

## Ghetto

## Playwright's Note

On various festive occasions our tradition demands that we remember. On the first night of Passover, which is the celebration of the freedom of a nation born of slavery, every adult participating in the feast is invited to tell the story of the Exodus in as much detail as possible. In other words, everyone is encouraged to reimagine the past, to revive it for his children by telling it as if he had lived it himself. History should be a constant and permanently living presence, the fruit of creative and imaginative memory. Maybe because it is the only possible way to assume it and yet to go on living, to survive.

## Characters

SRULIK, puppeteer, singer

DUMMY

KITTEL, SS officer, saxophone player (he also plays DR. PAUL)

GENS, head of the ghetto

WEISKOPF, director of a tailoring factory

CHAJA, female singer

KRUK, director of the library

*The Acting Troupe, who also play:*

HASID, a palm reader

DR. WEINER, a young doctor

DR. GOTTLIEB, an old doctor

JUDGE

RABBI

WOMAN

GRODZENSKI, a young smuggler

JANKEL, a young smuggler

GEIWISCH, a young smuggler

ELIA, a young smuggler

HEIKIN, a klezmer clarinetist

DESSLER, chief of the ghetto police

LEWAS, officer of the Jewish police

JEWISH PROSTITUTES, JEWISH POLICE, GESTAPO OFFICIALS.

480 Time/Place

The play takes place in the mind of Srulik as he recollects the Wilna ghetto during 1941–43.

## Act One

*The living room of an apartment in Tel Aviv. 1984. A bourgeois home, typically orderly and clean. A one-armed MAN sits in an easy chair, wearing a bathrobe. HE speaks with the difficulty and confusion of old age. His name is SRULIK.*

SRULIK The last performance? I don't want to talk about it. No, I don't remember anymore. It was a long time ago . . . Well, some things I remember, but what's the point? It was on the evening before Kittel murdered Gens. Gens was the head of the ghetto. Exactly ten days before the liquidation of the ghetto. That was the last performance. A full house! Of course. It was like that at every performance. The audience came right up to the last days of the ghetto. People who were loaded up and sent away in trains the next morning, still put on their best clothes the evening before and came to our theatre performance.

But as for what happened on the stage—that's all gone now. I'm the only one who could remember it, and I'm . . . (HE shrugs, as if to say "hopeless")

We had arranged a competition for plays about life in the ghetto. We got lots of plays. Everyone wrote: Katrielka Broide, Liebele Rosenthal, Hirshke Glick, Israel Diamantman. Everyone wrote for us. Wonderful plays. Songs too! (HE sings) "Frozen toes and frozen fingers frozen to the bone!" All hand-written, all gone now. Life in the ghetto. I mean, we lived in a world—a mad world—where people disappeared and their clothing stayed behind.

(Suddenly struck by his own words) Yes! The clothing! *Di Yogenesh in Fas*. I still have a few songs from that satirical revue. *Di Yogenesh in Fas*. That's Yiddish for "chasing around in a barrel" because the theatre was so small. But do you get the pun? "Di-yog-en-er"? Diogenes? Diogenes, the Cynic philosopher? He lived in a barrel and so did we. He roamed the world carrying a lantern in broad daylight looking for justice and truth. And in our little barrel? The ghetto? Did we have justice? Truth? We had a chase. A manhunt. Chasing around in a barrel. Of course, I'm no Diogenes . . .

But for a time I thought I saw . . . really saw what was happening. And we had a number in that show about clothes. "Finish it quickly!" No. "Disappear." Hmm. "Finish up quickly! Something, something disappear!" I get confused . . . "Finish it up! Today you're here, tomorrow . . . disappear . . ."

*A great rumbling and banging is beginning to swell behind him.*

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## Drama

I don't want to talk about it!

*With a stunning crash, the walls of his apartment collapse, the apartment vanishes, and we're faced with a bare stage. At the rear wall is a tremendous, chaotic mountain of clothing.*

*The explosion of the apartment leaves us in a dark, undefined space. Then we hear the clatter of keys, the shooting of a bolt, and a man enters. HE is dressed in underwear, but HE takes from the pile of clothing a German officer's uniform and puts it on. As HE does so, the stage fills with OTHERS, dressed in rags and sorting through more rags. The German officer, KITTEL, finds a machine gun and a long black case, and walks among the crowd shining a flashlight from place to place.*

KITTEL (Observing the mess) Chaos!

WEISKOPF, a mousy little man dressed in rags, walks up behind him. KITTEL ignores him.

Light! Get some light on in here! Separate 'em! Sort 'em! Keep moving!

WEISKOPF throws a switch. Industrial light goes on.

SRULIK (To the audience, as the scene materializes around him. HE is young now, and has both arms) That's Kittel. I was there too. We had to sort the clothes that came in.

KITTEL More light!

HE moves to the group of ragged PEOPLE pawing disconsolately through the clothes, indicating different areas for different piles of clothes.

Men's. Children's. Wet. Dry. We've got truckloads outside. Move!

*The PEOPLE separate into TWO GROUPS. ONE sorts, the OTHER brings in more piles from outside. KITTEL stands in the middle of all this, indifferent. CHAJA, a young woman, appears and approaches. SHE shivers with cold and pulls the sheet SHE'S wearing around herself tighter. Her hair is tangled and unkempt. Her feet are bare and filthy. SHE approaches KITTEL and stands, watching the WORKERS and UNPACKERS. KITTEL shines his light in her face.*

482 CHAJA May I . . . please . . . a pair of shoes.

KITTEL Come.

## Joshua Sobol

HE points to the spot in front of him. SHE moves to him, frightened.

You need what?

CHAJA A pair of shoes.

KITTEL If you knew where these shoes had been, you'd stay barefoot.

A pause.

Please. Help yourself. (TO WORKERS) Again! Pile 'em again!

CHAJA hesitates. Then SHE goes to a pile of shoes and begins to try some on. KITTEL spots her and hits her with his flashlight beam. The WORKERS stop and watch. CHAJA finds a pair, puts them on and starts to run.

KITTEL Halt! (Pointing to the spot in front of him) Come!

CHAJA returns. HE points to her sheet.

Take it off.

SHE complies. Beneath, SHE wears only a torn-up slip.

You need a dress.

CHAJA shakes her head. KITTEL points to the mound.

Take a dress!

SHE goes; takes a dress.

Put it on!

SHE does.

(TO WORKERS) What are you staring at? This isn't a show!

A coat!

SHE goes to the coat pile, picks one up quickly.

Hat!

SHE moves to the hat pile. SHE takes a beret, but doesn't put it on. Again KITTEL points to the spot in front of him.

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Come!

*Defeated, SHE goes to him. HE shines the light in her face.*

Hold your head up! Fix your hair! Put on the hat!

*SHE complies in something like panic.*

Not bad. With a little effort, you people can really be first-class. Turn.

*SHE turns, the reluctant model. HE looks at her belly quizzically.*

What's that? (*HE points the tip of his gun to the slight swelling in her belly*) What is that? A baby? Do you have any idea what happens to Jews who get pregnant?

*SHE is silent.*

Do you?! Come! Wait!

*CHAJA takes another step toward him. HE puts a hand on her belly.*

What is this?

*CHAJA takes a small bag from under her dress. KITTEL holds out his hand.*

Let's have it.

*CHAJA hands it to him.*

A pound of beans! (*KITTEL turns over the bag. Beans fall out and cascade across the stage*)

Black market? Who sold you this? I want names!

*CHAJA is silent.*

No names? So. You stole a pound of beans. (*HE looks piercingly at her for a moment*)

*In a whirlwind KITTEL grabs CHAJA and pulls her up to the pile of clothing. HE turns and crosses downstage, cocking his gun as he moves.*

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Hands up!

*SRULIK, who has been carrying clothes to the pile, runs to him. In his hand HE holds a life-sized dummy, who is completely beside himself. The DUMMY screams at KITTEL while SRULIK tries to silence him.*

DUMMY Stop! Halt! *Arrêtez!* Whoa! For God's sake, hold your fire!

SRULIK (*To the DUMMY*) Cut it out, Ignatz, he's got a gun.

DUMMY Oh, terrific! She's about to be blown to bits and you're pissing in your pants.

SRULIK (*To the DUMMY, a well-worn routine*) Well at least I know how!

DUMMY So much for chivalry! Whatever happened to the days of yore, when damsels in distress were rescued by knights in shining armor?

SRULIK So get a knight. I'm a Jew.

DUMMY You don't have to brag about it.

SRULIK Who's bragging? I'm trying to stay alive.

KITTEL Hold it! Who are you?

DUMMY He stole the beans.

KITTEL Is that right?

SRULIK Would you take evidence from a dummy? He's pathological!

DUMMY Pathological?! I'm not even Jewish!

KITTEL That's enough!

SRULIK You heard the gentleman. That's enough.

DUMMY He was speaking to you!

SRULIK No, you.

DUMMY No, you.

SRULIK (*To KITTEL*) You see, I'm helpless. He's driving me crazy. I can't get rid of him.

DUMMY He's quite right Herr Kittel, but he's got it backwards. I can't get away from him.

SRULIK Yes, you can!

KITTEL *Shut . . . up!* Or I'll tear your head off. (*To SRULIK*) Did you give her the beans?

SRULIK If I had beans they'd be in *my* stomach. Besides, this woman's not a thief. She's an artist. A great artist.

DUMMY Yes, she's an artist. And besides . . . (*Softly*) He loves her.

SRULIK Before the war, she was a star. Now she hasn't worked in months. She'll starve. I turn to you only because you are an artist too.

DUMMY Ass-kisser! Kittel *hates* ass-kissers!

KITTEL (*A satisfied laugh*) How true, how true. (*Suddenly serious, HE roars*) You! Get a scale.

*All work ceases. PEOPLE gather round.*

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Juden! Achtung! You all have exactly one minute to find every bean she stole. A pound of beans and not an ounce less. Go!

*A massive bean hunt; a scale is produced. EVERYONE crawls around the stage, retrieving beans. KITTEL looks at his watch.*

STOP!

ALL freeze.

. . . On the scale!

*EVERYONE puts the remaining beans on the scale. CHAJA checks the scale.*

CHAJA Eleven ounces.

KITTEL Five ounces short. Well, well . . . you now have a choice. Careful here. Think. This? (*HE points to the gun in his hand*) Or this? (*HE points to the long black case HE's been carrying*)

CHAJA (*SHE points to the case*) That.

KITTEL Ah, hah. Yes, indeed. (*HE takes out an object from the case. HE whirls on the crowd holding a saxophone as HE would hold a machine gun. HE laughs. HE puts it to his mouth and plays a few bars of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony*) Do you know that one?

*CHAJA nods.*

Well, by all means, let's try it.

*KITTEL plays. CHAJA opens her mouth but no sound comes out. HE stops.*

According to this Jew, you're a singer. A great artist. If he lied, then tomorrow morning, you're both off to Ponar\* where you will be stripped, marched to the pits, and shot. I hope that's sufficient inducement. Now sing!

*SHE opens her mouth wider, but still nothing comes out. SHE points to her throat.*

CHAJA My throat is dry . . .

KITTEL Well, why didn't you say so?

*HE gives her his flask. SHE takes a gulp and gives the bottle back.*

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\*Wooded area near Vilna, where tens of thousands of Jews were shot and buried in mass graves.

CHAJA Thank you. If I could sing one of our songs instead . . .

KITTEL S'il vous plait, Madame!

CHAJA (*Sings "Shtiler, Shtiler" [Be Still]*):

Be still, be silent, be a shadow, softly draw each breath  
The day of wrath is here, my child, we're in the house  
of death

Your papa's vanished like the wind and I with anguish burn  
And pray that, like the wand'ring wind, he one day will return  
The past's a fading fantasy, the present inky black  
Our single road leads to Ponar with no road leading back  
The world has turned its face away, we're banished, battered  
and reviled

But still, be still, we may yet live, my child

I saw a woman on the street whose manner was bizarre  
Some people spoke in whispers of her children and Ponar  
This is the winter of our souls, the blackest hour of night  
But nature's timeless wheel must turn and bring a new day's light  
Then there will come another time before your eyes grow old  
For us a warmer season when our foes will feel the cold  
We'll greet your papa at the door, we'll be a family as before  
And you will sing out loud forevermore—forevermore.

KITTEL My God you really are an artist. Jesus, look at this. (*HE rubs his eye with a finger*) Real tears. Well. That experience, in my opinion, is worth an ounce of beans. I mean . . . tears are easy. What about the other four ounces? You can't find work at your trade, so how do you propose to pay? You're all artists, yes?

DUMMY Yes sir. All artists. At your service, sir!

KITTEL Well. Interesting. Prove it to me. Prove your art is worth four ounces of beans. You'll get your opportunity. But watch out. I'm no fool. Don't play me for one.

*HE turns and goes. EVERYONE exits after him except CHAJA, SRULIK and, of course, the DUMMY.*

CHAJA (*To SRULIK*) How can I thank you?

DUMMY How do you think?

SRULIK Don't be silly. You don't need to thank me.

DUMMY Hypocrite!

SRULIK I'm just happy you're still alive.

DUMMY Give the man a shove!

CHAJA But you risked your life for me.

SRULIK Well, my life. What's it worth, really?

DUMMY In beans?

SRULIK After all, when you get right down to it, who am I? A puppeteer from the Meidim Theatre. An actor, not much of a man.

CHAJA I think you're a very brave man.

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DUMMY Brave?! Are you kidding? Did you see him trying to muzzle me? Chajale! I'm the one who saved you.

CHAJA (*Stroking the puppet's head*) You're cute.

DUMMY Oh, my. Mmm . . . that is heaven. Do you know how long it's been, since somebody stroked me like that. Would you like a back-rub? I could—

SRULIK Enough! You ought to be ashamed of yourself.

DUMMY (*Confidentially, to CHAJA*) He's insufferably jealous. (*To SRULIK*) Now go. Sit over there.

SRULIK Where?

DUMMY There.

SRULIK Here?

DUMMY *Further!* And don't bother us! (*To CHAJA*) You do love me, don't you.

CHAJA How could anyone not love you, *mazik*?\*

DUMMY And I love you, too! From the moment I saw you, my heart leapt. And I . . . you must be hungry. And here I am making idle chit-chat. (*To SRULIK*) Get her some food!

SRULIK Food?! Where from? I'm starving.

DUMMY Hah! What's in your pocket, then?

SRULIK My pocket? Lint. (*HE turns his pocket inside out. It's empty*) Not even lint.

DUMMY The other pocket, *gonif*†

SRULIK Oh the *other* pocket. Well . . . (*HE finds a carrot*) I must have forgotten . . . I, uh . . . please, take it. (*HE gives her the carrot*)

CHAJA And what will you eat?

DUMMY Don't worry about him! When it comes to carrots he's a bottomless pit.

SRULIK *takes a second carrot from his pocket.*

SRULIK *Bon appétit.*

*THEY eat in silence a moment. Then SRULIK speaks, getting up his courage.*

Do you . . . have a place to sleep?

CHAJA Under the stairs.

DUMMY Well, come to our place. We have an enormous blanket.

SRULIK What a suggestion!

DUMMY You think it's any fun snuggling up to you at night? You're all bones, and it's freezing at our place. Chajale, I only meant we could, you know, bundle up together. For warmth. Is that a sin?

\*Little devil. Term used affectionately for a mischievous child.  
†Thief.

CHAJA No, it's no sin, you little rascal, not in this world. I'm cold at night, too. All right, let's go!

CHAJA, SRULIK and DUMMY sing "*Hot Zich Mir Di Shich Zerissn*" (*Dance, Dance, Dance*).

CHAJA

Frozen toes and frozen fingers  
I'm frozen to the bone

DUMMY

But what's the good of freezing  
When you're freezing all alone

So dance, dance, dance  
A little dance with me  
Let's do a sultry tango  
It'll warm us up, you'll see

CHAJA

Not a penny, not a crust  
Nor twig do I possess

DUMMY

But with you beside me  
I remember happiness

So kiss, kiss, kiss  
Share a little kiss with me  
And maybe we can reinvent  
What kissing used to be

SRULIK

Colored papers, pink and yellow  
Yellow saves your life\*  
I've got my yellow papers  
But I haven't got a wife

DUMMY

So marry, marry, marry me  
Love's not beyond recall

SRULIK

And maybe we will live  
To see tomorrow after all.

CHAJA *exits. SRULIK looks around the stage like a professional appraiser. GENS appears and calls out to him.*

GENS So? What do you think?

SRULIK (*Dubiously*): Well, it's a place . . .

GENS Did you count the seats?

\*At various periods in the Vilna ghetto, the color of one's identity card could temporarily mean the difference between life and death.

SRULIK I counted.

GENS Six hundred seats!

SRULIK I counted.

GENS And have you had a look around at the stage?

SRULIK It's a stage.

