

HINDEL
No. A pure maiden.

SHLOYME
How do you come to know her?

HINDEL
She comes to Manke every night. . . Steals out of her home. . . Nobody sees her. Something seems to draw her here. . . she is so inquisitive. . .

RIFKELE, *thrusting her bare head through the window, beckoning to Hindel.*

Ps-s-s! Is my father down there?

HINDEL, *signalling back.*
No.

RIFKELE, *disappears from the window.*

SHLOYME, *eyeing Hindel closely.*
She! "Uncle" Yekel's daughter! A genuine gold-mine!

HINDEL
Hush! She's coming!
RIFKELE, *slender and beautiful; dressed modestly, and wrapped in a black shawl; steals through the door, runs down the stairs with trembling caution. She speaks more with signs than with words.*

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Where is Manke? There? (*Pointing to a screened compartment.*) There, with. . . ?

HINDEL
Nods "yes."

RIFKELE
Approaches the curtain of Manke's room and listens with passionate intentness, looking around every other moment with palpitant apprehension.

SHLOYME, *very softly, to Hindel.*
Tomorrow we must go and take a look at that house on Pivna Street.

HINDEL
And when shall we be married?

SHLOYME
First we've got to have a home.

HINDEL
I wonder how much the Rabbi will ask for performing the ceremony.

SHLOYME
As long as there's enough left to buy some furniture with. The place must make a decent showing. (*The door is suddenly banged open and Yekel bursts in.*)

YEKEL, *his face still betrays signs of his cunning and of his youthful dissipation. He is*

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dressed in dignified, orthodox fashion. Removes his hat and shakes the rain from it.

A fine business! It has to rain! (*Suddenly noticing Rifkele, he explodes with rage.*) What! You here! (*Seizes her by the collar and shakes her, clinching his teeth.*) What are you doing here?

RIFKELE, *terrified, stammering.*

Mam. . . Mamma told me. . . to. . . c-call. . . (*Bursting into tears.*) Papa, don't hit me!

YEKEL

Your mother. . . your mother sent you. . . here! (*With a loud outcry.*) Your mother! (*Dragging her upstairs.*) She'll lead you to ruin yet! Something draws her to it! . . . She wants her daughter to be what the mother was. . .

RIFKELE, *crying.*

Papa, don't hit me!

YEKEL

I'll teach you to mind your father! (*Leads her out. Rifkele's crying is heard from without.*)

SHLOYME

There's a virtuous Yekel for you! It doesn't become his dignity for his daughter to be a brothel-woman. (*Through the ceiling is heard a noise of angry stamping, and the weeping of a*

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woman.) He must be giving it to his wife now, all right! Biff! Bang!

HINDEL

He's right. A mother should guard her daughter well. . . Whatever you were, you were, but once you marry and have a child, watch over it. . . Just wait. If God should bless us with children, I'll know how to bring them up. My daughter will be as pure as a saint, with cheeks as red as beets. . . I won't let an eye gaze upon her. And she'll marry a respectable fellow, with an orthodox wedding. . .

SHLOYME, *slapping her across the shoulders.*

We'll see about that, all in due season. But talk to Rifkele in the meantime. Work upon her, I say. Otherwise everything's lost.

HINDEL

Don't you worry about my part. I'll know how to go about it.

SHLOYME

We'll see, then. (*Silence.*) If you land her, bring her right to me. You know. . .

YEKEL, *enters, in anger.*

It's time to close up. It's raining. In any case no dog's going to stick his snout into this place tonight. (*With a sharp look at Shloyme.*) Enough, enough of this billing and cooing. Time to close up. (*Mounts the steps, opens the*

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door and calls.) Reizel! To bed! Basha! Time to go to sleep! (From without are heard girls' voices: "Soon. Right away!")

HINDEL

Points to Yekel and signals Shloyme to leave.

SHLOYME

Goes up the steps. As he is about to go out he comes face to face with Yekel. They eye each other.

