

MOTHER. (*Looks at her.*) You are here, Anikol . . . I was sure you had left me . . .

HANNA. I'm with you, Mom, always. Very sad, Mom?

MOTHER. Reflecting.

HANNA. Oh me?!

MOTHER. Yes, Aniko. I was thinking how difficult it will be to part from you.

HANNA. (*Hugs her around her neck with joy.*) But I'm your little girl, that's what I'll always be to you . . .

MOTHER. Where do I go from here, Aniko?

HANNA. To my home, Mom. Look at my footprints in the soft sand, the two trees I planted by the tent, and listen to my voice in the murmur of the waves . . . (*Falls on her knees near her.*) These will be beautiful days. No more wars, and evil men won't howl at little girls's faces, and daughters won't part from their mothers anymore. Remember what I told you once about the stars.

MOTHER. Yes, I do. There are stars whose light reaches the earth only after they themselves are extinguished.

HANNA. Can you see this light?

MOTHER. It's near me, Aniko, very near, now . . .

HANNA. Only when a person is alone does darkness surround him. Do you know, when they put me there, against the wall, in the courtyard, there was a moment of darkness around me, and I thought I'd collapse. Then I opened my eyes—and I no longer saw the firing squad with their rifles pointing at me—I only saw you . . . you suddenly appeared, you, and all my friends, those with whom I traveled on the road of life—and there was light around me. I knew I was going to be with them forever, always, and was no longer afraid. (*The song "Eli, Eli, shelo igamer leolam" is heard from afar; the sound grows increasingly louder. Hanna gets up. Her Mother, too. They stand for a while looking at each other. Hanna begins to walk away slowly, as if ascending, until she disappears. The Mother is left alone as she follows Hanna with her eyes.*)

CURTAIN

LIT 5173 / Roskies

Ben-Zion Tomer

Ben-Zion Tomer was born in Poland in 1928. He went to Palestine by way of Russia and Tehran. He fought in the 1948 War of Independence and was held captive in Jordan. Tomer studied philosophy and literature at the Hebrew University. He edited a literary journal and taught at various educational institutions. A writer of prose, poetry, and plays, Tomer won the Prime Minister's Prize for literature.

His major works are *River Returning* (1959/poetry), *On the Equator* (1969/poetry), *Via Salt* (1978/prose), and *Children of the Shadows* (1962). *Children of the Shadows* has appeared in English, German, Spanish, and French.

Children of the Shadows

1962

(Translated by Hillel Halkin)

Characters

YORAM, twenty-eight years old.

NURIT, twenty-six years old.

DR. SIGMUND RABINOWITZ, fifty-five years old.

BALLOON SELLER, sixty years old.

BERELE, a newcomer, twenty-eight years old.

DUBI, twenty-eight years old.

HELENKA, Yanek's wife, twenty-six years old.

YANEK, Yoram's brother, thirty-seven years old.

WAITER

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PASSERSBY
PARTICIPANTS IN A PARTY

ACT I

Scene 1

The roar of the sea. Sunbeams dance on the waves. The stage is empty. After a few seconds, enough to permit the audience to take in the scene, Sigmund Rabinowitz enters from the direction of the sea, his legs straddling the railing of the boardwalk. In his right hand he carries a briefcase. With one foot over the railing he turns to look back at the sea. He crosses over to a bench and sits down, producing from his briefcase a notebook and a decrepit stuffed toy dog. Enter Dubi, passing by.

SIGMUND. Shameless mortal, sinful one. Give me a pound and I'll be gone. (*Dubi brushes him off with a self-assured gesture and walks away. Sigmund returns to his bench. The waiter appears in front of the sidewalk café. From offstage come the cries of melon vendors blended with phonograph music coming from the café. The waiter goes back inside. Enter the Balloon Seller. Sigmund is busy writing. The Balloon Seller sits down on the far end of the bench. Sigmund does not notice him. The Balloon Seller inches up to him and tries to peek at the notebook.*)

SIGMUND. (*Noticing him.*) Beat it!

BALLOON SELLER. It's not your bench.

SIGMUND. It's my notebook.

BALLOON SELLER. I haven't stolen it.

SIGMUND. But you were pecking.

BALLOON SELLER. I wasn't pecking . . . (*He takes a peek. Sigmund goes on writing. The Balloon Seller peeks again.*) What are you writing?

SIGMUND. My will.

BALLOON SELLER. (*Alarmed.*) No! You're sick? Going to die?

SIGMUND. To kill myself.

BALLOON SELLER. No!

SIGMUND. Right now . . . if you don't beat it.

BALLOON SELLER. Whew, you scared me . . . I can see you're fond of jokes . . . Haven't we met before?

SIGMUND. (*Examining him suspiciously.*) I hope not.

BALLOON SELLER. What's the matter? It's nice to meet old friends. . . . I'm from Bezchuchovitsa. Ever hear of it?

SIGMUND. No.