GENS This place, I give to you. Take it and create the Ghetto Theatre here. Not just plays: discussions, lectures . . . concerts. Culture!

SRULIK Culture. Well, yeah, why not?

GENS Clean the place up. I need an inventory—what's here, what you need—a list.

SRULIK When do you need it?

GENS Yesterday.

A HASID enters.

HASID (*Calling toward GENS*) Your honor, your honor! Mr. Police Commissioner, sir!

GENS What do you want?

HASID I want to read your palm. Give me your hand, I'll give you the future. Your hand please!

GENS What is this? A sideshow? Get a job.

HASID (*Suddenly trancelike*) This summer will change your life forever.

GENS Wait, wait, wait. How do you know that?

HASID (*Businesslike again*) I do ears, too. But it is in the palm that all of the details lie. Your palm, sir.

GENS Oh, for God's sake. (*Giving over his palm*) Make it quick, I'm busy.

HASID Three changes into eight. Can you see that?

GENS What if I can?

HASID Well, it's obvious. Three represents the third letter, which is Gimel. Eight is the eighth letter, which is Chet. You do see that?

GENS is silent, impatient.

Well, Gimel is G, like Germany, and Chat "Ch" which is like Cherut—that means independence and freedom. You will deal with the Germans with independence, and lead us to freedom. There will be a great revolution. But before that, you will take command of the ghetto. You will lead us to freedom.

GENS Great. You have dates for this event?

HASID (*Staring at GENS's palm intently*) In three more time periods.

GENS Three more time periods? . . . What the hell does that mean?

HASID Could be three weeks, three months . . . even three years.

GENS laughs. *The HASID sticks out his hand for payment.*

Three marks, please.

GENS What?!

HASID Three marks.

GENS (*Paying*) Go find some decent work. You peddle the future around the ghetto, you'll starve.

HASID Another thing I noticed in the future is an acting company . . .

GENS You were listening!

HASID And, I'm an actor. (*The HASID pulls off his wig and beard*) You want comedy, tragedy? "Has a Jew not eyes? Has a Jew not hands? If you prick us do we not bleed?" . . . (*Sings*) "So dance, dance, dance, do a little dance with me."

GENS Alright, alright. Go dance over there.

GENS *pushes the HASID upstage and looks to SRULIK.*

You'll find a place for him, yes? Now, we were saying . . . will the place be all right?

CHAJA The place is fine.

SRULIK But it's the time, Jakob. Three weeks ago fifty thousand Jews were murdered on this spot. The blood's not dry yet and you want us to create theatre here? It's not the time.

GENS (*Goes to a door at the side of the stage*) Not the time, you say. (*GENS opens the door and calls out*) Let 'em in! Now!

MEN and WOMEN are shoved into the room: the acting company. *THEY look around, dazed, frightened, blinking. SRULIK stares at them dumbfounded, as if seeing ghosts.*

SRULIK Lionek, my God. No, no it's all right. You're safe. It's me. Umma . . . I was sure you were dead.

CHAJA (*Spots HEIKIN and runs to embrace him*) Heiken, my klezmer. You're alive.

HEIKIN *embraces her, in a daze.*

SRULIK Where . . . Jakob . . . where did you find them all?

GENS Living in garrets, working in forced labor, hiding in root cellars, Srulik. These were the ones I could still save.

CHAJA *has been running from person to person as the room fills with ACTORS, showing off HEIKIN, who still looks about blindly. GENS hands him his clarinet. HEIKIN stares at it in disbelief, but can't bring it to his lips.*

CHAJA Heikin, please. For me.

HEIKIN *stares at her balefully. SHE begins to sing "Ich Benk A Heym" (I Long For Home) for him.*

CHAJA and the ACTING COMPANY (*singing*):

When you are young,  
Yes, young and strong,  
You long to try your wings.  
You leave your home,  
Your childhood nest,  
Forsaking childhood things.  
But when old age draws near,  
Scenes from your past appear  
And, oh! What feelings rise,  
From those forgotten ties,  
From childhood scenes  
When seen through older eyes.

I long to see my home once more.  
Is it the way it was before?  
The weathered porch, the slanting stairs,  
Four walls, a table and some chairs,  
My poor old home.

I long to know them once again,  
The things I took for granted then  
The songs I sang, the dreams I dreamed  
Are more enduring than they seemed.  
I miss my home.

I hear a breeze  
As gentle as a sigh,  
Recalling a mother's lullaby.

HEIKIN *begins to play, and the ENSEMBLE sings.*

ALL

Though not of brick nor made of stone,  
A stronger home I've never known.  
As strong as steel, as light as air,  
Built from my mother's loving care.  
I long for home!

I long to know them once again,  
The things I took for granted then.  
The songs I sang, the dreams I dreamed  
Are more enduring than they seemed.  
I miss my home.

I hear a breeze  
As gentle as a sigh,  
Recalling a mother's lullaby.

CHAJA

Though not of brick nor made of stone.  
A stronger home I've never known.  
As strong as steel, as light as air,  
Built from my mother's loving care.  
I long for home!

*The ENSEMBLE, momentarily uplifted, is lifeless again.*

SRULIK Jakob, this is not going to work.

GENS Tell me, Srulik, what these men and women have in common.

SRULIK They're artists!

GENS Artists? Pathetic! What they have in common is no work permits. Also no food rations. They're next in line for Ponar—that's what they have in common. You want that on your conscience? (*Gradually working himself up*) The right time for theatre, the wrong time for theatre. You intellectuals amaze me. When all this is over I can hear you telling your grandchildren: "Even though police chief Gens tried to force us to perform on the site of the massacre, I refused." The pride! The moral conviction! Well, look at them, Srulik! Look in their eyes! If you make them into an acting company on this spot, I can get them yellow work permits—and bread. And butter—and potatoes. And soap! A half ration of soap for every one of your "artists."

ALL (*Ad lib in whispers*) A half ration!

GENS That's right, for each of you. (*HE marches back and forth like an officer dressing down his troops*) But there's more. . . . As a troop of Jewish actors, you can make a difference! Look around! Our self-esteem is in the sewer. People walk the streets staring at their shoes—if they have shoes to stare at. You can change all that—give them back their self-respect. That's what I want: show them they have a culture—a language, a powerful inheritance; an inner life. Nu? Begin the rehearsal! In three weeks, I want to see a play! A performance!

SRULIK With all due respect, Mr. Gens, what are we supposed to rehearse? What kind of a play?

GENS Do I ask you how to run the ghetto? How should I know what kind of play? Something good, something funny, something-cultural. Whatever will make us feel like men again. You know what I mean—you're artists!

*SRULIK and the ACTORS exit. As THEY go, GENS and WEISKOPF remain. Across the stage, in the library, HERMAN KRUK appears.*

WEISKOPF Mr. Gens! Mr. Gens!

GENS You, too. You, too! Go rehearse.

WEISKOPF Mr. Gens, I'm not an actor.

GENS So who the hell are you?

*KRUK speaks, as if dictating, far from the actual scene. GENS and WEISKOPF remain motionless while KRUK dictates.*

KRUK That's Weiskopf. A few weeks ago he was a nobody, a *voince\** with a tailor shop. Who could know what the war would make of this man? In a few weeks—the king of the ghetto. A man to keep your eye on . . .

WEISKOPF If you could spare me just a minute or two, Mr. Gens . . . you won't regret it.

GENS I hope not.

WEISKOPF Do you know how many first-class tailors we have in the ghetto?

GENS Tailors?

WEISKOPF And sewing machines? How about sewing machines?

GENS Sewing machines . . . ?

WEISKOPF Take a look. (*Giving GENS a small notebook*)

GENS What is this?

WEISKOPF I made a few inquiries. Tailors . . . seamstresses . . . machines . . .

GENS A list. With names, addresses . . .

WEISKOPF I went from room to room.

GENS But what for?

WEISKOPF Have you seen the trains, traveling from the Russian front to Germany?

GENS I don't understand.

WEISKOPF Do you know what their cargo is?

GENS How should I know?

WEISKOPF Uniforms. Torn, bloody German uniforms. And why are they sent from the Russian front all the way to Germany?

GENS I imagine . . . to be put back in shape.

WEISKOPF You can appreciate the crucial point. We are next door to the Russian front here in the ghetto. Hundreds of tailors, seamstresses, sewing machines. . . . It's *meschugge*,† no?

GENS And you think the Germans . . .

WEISKOPF Approval on the spot. We'll erect a giant uniform repair factory. Instead of sending the stuff thousands of miles, burning coal, losing time, stopping up the tracks, they can deliver the uniforms here. Good for them, good for us.

GENS And every tailor, every seamstress, will be indispensable. . . . How many can you use?

WEISKOPF We could begin with, say, a hundred. Later we'll raise it to a hundred and fifty. I've picked out a spot.

\*Bedbug.

†Crazy.

GENS A hundred and fifty families, kept alive indefinitely. Come to my office tomorrow morning.

WEISKOPF Tomorrow? What happened to today? If we work through the night, tomorrow morning you'll lay out the whole program for the Germans—precise figures, just the way they like it—and we're in business.

GENS (*Regards WEISKOPF for a moment*) I like people like you. What's your name?

WEISKOPF Weiskopf.

GENS Come into my office, Mr. Weiskopf—Mr. Factory Director.

*THEY exit. Across the stage, KRUK dictates, leafing through some documents and letters.*

KRUK An interesting chapter in the life of the ghetto. An interesting case. Weiskopf. (*HE picks up a letter from his desk and reads*) "January 17, 1942. On Sunday, January 18, you are cordially invited to the premiere performance of the new Ghetto Theatre. On the program: dramatic scenes, songs, music . . ." (*HE turns to his invisible secretary*) Put this in capital letters: YOU DON'T PERFORM THEATRE IN A GRAVEYARD.

*A rush from all sides of the stage. MEMBERS OF THE RESISTANCE scurry about, leafletting and posterizing the stage with KRUK's slogan: YOU DON'T PERFORM THEATRE IN A GRAVEYARD. THEY exit, leaving KRUK where HE was. GENS enters the library, carrying a poster HE has ripped from the wall.*

GENS Herman Kruk? (*HE holds up the sign*) I know who did this. I know everything that happens in the ghetto. Everything. Why this slogan?

KRUK Why this invitation?

GENS Every important person in the ghetto was invited. You run the library.

KRUK And did you really think I'd come to your vaudeville show?

GENS What have you got against theatre?

KRUK The invitation is an insult.

GENS Insult?

KRUK A personal insult. (*Pause*) In any other ghetto, perhaps. There might be some entertainment, even some fun. One should always try to live in the presence of art—if possible. But here? In the middle of the tragedy of Wilna? In the shadow of Ponar? Of the seventy-six thousand Wilna Jews, how many are left? Fifteen thousand.

GENS Sixteen thousand.

KRUK A theatre? Now? It's shameless!

GENS All right. Let's talk about shame. On Saturday, September 6, 1941, the Germans herded us into the ghetto. Hell on earth. People were driven through the rain; wagons stranded in muck. And what did you see? Books. Books slipping from people's hands, into the mud. While our people stumbled through the streets as if they were drugged. Herman Kruk made a book collection. Next morning, you opened this library. Well, for that I salute you. Relax, Herschel, I don't expect anything in return. Look, let's face it, you're a socialist, a Bundist. I am a Zionist, a revisionist. Worlds separate us. Jakob Gens didn't fish any books out of the slime. I admit it. *I pulled human beings out of the slime.* I found them clothing and food, and I forged them into an orchestra and a theatre troupe. I've given them back their jobs, and I'll get them work permits. Heikin, the klezmer? I took him out of forced labor. I took a pickax out of his hand and gave him back his clarinet. Is that a crime? *(A pause. HE fishes the invitation to the theatre opening off KRUK's desk)* This is no invitation. It's an order. You and your friends, Bundists, socialists, leaders of the workers' union, all of you, will be at the theatre.

KRUK *(Regards GENS for a moment, struck by his ferocity)* Why is this so important to you?

GENS Solidarity. Everyone in the ghetto must agree that we are one people. A great, brave people, a creative force through history. I'm going to unite the ghetto. Everyone, everyone—without exceptions. It's not a matter of choice anymore.

KRUK I don't think you'd miss us. After all, the Jewish police, the foremen and brigadiers of the forced labor groups—you'll have a distinguished crowd. Plus whatever guests you've invited from the outside—German staff officers and their wives. I gather our famous chanteuse is feverishly looking for a few *Deutsche lieder* to add to the program, in case the Germans—heaven forbid—should want a few songs from the Fatherland.

GENS Look, we can continue this little discussion the day after tomorrow. In the meantime, I expect to see you at the theatre.

KRUK Enjoy it. Play up to the Germans any way you want to. The workers' union has decided to boycott. None of us will join this concert of crows.

GENS In that case, Mr. Kruk, your workers' union is hereby dissolved.

KRUK *(Outraged)* What?!

GENS Forbidden.

KRUK It's the only Jewish organization in the ghetto that was democratically chosen!

GENS Aye-aye-aye—*Vusszugstute*,\* Herschel.

KRUK What are we, Jakob? Nothing more than your own personal king-

dom? And this theatre is your Versailles? We refuse to take part in this revisionist farce!

GENS You think you can play party politics with me? Listen to me, Kruk: One more poster like this, you go straight to Ponar.

KRUK *(HE dictates again)* The boss of the ghetto has ordered the dissolution of the only democratically elected group we have: the workers' union. It seems the workers have been playing partisan politics. Just to make sure he is clearly understood, he has also threatened to send Kruk and his comrades to Ponar.

GENS History will judge which one of us helped the Jews more in this catastrophe, Kruk. Write *that* down in your diary. *(HE leaves)*

KRUK I write. I write. What else is there to do? *(Dictating again)* We are living through such a dismal time that people can no longer recognize the true nature of the world around them. They don't want to see. They can't see. And the sad truth is, as long as we are made helpless by fascism, it is our duty to write. That's why my notebook will see all; it will hear all; it will be the mirror and conscience of this catastrophe.

*During KRUK's monologue, the ACTORS and MUSICIANS become visible on stage behind him. CHAJA sings "Wei Zu Di Teg" (Crazy Times). It is a rehearsal.*

CHAJA *(Singing)*

Oy, little ones . . .

What times we live in!

Life grows harder day and night . . .

Cruel, crazy times . . .

Times of hydroplanes and Dreadnoughts!

Times of iron, steel and lead!

Ships that sail beneath the water!

Trains that rumble overhead!

Oy, it's all topsy-turvy!

Nothing is the way it was before.

Once the world was simple;

Now I don't understand it anymore!

The future's a puzzle.

The present's a maze!

Confusion and madness

Disfigure our days!

The future's a puzzle.

The present's a maze!

Confusion and madness

Disfigure our days!

\*That's what you say."

ALL

Oy, it's all topsy-turvy!  
Nothing is the way it was before.  
Once the world was simple;  
Now I don't understand it anymore.

\*Oy, little ones . . .

What times we live in!

Life grows harder day and night.

Cruel, crazy times . . . *(Repeat three times\*)*

Oy, it's all topsy-turvy!

Nothing is the way it was before.

Once the world was simple;

Now I don't understand it anymore!

Oy, it's all topsy-turvy!

Nothing is the way it was before.

Once the world was simple;

Now I don't understand it anymore!

*At the end of the song, WEISKOPF swings onto the stage with élan.*

WEISKOPF What is it with the moaning and groaning, people?

SRULIK Weiskopf, this is a rehearsal.

WEISKOPF Life is a rehearsal. Hard times? Nu? When do the Jews ever have it easy? Suffering makes us strong people. Take me for example. Who has better grounds to moan and groan than Weiskopf? Before the war I was a Schneider\* with nine tailor shops; nothing much but it was mine. Then the Germans came and squeezed us into the ghetto. No more shop, no more nothing. Kaputt, my whole life, into the toilet. Could I have cried? And how I could have cried! But no! I said to myself: Why are you called Weiskopf? Weiser Kopf. Wise head. All brains. *(HE taps himself on the head)* So I took my little Jewish brains and said to myself, Weiskopf, you have lost your store. Are you kaputt? Sure! And if you lose your head what? Double kaputt you'll be. But you have your brain, and as long as they don't remove it with a scalpel, you'll stay alive! So you've got a brain, why not use it? I looked around me: A ghetto—walls, walls, walls, walls. Closed up tight. But always: always always always there is a way out. And who found it? *(Triumphant)* Weiskopf! So before the war what am I? Just a nebbish with a shop. And today what do you see before you? The director of a tailoring factory—the largest in the district! A hundred and fifty Jews work for me. And who are my partners?

SRULIK The Germans!

\*Tailor.

WEISKOPF The Germans give *me* contracts. It's a great big business and all it does is grow. Each morning I wake up to a bigger income, and does that make me stingy? Do I hoard it? The opposite, my friends: I'm very generous. If someone comes to me with a good cause, I'm open handed; five thousand rubles I give, minimum. I'm free with my money and everyone should know it. I'm not ashamed of what I do. My way is the only way! I set an example for the community! I am an ordinary Jew, but we Jews, we're gifted. If you would follow my example, instead of *krecljng* and moaning, we would have a productive ghetto, and they would find us indispensable, the Germans. And once we're indispensable, we stay alive.