YEKEL

Get a move on. Time to close up. You've whispered secrets long enough.

SHLOYME, *thrusting his hands into his trousers pocket. Looks sharply at Yekel.*

Since when have you become such a respectable personage?

YEKEL

Off with you, now. Get a move on. I'll tell you later.

SHLOYME

To the devil with you!

HINDEL, *runs up the stairs to Shloyme.*

Shloyme, go home, I tell you. Do you hear? Go home!

SHLOYME, *leaving, with a defiant glance at Yekel.*

There's a fine lout for you!

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YEKEL

As if I need him here! . . . (*Pointing to Hindel.*) Here! You may take your old carcass along with you and start a place of your own.

HINDEL

People don't open places with old carcasses. You merely lie down to rest with them. But little dolls. . .

YEKEL, *calling into the entry.*

Reizel! Basha! (*Enter two girls, running. Rain is dripping from their wet, filmy dresses and from their unbraided hair. They are in a merry mood and speak with laughter. Yekel leaves, slamming the door behind him.*)

BASHA, *a stout girl, with red cheeks. Naive in manner; she speaks with a harsh accent.*

What a sweet odor the rain has! . . . (*Shaking raindrops off her clothes.*) Just like the apples at home drying, in the lofts. This is the first May rain.

HINDEL

Such a crazy idea: to stand in the rain. As if they'll attract the whole world. . . Nobody'd ever show up in a downpour like this. . . (*Goes into her compartment and sits down near her trunk, packing various articles.*)

REIZEL, *shaking off raindrops.*

To the deuce with the whole lot of them. I

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paid my account the day before yesterday. . . We were standing under the eaves, the rain is so fragrant. . . It washes the whole winter off your head. (*Goes over to Hindel.*) Just look. . . (*Showing her wet hair.*) How fresh it is. . . how sweet it smells. . .

BASHA

At home, in my village, the first sorrel must be sprouting. Yes, at the first May rain they cook sorrel soup. . . And the goats must be grazing in the meadows. . . And the rafts must be floating on the stream. . . And Franek is getting the Gentile girls together, and dancing with them at the inn. . . And the women must surely be baking cheese-cakes for the Feast of Weeks.* (*Silence.*) Do you know what? I'm going to buy myself a new summer tippet and go home for the holidays. . . (*Runs into her room, brings out a large summer hat and a long veil; she places the hat upon her wet hair and surveys herself in the looking-glass.*) Just see! If I'd ever come home for the holidays rigged up in this style, and promenade down to the station. . . Goodness! They'd just burst with envy. Wouldn't they? If only I weren't afraid of my father!

REIZEL

Why? Would he hurt you?

* Pentecost.

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BASHA

He'd kill me on the spot. He's on the hunt for me with a crowbar. Once he caught me dancing with Franek at the village tavern and he gave me such a rap over the arm with a rod (*Showing her arm.*) that I carry the mark to this very day. I come from a fine family. My father is a butcher. Talk about the fellows that were after me! . . . (*In a low voice.*) They tried to make a match between me and Nottke the meat-chopper. I've got his gold ring still. (*Indicating a ring upon her finger.*) He gave it to me at the Feast of Tabernacles.* Maybe he wasn't wild to marry me, — but I didn't care to.

REIZEL

Why didn't you care to?

BASHA

Because I didn't. . . He always smelled ox meat. . . Ugh! His name is Pshorik. Think of marrying Pshorik and having a little Pshorik every year! Ugh!

REIZEL

And how is it any better for you here?

BASHA

Here, at least, I'm a free person. I've got my chest of finery, and dress swell. Better clothes, upon my word, than the rich daughters

* Succoth.