BALLOON SELLER. Near Lvov.

SIGMUND. No.

BALLOON SELLER. It's a very nice place . . . (*After a pause.*) You scared me. To kill yourself. . . . Suicides don't go to Heaven. Do you believe in Heaven?

SIGMUND. As much as in this world.

BALLOON SELLER. I believe all right, even in the resurrection of the dead.

SIGMUND. Earth is Heaven enough for me.

BALLOON SELLER. You're not afraid to die?

SIGMUND. Afraid to die? Not at all, not at all—that is, I haven't been afraid up till now; but if there really were such a thing as Heaven and the Resurrection, I certainly would be.

BALLOON SELLER. I don't get it.

SIGMUND. Did I say you did?

BALLOON SELLER. Do you have a family?

SIGMUND. Would you kindly remove yourself and stop interrogating me?

BALLOON SELLER. I'm not interrogating you. . . . I saw a Jew sitting by himself, I sat down.

SIGMUND. I'm not by myself.

BALLOON SELLER. You're lucky.

SIGMUND. Praise be to God.

BALLOON SELLER. Do you live in Tel Aviv?

SIGMUND. Here.

BALLOON SELLER. Here where?

SIGMUND. Here is here. (*Points to the bench.*)

BALLOON SELLER. On the bench?

SIGMUND. Under it.

BALLOON SELLER. I live in a shack . . . not far from here . . . it's fine in summer, but in winter . . . you're not afraid to sleep all alone?

SIGMUND. I don't sleep all alone.

BALLOON SELLER. I don't get it.

SIGMUND. I don't doubt that. . . . Shall I tell you a secret? You are a fortunate man.

BALLOON SELLER. Me?

SIGMUND. You.

BALLOON SELLER. I don't think . . .

SIGMUND. That's why you're fortunate.

BALLOON SELLER. I really don't get it.



AND THE BUSH וְהַסִּנֵּה
WAS NOT אִינְנוּ
CONSUMED אָכַל

SIGMUND. And so you're fortunate. It says somewhere: blessed are the poor of brain, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven . . .

BALLOON SELLER. Then you do believe in the Kingdom of Heaven?

SIGMUND. Listen, Reb Yid, you have your balloons, why don't you go and sell them?

BALLOON SELLER. Who to? It's autumn . . . the cafés are empty . . . in summer it's fine . . . people . . . lots of people . . . children . . . they even made up a song about my balloons . . . (Sings.)

Uncle Balloon

Has balloons to sell

Uncle Balloon

We think he's really swell.

Little devils. But in the winter . . . it's so depressing . . . and boring.

SIGMUND. Talking is boring.

BALLOON SELLER. If you were as lonely as I am, you wouldn't say that.

SIGMUND. You're right. . . . It's a pity you don't sell loneliness instead of balloons. I'd buy some loneliness from you. (He gets up.) (Enter Yoram. He sits down in the café. Sigmund stares at him as if bewitched. He buries his face in his hands as if trying to remember something.)

BALLOON SELLER. What's the matter with you? (Sigmund brushes him off rudely. He gets up quickly as if to walk off, then comes back. In the meantime, the Balloon Seller moves to another bench.)

WAITER. (To Yoram.) What will you have?

YORAM. Espresso. (He takes a letter from his pocket and reads.)

WAITER. (Returning with the coffee.) Here you are. . . . (He cleans a nearby table.) Don't I know you from somewhere?

YORAM. I used to come here during the war. During the truce.

WAITER. That's right, that's right. An officer. With a jeep. Oh, you used to enjoy yourselves. Now none of you come here any more. Maybe you'd like some music? We have lots of records—wartime hits, I don't remember the names.

YORAM. No, thanks, don't bother. (Waiter arranging the chairs.) You used to clear tables here, if I'm not mistaken.

WAITER. Yes, I was a newcomer then, now the café is mine, all mine . . .

YORAM. Then you've done well for yourself.

WAITER. Yes, some German compensation money and some brains. In Yiddish we say brains are a gift from God. You speak Yiddish?

YORAM. No.

WAITER. You know, sir, when one of you guys comes here, something in my heart . . . now you don't come anymore. But we're as crowded as ever. In the summer. Lots of noise, but nobody knows how to have a good time. (Yoram looks at his watch.) She'll come, she'll come all right. That's how girls are, they come late, but they come.

YORAM. Maybe I'm waiting for him and not for her?

WAITER. When you wait for a him, you wait differently. I'm an old pro. In the old country, I worked in a big hotel. (He leaves. Enter Nurit. Yoram puts the letter in his pocket and gets up to greet her. They shake hands.)

NURIT. It's strange to see you out of uniform.

YORAM. And to see you without braids.

NURIT. When did you arrive?

WAITER. (Enters.) Something for the lady?

NURIT. *Café au lait.* (The waiter disappears.) So you've really, really left the kibbutz?

YORAM. Are you surprised?