*KITTEL emerges from the pile of clothing. HE has a large case in each hand. HE puts them down and applauds WEISKOPF's speech.*

KITTEL Bravo, Weiskopf, bravo! I like you. And when I like someone, he stays alive. *(HE goes to a GIRL and slaps her)* Doesn't anyone say *shalom aleichem* around here?

EVERYONE stops and greets him.

I'll let it go this time because I took you by surprise. I didn't come through the gate. So no one could send out the warning—"Kittel is in the ghetto." *(HE laughs)* Be careful, though. Kittel doesn't use the gate. Kittel slithers into the ghetto like a snake. You dig a tunnel to hide yourself, Kittel reaches out to grab you. You take an idle stroll down the street, Kittel strikes from an attic window. Don't hide in the basement. Kittel is already there. *(TO SRULIK, suddenly)* What is in the cases? The wrong answer will cost you more than you can pay.

SRULIK *(Pointing to one case)* The gun.

KITTEL *(Opening the case)* The gun. Very good. *(HE gets it out and loads it. Then to CHAJA)* And in the other one.

CHAJA The saxophone.

KITTEL Well, let's see. *(HE opens the case)* The saxophone. The gun and the sax! Haaa! *(Suddenly cutting and threatening)* Why do I love you Weiskopf? Why?

WEISKOPF I'm productive.

KITTEL laughs.

And I make a contribution to the war economy.

KITTEL And who made you productive?

WEISKOPF You did.

KITTEL I . . . (HE smiles, then becomes enraged) . . . can't stand ass-kissers. (TO SRULIK) Why can't I?

SRULIK Because you're an artist.

KITTEL I'm an artist. And what do artists invariably love?

SRULIK The true, the good, the beautiful.

KITTEL Did you hear that, Weiskopf? The true, the good, the beautiful. I didn't make you productive, you made you productive. All I did was create the climate for you, so that a previously hidden tendency in your Jewish character could emerge full-blown. I mean, this mad energy you Jews possess, Christ almighty. I look at the Lithuanians trudging through the streets; Jesus, what scum they are. We should be wiping them out, not you. What a mistake. No wit, no spirit—they're the walking dead. Then I slither into the ghetto, and it's another world. Raw energy is spilling out into the street, it's a sight. It's beautiful. You probably didn't even notice; I mean, those who live in paradise take it for granted. Yes? But for me . . . the cafes, the shops, the sense of people doing business . . . the spirit! When you run out of real food you chop up some beets and call it caviar. Sauerkraut juice becomes champagne—so it's champagne and caviar every night. Combine that Jewish spirit with German soul, and something great will be born. Did you ever dream you'd come so far Weiskopf? Tell the truth now!

WEISKOPF Never.

KITTEL So. The good, the beautiful and the true. All right, we've covered the good and the beautiful, now for the truth, without which there is no real art. A question, Weiskopf. The true answer lies at the essence of your Jewishness, and it is a question of truth. Let me remind you, Weiskopf . . . (HE gestures to the two cases at his feet) The gun, the saxophone. (Picking up the gun) Now, Weiskopf, what is the difference between partial liquidation and total liquidation? That is the question.

WEISKOPF looks at him, thinks. Tension builds.

WEISKOPF If you kill fifty thousand Jews but not me, that's partial liquidation. If you kill me, that's total liquidation.

KITTEL Bravo! Very nice, Weiskopf, absolutely on the mark. The wit! The sting! No one but a Jew could think of such an answer. Well, forget about the gun, this is hardly the time for the gun. It's time for the saxophone. I'm telling you, when the ghetto is liquidated, I'm going to have a piano set up right by the gate, and while you march to the trains, I'll play Schumann. "Scenes from Childhood," I think. Or "Carneval"? (HE muses) Well, I'll tell you what I'm doing here. Ah! The orchestra?

The MUSICIANS step forward, warily.

Gentlemen! To your instruments!

The MUSICIANS move hesitantly to their instruments.

The reason I came . . . is Gershwin. Can you imagine? All of a sudden I had this hankering for Gershwin. Funny, isn't it? These pigs at the Ministry of Culture in Berlin have banned him. "Death to jazz," they shout. So, when the simple urge for a bit of Gershwin begins to get to me, where am I supposed to go for satisfaction? Ah, the ghetto. Your Mr. Gens told me you had a jazz band, and that's why I'm here. (HE looks over the BAND, missing someone) Where's your vocalist? There's a singer here, she owes me two ounces of beans . . .

CHAJA steps forward out of the group and stands face to face with him.

Mademoiselle. Well, let's see if you can pay your debt. (HE leaps onto the improvised podium, and directs with his saxophone) "Swanee"! Do you know it? You must! Everybody—"Swanee"! Alright, I'll make it simpler for you. Sing it in Yiddish.

SRULIK We'll have to . . .

KITTEL Now!

The BAND launches into "Swanee." CHAJA gives it all SHE'S got, fighting for her life. KITTEL moves between the ACTORS, sax in hand, and orders them to dance. THEY improvise a jazz number to "Swanee."

CHAJA (Sings "Swanee")

Ich bin avek fun dir a lange zait  
Ich benk noch dir, ich gai ash oiss  
Ch'ob a gefil, du libst mir fil  
Swanee, du rufst mir oiss.

\*Swanee, wi ich lib dir

Wi ich lib dir

Main taire Swanee,

Ich shenk di ganze velt

Zu zen noch ein moll D-I-X-I-E

—Ven now my mamee warten oil mir

Davwen far mir

Dort bai der Swanee

Di fremde weln mir nisht zen shoin mer

Ven ich kum zu dem Swanee mer . . . (Repeat\*)

in English!

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\*Swanee

Swanee

Ich kum zurick zu Swanee

Mammy

Mammy

Ich will zurick a heim! (Repeat\*)

KITTEL Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you! What a unique artistic experience. Not perfect, of course. The choreography was a bit . . . how can I say it . . . ragged? And a touch . . . heavy-handed. In jazz, the body must be light, utterly relaxed. (HE dances a bit to demonstrate, singing his own accompaniment. HE stops; turns to CHAJA) And the vocal? Not bad at all. I'd say you have a bright future in front of you. In a few years you could sink your teeth into—what—Porgy and Bess? Or even Carmen. As for today's performance, let's call it an ounce of beans on the Kittel scale. A magnificent score. (Turning to WEISKOPF) Look at them, Weiskopf, they can't step out on stage in these rags! You may donate the costumes from your treasure-house, yes? And make it lavish, Weiskopf. Extravagant.

WEISKOPF Only the finest.

KITTEL Good man, Weiskopf. Don't forget: I'll be there.

KITTEL starts to leave without his gun and saxophone. WEISKOPF runs and picks them up.

WEISKOPF Mr. Kittel . . . ?

KITTEL (TO EVERYONE) And the rest of you—remember: Kittel can turn up anywhere—anytime, anyplace. Lift up a rock, Kittel is coiled underneath. Kittel, the snake.

HE laughs, and disappears, without the cases, into the orchestra pit. TWO GESTAPO OFFICIALS run in and grab the cases from WEISKOPF and exit.

WEISKOPF Okay, okay, people, let's get going. Come and get it. Take what you need, whatever you want. Meine is deine.\* Any cut, any size, any amount. The one thing we have in abundance is clothing. Everything sorted, everything stacked. Help yourselves, try it on for size. (WEISKOPF grabs a dress from the pile and hands it to CHAJA) Here Chajele! Try it on. Slips, suits, cloaks and coats. The finest workmanship, the latest styles. From Lodz. (HE holds up a little girl's dress by mistake) Children's wear?

A momentary shock-wave, as the ACTORS realize what this clothing is. WEISKOPF tries to cover, dropping the dress quickly.

\*"What's mine is yours."

Well, it's not a children's theater. What do you need in fabrics? You want wool, you want corduroy? What do you want, rags? Of course, you need rags, for a play. Rags I also have no shortage of. And professional stuff? Whatever your play calls for: police, judges, doctors—I got cloaks for Hasidim, caftans for rabbis in genuine velvet. And for ladies and gentlemen of leisure, the finest tweed suits from Manchester, and haute couture from Paris. Wait, wait! What about uniforms? The Polish cavalry I got in heavy supply. Uniforms of brave heroes, some from Warsaw, some from Danzig, men who galloped on horses with fixed bayonets and met the tanks of the German army. Can you imagine what these uniforms looked like when they turned up in my shop?! Like from a sausage grinder! The blood, the bullet holes—and now? Take a look I beg you. Like new. Their past life has been erased with an invisible weave. Step into them and step right out on stage. You don't want Polish uniforms, how about German? Believe me they don't look so much better than the Poles when they get here from the front. If these uniforms could talk, my God, the tales they'd tell! I'll tell you, you should see the action in our laundry when these uniforms come in, that you could make a play from. Real drama! Germans and Poles chasing each other in the wash kettles, fires blazing in the ovens, the muck and filth that comes boiling over and runs across the floors and out into the sewer. An entire world fogged over with chlorine, grease and steam. What a battle! And then you should see the repair shop! An enormous tailoring station, a hundred and fifty sewing machines rattling away around the clock—RAT—TAT—TAT—TAT—TAT—it sounds like a railroad station. And all for you! The theatre company! Ladies and gentlemen, help yourself, whatever you don't see, just ask. There is no shortage of clothing here!

The ACTORS have dressed. TWO are dressed as DOCTORS GOTTLIEB and WEINER, ONE in a rabbi's caftan, and ONE in a judge's robes. A WOMAN has dressed herself in rags, and immediately turns screaming to WEISKOPF.

WOMAN Mr. Weiskopf, Mr. Weiskopf! They've arrested my husband. WEISKOPF (Still lost in thought) Don't worry, please. It'll all work itself out.

WOMAN Work itself out? They caught him with five pounds of flour, and locked him up in Lukischki.\*

WEISKOPF I said, be calm. It will work out.

WOMAN But he's a diabetic. Without insulin he won't last a week. Everyone says, you're the only one—

WEISKOPF Please, I'm talking now. I was right in the middle of—

\*Jail in Vilna.

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WOMAN I have to come up with twenty thousand rubles *today*. If I don't pay them—

WEISKOPF I beg your pardon. Do you know who you're talking to?

WOMAN Weiskopf! But there's so little time! From Lukischki they send them straight to Ponar, and—

WEISKOPF My good woman. Why is my name Weiskopf? You can go home now. *It will all work out*. I'll speak to my German before the day is out. Weiskopf will never give up. (HE *exits regally*)

*Another ACTOR, who will later play DOCTOR GOTTLIEB, immediately waltzes on behind him, doing a dead-on imitation.*

GOTTLIEB I'll speak to my German! Weiskopf will never give up! Weiskopf will never shut up, Weiskopf will never wake up!

WOMAN (SHE *looks around, confronts the JUDGE and the RABBI, still in character*) We should kiss Weiskopf's shoes! He gives carloads of food to the poor. He gets people out of jail. . . . We should kiss Weiskopf's shoes I say!

SHE *hands WEISKOPF's shoe to the RABBI. HE passes it to the JUDGE.*

JUDGE Well, there's no legal precedent for shoe-kissing, but in these extraordinary circumstances, I'll make an exception.

RABBI Yes, an exception should be made. This man Weiskopf may not be a scholar, but in view of his amazing generosity and . . . ah . . .

ALL Power . . .

RABBI Power! He should immediately be elevated to a honored place in our council.

JUDGE Next case! (*Slams shoe*)

*Music. GOTTLIEB and the WOMAN move over to the others. GOTTLIEB quickly dons his doctor's coat and falls asleep. The WOMAN becomes a nurse. What's left on stage is a set-up for vaudeville scene: five characters dressed in exaggerated stereotype.*

WEINER Rabbi. Your Honor. Dr. Gottlieb. I'm glad you're here. The situation is desperate.

RABBI So what else is new?

JUDGE Who is this guy?

RABBI Dr. Weiner.

JUDGE Oh! Dr. Weiner. Well, introduce yourself.

WEINER I'm Dr. Weiner—in charge of the ghetto hospital, and here is my problem. I've got too many diabetics and not enough insulin. In three months all the insulin in the ghetto will be gone, and all our diabetics will die. Now, some could live long, full lives, others

are already old and dying. I have to give out the insulin. You're the moral pillars of the ghetto. You tell me: do we have the moral right to . . . ah . . . choose . . .

JUDGE and RABBI Gesundheit!

WEINER Do we have the right to select?

ALL What?

WEINER Select . . .

ALL WHAT?

WEINER Select.

ALL Oh! Select. . . . WHAT?!

WEINER Cut off insulin to the old and dying, and allow the fittest to survive? Or do we condemn them all to death?

*A long silence. It grows oppressive, then embarrassing.*

JUDGE (Finally) That's a good question. All right, the case is clear. You want to know whether you can condemn specific people to death. As a judge I can give you a judicial answer: Sure. But not just anybody. Only in cases where the crime carries the death penalty. So I ask you: What is the nature of the crime of these old diabetics? The answer is: They're accused of being seriously ill. Proof? Plenty—blood sugar count, lab tests, occasional coma.

ALL Guilty, guilty, guilty.

JUDGE But, I make a concerted search of every law book in my library, and nowhere do I find serious illness listed as a capital crime. I'm sorry, Doctor.

RABBI There is a passage in the Talmud which relates to this theme. Maybe. It's hard to tell, but let's give it a try. An enemy attacks a city and demands, let's say for the sake of argument, twenty hostages. By the death of the twenty, the city will be saved. Now, the Talmud asks: Should one deliver the hostages or not? And the Talmud answers: Maybe. If the enemy presents a list of names, then those people should be delivered so that the city may be saved. But, if the enemy does not give a list of names, then not one man may be delivered to the enemy. Better that the whole nation should be destroyed than that anyone should have the power to decide who lives and who dies. That leaves us with a big question: Who is the enemy here, and who makes the list?

WEINER The list? Here's the list. (HE *produces the list*)

EVERYONE *dives for cover. HE chases them around the room with the list.*

Here. Each patient and his medical history. Name, age, legal status. Occupation, contributions to the community. Look!

JUDGE Get away from me with that list!

RABBI I don't want to see! I don't want to know!

WEINER Listen to it! Who gets the insulin? Here's a seventy-eight-year-old widow, no children, critically ill. And here a thirty-six-year-old father of three with a law degree—should I name names?

JUDGE and RABBI No names! Never name names.

RABBI What's the point of your list! God alone gives life, He alone may take it back. Can you tell me who will live through the night . . . if any of us? Human beings don't know. Human beings have no right to know! Only God.

KITTEL (*Offstage*) Gens! Gens! Gens! (HE *pops up from the corner of the stage and calls out*) Gens! Oh, there you are. You've got to help me Gens. I've got a problem of logic here—you're the only man who can untangle it. A man and woman get married, right? They have a child. Have they added to the race or not?

GENS Not ultimately, no.

KITTEL Good. Very good, Gens. So far, excellent. Now, they have a second child. Have they added to the race yet?

GENS No. Two parents, two children . . .

KITTEL Right. Of course. Now: three children.

GENS Well, three children . . . that, ah . . . that would be an increase.

KITTEL Three children is an increase! Exactly as I thought. Thank you, Gens. The Führer, you realize, has ordered an immediate stop to the natural propagation and increase of the Jewish race. Which means that the third child . . .

GENS Is excess?

KITTEL Precisely the word. Excess. I knew I could count on you, Gens, to solve the problem with that exquisite logic I've come to expect. Right! Now: selection of the third child—let's get to it, Gens. One mother, one father, two children. The third child, out. Move it, Gens.

HE *tosses GENS a cane with a bent knob on top. GENS stands on a platform and conducts the selection.*

GENS Father, mother, child, child. Father, mother, child, child. Move it! Double time! Father, mother, child, child . . .

*Music is heard in the distance. As GENS works, KRUK comes downstage and dictates.*

KRUK Eight rows ahead of me were five people: husband, wife, and three children. Now what? Gens counted them like this:

KRUK and GENS Father, mother, child, child, child.

KRUK The youngest boy, a twelve-year-old, he smacks with the cane and knocks him back off to the side. The rest of the family he shoves into the group that lives. The family stands open-mouthed among the chosen survivors, wailing: "Our child is lost, taken from us by a Jew; Jakob Gens has murdered our child!" Rage

sweeps through the crowd. They surge forward, whispering, "Gens, the Jewish Jew-killer. The traitor." Only abject terror keeps them in check. Meanwhile, another family moves past his cane: a mother, a father, a child. Gens counts: "One father, one mother, one child. . . ." He stops, turns to the father, and shouts: "You idiot! Where the hell is your twelve-year-old?" The father begins to stutter uncontrollably, denying the existence of a second child, but Jakob Gens, the Jewish Jew-killer, won't hear of it. He smacks the man with the cane, shrieks at him, creates a complete uproar of protest. In the midst of this chaos, Gens grabs the stray twelve-year-old, the third son of the other family, and pushes him at the bewildered father: "Schmuck! Here's your son, for God's sake keep track of him!" The child goes with the new family, and the family stands among the survivors. And Jakob Gens, the Jewish Jew-killer, saves another child.