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of my village. . . (*Fetching from her compartment a brown dress.*) When I go walking on Marshalkovski street in this dress they all stare at me. . . Fire and flame! Mm! If I could only put in an appearance in my home town dressed in this fashion, here's how I'd promenade to the station. (*Struts across the room like a lady of fashion, raising her skirt at the back and assuming a cosmopolitan air.*) They'd die of jealousy, I tell you. . . They'd be stricken with apoplexy on the spot. (*Promenades about the room playing the grand dame.*)

REIZEL, *straightens the folds of Basha's dress in the back and adjusts her hat to a better angle.*

That's the way! Now raise your head a bit higher. . . Who needs to know that you were ever in a place of this sort? You'll tell them that you were with a big business house. A Count has fallen in love with you. . .

HINDEL, *from her room, where she is still busy with her chest of clothes.*

And what's the matter with a place of this sort, I'd like to know? Aren't we every bit as good as the girls in the business houses, eh? The whole world is like that nowadays; that's what the world demands. In these days even the daughters of the best families aren't any better. This is our way of earning a living. And believe me, when one of us gets married,

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she's more faithful to her husband than any of the others. We *know* what a man is.

BASHA, *still strutting about the room.*

Ah! Do you imagine they wouldn't recognize me right away? Their hearts would tell them. . . You know, my mother died from the shock. . . She couldn't live through it. . . To this day I haven't visited her grave. . . (*Suddenly comes to a halt.*) Sometimes she comes before me. . . At night I see her in my dreams. She appears to me in her shroud, covered with thorns and briars, because of my sins. And she pulls me by the hair.

REIZEL

Oh, mother! And did you really see her? How does she look, your dead mother? Is she pale?

HINDEL

Shut up, will you? Late at night they have to start telling stories about the dead. No dead people can come here. Our boss has a Holy Scroll upstairs. . . (*A sudden hush.*) What's wrong about our trade, I'd like to know? (*She leaves her little room and goes into the cellar.*) Wasn't our mistress in a house like this for fifteen years? Yet she married. And isn't she a respectable God-fearing woman? . . . Doesn't she observe all the laws that a Jewish daughter must keep? . . . And isn't her Rifkele a pure child? And isn't our boss a respectable man?

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Isn't he generous? Doesn't he give the biggest donations to charity? . . . And he's had a Holy Scroll written. . .

REIZEL

But they say that you mustn't read from such a Holy Scroll, and that the daughter of such mothers become what the mothers themselves were. . . that something draws them on like a magnet, and that the Evil Spirit drags them down into the mire. . .

HINDEL, *frightened*.

Who said so?

REIZEL

An old fortune-teller, — a sorceress told it to me. . . it's just as if such a daughter were in the power of an enchantment. . .

HINDEL

That's a rotten lie! . . . Where's the old gypsy who told you that? . . . I'd scratch her eyes out for her! There is a God in heaven, I say! We have a God in Heaven!

MANKE, *steals from her compartment into the cellar. She is half-dressed, with a shawl thrown over her. Her colored stockings are visible, and her hair is in disorder. Her eyes sparkle with wanton cunning. Her face is long, and insolently pretty; she is quite young. A lock of hair falls over her forehead. Her eyes blink as she*

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speaks, and her whole body quivers. She looks about in surprise.

What? Nobody here?

REIZEL, *to Manke*.

Is it you, Manke? A good thing you came. (*Pointing to Hindel.*) She's almost made a Rabbi's wife of me. Where have you left your guest?

MANKE

He fell asleep. So I stole out.

REIZEL

Some generous land-owner, perhaps? Maybe he'll stand for the drinks?

MANKE

Bah! He's a fool. Third time he's come. And he keeps asking me, who's my father, who's my mother, — as if he intended to marry me. . . Whenever he kisses me he hides his face in my bosom, closes his eyes and smiles as if he were a babe in his mother's arms. (*Looks around. In a low voice, to Hindel.*) Hasn't Rifkele been here yet?

HINDEL, *with a soft laugh*.

She was here. . . and her father caught her. . . and maybe he didn't raise a rumpus. . .

MANKE

Good heavens! How long since?