NURIT. A little . . . you were so passionately fanatic . . . like a monk.

YORAM. The . . . frock is not the man. And how are you?

NURIT. I've cut off my braids, as you see, and gave away my jumpers to the maid. How do you like my new hairdo? Is it nice?

YORAM. I'm not very good with compliments.

NURIT. I know . . . it's all written down in your personal file, Captain.

YORAM. There's a lot written down in our personal files. They'd best gather dust.

NURIT. If they become dust, what will become of us?

YORAM. That is the question.

NURIT. And what do you do now, Hamlet?

YORAM. Hamlet?

NURIT. That's what they called you, Captain. You never knew?

YORAM. Never.

NURIT. Dubi gave you the name. He said that when you studied *Hamlet* in school you had all kinds of theories about it. . . . Do you have any plans?

YORAM. I'll manage somehow. After all, I'm not a newcomer.

NURIT. Do you have a place to stay?

YORAM. Why have they chopped down the old woods by the river? Maybe at Dani's. Do you ever see him?

NURIT. Hardly at all. Every Independence Day. Wherever the coffee still flows—there you'll find Dani. Haven't you any relatives in town?

YORAM. No.

NURIT. In that case, you have even less than an immigrant—you don't even have the Jewish Agency. And money?

YORAM. Enough. For two weeks.

NURIT. And no profession, of course. A professional idealist and warrior. You should have stayed in the kibbutz, or gone back to the army. You're like a fish in water there.

YORAM. That's why I'm trying to live on land.

NURIT. You're likely to dry up.

YORAM. Hey, balloons!

BALLOON SELLER. (Gets up off his bench, approaches.) Balloons! Balloons!

YORAM. (To Nurit.) Instead of roses. How much does one cost?

BALLOON SELLER. Ten pennies.

YORAM. And how many balloons do you have?

BALLOON SELLER. (Counts them.) Ten.

YORAM. I'll take them all.

BALLOON SELLER. All of them?

YORAM. All of them.

BALLOON SELLER. If you buy them all, what will I do all evening?

YORAM. You don't want to sell?

BALLOON SELLER. I do, it's just that when I have my balloons I can walk up to people, I can talk to them. The night is so long. (Yoram takes out a bill.) Here you are, mister, they're yours. (He gives Yoram all the balloons.) I'm all alone here. My family . . .

YORAM. All of it?

BALLOON SELLER. Yes, dead. From typhus. A wife and three children. In Samarkand.

YORAM. (Somehow excited.) Samarkand?

BALLOON SELLER. You know where that is?

YORAM. (Reservedly.) I've heard of it. Where is it?

BALLOON SELLER. Not far from Tashkent, the city of bread, they call it. Bread . . . what a famine we had there, what a famine . . . you were born here, weren't you? Can tell right away . . . the ones who were born here don't know where it is. Would you like to see pictures of my children?

YORAM. No, we believe you.

NURIT. (She takes the balloons from Yoram, hands half of them back to the balloon seller.) Five will be enough.

BALLOON SELLER. You don't want them all?

NURIT. What will you do all evening? (The balloon seller takes some change from his pocket and begins to count it.)

YORAM. You can keep the change.

BALLOON SELLER. (Proudly.) I'm not a beggar. Half-a-pound, please. (He leaves the money on the table, takes five balloons from Nurit, and disappears.)

NURIT. They're so quick to take offense.

YORAM. Each one of them has twenty pounds of TNT in his heart.

NURIT. He thought you were born here.

YORAM. They all think so.

NURIT. Do they? Why did you buy all those balloons?

YORAM. I don't remember anymore.

NURIT. In order to pop them?

YORAM. They are too lovely for that, it would be cruel and unfair. There's an alternative.

NURIT. Being?

YORAM. To keep them until they shrink by themselves. And still another: to let them fly away and disappear. Nurit, it's good to see you . . .

NURIT. Really? (Yoram lays his hand on hers, she pulls away.) I have to go.

YORAM. I know it's too late to ask for forgiveness.

NURIT. Forgiveness . . . after two years. . . . I believe that's a new word in your vocabulary.

YORAM. Many words have died in the meantime. Through those two years, I kept wondering.

NURIT. I can still remember that morning in the kibbutz. I came to stay with you for good. I waited for you to say just one word, but you, all you had to say was "Nurit, go home." That was all.

YORAM. I couldn't Nurit, something gave inside me, everything. . . . Suddenly you came, to my home which wasn't a home anymore and from which there was nowhere to go, which I still wasn't ready to leave. . . . I wanted to find it all over again, or to lose it all, but to lose it by myself, just me alone . . .

NURIT. And you thought that for two years I'd be a lily-white maiden, shut up in her castle, waiting for an eagle, or at least a dove, to bring her a letter from her prince charming far away . . . two hours away by bus. . . . I have to go. Someone's waiting for me at home. . . . (Vengefully.) Dubi! Would you like to see him? Let's go. (Yoram gets up. He leaves a bill on the table. As they are about to go, Sig

mund appears. He stares fixedly at Yoram, who, unlike Nurit, does not notice him.)