*Lights down on KRUK. The white curtain goes up again, reintroducing the DOCTORS, the RABBI and the JUDGE, in the pose where we left them. But something has changed. Their vaudeville costumes have been replaced by realistic clothes, and their jovial style has vanished as well. THEY'RE sober, serious.*

RABBI Look Dr. Weiner. It just can't be. We are neither legally nor morally authorized to decide who lives and who dies. It's God's decision. God and God alone.

WEINER With all due respect, Rabbi, what world are you talking about? Surely not the world we live in—the world of the ghetto. God has deserted us here. Men decide everything here. Everything! And what you shrug and call the will of God, is the will of a group of evil men.

RABBI That's blasphemy.

WEINER What keeps us going? Hope. Hope that—what—that the Red Army will march in here and liberate the ghetto while we're still alive to appreciate it. Hope! That's all we have. (*Producing insulin ampule*) And this ampule here, for the men and women who live by it, contains the little word, "perhaps." It's hope in a bottle. In a little bottle of insulin is more hope for these men and women than all your principles could give them. For the others, the ones we call "hopeless cases," what's the point? If that day of liberation comes, what will it mean to them? It's too late for them. Heaven has nothing to say about these things anymore.

RABBI Blasphemy!

WEINER Look, Dr. Gottlieb. You're older than me, you have far more experience. Say something!

GOTTLIEB I'm sorry. I'm walking out of this meeting as a protest. I won't stand for discrimination against the ill. No matter how ill.

WEINER Are you suggesting I should become a robot? A medicine dispensing machine that sees nothing, feels nothing—is that your idea of ethics?

GOTTLIEB You're on your own. I wash my hands of it; you're a monster of medical science. Selection among patients? It's Nazi medicine!

WEINER I am a monster?! You condemn them *all* to death. You walk away from your responsibility to humanity and let them die? And you call me a Nazi?!

GOTTLIEB *looks from the JUDGE to the RABBI and back again. Without a word, the three of them turn and depart, leaving WEINER alone.*

What are you walking out on? Me, or your conscience?

GENS *steps into the hospital basement. HE has a bottle in his hand, and is drunk. HE mumbles past WEINER.*

GENS Father, mother, child, child. . . . Father, mother. . . . (HE waves at WEINER and collapses on the pile of clothes) How come you stay here, Doctor? (Pause) Why not just. . . take off? Go join the partisans for God's sake. You even look Polish. You've got the forged documents, I know that. (Self-mocking) "Gens knows everything that's going on in the ghetto!" Sure, sure, sure. On top of everything else, you sound like a Pole. One hundred percent Warsaw Pole. What's keeping you, for God's sake; there's no future in the ghetto, y'know. So?

WEINER *remains silent.*

Go on. Join the partisans. Get out!

WEINER I'm afraid.

GENS (HE laughs, mirthlessly) What, you're staying here because it's so safe?

WEINER I'm afraid of deciding.

GENS But you have the courage to stick around here.

WEINER Here in the ghetto, I never decide anything. I go from day to day, not responsible, not responsible. I let it happen. Day after day you let it happen. In the ghetto there is nothing more beautiful than the philosophy of passivity.

GENS There's no future here, you know that very well.

WEINER What about you, Mr. Gens? You could leave anytime. What are you doing here?

GENS (With the insolence of a drunk) My place is here. With my people. I stand with the Jews in the ghetto. I won't flee into the forest.

WEINER Flee? You know the partisans aren't running away. Whoever goes into the forest goes to fight. They're heroes.

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GENS (Sits bolt upright. His drunkenness vanishes) Hear me! There are many forms of resistance, my good Doctor. You want gun running and sabotage? Go to the forest. Don't bring it here in the ghetto.

WEINER *tries to object, but to no avail. GENS is gaining power as HE speaks.*

Don't play dumb, Dr. Weiner. Are you blind? Don't you understand what the Germans have in mind? Blowing our bodies to bits? That's easy. They can have any one of us they want. No, Dr. Weiner. They're after our souls. They're trying to get inside—reach down our throats, to the essence that's inside. Our souls. And that must never happen. This is the ultimate test of Jewish history: they'll lose the war, of course, that's a matter of time. But they could lose the war and still conquer the Jewish spirit, still infect us with their deadly sickness. Do you see? Can you understand? That's what the Resistance can never prevent out there. We have to protect our spirit, our essence in here, in the ghetto. And to do that, we have to save those who are strong. Physically, spiritually strong. Selection! We have no choice. The sick, the weak, the hopeless ones: let them go. They're a sacrifice. So much for insulin. (Pause) What will our children, our grandchildren think? Will they be able to justify our actions in their minds? Can they possibly understand the world we had to survive in? Well, it's not my problem. I stay here. I've got to save what there is to save. (HE slugs from the bottle, and goes off mumbling) There's no future in the ghetto. No future. That's why I stay.

SRULIK *crosses downstage. Blackout.*

END OF ACT ONE

## Act Two

Four young gutter rats climb through a hole in the ghetto fence, maneuvering a coffin with them. THEY are LIEB GRODZENSKI and his henchmen, JANKEL, GEIWISCH and ELIA. GENS shines a flashlight on them. THEY freeze in its beam. GENS recognizes one of them.

GENS Halt! Good God. Leibe! Grodzenski?

GRODZENSKI Evening, chief.

GENS (Pointing to the coffin) What the hell is that?

GRODZENSKI They buried a man in the cemetery outside, so we're bringing back the coffin.

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GENS Through a hole in the wall? Has the gate disappeared, what?

GRODZENSKI (Thinking fast) It's a short cut.

GENS (Cuffing GRODZENSKI good-naturedly) What the hell is in that coffin Grodzenski? You running guns for the Resistance?

GRODZENSKI Who, us? Transport illegal firearms into the ghetto? You gotta be kidding, chief. . . .

GENS All right, all right, so whaddaya got? Salami? Coffee? What? Sugar?

GRODZENSKI A ghost, chief. The ghost of a dead man, that's all.

GENS (Trying to lift one end of the coffin) This ghost has rocks in his pockets.

GRODZENSKI Well, there are ghosts and ghosts, right, chief. . . .

GENS I can't have it, Lieb. You can't do this in public and expect to get away with it. You be at my office tomorrow morning at nine A.M. I want a five thousand ruble contribution to the juvenile delinquents home. In cash. Is that clear? Call it a tax.

GRODZENSKI Three thousand rubles, sure chief, sure. . . .

*That's all GENS can take. HE collars GRODZENSKI.*

GENS You don't negotiate with me, friend! You're under arrest.

GRODZENSKI Wait, chief, wait. Tomorrow morning, nine A.M. Five thousand rubles. For juvenile delinquents. No problem, chief. You have the word of Leib Grodzenski.

GENS Too late. You spend the night in a cell while your friends dig up a ransom. You'll have some time to think it over, Momser. Next time you'll think twice before you tangle with Jakob Gens.

GENS *pulls him out. The OTHERS remain, look on in disbelief. JANKEL and GEIWISCH are talkative. ELIA lurks in the shadows.*

JANKEL Nu? What, do we follow him? You want to go spring him, what?

GEIWISCH That's a nice idea. Your five thousand rubles or my five thousand rubles?

JANKEL Oh, yeah. That's a problem. Well, you know what? Maybe we should make—a plan.

GEIWISCH (Looks at him incredulous, then defeated) We'll wait here for our contact to come from Weiskopf. When he collects the goods, he'll give us the dough, and we'll spring Leib from the can.

*The TWO of them settle down on the coffin and roll cigarettes.*

JANKEL That was a good plan.

GEIWISCH It wasn't that complicated.

ELIA, JANKEL and GEIWISCH (Singing "Isrulik" [They Call Me Izzy])  
Come buy my fine tobacco

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Or buttons for your shirt.

A lower price you'll never have to pay!

Thank heaven for the ghetto:

Where life is cheap as dirt!

A penny lets me live another day!

They call me Izzy,

A kid right from the ghetto.

Always busy,

I hustle all day long.

In my pockets,

Less than nothing;

My only assets:

A whistle and a song.

A coat without a collar,

Galoshes but no shoes;

There's room inside my pants for two or three.

And if you think that's funny,

Well, mister, I got news:

I'll teach you not to laugh at guys like me!

They call me Izzy,

A kid right from the ghetto.

Always busy,

I hustle all day long.

In my pockets,

Less than nothing;

My only assets:

A whistle and a song!

I wasn't born an orphan

Or raised by hearts of stone.

My parents loved me just as yours loved you.

But they were taken from me.

Since then I'm on my own

And like the wandering wind, I'm lonely too.

They call me Izzy,

A kid right from the ghetto.

Always busy,

I hustle all day long.

In my pockets,

Less than nothing;

My only assets:

A whistle and a song!

They call me Izzy,

A kid right from the ghetto.

Always busy,

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A smile from ear to ear.  
Still it happens,  
All too often  
When no one's looking.

*Sudden stop. Slowly.*

I wipe away a tear.

JANKEL Hey! Shh. Someone's coming.  
GEIWISCH From Weiskopf. Our contact.

*The HASID enters.*

HASID Good evening, boys, how are you?  
GEIWISCH You come from Weiskopf?

HASID I can read your palm.

GEIWISCH Oh, for God's sake! Get the hell out of here!

HASID (*Moving to ELIA, the third gangster*) Ah hah! What's this? The coming week will bring a fundamental change in your life.

GEIWISCH I said beat it!

ELIA Hold on a minute. How do you know that? You haven't even looked at my palm.

HASID I do ears, too, but it is in the palm that all of the details lie.

*ELIA wrestles with his better judgment for a moment, but HE's hooked.*

ELIA Okay, okay! Read my palm.

*The HASID looks at his palm.*

HASID Very interesting. Very interesting. Your palm is made up of eight and three. Chet and Gimel are at war, yes? In your hand, Chet conquers Gimel. Chet is like Cheruth—freedom, independence. Gimel is like Germany. Therefore, in your hand, freedom and independence will win out over the Germans. In three more time periods.

ELIA In what? What is that—"three more time periods"?

HASID Could be three weeks, three months, three years . . . (*Extending his hand*) Thirty rubles please.

ELIA What about three seconds?

HASID Well, if it's three seconds that will be forty rubles!

ELIA Here, take it.

*HE sticks a knife into the HASID's gut. The HASID gasps. ELIA drags him a few steps, pulls out the knife, and the HASID collapses in a pool of blood. ELIA rifles his pockets.*

GEIWISCH My God, Elia you're crazy! What the hell did you . . .

*ELIA stands up with a fistful of money.*

ELIA Crazy, eh? A thousand, two, six, *ten thousand rubles!* Crazy is right.  
GEIWISCH Stash it in the coffin! Quick!

*THEY open the coffin lid. A FIGURE wrapped in a shroud sits bolt upright. The THREE GANGSTERS gasp. Then the shrouded FIGURE stands and climbs out. The THREE scream and scatter. The DEAD MAN, now alone on stage, starts to unwrap his shroud. It's KITTEL. At that moment, KRUK enters the library and starts to dictate.*

KRUK This is the second murder and robbery in the ghetto. There's no doubt now that the perpetrators are members of the ghetto underworld. According to my sources, the crimes are tied to the flourishing black market here. The ghetto elite acquire whatever their taste dictates, and the underworld keeps the goods flowing to those who can pay.

*KITTEL throws the shroud into the coffin and removes a thick book. HE puts on a pair of horn-rimmed glasses, sticks the book under his arm and is thus transformed into a new character—DR. PAUL. HE enters KRUK's library.*

DR. PAUL Do I have the honor of addressing Mr. Herman Kruk?

KRUK Indeed. And to whom, may I ask—

DR. PAUL My name is Dr. Paul. I'm from the Rosenberg Foundation. For the investigation of Judaism without Jews? It's a pleasure. You have heard of us.

KRUK I've heard the name . . .

DR. PAUL The foundation, Mr. Kruk, works with scholars and experts in all areas of Jewish culture, sending them into specially chosen ghettos to conduct our research. Our goal is to document the intellectual, spiritual and religious components of your culture, and separate the chaff from the wheat, so to speak. We're after the essence of Judaism—in terms of artifacts. Then, when we've collected certain cultural objects we send them to the Central Institute in Frankfurt.

KRUK I see.

DR. PAUL It's a difficult task, and it must be completed soon, before the transmitters of your rich heritage, ah . . . cease to exist. I have been given the great honor of being sent to Wilna, and I hope that you and I can develop a close working relationship, as befits a couple of scholars embarking on a noble, arduous task. I've heard much about you—your mind, your abilities. No doubt you've

heard nothing whatever about me. Allow me to give you my most recent work.

*HE gives KRUK the book HE's been carrying. KRUK leafs through it.*

KRUK Investigations of the Talmud . . .

DR. PAUL Precisely. The Jerusalem Talmud. That's my particular area of expertise. I'm ashamed to admit that I still haven't mastered Aramaic. But I've begun. I've even done some work on the Babylonian Talmud.

KRUK And how, may I ask, did you find me?

DR. PAUL I used the method of Rabbi Jochanaan Ben Sakkai. But in reverse.

KRUK I beg your pardon?

DR. PAUL I was speaking metaphorically. The Rabbi escaped the occupied city of Jerusalem, as you no doubt know, on the eve of the temple's destruction. He was carried out in a coffin by four of his students. And I have entered your ghetto—the Jerusalem of Lithuania, to employ another metaphor—by the same method. Wouldn't you like to sit down?

KRUK Thank you.

DR. PAUL As your great poet Bialick said: "As man *schtejt*—redt man, as man *sitzt* . . ."

KRUK "Redt sech . . ."\*

*DR. PAUL laughs. KRUK joins him uneasily, then stops.*

How does it happen . . .

DR. PAUL How can a goy like me converse so easily in Yiddish? Do you think the question offends me? Or did you take me for a Jew? Even in Jerusalem they thought I was Jewish. Well, The Arabs did. I almost got killed in the pogroms of '36. The kids—Arab street gangs—pummeled me. I'm only here today because the Jewish fighters from the Haganah† saved me. Good men, nice fellows. (*HE chuckles as if at the memory of them, then his laugh turns threatening*) Were you there? In Jerusalem?

KRUK No.

DR. PAUL What a shame.

KRUK I've never even been to Palestine.

DR. PAUL Shame on you.

KRUK I wouldn't say that. I'm no Zionist.

DR. PAUL Communist?

KRUK (*After a moment to consider*) I was a communist.

DR. PAUL You were a founding member of the Polish wing of the International Communist Party, as a matter of fact.

KRUK So. You know all about me.

DR. PAUL Does it embarrass you, this . . . episode . . . in your political life.

KRUK Embarrass me? (*A pause*) Not at all. I mean, during the October revolution all of us were drunk with enthusiasm. I really thought—I really *knew*—that the revolution meant the end of all injustice, the end of persecution—even of Jews.

DR. PAUL But you left the party. *Before* Stalin's excesses made it fashionable.

KRUK Long before. Stalin had nothing to do with it. I left because the Jews in the party were vilifying their own heritage. It was outrageous.

DR. PAUL And that bothered you. Even though you're not a religious man.

KRUK My atheism has no more to do with it than Stalin did. It's just incomprehensible to me that Jews would spit on their own beliefs. The self-loathing, at the time I just couldn't understand—

DR. PAUL . . . But now you do. Understand, I mean.

KRUK That's right. Thanks to the Germans.

DR. PAUL (*Looks at him a moment*) Now I don't understand.

KRUK It's the circumstances that allow us to see ourselves so clearly. I mean, when Jews like that Gestapo-agent Dessler, and his henchman Lewas routinely storm around the ghetto beating up Jews to show the Germans how friendly they can be, what am I supposed to think? When the Jewish police invite German officers to the Jewish council building to have a party, get drunk together, sing songs together, invite in a truckload of Jewish whores for the night, I suddenly understand just how deeply Jewish self-hatred is rooted.

DR. PAUL (*Regards him with apparent sympathy*) Yes, I see. But you're a socialist, right? A Bundist, as you people call it? A believer in the Diaspora. Jews wandering the world, as opposed to a Jewish state.

KRUK That's right. Does that seem odd to you?

DR. PAUL After everything that has happened to you, you still believe that socialism in the Diaspora would allow for the survival of Jewish culture?

KRUK Absolutely. Maybe not in my lifetime, but someday.