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HINDEL

Quite a while ago. . . He must be asleep by now. (*Softly.*) She'll surely be down again soon.

REIZEL, *to Manke, in a merry mood.*

Come, Manke, let's go out into the street. It's raining. The drops are like pearls. . . The first May shower. Who's coming out with me for a rain bath?

MANKE, *approaching the window.*

It's raining. And what a thin drizzle. And how sweet it smells. . . Let's go out.

BASHA

At home when we have a shower like this the gutters run over and flood the narrow lanes. And we take off our shoes and stockings and dance in the rain barefoot. . . Who's going to take her shoes off? (*Removes her shoes and stockings.*) Take off your shoes, Manke, and let's dance in the rain!

MANKE, *removes her stockings and lets down her hair.*

There! Now let the rain soak us from head to foot. . . Standing in a May shower makes you grow. Isn't that so?

BASHA, *runs over.*

Come. Let's splash each other. . . Let's sprinkle handfuls of raindrops over each other. (*She*

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lets down her hair.) Let's drench our hair just like the trees. . . Come!

HINDEL

Wait. Wait. "Uncle" isn't asleep yet. He might hear us. (*All listen, their ears directed to the ceiling.*)

REIZEL

Come along! Can't you hear him snoring?

MANKE

Wait. . . We'll tap softly for Rifkele. (*Basha and Reizel go out. Manke takes a stick and taps in a corner of the ceiling, very softly. From outside comes the noise of the girls skipping about in the water. They take handfuls of raindrops and throw them in through the open door, calling "Come out! Come out!"*)

RIFKELE, *thrusts her head through the window. She is in her night clothes, covered by a light shawl. She whispers cautiously.*

Manke, Manke. Did you call me?

MANKE, *takes a chair and places it under the window; stands upon it and reaches to Rifkele's hand.*

Yes, Rifkele. I called you. . . Come, we'll stand in the May rain, splash water over each other and grow taller. . .

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RIFKELE, *from above.*

Hush! Speak more softly. I stole out of bed. So that pa wouldn't hear. I'm afraid, — that he'll beat me.

MANKE

Don't be afraid of your father. He won't wake up so soon. Come, let's rather stand in the rain. I'll let your hair down. (*She undoes Rifkele's braids, reaching through the window to do so.*) There. And now I'll wash them for you in the rain. Just like this.

RIFKELE

I have only a nightgown on. All night I lay in bed waiting for my father to fall asleep, so that I might steal out to you. I heard your tapping and sneaked away. So softly, barefoot, — so that my father shouldn't hear me.

MANKE, *embraces her passionately.*

Come, Rifkele, I'll wash your eyes in the rainwater. The night is so beautiful, the rain is so warm and the air is so full of delightful fragrance. Come.

RIFKELE

Hush. . . hush. . . I'm afraid of my father. . . He beat me. . . He locked the door. . . And hid the key near the Holy Scroll. I lay awake all night. . . I heard you call me. . . You called me so softly. . . And something drew me so irresistibly to you. . . and I stole the key from the

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Scroll. . . My heart pounded so wildly. . . so wildly. . .

MANKE

Wait, Rifkele, I'm coming right out to you. (*Jumps down from the chair and runs up the stairs.*) I'm coming out to you. Just a moment and I'm with you. (*She leaves. Rifkele disappears from the window.*)

HINDEL, *from the curtain of her compartment she has been listening very intently to the conversation between Manke and Rifkele. She now begins to pace up and down the cellar excitedly, wrapt in thought and muttering to herself very slowly.*

With God's help, if I can only get both of them, Rifkele and Manke, this very night. . . I'll take them directly to Shloyme's. . . And I'll say to him, "Here you are. . . Here's your bread and butter. Now rent a place, marry me, and become a respectable man as well as any other." (*Stops abruptly. Raises her hands toward the ceiling.*) Father in Heaven, you are a Father to all orphans. . . Mother in your grave, pray for me. . . Let my troubles come to an end. Let me at last be settled in my own home! . . . (*Pause.*) If God is only good to me, I'll have a Holy Parchment written in His honor. . . And every Sabbath I'll give three pounds of candles to the House of Study. (*A long pause. She is lost in the contemplation of her future pros-*