NURIT. Who's that?

YORAM. Who?

NURIT. That man.

YORAM. How should I know? Some nut.

NURIT. (Releasing the balloons, which slowly rise and disappear.) Let's go. (They leave. Music is heard from the café. A man enters and sits by the table, newspaper in hand.)

SIGMUND. (following them. To himself.) What a resemblance! (He follows them offstage.)

Scene 2

Nurit's room. A bookcase featuring the collected works of various authors. A small table. Two armchairs. As the light goes on in the room the music from the café gradually fades out and some quiet music of Bach's fades in. Yoram and Dubi are seated by the table, on which there is a chess board. They are silent. Nurit enters, wearing an apron. As she approaches Dubi, he strokes her back; she slips away. Yoram notices, though his head is lowered over the chess pieces. Nurit leaves. When Yoram and Dubi speak, it is with the tone of people recollecting something from long ago.

YORAM. No, the pawn here was mine. The queen is yours.

DUBI. How do you manage to remember?

YORAM. It was one of those games that you don't forget.

DUBI. It was on Hill 74. How many years ago was that? Seven?

YORAM. The board and the pieces haven't changed at all.

DUBI. And the chess players?

YORAM. More or less the same.

DUBI. Nurit was in the next room, too. (From the kitchen comes the sound of something heavy falling.)

YORAM. Nurit, are you all right? (To Dubi.) The hut shook with every explosion.

DUBI. Shall we begin?

YORAM. We might as well. Who moved last, do you remember?

DUBI. (After hesitating.) . . . I did.

YORAM. Right.

DUBI. It's your move then.

YORAM. It's my move. (He moves.) There.

DUBI. (Moving.) Can I take that back?

YORAM. It's just like it was then. . . . How did I answer you? Yes, you can take it back, as long as you've got somewhere to go to.

DUBI. I had a place to go then, Green Fields.

YORAM. A lovely name, Green Fields.

DUBI. It was a lovely kibbutz. . . . I said to you, "If you ever feel like it, come join us."

YORAM. Will you have me?

DUBI. Well, you're not exactly one of the "gang," you're a little green, but we'll give it a try.

NURIT. (Entering.) Anybody care for some coffee? (The two of them burst into laughter.) What are you laughing for?

YORAM. We recalled the last game we played, up on the hill, and the conversation we had, and you came in exactly the same place you did then.

NURIT. Is the game still on?

YORAM. Uh-huh . . .

DUBI. This time we'll finish it, right Nurit?

NURIT. (To Yoram.) You drink it black and without sugar, if I remember correctly.

YORAM. You haven't forgotten.

DUBI. And I take milk and three spoonfuls of sugar. (To Nurit, who is standing in the doorway.) And turn off that Bach of yours. It makes me jumpy.

NURIT. With a whole lot of sugar. (To Yoram.) These kibbutz boys always need something to suck on. (She leaves.)

YORAM. When did you leave Green Fields?

DUBI. It's been a while. Three years ago.

YORAM. Do you ever go back to visit?

DUBI. Hardly at all. You know how it is.

YORAM. Don't you ever visit your parents?

DUBI. They've also left. My father is now a big shot in the immigration department.

YORAM. And you?

DUBI. I'm his assistant.

YORAM. (Bursting into laughter.) You?

DUBI. What's wrong with that?

YORAM. Nothing. . . . I only happened to remember the way you used to talk about the new pastoral age . . . about Arab dances, artesian wells, horses and camels . . . campfires. The mysterious powers of fire . . . about how one shouldn't allow anyone over the age of thirteen into the country . . . so as not to nip our reawakened primi-

tivism in the bud. . . . Do you remember? I was fourteen years old when I came here.

DUBI. That extra year will always count against you.

YORAM. I suppose you're right. (He laughs again.) So now you're helping gather our Jewish brethren from the corners of the earth?

DUBI. As if I give a damn. . . . At least I can get to Europe every once in a while instead of rotting away forever in this provincial hole.

YORAM. Now that's another story! That I can understand.

DUBI. We'll be going away to Paris for two years pretty soon.

YORAM. Who's we?

DUBI. Nurit and I. (Nurit enters with the tray of coffee. Two cups.)

NURIT. (Giving Dubi a cup.) With. (To Yoram.) Without.

DUBI. Get dressed. We'll be late for the movie.

NURIT. I've invited Yoram for dinner.

YORAM. (He is surprised, then understands.) Don't put yourselves out.

DUBI. I'm sorry I don't have another ticket. (To Nurit.) Are you off?

NURIT. (Angrily.) I've invited Yoram for dinner. (She leaves.)

DUBI. Okay! I'm going.

YORAM. I'm awfully sorry.

DUBI. It's all right, I have to go.