DR. PAUL You remind me of a Hasidic legend. A king had a fight with his son, and threw him out of the castle. Then he thought better of it, and sent a messenger out to find him. He said to the messenger: "Go seek my son, and ask him what he'd wish for if he had three wishes." The messenger found the son living in filth, clothed in rags, and put the question to him. And the son said: "Three wishes? Bread, clothing, and a place to sleep." The messenger

\*"When you're standing, you speak your mind, but when you're sitting, you listen (to someone else)."

†Jewish fighting organization in Palestine that preceded the Israeli Defense Forces.

reported back to the king, and the king said: "My son has forgotten that he's a prince. If he'd remembered who he was, he would have only had one wish—to come back to the castle. With that, all his other wishes would also have come true. He would have had food, clothing and far more than shelter. My son is really lost forever." So you see? You dream of native cultural riches for a people wandering the world? Why fight for a few privileges among people who don't want you when you could go back to the castle? In Palestine you could have it all. You wouldn't have to walk around in rags *hoping* that one day—"not in my lifetime"—good would triumph over evil.

KRUK Are you a lobbyist for the Zionists, Dr. Paul? Allow me a question. What did you do in Jerusalem?  
DR. PAUL Allow me a question, Mr. Kruk: I know you deplore the way Gens uses people like Dessler and Lewas to control the ghetto. Strongarm tactics and—  
KRUK Gens does what he can under the circumstances you created.  
DR. PAUL Are you defending these characters? Believe me, I don't like them any better than you do. All they want to do is mimic us . . . but what they look like is a horrifying caricature—something you might see in a funhouse mirror. I, for one, don't enjoy staring at such things. This slavishness will get them nowhere. You, on the other hand, are different. You go your own way. You have good instincts, Mr. Kruk. (*Confidentially*) Listen: I know you were in the underground in '20 and '21. During the anti-Semitic riots you behaved heroically. I know all that. Suppose I told you Gens's days are numbered? He and his henchmen are no good to us anymore, and we'd like to put you in their place. You could handpick the people you'd work with. Carte blanche.  
KRUK Are you joking? I wouldn't take a job offer from you!  
DR. PAUL Not even if you crown Gens by your refusal?  
KRUK *Nebucht!* Heaven protect me from a king who depends on your favor. And as for the Hasidic legend, you've got it all wrong. The son understood the situation perfectly. He wished for what he needed: Men aren't at home because of any particular soil—they're at home with their heritage, with their traditions. *That's* the loss they must guard against. Without culture, they lose their identity.  
DR. PAUL Very well. If you side with the Diaspora, you leave the future of Zionism to the Genses of this world. *They* don't turn down offers of power. Not from us, not from anyone.  
KRUK What people do in the ghetto, Dr. Paul, may have nothing to do with their behavior in Palestine. Palestine's another world.  
DR. PAUL Permit me to disagree. I've been there, you haven't. I'm also familiar with the leaders of the same Zionist movements that Gens

\*Roughly, "Lord help me!"

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and Dessler subscribe to. I know whereof I speak. (*Pause*) I admire your brand of Judaism, Mr. Kruk. Your Judaism might stand a chance of creating a balance between our two peoples. I regret that you won't assert it, just at the moment when you might gain some political influence. You might have corrected a terrible historical injustice.

KRUK What balance? What historical injustice? What are you talking about?  
DR. PAUL Well, never mind. We'll discuss it another time. (*He stands up, hands Kruk a list*) In the meantime, I need these books wrapped. I have to send them to Frankfurt. Artifacts, as I said. (*In addition, I have a less tempting job offer, one that you'll hardly find tainted, though. I need a report on the sect of Karaites in Wilna. In Berlin they want a scientific opinion as to whether the Karaites belong to the Jewish race of not.*)  
KRUK Of course they're Jews, but . . .  
DR. PAUL You're not above making such a report?

KRUK stares at him. In the background, the noise of a crowd. DR. PAUL and KRUK stand.

DR. PAUL (*Points to the noise*) You see? Those are the *other* Jews. They understand power. Those are the faces in the funhouse mirror. You think I enjoy looking at them? (*He laughs a bone-chilling laugh and disappears*)

GENS, the JUDGE, DR. GOTTLIEB, DESSLER and LEWAS enter. The latter two are dressed as ghetto police. They lead the three condemned gangsters, ELIA, JANKEL and GEIWISCH, who are tied together. A wooden frame is shoved onstage by TWO ACTORS dressed as butchers. On the upper crossbar are three meathooks, each dangling a hangman's noose. Three stools are placed under the hooks.

GENS (*Calls out*) Your Honor!  
JUDGE The Jewish court of the Wilna ghetto, in its session of June 4, 1942, has reached a verdict in the case of Jankel Polikanski and the brothers Itzig and Elia Geiwisch. The accused are found guilty of the murder of actor and palm reader Joseph Gerstein on the night of June 3. Having been found guilty of this murder, the three are sentenced to death by hanging.  
GENS (*Trying to remain sympathetic*) Your Honor, members of the Jewish Council, police officers, ladies and gentlemen. Of the seventy-six thousand Jews who once populated Wilna, sixteen thousand, thank God, are still alive. It is the duty of these remaining Jews to be upright, hard-working and honest. For those who do otherwise, we have no comfort. We must investigate and prosecute all

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criminal cases within the ghetto, and carry out the sentences with our own hand. We have no choice . . .

KITTEL enters and stands near GENs. They greet each other with a look. Suddenly GENs is a transformed man, aggressive and blunt.

The execution of the three convicted slayers—Jews who murdered Jews—will be carried out in the courtyard of the old slaughterhouse, at number nine, Butcher's Street. The sentence will be carried out by the Jewish police, whose duty is to protect life, law and order in the ghetto. (*To the POLICE*) Gentlemen: your duty!

DESSLER and LEWAS lead the condemned MEN to the gallows. GENs raises his cane, and gives the signal by sharply dropping it. KRUK dictates.

KRUK The rope around the neck of Jankel Polikanski broke, and Jankel fell to the ground. He was still alive. Gens, citing the oldest traditions of judgment, wanted to pardon him. Kittel, looking like a Roman Caesar, turned thumbs down . . . and Jankel was hanged again.  
KITTEL (*Moves to center stage, raises his arm to speak, and pulls a sealed notice from his pocket. He ceremonially breaks the seal, unfolds it, and reads*) On this solemn and impressive demonstration of orderly self-rule by the Jews of the Wilna ghetto, which has been carried out flawlessly in every respect, I hereby declare: Whereas the Wilna ghetto leadership is about to embark on an important new task; and Whereas the present Judenrat is an unwieldy and slow-moving body, now therefore, the Jewish Council is hereby dissolved. In its place I name Jakob Gens as the autonomous and sole leader of the Wilna Ghetto.

Applause.

He will be assisted by Mr. Dessler, as police chief and Mr. Lewas as chief guard of the gate.

Applause.

GENS (*Raising his hand, like KITTEL did*) Thank you. In honor of this change in ghetto leadership, I invite the police chief and other public officials to a celebration. And I make a solemn promise to all of you: The new ghetto leadership will do everything, everything in its power to promote well-being and security in the community. I thank you.

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KITTEL I accept your invitation to the celebration if—if—you can guarantee good music, and a first-rate show. It will be a great honor to see your unforgettable chanteuse again. I still have a small bill to settle with her, perhaps we can do some business at your celebration. (*He puts his proclamation away, turns to go, then turns back for a moment*) One other thing. In honor of this event, I will waive one of our strictest regulations. For the celebration—and only for the celebration—you may once again bring flowers into the ghetto.

He goes. A jazz BAND appears and strikes up a cheerful number. It's not a real band, but the ragged ACTORS who we met earlier with their instruments, spruced up a bit for the occasion. WEISKOPF sweeps on stage, very much the successful businessman in authority. During his next speech, his instructions are followed, causing a riot of activity. WEISKOPF himself runs to and fro, the happy despot in the midst of his prosperity. At the end, the stage is utterly transformed.

WEISKOPF Flowers! For God's sake more flowers! It's a once in a lifetime event. I want to see a riot of colors. Petals, blooms—everywhere. (*To a pair of ACTORS carrying a buffet*) Look, the cold buffet can get over there, and the roast chicken over here. (*To some COOKS setting up the food*) No, no! The gravy next to the chicken, what is it with you people? You've never been to a dinner party before? Shlemiel. All right now. (*He turns, looking for something*) Wait a minute, where's the *cholent*? What the hell happened to the *cholent*? What are you gonna serve if for desert? Get it out here!

More COOKS emerge with a huge stewpot.

Okay. Now the bar, the bar . . . the bar can go there. No, wait. Better idea. Divide the bottles up among the people and they can drink all they want.

WAITERS begin to place bottles on tables.

Open 'em up! Open 'em up! I want it lavish—leftovers we can donate. We'll show these pigs we know how to celebrate. What happened to the kvass? (*To an idle WAITER*) Hey, you! Shmuck! Bring the kvass. (*To another*) And you! Didn't I say open all the bottles? Don't talk to me about waste, it's my money, right? Is it your money? No, it's my money, I'll spend it my way. Besides, it's business. I mean what the hell, *shmeikel* these pigs today, tomorrow the orders start rolling in. I'll bring in a hundred times what I'm spending today. Today's nothing. Especially the way it looks now—who the hell is responsible for this?! All right, all right, the

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orchestra goes here and the stage . . . (HE turns to the makeshift platform where the entertainment will take place) My God, the stage! Who the hell arranged this place? What is this, poverty theatre? This is supposed to be a "Follies," not a tragedy—who thought this up? Oh, what the hell, strew the damn place with flowers, who'll notice? (Shouting off) Another truckload of flowers! (Under his breath) I'll kill that Srulik, where does he find these set decorations?

To the STAGEHANDS as THEY work with the flowers.

I want it gorgeous. Gorgeous and plush, like a bower in heaven. Their eyes should pop out of their heads when the lights come up. Their eyes should pop out and they should never find them! May the plagues of the Pharaohs and the trials of Job befall them! (Going a bit mad now) And the food—gorgeous too! And with a smell—they should eat like no tomorrow. Seconds, thirds, stuffed from head to heel! Plug 'em up at both ends and may the worm of Titus dance a tango in their brains. We'll pleasure them to death! Rice, meat, roast chicken and gravy! Cake! And kvass, kvass, kvass! Build up the pressure, tangle their guts till their asses explode! Strangle 'em on their entrails and feed 'em to the dogs! (Looking around, in a sweat) Magnificent! Spectacular! Brilliant! Orchestra ready? Play!

The stage is unrecognizably lavish. The ORCHESTRA strikes up. The guests enter: GENS, DESSLER, MUSACHKAT, KITTEL, two GESTAPO OFFICIALS, three JEWISH PROSTITUTES, SRULIK and his DUMMY, and CHAJA, in a spectacular evening gown. WEISKOPF receives the guests, offers drinks and hors d'oeuvres. While THEY eat and mingle, CHAJA sings "Friling" (Springtime). During the song, the orgy begins. Dancing, drinking, eating. The PROSTITUTES move through the CROWD offering their favors freely.

CHAJA (Singing)

I wander through alleyways, lost and distracted  
Until I arrive at the wall.  
The weather is warm and the breezes are gentle  
But I don't feel April at all.  
I stand there and listen to laughter and street sounds  
That come bubbling in from outside.  
Your face is before me wherever I go  
And it's almost a year since I cried.

Springtime

Where is my loved one?  
Why do the birds sing up there in the trees?

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Springtime

There's music in the flowers  
But till I join you I won't hear the melodies.

I pass our old house ev'ry morning at six  
On the way to my long daily grind.  
The doors are all padlocked, the windows are shuttered  
Like me, it is deaf, dumb and blind.  
Each night I am drawn to the same shady corner  
We'd meet there each day, way back when.  
But why do I go there? I guess I can't help it . . .  
Tonight I will go there again.

Springtime

Where is my loved one?  
Why do the birds sing up there in the trees?  
Springtime  
There's music in the flowers  
But till I join you I won't hear the melodies.

I peer in dark waters, the face that's reflected  
Is someone I no longer know.  
Wherever you are, be it earth or in heaven  
Or hell, that's the place I will go.  
I wander through alleyways, lost and distracted  
My odyssey's practi'ly through  
And spring will be warm in the April of Aprils  
When I'm reunited with you.

Springtime

Where is my loved one?  
Why do the birds sing up there in the trees?  
\*Springtime  
There's music in the flowers  
And when I join you I will hear the melodies. (Repeat\*)

When the song is done the AUDIENCE applauds. KITTEL raises his hand and there is silence. HE moves to CHAJA.

KITTEL Close your eyes.

SHE does. KITTEL pulls a long string of pearls from his pocket and places it around her neck. Amazed admiration from the CROWD.

Now open them.

CHAJA (Discovering them) Oh!

KITTEL Unfortunately, they're only pearls. But if you knew where I'd gotten them . . .

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CHAJA tries to take them off, but KITTEL stops her.

Now, now. She who begins with shoes ends up with pearls. But you still owe me three ounces of beans. Well, two and a half, counting that last song.

DUMMY Careful Chajele, your price is dropping.

KITTEL (Leaves her and moves to SRULIK and the DUMMY) And how's our little wooden friend? Still taking chances?

DUMMY Taking chances? Please. It's just ordinary, run-of-the-mill chutzpah.

KITTEL Ha! Chutzpah, you say. A great Jewish tradition. Let's hear a little chutzpah, if you dare.

DUMMY All right, but . . . my, my, Herr Kittel, you don't look too well.

KITTEL It's nothing. A little headache.

DUMMY A headache. Well, by all means, I'd prescribe head baths. A miracle cure guaranteed to eliminate all pain.

KITTEL (Not understanding) Head baths?

DUMMY Stick your head in the water three times and pull it out twice.

KITTEL laughs and EVERYONE joins him. Suddenly HE stops. EVERYONE stops. Tense silence. Then KITTEL laughs loudly again.

DUMMY Do you know why a German laughs twice when he hears a joke?

KITTEL No, why?

DUMMY Once when he hears it, and once when he gets it!

KITTEL (Laughs once, goes silent. Then laughs again, goes silent again, ominously) So. That's chutzpah. Very good. I bet you wouldn't dare to take it one step further.

DUMMY How much do you bet?

SRULIK (To the DUMMY) What?! Cut it out.

DUMMY You cut it out. We could get rich here. (To KITTEL) All right. You can put up fifty thousand rubles, and I'll wager my life.

KITTEL (Reaches in his pockets and comes up with some paper money) I'm a little short . . .

WEISKOPF (Butts in, forcing a wad of bills on KITTEL) Please, Mr. Kittel, be my guest.

KITTEL Do you have a pen, I'll give you an IOU.

WEISKOPF pats his pockets for a pen.

DUMMY What does he need an IOU for? Germans always give back, it's in their character. You took Krakov—you gave it back. You took Stalingrad, you gave it back. Germans give everything back—you'll pay Weiskopf back every penny, of course!

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The proceedings come to a dead, stumped halt. KITTEL stares at the DUMMY. A horrified silence.

KITTEL (Handing the money to SRULIK) Here. You win. This time.

SRULIK No, please . . . he didn't mean . . .

DUMMY Shut up and take it. A thief who steals from a thief is no thief.

KITTEL (Sharp, angry to SRULIK) Es reicht.\*

Another dead, mortifying silence. WEISKOPF breaks in with a bottle of cognac.

WEISKOPF Some cognac, Mr. Kittel, please. You've never tried a finer. Exquisite French cognac . . . only the best for you.

HE forces a glass on KITTEL. Both MEN drain their glasses in a single swallow.

KITTEL Aaahhhh! Parce! Parce! That reminds me of Paris. Paris . . . Paris. Very nice, yes.

SRULIK quickly orders the ORCHESTRA to strike up some French music. CHAJA begins to sing a chanson. The party has now begun to deteriorate into a debauch, crushed flowers and clothing litter the stage, and many empty liquor bottles.

WEISKOPF (To KITTEL) I'm in a position to make you a fantastic offer.

CHAJA (Sings "Parlez-moi d'Amour")

Parlez-moi d'amour  
Redites-moi des choses tendres.  
Votre beau discours  
Mon coeur n'est pas las de l'entendre.  
Pourvu que toujours  
Vous répétiez ces mots supremes:  
Je vous aime.†

Parlez-moi d'amour  
Redites-moi des choses tendres . . .

\*"That'll do!" or "That's enough!"

†Speak to me of love

Tell me once more those tender things.  
My heart will never grow weary  
Of hearing your beautiful speech  
Provided you always  
Repeat those supreme words:  
I love you.

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KITTEL is now dancing suggestively with CHAJA as SHE sings. The COMPANY interrupts her with "Mir Lebn Eibek," carrying her away from him.