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pects.) Yes, he is a good God. . . a good God. . . Father in Heaven. . . Mother, pray in my behalf. . . don't be silent. . . pray for me. . . do your very best for me. . . *(She returns to her compartment and begins hastily to pack her things.)* I can be ready, anyway. *(A long pause. The stage is empty. Soon Manke leads in Rifkele. They are both wrapped in the same wet shawl. . . Their hair is dripping wet. Large drops of water fall from their clothes to the floor. They are barefoot. . . Hindel, behind her curtain, listens as before.)*

MANKE, *speaks with restrained passion and love, — softly, but with deep resonance.*

Are you cold, Rifkele darling? Nestle close to me. . . Ever so close. . . Warm yourself next to me. So. Come, let's sit down here on the lounge. *(Leads Rifkele to a lounge; they sit down.)* Just like this. . . Now rest your face snugly in my bosom. So. Just like that. And let your body touch mine. . . It's so cool. . . as if water were running between us. *(Pause.)* I uncovered your breasts and washed them with the rainwater that trickled down my arms. Your breasts are so white and soft. And the blood in them cools under the touch, just like white snow, — like frozen water. . . and their fragrance is like the grass on the meadows. And I let down your hair so. . . *(Runs her fingers through Rifkele's hair.)* And I held them like this in the rain and washed them. How

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sweet they smell. . . Like the rain itself. . . *(She buries her face in Rifkele's hair.)* Yes, I can smell the scent of the May rain in them. . . So light, so fine. . . And fresh. . . as the grass on the meadows. . . as the apple on the bough. . . So. Cool me, refresh me with your tresses. *(She washes her face in Rifkele's hair.)* Cool me, — so. But wait. . . I'll comb you as if you were a bride. . . a nice part and two long, black braids. *(Does so.)* Do you want me to, Rifkele? Do you?

RIFKELE, *nodding.*

Yes.

MANKE

You'll be the bride. . . a beautiful bride. . . It's Sabbath eve and you are sitting with your papa and mamma at the table. . . I — I am your sweetheart. . . your bridegroom, and I've come as your guest. Eh, Rifkele? Do you like that game?

RIFKELE, *nodding.*

Yes, I do.

MANKE

Wait, now; wait. Your father and mother have gone to sleep. The sweethearts meet here at the table. . . We are bashful. . . Eh?

RIFKELE, *nodding.*

Yes, Manke.

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MANKE

Then we come closer to one another, for we are bride and bridegroom, you and I. We embrace. (*Places her arm around Rifkele.*) Ever so tightly. And kiss, very softly. Like this. (*Kisses Rifkele.*) And we turn so red, — we're so bashful. It's nice, Rifkele, isn't it?

RIFKELE

Yes, Manke. . . Yes.

MANKE, *lowering her voice, and whispering into Rifkele's ear.*

And then we go to sleep together. Nobody sees, nobody hears. Only you and I. Like this. (*Clasps Rifkele tightly to herself.*) Do you want to sleep with me tonight like this? Eh?

RIFKELE, *looking about nervously.*

I do. . . I do. . .

MANKE, *drawing Rifkele closer.*

Come. . . Come. . .

RIFKELE, *softly.*

I'm afraid of my father. He'll wake up and. .

MANKE

Wait, Rifkele, wait a second. (*Reflects for a moment.*) Do you want to go away from here with me? We'll be together days and nights at a time. Your father won't be there, nor your mother. . . Nobody'll scold you. . . or beat you. . .

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We'll be all by ourselves. . . For days at a time. . . We'll be so happy. What do you say, Rifkele?