YORAM. (Looks at his watch.) We've still got time. Come on, let's finish the game.

DUBI. (Angrily.) Some other time. (In a tone ostensibly friendly, but actually haughty and ironic.) Nurit told me you're looking for work. For someone like you, I can always find something—with you speaking a couple of languages and being acquainted with the problems of immigrants.

YORAM. No thanks, I have plenty of offers. . . . But thanks anyway.

DUBI. It's just that . . . for old time's sake.

YORAM. I know how you feel, and I'm grateful . . . really . . .

DUBI. Well, that's that. I'm going. Whose move is it?

YORAM. Mine. . . . Some other time.

DUBI. Fine, sure, it's about time we finished this game. (He steps toward the kitchen door, then turns back and leaves.)

YORAM. (Following after Dubi, who leaves without saying good-bye.) So long, Dubi. (Dubi doesn't answer. Yoram is left by himself on stage. He plays with his and Dubi's chess pieces.)

NURIT. (To Yoram.) I'll be right back. (She leaves.)

YORAM. (Speaking as it were, first to Dubi's chess pieces, then to himself.) Can you have that move back? You can have it back! If you've got somewhere to go. But you haven't, Dubi, you haven't. Yes, now you're on horseback. But it doesn't matter. I'll get you off that high horse. All the king's riders . . . (Outside, on the boardwalk, Dubi crosses the stage. He remains standing by the darkened café. He lights a cigarette. Enter Nurit.)

NURIT. Dubi, there's something I have to say to you.

DUBI. Me, too. I don't want to see him around here anymore.

NURIT. That's no way to behave.

DUBI. What right have you got to talk? He's always tagging after me, like a puppy. There, it was Naomi; here, it's . . . (Nurit moves to the railing. Dubi follows her. They engage in conversation, as it were, while Yoram speaks the following monologue.)

YORAM. I'll never forgive you that night in the dormitory. I was dreaming of Samarkand. After the typhus. I was hungry. I leaned against a wall and the wall collapsed. "Who's making that racket?," you asked. "Let him be, he's dreaming," Naomi said. "Then let him stop dreaming. I can sleep without dreams!" I was afraid to fall asleep because I might shout again. Always, whenever I couldn't fall asleep, you used to snore. You lay there and snored. Every time. You slept so soundly. At peace with yourself like a block of wood. And as stupid as a block of wood.

DUBI. (Continuing, as it were, their previous conversation.) No.

NURIT. Yes, Dubi. I'm not going with you to Paris.

DUBI. You mean . . .

NURIT. Yes.

DUBI. You . . . love him?

NURIT. What difference does it make? If he hadn't turned up, I wouldn't have gone with you anyhow. You were so sure of yourself, you never bothered to ask me. Good night, Dubi. (She starts in the direction of home. Dubi takes the tickets from his pocket and tears them up. He stands there for a moment, thinking, then disappears.)

YORAM. (Moving one of his pieces.) Move. Stop dreaming, Dubi. I've got myself, but where have you got to go to? You haven't got anywhere, Dubi nowhere! I've cut you down to size, Dubi. A chip off the old block. Mate! (He scatters the chess pieces. Nurit enters.) I'm sorry.

NURIT. Soon we'll eat dinner. (They look each other in the eyes. Again, Bach's music.)

BLACKOUT

Scene 3

The café. Daylight.

BERELE. How come nobody from our town knows that you're here in Israel?

YORAM. I don't know. . . . You say you saw my parents a month ago?

BERELE. Approximately. . . . They're kind of angry with you.

YORAM. With me? Why?

BERELE. They said you hardly ever write.

YORAM. You really haven't told me anything about yourself yet.

BERELE. What's there to tell? It's pretty tough being alone. . . . It's a funny thing, when I got on the boat I thought there was nothing between me and Israel but the sea. Now I know that there's still another sea that I must cross; a sea of new immigrants . . .

YORAM. You've . . . got no one? . . . I mean . . .

BERELE. It's all right. I know what you mean. I've already noticed that only here people are afraid to talk about these things, but that's obviously my situation. Obviously.

YORAM. (*Sipping his drink.*) I guess you're in need of a job. (*He takes out a pencil and notebook.*) I'll give you a note to a friend of mine—I'm sure everything will turn out all right . . .

BERELE. Thanks, Yossele, thanks.

YORAM. Don't talk nonsense. . . . By the way . . . my name now is Yoram.

BERELE. Since when? To me you'll always be Yossele. Do you know that two more of the old gang, Hersch and Wolf, are here in Israel?

YORAM. Wolf?

BERELE. What? You don't remember Wolf? The tall one . . . with the . . . And now you, too. . . . I'm meeting them tonight, will you come along? There's so much to talk about. . . . It's been such a long time.

YORAM. I'm sorry, but I won't be in town tonight. Look, give me their address, I'll see to it that . . .

BERELE. It's a shame. . . . Your mother gave me a sweater for you. Where should I bring it?