## ACTING COMPANY (Singing)

Mir lebn eibek, ess brent a velt.  
Mir lebn eibek, on a groshn gelt.  
Un oif zepukenish alé sonim  
Voss viln unz farshvampz unzer ponim—  
Mir lebn eibek, mir zeinen do!  
Mir lebn eibek, in yeder sho.  
Mir viln lebn un derlebn  
Shlechte zeitin ariberlebn.  
Mir lebn eibek, mir zeinen do!\*

At the end of the song WEISKOPF calls for silence.

WEISKOPF Ladies and gentlemen! I have good news. Mr. Kittel and I have just closed the most tremendous deal in the history of laundry! We will take in four hundred railroad cars of uniforms in need of repair. Work for everybody! But there's more: I've just received word—I'm afraid I can't reveal my source—that I am to have a meeting with Göring himself! I will travel to Berlin to work out a five-year contract between the German army and the factory. We will build a new place—a gigantic plant with all new machinery and equipment for making uniforms, fatigues, combat boots, dachrician—everything for the modern soldier. The success story continues! So . . . to your health! L' chayim.

ALL L' chayim!

KITTEL Prosit!

ALL Prosit!

EVERYONE drinks. The orgy gets further out of control. KITTEL sees GENS standing alone, observing.

KITTEL Gens! Gens!

\*We live forever, a world is burning.  
We live forever, without a penny.  
And to spite our enemies  
Who want to blacken our days—  
We live forever, we are here.  
We live forever, always.  
We want to live and see the future  
Surviving the bad times.  
We live forever, we are here!

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GENS goes dutifully to KITTEL. KITTEL lays a hand on GENS's shoulder, and walks with him.

What's your problem, friend? You're not enjoying this party.

GENS I'm having a wonderful time.

KITTEL Please! Dessler is having a wonderful time. Muschkat is having a wonderful time. Lewas is having a wonderful time. You are standing like a stone. You never have any fun. You know how to throw a party, but you have no idea how to enjoy one. And do you know why? Because you're an asshole, Gens. You want to use a party. You want to make sure we're fraternizing in a useful, productive way. You want favors. You want to prove something. I just want you to have a wonderful time. How does the song go? You know the song: "I want to be happy, but I can't be happy . . ."

GENS ". . . till I make you happy too." I'll do my best.

KITTEL It's not hard! Look, I'll help you.

KITTEL raises his hand. Immediate silence.

Ladies and gentlemen! I have good news. You'll all be very proud. I've decided to expand the empire of our friend Gens. I hereby annex the Oschmany ghetto. From this moment on—with the aid of the Jewish police and the honorable Mr. Dessler, the Jews of Oschmany are your subjects.

Applause. DESSLER stands and bows. KITTEL raises his hand. Immediate silence.

There is one . . . small . . . thing. As you may know, there are four thousand Jews living in Oschmany. Unfortunately, that's two thousand more than we need. So, this evening, a battalion of the Jewish police, under the direction of Dessler . . .

DESSLER Yes, sir!

KITTEL We will conduct a selection process. Of course, we could send our own people or Lithuanians, but our presence in the ghetto always upsets you people so much. No need for unnecessary panic. Your people speak Yiddish, the population will stay calm, and the job can be done smoothly. (Issuing an order) Police officers. Attention!

The JEWISH POLICE rise, untangling themselves from the whores. THEY are stripped to their underwear.

Ah. How convenient. You see, everything works out for the best. To celebrate the Oschmany plan, you will get new uniforms. Russian officers' uniforms, complete with caps and coats, leftover from

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the Czar's army. We found them in the Wilna warehouse. Bring on the uniforms!

A GERMAN SOLDIER brings fresh uniforms. The JEWISH POLICE dress. ONE of the WHORES distracts KITTEL, who collapses on top of her for a quickie. As HE paws her, GENS stands over them.

GENS Excuse me. Uh . . . pardon me, Mr. Kittel. Out of four thousand people, more than half have got to be productive.

KITTEL (Distracted, but listening) You think so?

GENS Absolutely. According to our experience, no more than one thousand are really unproductive.

KITTEL Is that so? Really? All right, make it one thousand.

GENS Well, wait, wait. Let's suppose that in the selection process, we discover that there are only eight hundred who are really unproductive.

KITTEL Take it easy, Gens. Productivity is a vague concept, I don't need to tell you that. A Jew can prove anything he wants to, yes? Is an eighty-year-old man in a wheelchair productive? You'd connect a generator to the wheel chair and claim he's making electricity when he rolls off to take a shit!

GENS All right, all right. Look, that brings up age, and age is very clear. What would you say to a selection of all Jews eighty and older.

KITTEL (Looking GENS straight in the eye) Seventy.

GENS Seventy.

KITTEL But a minimum of seven hundred.

GENS No fewer than five hundred, no more than seven hundred.

KITTEL Listen, Gens, what's a hundred head more or less between you and me? Call it six hundred and we'll shake on it.

GENS Six hundred. Deal.

KITTEL turns to the POLICE, who are now in uniform and armed with truncheons.

KITTEL Nice. Very handsome. We'll send along eight Lithuanians from the Ypatinga militia. You hand over the old people, they'll do the rest. Dessler!

DESSLER Yes, sir!

KITTEL The troops are at your command!

DESSLER Yes, sir! Thank you, sir!

KITTEL Would you care to address the troops, Dessler?

DESSLER Gentlemen! MOVE! We have been given an order, and we will execute it to the letter! Every detail. Any questions? All right then: Left face! Division, march! Left-right, left-right . . .

THEY march off in front of DESSLER, when HE is almost off. GENS shouts after him.

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GENS Dessler! Get back here!

DESSLER returns.

You're about to do a filthy job. There's no choice, I understand that. You needn't jump at it like a famished dog in front of these butchers.

DESSLER We're doing it, aren't we? You think it matters how we do it? You think your broken heart buys you anything? We're none of us going to heaven, Gens, and you gave the order. You stay here and drink—I go out into the field and do the job. Don't you preach morality to me!

DESSLER wheels and departs. GENS spits after him.

GENS Scum! (HE upends a bottle of cognac)

KRUK appears and dictates.

KRUK Four hundred and ten old and sick Jews were selected and penned together in the square in Oschmany. An old Jew began to sing "El Moleh Rachamin," and everyone started to cry. Some of the Jewish police, who had rounded up the elderly, broke into uncontrollable wailing. The 410 were driven six miles out of town, and the eight Lithuanians went to work, liquidating the throng while the seven Jewish police from Wilna stood by. The action was overseen by Dessler, Nathan Ring and Mosche Lewas—all Jews. The three of them were armed with pistols. During the entire process, selection and extermination, the seven Jews and eight Lithuanians consumed one hundred bottles of vodka and schnapps. The Jewish Council donated a baked lamb for the event. When it was all over the astounded citizens of the Oschmany Ghetto lined the streets in dumb incomprehension and stared at the departing Jewish police. One of the policemen, Isaak Auerbuch, was seized by hysteria during the selection process and had to be given emergency medical treatment. Another, Dressin, began to sing:  
"We came to warm your heart,  
Good night, we now depart."

GENS (Drunk, lurches forward and speaks to KRUK's voice) Kruk—no, no, no, listen—Kruk is an honest man. A courageous man. He tells the truth, and not many people want to hear it. He's all right. Fearless. Many of you think just the way he does, I know it. I know it. You think I'm a traitor, you wonder what the hell I really want out of all you upright, innocent people. After all, it's me you're talking about, isn't it? I'm the one who has your hiding places blown up, right? Gens! Well, Gens has his own way of hiding Jews from the

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butchers. I wheel and deal, right? I'm a monster, right? Well, for me only one thing counts. Not Jewish honor. Jewish life! Jewish lives. If the Germans want a thousand Jews from me, they get 'em! Because if we don't do it their way, they'll march in here and take a thousand Tuesday, and a thousand Thursday. And a thousand Saturday. And ten thousand next week. You people are all saints, I know! You don't dirty your fingers. Gens gets down in the mud and wrestles with the pigs. And if you survive, then you can say: Our conscience is clear. But me? If I live through this I'll walk through life dripping shit, blood on my hands, and I'll turn myself over to the Jewish tribunal and say, "Look at me! Everything I did I did to save as many Jews as I could. To save some, I led others to their deaths with my own hands. And to preserve the consciences of many, I had no choice—I plunged myself into the sewer, and left my conscience behind." A clean conscience for Jakob Gens? I couldn't afford one!

END OF ACT TWO

## Act Three

The PEOPLE slowly start to awaken and clean up the orgy. As THEY do this CHAJA sings a Yiddish version of "Friling."

CHAJA (Singing)

Ich blondzshé in geto  
Fun gessl zu gessl  
Un ken nit gefinen kein ort;  
Nito iz main liber  
Wi trogt men ariber,  
Mentshn, o zogt chotsh a vort.  
Ess loicht oif main heim izt  
Der himl der bloyér—  
Voss zshé hob ich izt derfun?  
Ich shitei vi a betler  
Bai jetvidn toyér  
Un betl, a bisselé zun.

Friling, nem zu main troyer,  
Un breng main libstn,  
Main trayen zu-rik.  
Friling, oif dainé flihl bloyé.

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## Drama

From the land of waving palms and drifting snow,  
We are coming braced by pain and steeled by woe.  
And where torrents of our blood have  
Stained the earth,  
There our strength and dedication find rebirth.

Gradually, the ENSEMBLE joins in, a militant energy driving them.

Some day soon the sun will bless us with its light  
And our foes will be devoured by the night  
But until the sun can burn away the mist  
Then this song shall be our theme as we persist.

Not a song the robin sings throughout the land  
But a song a people sings grenade in hand!  
It was written not with ink but with our blood  
Mid collapsing walls and storms of flying mud!

So

Never say you can't go on, your day is done,  
While a thick and smoky mist enshrouds the sun;  
For the sound of marching feet is drawing near  
And they're beating out the message:

We are here!

Yes, the sound of marching feet is drawing near  
And they're beating out the message:

We are here!

GENS bursts on stage. EVERYONE turns to him.

GENS What the hell is this? What are you thinking? A song like that—it could sink the whole ghetto. Do you know what would happen if the Germans even heard about this?

SRULIK Mr. Gens . . .

GENS I'm talking!

SRULIK But Mr. Gens . . . you're the one who ordered us to create a theatre.

GENS Not this kind of theatre! Not a song that incites riots! We've just calmed the place down for God's sake.

DUMMY Like a graveyard.

GENS People, please, there's nothing to fear now. The ghetto is finally secure.

DUMMY Well . . . compared to Ponar . . .

GENS This is no time to provoke audiences. Theatre, yes—but entertainment. Something to take people out of themselves. We need to show the world we're industrious, hardworking people, not maniacs.

DUMMY Present company excepted.

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O nem main harz mit  
Un gib ess op main glik.\*

The scene evolves to a May Day celebration in the ghetto. Red paper flowers, red flags and posters decorate the stage. EVERYONE wears red neckerchiefs or scarves. As the music ends, KRUK speaks.

KRUK After the events in Oschmany, the atmosphere in the ghetto was never the same. The people grew restless, irritable. Normally, ghetto inhabitants sleepwalk through life. They live like flies—from day to day. Things calmed down so they calmed down. What choice did they have? But there is a faction that refuses to be calm. At this moment Zalman Tektin lies in the prison hospital in critical condition. Yesterday he was shot during an attempt to rob a German munitions depot. He's eighteen. (HE pulls a manuscript from his pocket) This song was written by a comrade of Zalman's, if he were here he'd want us to do it for him. Let's sing it! (HE hands it to CHAJA) Can you do it? Or do you only know tangos?

CHAJA steps on stage and takes the music and sings "Zog Nit Keinmol" (Never Say You Can't Go On).

CHAJA (Singing)

Never say you can't go on, your day is done.  
Yes, a thick and smoky mist enshrouds the sun;  
But the sound of marching feet is drawing near  
And they're beating out the message: We are here!

\*I wander in the ghetto  
From alley to alley  
But can't find any place.  
My beloved is gone:  
How does one live through it?  
People, tell me at least one word.  
The blue sky  
Now shines on my home—  
What do I gain from that now?  
I stand like a beggar  
By each and every gateway  
And beg for a little sun.

Spring, take away my sorrow,  
And bring back my beloved,  
My faithful one.  
Spring, on your blue wings  
O take my heart with you  
And give it to my love.

Less literally translated stanzas from this song appear on pages 520-521

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## Joshua Sobol

GENS You want to make fun of something, fine, make fun of your own: take a crack at people who won't look for work, at parasites.

DUMMY (Pointing at SRULIK) Here's one. He won't even help our German friends pick out their favorite Jews.

GENS Look, I've got nothing against satire, but watch who you aim it at. DUMMY Whoever passes by. Parasites, traitors.

GENS Who's a traitor? Me? The Jewish police? Just what the hell are you trying to say? The Jewish police will lead this place to freedom! Not you! It's a delicate balance we've achieved here. Upset that balance, and you'll be the traitors.

KRUK That's what you call solidarity Mr. Gens? . . . One people.

GENS Don't you preach morality to me! If there's a Jewish patriot here, it's me! I'm going to bring Hebrew into the ghetto starting right now! Tomorrow morning we begin Hebrew lessons in the schools. Required. No more Yiddish bibles. Hebrew bibles. Hebrew in elementary schools from day one. In kindergarten. And I'm also introducing Palistinography to the schools. Any objections? Me. I object. I object to the utter lack of Jewish national conscience in Wilna. I object! And in the theatre! A gala performance in Hebrew, how about that for an idea! Hebrew lectures, readings, a blue and white evening dedicated to reading the poetry of Bialik! Anyone not in agreement with the new policy of nationalism is hereby barred from all key positions. Alright now. Does anyone object?! I thought not.

KRUK I'm sorry Dr. Paul isn't here. He was right. The Germans have been more successful than they could have dreamed.

GENS What was that?!

KRUK Nationalism breeds nationalism.

GENS I beg your pardon. Are you saying the Germans have done this to me?

KRUK Take it however you like.

GENS This rehearsal is hereby dissolved. Everybody go home. Now!

The GROUP disperses singing "Zog Nit Keinmol." Only the DUMMY and SRULIK remain.

DUMMY Go home! Get out! Study Hebrew!

SRULIK Please, not now. I can't take it anymore.

DUMMY Pay attention! A historic moment. You'll want to tell your grandchildren you were there for the Hebrewization of the ghetto. At this moment in history, what could be more important than Hebrew. To say nothing of Palistinography. You don't know what Palistinography is, do you?

SRULIK Yes I do. You stick your head into Palestine three times and you take it out twice.

DUMMY But let's get down to brass tacks. How do you tell Chaja you want to sleep with her in Hebrew?

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SRULIK How did I get myself into this mess?

DUMMY "Ani chafetz bach," I think. Or maybe "Yesh li chefetz bach"!\*  
What do you think? Which one? Could be important. Could be  
the difference between a "yes" and a "no."

SRULIK Don't make me meshugge!

THEY start to leave, the DUMMY still chattering.

DUMMY Chajale! Chajale! Ani chafetz bach! It's love! It's love! What do  
you say, Chajale? You wanna . . . chafetz bach? You think so?

THEY're offstage now, the DUMMY's voice fading.

My, my, my. The Hebrewization of the ghetto of all things. What  
next . . .

The scene shifts to the library. CHAJA is looking for a book. SHE has  
changed. Her dress is simple, almost masculine. Her hair is pulled  
back. KRUK approaches and looks at her carefully.

KRUK May I help you?

CHAJA No thanks. Just looking . . .

KRUK Excuse me, but you come here every day and search for hours.  
Surely I could help you . . . you must be looking for something.

CHAJA (A little defensive, protecting something) I like to browse.

KRUK I thought you were wonderful in the revue—"Pesche from  
Resche."

CHAJA Wonderful?

KRUK There's no need to be ashamed. It's a fine thing to be an actress.

CHAJA Is it? I don't think so.

KRUK No?

CHAJA What good is theatre in our situation? It's trivial . . . even in-  
sulting.

KRUK I thought that way once. I was against the theatre company from  
the beginning.

CHAJA I know. You were right. You are right.

KRUK (Shakes his head) No. Every form of cultural activity is essential  
here in the ghetto. It's the battle plan in our fight to remain human  
beings. The fascists can kill us at will—it's not even a challenge for  
them. But they can't achieve their real aim: They can't obliterate  
our humanity—not as long as we cling to a spiritual life, not as  
long as we reach for the good and the beautiful. They forbid flow-  
ers in the ghetto, we give one another leaves. And suddenly, leaves  
are the most beautiful flowers in the world. Theatre is essential.

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\*Both expressions mean "I desire you." The first uses the Hebrew active voice with direct  
object; the second, an indirect and passive form.

לֵךְ לְךָ אֶתְּךָ!

Silence.

You must be looking for a book on theatre. Come.

CHAJA I don't want a book on theatre. I want a book . . . on explo-  
sives.

KRUK (Smiling) Why didn't you say so? I could have saved you pre-  
cious time.