RIFKELE, *closing her eyes.*

And my father won't know?

MANKE

No. We'll run away this very night, — with Hindel, to her house. . . She has a house with Shloyme, she told me. You'll see how nice everything will be. . . Young folks will be there aplenty, — army officers. . . and we'll be together, all by ourselves, all day long. We'll dress just like the officers and go horseback-riding. Come, Rifkele, — do you want to?

RIFKELE, *trembling with excitement.*

And papa won't hear?

MANKE

No, no. He won't hear. He's sleeping so soundly. . . There, can't you hear him snoring? . . . (*Runs over to Hindel's compartment and seizes Hindel by the arm.*) Have you got a place? Come! Take us away at once!

HINDEL, *waking with a start.*

Yes, yes. To Shloyme's, right away! (*She throws a dress over Rifkele.*) He'll find us a place quickly enough.

MANKE, *hastily dressing Rifkele.*

You'll see how nice everything'll be. . . What

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a jolly time we'll have. (*All dress, seizing whatever they happen to lay hands upon. Slowly they ascend the steps. At the door they encounter Reizel and Basha who, drenched to the skin, are just returning to the cellar. Reizel and Basha look at the others in surprise.*)

REIZEL and BASHA, together.
What's this? Where are you going?

MANKE

Hush! Don't make any noise. We're going for some beer, — and lemonade. . . (*Hindel, Manke and Rifkele leave, followed by the amazed glances of Reizel and Basha.*)

REIZEL

There's something suspicious about this that I don't like.

BASHA

Same here.

REIZEL

Something's up. . . Good heavens!

BASHA, stares at Reizel in fright.
What? You mean *that*?

REIZEL

It's none of our business. Let's put out the lamp and go to sleep. We know nothing about it. (*Turns down the wick of the lamp. The stage is bathed in gloom. The girls go to their*

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respective compartments.) That fortune-teller was certainly right, I tell you. She certainly was right! . . . (*She disappears. For a moment the stage is empty and in darkness.*)

BASHA, comes running wildly from her room, with a hysterical outcry. She is in night clothes.

REIZEL, thrusting aside the curtain of her compartment.

What's the matter, Basha?

BASHA

I'm afraid to go to sleep. I feel that the ghost of my mother, with her thorns and her briars, is hovering about my room.

REIZEL

The Holy Scroll in the room above has been defiled. We have no one to shield us now!

BASHA

I'm afraid this is going to be a terrible night. My heart's thumping. (*Suddenly, from above, a din is heard. There is a scraping of chairs and tables. The girls, eyes distended with fear, listen intently. Soon there is the sound of something heavy falling down the outside stairs.*)

YEKEL, outside.

Rifkele, Rifkele! Where are you?

REIZEL, to Basha.

Let's lie down in our beds and pretend we're

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fast asleep. . . We know nothing at all, remember! (*Both go to their beds and feign deep sleep.*)

YEKEL, *rushes into the cellar, a burning candle in his hand. His hair is in disorder. Over his nightshirt he has thrown a coat. He shouts wildly.* Rifkele! Rifkele! Is Rifkele here? (*No reply. He tears the curtains of the compartments violently aside.*) Rifkele! Where is she? (*Waking Reizel and Basha.*) Where is Rifkele! Rifkele! Where is she?

REIZEL and BASHA, *rubbing their eyes with their sleeves, as if awakened from sound sleep.*
What? . . . We don't know.

YEKEL

You don't know? . . . You don't know? . . . (*Rushes up the stairs, almost at a single bound. Goes out. Pause. There is a sound outside of something falling down the stairs. The door is suddenly banged open and Yekel stumbles in, dragging Sarah by the hair. Both are in night attire. Yekel pulls Sarah downstairs by the hair. Points to the cellar.*) Where is your daughter? Your daughter, — where is she? (*Basha and Reizel huddle close to the wall, trembling with terror.*)

QUICK CURTAIN