YORAM. Could you maybe leave it . . . here? At the café? The waiter will give it to me. . . . I mean . . . well, I don't have a permanent address yet.

BERELE. Right, I understand . . . (*He sips the drink.*) Your parents must have gotten their visas by now.

YORAM. Yes, two weeks ago. They're coming soon.

BERELE. You're lucky. You always were lucky.

YORAM. Would you like another drink? . . . No . . . I'll just finish writing this note. . . . Sorry, I've got to be on my way now. . . . Try this address, and I'm sure everything will be alright . . . (*He hands over the note.*) In a couple of days I'll have the time, we'll definitely get together; in the meantime, give my regards to Hersch and Wolf. . . . I'll get in touch with you all. (*He gets up, as does Berelé. Yoram accompanies him and adds, after they have already parted.*) Berelé. . . . Maybe you need some money? (*Berelé cringes inside, lowers his head.*) Twenty pounds, okay? (*He pushes the bills into Berelé's hand.*)

BERELE. Thanks.

YORAM. Forget it . . .

BERELE. I'll let you have it back from my first paycheck. (*He turns sharply and disappears in the direction of the boardwalk. Yoram follows him with his eyes.*)

BLACKOUT

Scene 4

In this scene Yoram talks at length about his past, but this must be acted concretely, as if events were actually taking place in the present. The lights pick out Sigmund, who is staring at Yoram and Nurit's window. Noises come from the boardwalk: the sound of waves, "Hot corn!", etc. The waiter chases Sigmund from the front of the café. All this is mimed. A half-empty glass of whiskey that has been left on a table is gulped down by Sigmund as soon as the waiter disappears. As in the previous scene, the man with the newspaper is seen onstage. The light in Nurit's room is intimate and warm.

YORAM. (*As if continuing a conversation.*) So Naomi said, "Listen, Yossele, from now on your name is Yoram."

NURIT. How old were you when you came here?

YORAM. Fourteen.

NURIT. Half of what you are now.

YORAM. Half there and half here.

NURIT. When it comes to the first half, I'm completely in the dark.

YORAM. The dark side of the moon.

NURIT. Take me there.

YORAM. You'll end up like Lot's wife.

NURIT. Take me there.

YORAM. It's a long story.

NURIT. We have a long night ahead of us.

YORAM. You won't understand anyway.

NURIT. Thanks for the compliment . . .

YORAM. You know what I mean.

NURIT. I know. Tell me about it.

YORAM. The night isn't long enough. Nurit, come here. (*She sits by his side.*) Aren't you afraid to marry me? You hardly know me at all. . . . It's strange, other girls never wanted to know more than they knew, and so they only knew the second half of the story.

NURIT. Perhaps because that's as far as you ever let them go? (*She gets up.*) Now you're trying to get out of it again.

YORAM. Perhaps. Since the day I came here, I've tried to eat from the tree of forgetfulness. Do you remember your childhood?

NURIT. Everything.

YORAM. And sometimes, I remember nothing . . . isolated fragments . . . nothing whole or in one piece.

NURIT. Is changing a name enough to forget?

YORAM. No. (*He gets up.*) But it's enough to make believe. Whoever wants to change his biography in this country, changes his name. (*As if to himself.*) From now on, your name is Yoram. Yoram! Wasn't I something?! (*He laughs sarcastically, then, as if were, imitating Naomi's voice.*) You changed so much since you came. Now if you'd only learn to dance a polka you'd be just like the rest of us. Just like the rest of us! I'll never forget that evening in the dormitory. I was waiting on tables along with Dubi and Naomi. I was cleaning up. Huge amounts of food had been left on the table. Enough to have lasted my parents a whole year over there. "What should I do with what's left?" I asked. "I throw it out!" Dubi said. "I can't!" I said. The two of them began to laugh as if I had told a good joke. Suddenly I started to hate myself. Them. Myself. The memories that kept me from being one of them. Do you know what Dubi was? What I wouldn't have given to have one-quarter of that? Try to imagine: the first-born child of the kibbutz. Captain of the soccer team. The best dancer around, and if that wasn't enough—a good tractor-driver and an excellent speaker. A very important person in the Jezreel Valley. The prince of the valley. And Naomi was his girl. Inside me, I began to murder Yossele. Yossele is dead! Long live Yoram! A year later, I was king, Naomi was in my arms. I learned to dance the polka. I learned the ropes. All the ropes. . . . Let's go to the movies!

NURIT. (*Going over to the pantry.*) Will you have a drink? (*She returns with a bottle and two glasses and pours drinks.*)

YORAM. Have you spoken to your father?

NURIT. Everything will be all right.

YORAM. I want to know what he said.

NURIT. That you should rejoin the army. Security, my dear, young love, my dear, but even the young need security.

YORAM. He's like all those in this generation who never played at being soldiers, now we've become their toys. Actually, I don't blame him. What have I got? A profession?