HE climbs a ladder and takes a thin book from the top of the shelf. HE  
climbs back down and hands her the book. SHE looks through it  
quickly.

CHAJA Is this Russian?

KRUK It's a Soviet army manual. I stole it from the university. It's the  
only book I've ever stolen.

CHAJA But I don't know the language.

KRUK You must have friends. Show it to your friends. Unless I'm mis-  
taken, one of your friends will know Russian.

CHAJA Thank you. I'll bring it back.

KRUK Please, I don't even know you took it. A thief who steals from a  
thief is no thief.

CHAJA Thank you. (SHE heads for the door)

KRUK (When SHE is almost there) Wait.

From a tin box HE takes a leafy stem and hands it to her. SHE takes it,  
and begins to sing "Dremlen Feigl" (Drowsing Birds) to him. As SHE  
sings the scene shifts.

CHAJA (Singing)

Baby birds in summer branches  
Drowse in a downy nest  
Down below a baby nurses  
Softly on a stranger's breast  
Lullaby, lullaby, croons the stranger  
Rest, sweet little one, rest  
Lulu lulu lu

There's a story I must tell you  
Though you're much too small  
Baby dear, your mama's gone  
She won't be coming back at all  
And when your daddy tried to save her  
These eyes saw him fall  
Lulu lulu lu

If you get a little older  
This sad story you will know  
Carry it with you like a blessing

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Everywhere you go  
Lullaby, lullaby, klaine schaine  
Orphan child, I love you so.  
Lulu lulu lu.

As SHE sings and strolls, lost to this world, a strong flashlight beam  
catches her. SHE freezes, startled. It's KITTEL.

KITTEL Where have you been? Rehearsal?

CHAJA Yes. Working on a new piece.

HE reaches for her book.

KITTEL You sang very well at the party. Is this your new play? (HE looks  
it over) In Russian?

CHAJA That's right. Do you . . . know Russian?

KITTEL Sorry.

CHAJA Pity. It's a good play.

KITTEL What's it called?

CHAJA Beneath the Bridge.

KITTEL And you're performing it in Russian?

CHAJA No, no. We'll adapt and improve it.

SHE reaches for the book. KITTEL holds on to it.

KITTEL You dance and sing your way through the war, eh?

CHAJA When I'm happy I laugh. When I'm sad I sing.

KITTEL (Laughs) Very good. (HE hands her the book) Perhaps—I hope—  
you'll wipe out your debt to me with this one.

CHAJA I'll try.

SHE runs off suddenly. KITTEL looks after her.

KITTEL What an exotic group of people. My God, they're strange.

HE puts on his black, horn-rimmed glasses and becomes DR. PAUL. HE  
enters the library. KRUK appears from behind a bookshelf. DR. PAUL  
waves a manuscript HE has in his hand.

DR. PAUL I've read your study on the Karaites in Lithuania. Brilliant  
work.

KRUK Thank you.

DR. PAUL You reach the conclusion that there's no connection whatever  
between the Karaites and the Jews.

KRUK That's what the research shows.

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DR. PAUL You argue the case so convincingly that I almost believed you  
were telling the truth.

KRUK I was.

DR. PAUL (Chuckling) Mr. Kruk, there's no doubt whatever that the Kara-  
ites are Jews. You know it and I know it. You've constructed a  
monumental superstructure of falsehoods, half-truths and supposi-  
tions, so skillfully built that it looks like "proof." And for no other  
reason than to save the Karaites from annihilation. The Karaites—  
a race that despises your own people. Why?

KRUK You commissioned the study, Dr. Paul.

DR. PAUL I didn't commission you to reach this conclusion.

KRUK My conscience is clear.

DR. PAUL Scientific conscience? Or human conscience?

KRUK Is there a difference?

DR. PAUL And the truth? What about the truth?

KRUK All my research rests on a single truth.

DR. PAUL When you say "truth" you mean "lie," and vice versa. True?

KRUK False.

DR. PAUL Talking with you is a sublime experience, Mr. Kruk. A great  
intellectual pleasure. I think you'll agree that the two of us—  
just by talking, yes?—the two of us have managed to wipe out  
the distinction between what is true and what is false. Do you  
think?

KRUK I don't think you came here for a symposium on truth and false-  
hood, Dr. Paul.

DR. PAUL Look, you had an opportunity here. All you had to do was  
write the truth, and you would have had instant revenge on a sect  
of collaborators who have been betraying you since the war began.  
But no. You decide to protect them, and why? Don't you have any  
aggressive urge, you people?

A moment of silence.

KRUK You promised to send my report to Berlin.

DR. PAUL You know what your friend Freud has written about the origin  
of aggression?

KRUK That it derives from a basic impulse toward death.

DR. PAUL The death instinct, yes. So. German aggressiveness proves  
there's a death instinct in our souls, yes?

KRUK You'd know more about that than I would.

DR. PAUL While the Jews show no aggression at all, which means they  
have no death instinct, right?

KRUK Could be.

DR. PAUL You don't seem very engaged by this theory. As a Bundist—  
and an anti-Zionist—I would have thought you'd be very inter-  
ested.

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KRUK I don't think I see the connection.

DR. PAUL I think I can clarify it for you. The Zionist Jews in Palestine are completely different from you. They're an effective military organization, and they don't necessarily wait to be attacked. When I was in Palestine, I watched them make pre-emptive strikes on villages before the enemy had a chance to get organized. They're not like you, Kruk, they're no strangers to aggression. Is that the death instinct that you lack coming out in them, Kruk? Have we succeeded in transplanting it from the German soul into the soul of the new Jew?

KRUK What are you talking about? Zionism existed long before you came to power.

DR. PAUL I'm not just talking about Germany—I'm talking about two thousand years of anti-Semitism—persecution, pogroms. Please understand, Mr. Kruk: nothing in the world is more irritating than your endless capacity for suffering. It drives us wild. When we see the utter lack of killer instinct in you, we taste blood in our mouths—murder erupts in our souls. That's just the way it is—I sometimes think it's a chemical reaction. *(Pause)* The Jew only wants to survive, yes? He swallows degradation, humiliation, inhuman suffering—all just for the privilege of staying alive under appalling conditions. We rip the basic necessities of human survival out from under you and what do you do? Build a theatre. Sing and dance. All right, perhaps the German killer instinct is strong—but we're only carrying out the wishes of every nation in Europe. No other country would dare, that's all.

KRUK No theory will justify your crimes.

DR. PAUL You think not? Then why don't the Allies destroy the death camps? They're fair game, but no one touches them.

*KRUK stares at him, unable to summon a response.*

Well, never mind, time is short and I have another assignment for you. You'll survey all the monasteries in the district and catalog all the books in monastery libraries.

KRUK I'll what? What's the point of that?

DR. PAUL Point? No point. Beyond the fact that it'll keep you alive. If you work for me, you're safe.

KRUK *(Trying to get the real answer)* I don't much care whether I live or die, under the circumstances . . .

DR. PAUL How can you say that? The Eastern Front is collapsing, the Russians will invade Lithuania any day now . . .

KRUK *(Still prying)* It's an attractive vision of events, Dr. Paul. I'm afraid I don't buy it.

DR. PAUL It's true, believe me. They're sending untrained officers to the Eastern Front—men with no combat experience whatever.

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*A light begins to dawn for KRUK.*

Everyone is needed to stop the Russians.

KRUK *(Filling in the pieces)* Then why should I detain you here? You must be itching to join your brothers on the Front.

DR. PAUL We're both intelligent men, Kruk. I'd like an inventory of the monastery libraries. Is that clear?

KRUK Absolutely clear.

DR. PAUL Very good. Goodbye, Mr. Kruk. *(HE departs)*

KRUK *(Dictates)* A strange symbiosis is developing between this German and myself. I don't want to die in Ponar, he doesn't want to die on the Front. So, he's attached himself to me; I carry out a series of pointless tasks under his direction, and both of us remain alive. I spend my days traipsing from monastery to monastery in Wilna, places I'd never set foot in before. As long as it keeps me alive . . . why not?

*GENS and WEISKOPF enter.*

GENS Well, this is the spot. Three thousand square feet of warehouse space. And a sewing machine takes what—six square feet?

WEISKOPF That's not the issue here. What do I—

GENS You could put five hundred machines here.

WEISKOPF What do I need with five hundred machines? I'm trying to tell you—I don't need the machines, I don't need the workers. I can do perfectly well with—

GENS They're dumping four hundred carloads of uniforms on you. You know how much work that is? The Germans'll give us another factory, no questions asked. It's a golden opportunity.

WEISKOPF I already got a factory!

GENS What?

WEISKOPF Look, I need, at the most, fifty more operators. They can fit in the old place. With those fifty I can handle the German order, no problem.

GENS No you can't.

WEISKOPF Are you telling me my business? Do you doubt Weiskopf? Look, I worked it out exactly—I know my business. *(HE pulls a large spreadsheet from his pocket and unfolds it)*

GENS What the hell is that?

GENS The numbers. You can graph it right on a graph. Production rates per worker per hour, number of workers. I add fifty workers, I put them on split shifts, two hours additional per worker and the job gets done. It's in black and white.

GENS Let's see.

WEISKOPF Be my guest.

*HE gives GENS the spreadsheet. GENS looks it over.*

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GENS You're a thorough man, Weiskopf. You don't miss a trick.

WEISKOPF Naturally. I know my business.

*GENS tears up the spreadsheet.*

What the hell are you doing? My numbers! I spent all morning—

GENS Piss on your numbers!

WEISKOPF Don't you speak to me that way!

GENS Your numbers! You think I give a shit about saving money for the German army? Are you crazy? Five hundred more workers means five hundred more families saved. Does that make sense to you?

WEISKOPF What am I, a welfare fund now? I run a factory, it's a business. I pay a decent living wage to my employees, and what little is left over I live on.

GENS "What little is left over . . ."? The ghetto's newest millionaire! Believe me I don't care—you earned it, I'm no socialist. But even greed has its limits. Now listen to me Weiskopf: You'll build a second factory on this site, and employ five hundred workers supplied by the Ghetto Work Authority.

WEISKOPF The Ghetto Work Authority! Cripples I'll get!

GENS What are you running now, the Olympics?! You run a lousy factory stitching together lousy uniforms for the goddamn enemy. And Jewish cripples are very good at that, if it saves their lives.

WEISKOPF It is not a "lousy" factory. It's a successful business enterprise. I built it with my own hands from nothing. The factory is my life—I *am* the factory. I'm not about to let you blow it to bits with your lousy philanthropy!

GENS Tomorrow you start organizing a new factory!

WEISKOPF No, no, no, no, *NO!* Understood?

GENS Let me put it another way. It's an order!

WEISKOPF An order? You think I take orders from you? Fuck your order. You're not the ultimate authority around here.

GENS Oh really? So who is? Not you, by any chance?

WEISKOPF Kittel.

*A pause.*

GENS So help me, Weiskopf, if you speak to Kittel about this I'll—

WEISKOPF You'll what?

GENS Weiskopf.

*WEISKOPF stares at GENS defiantly.*

You will not speak to Kittel about this . . .

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*KITTEL peers out from the bundle of clothing and climbs out, standing directly between the two. HE seems surprised to find the two men here.*

KITTEL My goodness, Gens . . . what are you doing here? I've looked everywhere. You planning your next show?

GENS No show. This is now the site of Weiskopf's new factory.

KITTEL Well, that shows admirable initiative. What's wrong with the old factory?

GENS We've outgrown it. The five hundred sewing machines won't fit.

KITTEL Five hundred sewing machines . . . my, my. Growing by leaps and bounds. You planning to drape Europe in newly-minted shrouds?

GENS It's the uniforms. Four hundred carloads . . . we have a contract to fulfill.

KITTEL *(Turning to WEISKOPF)* A contract, yes. You need five hundred workers for this . . . contract?

WEISKOPF Well, maybe not five hundred . . . I mean, perhaps we could . . . uh . . . make some adjustments . . .

GENS Don't make promises you can't keep, Mr. Weiskopf.

KITTEL You seem to have a slight disagreement here.

WEISKOPF Yes, well, there are always different estimates in any situation. That is . . . *(HE begins to cough uncontrollably)*

KITTEL Weiskopf! Are you hiding something?

WEISKOPF Me? Why would I hide?

KITTEL That's good.

WEISKOPF Except—

KITTEL Except what?

*Silence.*

Is there a disagreement here or not? Answer me!

GENS No!

WEISKOPF *(Simultaneously)* Yes!

KITTEL Well, we cleared that up. *(Turning serious)* Now I want the truth. Disagreement? Weiskopf, you're a reliable businessman. How many more workers do you need? The truth, now.

WEISKOPF I need about—

KITTEL Precisely.

WEISKOPF Fifty.

KITTEL Fifty. So why this place? Gens, are you hiding something?

GENS Nothing. He needs five hundred workers, not fifty.

KITTEL *(To WEISKOPF)* Where are the figures you showed me? Your graphs?

WEISKOPF I gave them to him.

KITTEL *(Turning to GENS)* May I see them please?

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GENS I tore them up.  
 KITTEL You what?  
 GENS The figures were a joke. Mr. Kittel, the man is deluded, believe me.  
 KITTEL Is that so, Weiskopf? Did you waste half my morning on a joke?  
 WEISKOPF Mr. Kittel, if you give me an extra two hours per day per man and if you let me hand-pick fifty choice workers, if I don't have to hire cripples and half-wits, and if—  
 KITTEL If, if, if . . .  
 WEISKOPF If no one interferes with my work schedules—  
 KITTEL Your next if, Weiskopf, is your last.  
 WEISKOPF Mr. Kittel, I'm only trying to help save you money. I'm sure that if I were to speak to Göring about this—  
 KITTEL That's enough! Talk about "chutzpah"! You're worse than the dummy at your theatre—at least he made me laugh.  
 WEISKOPF You promised me a meeting with Göring!  
 KITTEL Jesus, Weiskopf, can't you take a joke? I mean, people who can't take a joke get on my nerves.  
 WEISKOPF I swear on my wife's head! Give me fifty workers and I'll finish the job. Believe me—  
 KITTEL Weiskopf, you're hysterical!  
 WEISKOPF (*Trying to calm himself*) Please. Let me explain it once more. With fifty workers . . .  
 KITTEL Gens says you're deluded. He says it's impossible.  
 WEISKOPF Well, Gens is the head of the ghetto . . .  
 KITTEL You don't say.  
 WEISKOPF I'm only trying to point out . . . he could have his own agenda, his own motives . . .  
 KITTEL Are you sweating?  
 WEISKOPF Not at all, I—

LEWAS breaks in, carrying a bottle of cognac and a salami.

LEWAS You okay chief?  
 GENS Not now!  
 LEWAS But chief, you told me—  
 GENS Piss off!  
 KITTEL What is that, Lewas?  
 LEWAS We searched his house. Weiskopf's.  
 KITTEL My, my. In Weiskopf's house. (*HE takes the bottle and looks at the label*) Contraband cognac. And Hungarian salami. Weiskopf!  
 LEWAS There's more. Rice. Olive oil, half a sack of sugar . . .  
 WEISKOPF It was left over from the party. I—  
 KITTEL Weiskopf, really. Nothing warms my heart like the sound of a man apologizing.  
 WEISKOPF All right then. I'll tell you why he wants five hundred extra workers. I'll tell you the real reason. I'll tell. The real reason—

KITTEL Gens? Free me from this leech.  
 GENS Lewas! Take care of him.

LEWAS turns to WEISKOPF and slaps him hard. WEISKOPF reaches up to protect his face and LEWAS lunges at him, pulling the buttons off his pants. His pants drop to the floor. WEISKOPF, more embarrassed than hurt, bends down and quickly retrieves his trousers. But LEWAS has taken the opportunity to get some brass knuckles on, and when WEISKOPF straightens up, holding his pants with both hands, LEWAS lets him have it again, this time tearing into his face. WEISKOPF topples to the floor with a scream. When LEWAS picks him up there is blood dripping from his face. LEWAS delivers one more battering punch to the face, and WEISKOPF goes down for good.

Lock him up.

LEWAS drags out WEISKOPF, KITTEL, who has been watching impassively, opens the cognac and takes a slug.

KITTEL Nicely done, Gens. (*HE gives GENS the bottle*) You leaved quickly, you people. Call in your gorilla.  
 GENS Lewas!

LEWAS, who has deposited the insensible WEISKOPF at the back of the stage and left him there, returns.

LEWAS Yes, chief.  
 KITTEL Bring me the theatre troupe. All of them. Now.  
 LEWAS Yes, sir!

LEWAS goes back to WEISKOPF, drags him off stage.