NURIT. Take Gilcad's offer.

YORAM. You're kidding. You're prepared to live in a little town full of immigrants?

NURIT. I'll live with you.

YORAM. You'd be a stranger there.

NURIT. And you?

YORAM. I am already a stranger.

NURIT. Then there's nothing to worry about, stranger. The ceremony will be in two weeks.

YORAM. You have a magnificent way of putting things.

NURIT. You're not telling me anything I haven't heard before, but if you think I'm something, you should listen to my father. (*Imitating him.*) Yoram? A lovely guy. Back then, during the war, his picture was in all the papers. Yes, indeed, well I remember. . . . The special atmosphere of the Holy Land. . . . The speech that I gave the day his shipload of immigrants arrived on our shores! Published verbatim in all the papers. The special atmosphere of the Holy Land. . . . Simply marvelous. . . . Along came a bent-over refugee lad. . . . Perfectly marvelous.

YORAM. Along came a bent-over refugee . . . come on, let's have a rhyme for it.

NURIT. They bathed him all over in D.D.T.

YORAM. Not bad, not bad at all:

Along came a bent-over refugee,

They bathed him all over in D.D.T.

And that was the last of the refugee.

(*The doorbell rings. Dubi enters.*)

NURIT. Oh, is that you?

DUBI. I can only stay a few minutes. The taxi is waiting for me. I came to get my small valise.

YORAM. I'm going down to get cigarettes. I'll be back in a minute. (*He leaves.*)

DUBI. Are you happy?
 NURIT. We're getting married soon. Will you come?
 DUBI. Why not? If I'm in the country.
 NURIT. It's in two weeks.
 DUBI. Then I can make it.
 NURIT. Dubi. Try not to be mad at me. . . . I know that . . .
 DUBI. Me? Mad? At you? They say one shouldn't carry coals to Newcastle or come to Paris with a woman around one's neck. There's one thing, though, I still would like to know. Why did you have to pick me, was it to get over him?
 NURIT. Dubi, it's pointless to talk about it now.
 DUBI. Still, I think I have the right to know, don't I?
 NURIT. Maybe it was because . . . because you never liked him. I tried not to like him, too.
 DUBI. You're wrong. I never hated him. I only felt sorry for him.
 NURIT. I don't think he needs your pity, Dubi. . . . You always liked to call him Hamlet so you could sneer at him. But some of us possess the strength to be weak, too.
 DUBI. Thanks.
 NURIT. There was really no need to open up old wounds.
 DUBI. I guess it would flatter you if I were sore all over, but I don't bleed so easily. . . . I have to go. *(He steps into the next room and returns with the valise.)*
 NURIT. You'll come?
 DUBI. Of course. Good night, Nurit. *(He leaves, Yoram returns.)*
 NURIT. Yoram, come here . . . do you love me? *(He hugs her tightly.)* Yoram, the window's open. *(She slips out of his embrace and goes to close the windows.)* Come here. *(Yoram crosses over to her.)* Look down below. *(Yoram looks.)* He's looking at us again. Who is he?
 YORAM. How am I supposed to know?
 NURIT. He saw you and ran. Yesterday, I met him on the stairs. He was reading the names on the mailboxes. *(She looks out of the window again.)* Look, he's back.
 YORAM. I'll go down after him.
 NURIT. Don't go. Are you sure you don't know him? He's always hung around the boardwalk, but he's never followed me before. I don't like it.
 YORAM. You're not getting superstitious, are you?
 NURIT. I certainly am. . . . When I see a black cat . . .
 YORAM. Don't worry about it. He's crazy-looking, all right, but he seems harmless. *(He leaves. Nurit keeps looking at Sigmund through the*

window. Sigmund continues to look up at her. At first he is unaware that Yoram is approaching. When he notices him, he glances at him and takes a step forward, then suddenly swivels around and disappears.)

YORAM. *(Following Sigmund.)* Hey, you! God, what eyes, they shine in the dark like a cat's!

NURIT. *(The telephone rings. She answers.)* Hello? To whom? Yoram Eyal? There must be some mistake. . . . Who? Uzi? How are you? . . . Now what leads you to suspect that Yoram must be here? . . . *(She laughs.)* Really, I'm not kidding. . . . Okay, Uzi, I'll call him. *(She yells to Yoram as if he were in the next room, although he is by now standing beside her.)* Yoram, Uzi!

YORAM. *(As from the next room.)* Coming! *(He takes the receiver.)* Uzi? . . . Yeah. . . . Yeah. . . . Branch manager? But I. . . . How. . . . Listen, old buddy, we're going to hit every bar in town tonight, we're going to get plastered. It'll be like after—what was the name of that god-damn Arab village? . . . That's right, Abu Shusba. . . . The wedding? . . . Nurit calls it the ceremony. . . . In two weeks. . . . What time should I come over? . . . Nine? . . . I'll come right away. . . . Uzi, you wouldn't feel insulted if I thanked you, would you? See you, Uzi. *(He hangs up, goes over to Nurit, picks her up and circles the room with her.)* Did you hear that? *(They tumble onto the sofa. Nurit struggles free and sits down.)*

NURIT. And now I've got a surprise for you. Do you like this apartment?