KITTEL Now let's get down to business. I've been getting reports. People are escaping from the ghetto.  
 GENS But that's impossible.  
 KITTEL Horseshit, Gens. It's a fact and you know it. Since the day the bomb exploded beneath the bridge—the big fire—you remember?  
 GENS Beneath the bridge, yes . . .  
 KITTEL Since that day, thirty people have disappeared from the work crews.  
 GENS What's the connection?  
 KITTEL You tell me.  
 GENS I don't get it. The Jews don't figure in it—the bridge was in a Lithuanian village. I thought . . .  
 KITTEL You could blame the Lithuanians. Well, it played out that way. didn't it? Forty Lithuanians were shot for that firebomb; let's not

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mourn them, Gens. Let's just hope they were innocent creatures whose souls are in heaven—a place where they'll be safe from the likes of you and me, right Gens? (*HE laughs, then turns serious*) Tell me Gens, what do the words "mutual responsibility" mean to you?

GENS It's a Jewish principle.  
 KITTEL Right. What does it say in the Old Testament? "One hand washes the other"? Something like that.  
 GENS All Jews answer for one another . . .  
 KITTEL Right, close enough. Well, this beautiful Jewish adage is now the law of the ghetto, Gens. If anyone disappears, his family will be shot. If a family disappears, everyone who shared a room with them will be shot. If a roomful of people disappear, everyone who lives in the same house with them will be shot. All workers will be divided into groups of ten. One runs, the other nine die. Is that clear to you, Gens?  
 GENS Clear. Yes.  
 KITTEL Oh, and as for Weiskopf's factory . . . no expansion. No new work. Any questions?

GENS remains silent.

The weasel was right, of course. His calculations were accurate down to the minute. He explained it to me clearly this morning. What are you going to do about it?

GENS Get him back?  
 KITTEL What?  
 GENS Weiskopf. Reappoint him, give him back his factory.  
 KITTEL Jesus Gens! You people are really baffling. My whole life all I hear is how smart the Jews are, how resourceful. . . . Don't you know anything about the way the world works? There's no second chance in this world, Gens. A man collapses, you bury him. You don't prop him up with a stick. You think I care about who was right and who was wrong in your pitiful squabble with the weasel? Gens, really. Learn a little German philosophy: Among reasonable people the only conversation worth having is the one about *how* to achieve a goal. Who cares about the wisdom of the goals themselves? Who's got time? There are no just goals. I justify a goal. My will. When you and Weiskopf square off, the only thing that interests me is: Whose will prevails? Who is stronger? Not even really a challenge for you, was he? He caved in the minute you poked him, like a house of cards. I mean, it wasn't even any fun. He'll be in Ponar by the weekend. You're too damn good at what you do, Gens. Now, let's see the theatre troupe.

A series of massive, discordant notes from the BAND. From out of the clothing pile there is a sudden, eerie explosion of clothes. GARMENTS wave about on the pile and cry in agony.

SRULIK'S VOICE Welcome to the last performance!

The "Finale" begins.

COSTUMES

We have been living in hell!  
 We have been living in hell!

THEY rise off the pile and begin to dance—stylized versions of the theatre troupe. The stage is eerily vacant of human form, but is filled with the swirling, dancing costumes.

(Singing)

Scalding steam!  
 Choking fumes!  
 Thrashed with sticks in the  
 Laundry rooms!

Boiled in suds!  
 Soaked in lye!  
 Jabbed with naptha until we die!  
 Ai! Ai! Ai!

Stitched—and stretched!  
 Wrung out—and hung out!  
 And always that smell!  
 That disinfectant smell  
 That nothing can dispell!  
 We have been living in hell!

But when at last  
 We are free  
 Our threads will tremble  
 With ecstasy.  
 Ai! Ai! Ai! Ai!  
 Coats and pants  
 Will find a reason  
 To sing and dance.

Ai! Ai! Ai! Ai! (*Etcetera*)

SRULIK (*Over the music, to the DUMMY*) What the hell's going on? You promised me these clothes would be neatly folded, sorted and stacked. Now they're all over the place. Can't you control them?

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The DUMMY beats the clothes. As HE sings and attacks them, THEY quietly go back to the pile and curl up, defeated.

DUMMY (*Singing*)

Ail Ail  
You must be steamed and soaked with lye.  
Ail Ail  
You know that's your fate so don't fight it.

SRULIK Shut up and lie down.

ALL No!

SRULIK No? No? Where else do you think you can go?

ALL

We will find a wardrobe,  
An armoire.  
Quality clothes need room to breathe.  
Quality clothes, that's what we are  
And quality clothes should have their own armoire.

The HASID's head and upper torso burst out of the pile.

HASID Your Honor! Mr. Police Commissioner, sir. (*HE sings*)

I read sleeves,  
I'll tell your future!  
Blessed is he who believes!  
Chet conquers Gimmel!  
Three becomes eight!  
The change in your future  
Will be great!  
Could be three days . . .  
Could be three weeks . . .  
Could be three months . . .  
Something in threes . . .  
Three million marks, if you please!

The CLOTHES begin to agitate again. THEY make the pile swarm with life, holding out their palms to be read.

COSTUMES (*Chanting*)

OUR FUTURE!  
OUR FUTURE! OUR FUTURE!

SRULIK Their future?! Jesus, Ignatz, can't these people take a joke? I thought I could depend on you. Well, learn a little German philosophy. If you want a job done well . . .

HE begins to unpack his saxophone case as the clothes continue to climb back off the pile. SRULIK pulls the saxophone from the case and begins

to gun down the COSTUMES with it. A series of rim-shots from the pit and the COSTUMES all lie quietly in and around the pile. There is dead quiet for a moment. An oversize costume of CHAJA appears.

CHAJA'S COSTUME That's enough! That's enough! (*Sings*)

We're done with suds! We're done with lye!  
We're done with naptha, you and I!  
We're going home . . . it can't be far . . .  
Home to our cozy old armoire!

COSTUMES (*Singing*)

We'll flee this damp and soapy spot  
Where some are spared and some are not.  
From fumes and steam we seek release  
So we can go and live in peace.

ALL (*Singing*)

La la la la la la la la (*Etcetera*)

DUMMY (*Singing*)

You're only rags, no more than rags!  
How dare you dream of being free!  
You're only rags, how stupid can you be?

ONE COSTUME Look!

ANOTHER COSTUME A wardrobe!

CHAJA An armoire! (*SHE sings*)

We're going home  
To our armoire . . .  
The finest clothes  
Is what we are . . .

ALL (*Singing*)

We're going home . . .  
It can't be far . . .  
Home to our cozy  
Old armoire!

We're going home

To our armoire!

The finest clothes

Is what we are!

We'll have a home . . .

A gracious home . . .

A spacious home . . .

We're going home!

We'll have a home . . .

A gracious home . . .

A spacious home . . .

We're going home!

CHAJA (*Singing*)

*Ich benk a heym.*

ALL (*Singing*)

We're going home!  
We're going home!  
We're going home!

KITTEL (*Applauds*) Bravo! Bravo!

HE whispers something to GENS. GENS exits.

All right, everybody out. I said out!

Silence, the armoire stays shut.

ROUSE!

The armoire opens and one by one the PIECES OF CLOTHING emerge.

Line up!

The CLOTHES form a line in front of KITTEL.

Very good work. A great satire. I'd like to see the actors.

DUMMY What actors? We're only clothing.

KITTEL I said I'd like to see the actors. Now!

The faces of the ACTORS slowly emerge from the clothing. One by one they become visible. But ONE DRESS remains empty. KITTEL is drawn to it.

You too, my chanteuse. I want to see your face.

Silence. It grows uncomfortable. KITTEL looks down the neck of the woman's costume. HE looks up, stunned.

It's empty. Unbelievable! I said I want to see the entire troupe! All right, you've put on a great show. Full of Jewish wit and . . . what do you call it . . . *chutzpah*? Okay. The performance ends. I applaud loudly, and what has happened? An actress—an actress already in debt to me for two-and-a-half ounces of beans—is missing. Vanished from under your nose.

Silence.

You know what this means, according to the new rules of the ghetto? Mr. Gens can tell you about "mutual responsibility," an old Jewish concept, recently adopted.

Silence.

So. A Jewish satire. Very funny. (*Suddenly, the nightclub compere\**)  
And now! A German satire: *Up Against the Wall!*

EVERYONE turns in terror and faces the back wall.

Machine-gunner, front and center!

A blood-curdling screech, and GENS enters, pushing a wheelbarrow. On it is a huge jam-pot labeled "JAM." Next to the pot is a basket loaded with sliced challah.

Machine gun here! Load! Release safeties! (*HE releases the safety of his own gun*) Actors! About face!

The ACTORS turn, their faces frozen death-masks of terror. It takes them a moment to even see the jam pot. THEY stare, bewildered. KITTEL roars with laughter.

What, you thought I'd have you shot? After that fantastic number? German satire, I said. Look in these hard times, with the Russians threatening to march in here any day, you've given me a moment of transcendent joy that is solely the province of the arts. Your virtuosity has saved your lives, and here is my thanks. Break bread with me: Fresh-baked bread and red currant jam. Please. Help yourself. Here's to your next performance! (*KITTEL takes a slice of bread, dips it in the jam and eats, bliss crossing his face*) If there's one thing I'm a sucker for it's red currant jam. Mmm-mmm. Come on, try some. Please . . . join me?

The ACTORS move hesitantly to the pot, their minds a scramble. But little by little, THEY join in, first slowly, then ravenously. THEY pack in close to the pot, jockeying for position. As THEY eat, the DUMMY sings.

DUMMY (*Singing*)

Gobble it up! Gobble it up!  
Quickly! Quickly!  
Today—you're here.  
Tomorrow you'll all disappear!  
Sooo . . .  
Quickly! Quickly! Quickly!  
Gobble it up!

\*Speaking like a master-of-ceremonies or an announcer in a revue.

As the DUMMY sings and the ACTORS eat, KITTEL steps back. In a burst of energy HE swings round, raises his gun and fires hundreds of rounds into the crowd. Pandemonium. The TROUPE goes down in a hail of bullets and ALL fall forward with their heads in the jam pot. Only SRULIK and the DUMMY survive. THEY stagger back away from the pot. SRULIK is still in his Kittel costume. As KITTEL turns to SRULIK, HE confronts a grotesque mirror image of himself.

DUMMY (Singing impudently to KITTEL)

Finish it up! Finish it up!  
Quickly! Quickly!  
The master race?  
You poor deluded man!  
Go ahead! Brag!  
Tomorrow you know what you'll be?

KITTEL shoots the PUPPET. Blood runs from his mouth. As HE falls, SRULIK's Kittel costume falls away with him. Underneath, SRULIK wears a bathrobe, as at the opening. One of his arms falls away with the Kittel costume.

SRULIK A rag!

Finish it up!  
Finish it . . .

HE stares at the audience, an old, one-armed man. The clarinet is heard again, coming closer. As the music finally drifts away . . .  
Darkness.

END OF PLAY

#### The Songs

*Shitler, Shitler* (Be Still) Lyrics by Schmerke Kaczerginski; music by Alec Volkoviski; English lyrics adapted by Jim Friedman.

*Hot Zich Mir Di Shich Zerissn* (Dance, Dance, Dance) Anonymous; English lyrics adapted by Jim Friedman.

✗ *Ich Benk A Heym* (I Long for Home) by Lev Rosenthal; English lyrics adapted by Sheldon Harnick.

*Wei Zu Di Teg* (Crazy Times) Lyrics by Katrielke Broide; music by Misha Veksler; English lyrics adapted by Sheldon Harnick.

*Isrulik* (They Call Me Izzy) Lyrics by Lev Rosenthal; music by Misha Veksler; English lyrics adapted by Sheldon Harnick.

*Frling* (Springtime) by Schmerke Kaczerginski; English lyrics adapted by Jim Friedman; music adapted by Gary William Friedman.

*Zog Nit Keinmol* (Never Say You Can't Go On) by Hirsh Glick; English lyrics adapted by Sheldon Harnick.

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#### Drama

#### Joshua Sobol

exterminations at Ponar. Kruk notes that the two of them left during the intermission.

In its first year, the theatre put on no fewer than 111 performances, selling a total of 34,804 tickets. The hall was usually packed and the shows were often sold out weeks in advance. By the time the ghetto was liquidated on September 20, 1943, the number of performances had doubled. A population of twenty thousand people had bought seventy thousand (!) tickets.

The performances included both light and serious theatre. In its two-year history, the theatre put on four variety revues based on original material written in the ghetto, mainly by Katriel Broide and Leib Rosenthal, whose poems and songs were especially popular.

The revues included programs like *Karena Yahren Un Wie Zu Die Tag* (July 1942), *Men Kann Garnicht Wissn* (October 1942), *Peshe von Reshe* (June 1943), and *Moshe Halt Sich* (August 1943). The last was staged just when deportations to Estonia were at their worst, and continued until the liquidation of the ghetto on September 20, when the songs of the revue accompanied the last of the Wilna Jews being taken to the camps.

The repertoire also included the following five plays: *Grineh Felder* by Peretz Hirschbein, first performed in August 1942; *Der Mentsh Untern Brik* by the Hungarian playwright Otto Hindig, November 1942; *Der Otzar* by David Pinski, March 1943; *Hayehudi Hanizchi* by David Pinski, first performed (in Hebrew) in June 1943; *Der Mabul* by Swedish playwright Henning Berger (August 1943), performed in the final weeks of the ghetto.

Rehearsals of *Tevya the Milkman* were well under way when the ghetto was liquidated. On its first anniversary, the theatre held a "Theatre Week in the Ghetto" at its home at 6 Rodnitski Street. This was a full-fledged festival, including a revival of the first concert in the ghetto, two performances of *Grineh Felder* and one of the *Men Kann Garnicht Wissn* revue, the Yiddish choir, recitals, light music concerts and a jam session of the jazz ensemble, as well as one symphony concert and a performance of the Hebrew choir. In its January 24 write-up on Theatre Week, the *Ghetto News* (printed under the auspices of the Judenrat) proudly noted that its pace of activity would do credit to a cultural center in any European metropolis.

Cultural activity in the Wilna ghetto was not confined to the theatre. Two days after the Wilna Jews were forced into the ghetto, a library was opened at 6 Strashon Street by Hermann Kruk, one of the cultural leaders of the Bund party, who had established hundreds of libraries and cultural centers in the Jewish communities of pre-war Poland. By September 19, with the extermination *Aktion* fully under way, 1,485 readers had registered at the library. Books were being borrowed at a rate of four hundred a day. Even during October 1941 with the *Aktionen* being implemented more intensely than ever, the library continued to supply its readers with books. On Yom Kippur (October 1, 1941) three thousand Jews were deported to Ponar. On the following day, 390 books were borrowed from

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*Dremten Feigl* (Drowning Birds) by Leah Rudwitzky; English lyrics adapted by Jim Friedman.

*Finale* (Dance of the Clothes) Lyrics by Sheldon Harnick; music by Gary William Friedman.

#### Postscript

*A Theatre in the Wilna Ghetto* by Joshua Sobol

In 1942–43, with the horrors of the Holocaust well under way, a theatre was involved in putting on plays in the Wilna ghetto. It had its debut on June 18, 1942, about four months after the Jews of Wilna were deported to the ghetto, and a mere two months after the mass extermination in which over fifty thousand of the seventy thousand Jews were massacred.

The decision to found a theatre at such an agonizing time met with a stormy response in the ghetto. In his diary on January 17, 1942, the ghetto librarian and record-keeper Hermann Kruk, a Bundist, wrote: "In a cemetery there can be no theatre." When the slogan also appeared in the alleyways of the ghetto on the following day the head of the Jewish police, Jakob Gens, warned Kruk: if any such slogans appeared again, the librarian and his cohorts would be sent to Ponar.

Whose decision was it to found a theatre in those excruciating days? At a party marking six months since the theatre was established, its director Israel Segal noted that Gens himself had been behind it. Gens, head of the Jewish police at the time, was to become sole ruler of the ghetto as of July 1942; it was his brainchild, the ghetto theatre.

Despite the strong protest of political circles and intellectuals within the ghetto, the first performance was held as scheduled on January 18, 1942. The evening's artistic success was reflected in the ticket sales as well. Kruk himself noted in his diary that the proceeds were as high as four thousand rubles, all earmarked for charity, in keeping with the slogan: "Let no man go hungry in the ghetto." As news of the opening night success spread through the ghetto, it became clear that the theatre was there to stay. Fear of offending the public in a time of anguish and grief proved to be unfounded. "People cried and laughed—and their spirits were lifted."

Driven by his conviction that normalization and productivization of the ghetto were the key to saving as many people as possible, Gens regarded the theatre not only as a source of livelihood and employment for the actors but also as an invaluable emotional outlet which would boost morale and help to normalize ghetto life. This accounts for his insistence on cultivating the theatre and turning it into a permanent feature of ghetto life. A week after opening night, there was a repeat performance. Thanks to the warm reception the theatre had had at its debut, public objections subsided—despite the presence of German and Lithuanian officers in the audience. Among these, according to Kruk, were the Nazi officer Herring and the commander of the Lithuanian militias charged with the mass

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