YORAM. I don't get it. I thought you wanted me to take the job Gilead offered me.

NURIT. Father's built a private house. In a week they're flying this coop.

YORAM. Why didn't you tell me?

NURIT. I didn't want you to feel dependent on father or me.

YORAM. Nurit. *(He hides his head in his hands.)* You're. . . . I'll never forget this.

NURIT. Tomorrow we're going to order new furniture. We'll get rid of these historical relics. What am I going to do with all these collected works? *(Yoram looks at his watch.)* Which do you like better: bright furniture or dark? *(Unable to concentrate, Yoram goes over to the window. He half-listens.)* I saw some lovely African masks in the flea-market. Black. Yoram, you're not even listening.

YORAM. I'm listening, Nurit.

NURIT. No, you're not listening.

YORAM. It's late, I've got to go to Uzi's.

NURIT. I think you're in a bad mood.
 YORAM. Look, I. . . . I'm just not used to . . . since I was eleven, all I ever thought about was a bed to sleep in, a roof over my head. . . . And now all of a sudden, a home . . . furniture . . . I've got to go. *(He kisses her hurriedly and leaves.)*
 NURIT. *(She sits on the sofa, thinking to herself.)* When he should be happy—he's sad. When he's sad—he's sarcastic. Like a Chinese doll. *(She plays with two dolls that are on the bed. To one of them.)* Isn't he a darling? Say he is! *(She brings the dolls together.)* What do you know about it, he's awfully cute. All he needs is a home. That's all.

BLACKOUT

Scene 5

On the boardwalk. The café is lit up with colorful Chinese lanterns. The stage is foggy. Two couples from the party stroll outside for some fresh air, to the accompaniment of a steamy jazz tune. Another couple slips into the café. The dance music and the noise of the party cease. The stage is now bathed in red moonlight, though still shrouded in fog. The music switches to blues. One of the partygoers, drunkenly, takes a harmonica from his pocket and blows two sad chords. Berle emerges from the café, followed by Yoram.

YORAM. Hey, Officer! Stop that thief! Berle, do you remember how we used to punish quitters when we were kids?

BERELE. We dunked them three times in water, with their clothes on.

YORAM. Well, if you quit now I'm going to dunk you in three bottles of wine.

BERELE. I've got to get back to the precinct, I'm on duty tonight.

YORAM. Don't hand me any stories, Officer, you already told me that somebody was standing in for you tonight.

BERELE. Look, Yossele, I don't feel, how would I say. . . . They're all in there. You know what I mean.

YORAM. So what if they are there? They're just like you and me, they're like everybody all over the world. Take my word for it, they hollered when they were born and they wet their pants the same as we did.

BERELE. At any rate, that's how they seem to me. My girlfriend said something smart to me yesterday: the insecure feel secure only among the insecure.

YORAM. Why didn't you bring her along?

BERELE. She felt embarrassed. To tell the truth, so did I. . . .

YORAM. From a distance every cat looks like a tiger. Come in, no one's going to eat you.

BERELE. I'd better get back to work. Have you heard from your parents?

YORAM. *(He takes a letter from his pocket, shows it to Berle.)* This. They'll be here in two weeks.

BERELE. You're lucky. *(Nurit enters from the café.)*

NURIT. *(To Yoram.)* I've finally found you. *(To Berle.)* Are you leaving?

BERELE. I've got to get back to work. *(Kisses her hand.)* Once more, congratulations! *(He leaves.)*

NURIT. It's so foggy!

YORAM. Yes, it's foggy.

NURIT. You sound sad. *(She strokes his hair. He remains silent.)* Let's go inside . . .

YORAM. You go . . . I'm not . . . I'll come right away.

NURIT. But right away, all right? *(She goes.)*

YORAM. Nurit! *(She returns.)* I've something to tell you.

NURIT. Happy or sad? If it's sad—not tonight. What did you want to tell me? *(She sees the letter in his hands.)* Who's that from?

YORAM. I'll tell you when we get home.

DUBI. *(From inside.)* Nurit!

YORAM. Go on. You're being called. Go on.

NURIT. You're so strange, Yoram. What's the matter?

DUBI. *(From inside.)* Nurit! Where are you? Nurit!

NURIT. *(In the direction that Dubi's voice is coming from.)* Can't you wait a minute? *(To Yoram.)* Is it something important?

YORAM. *(Angrily.)* Not now. When we get home. *(The band strikes up a polka in the café.)*

DUBI. *(Coming out.)* Nurit, where are you? You promised to polka with me, I have a right to the last polka. *(He takes her by the waist. Before they begin to dance, he says to Yoram.)* Don't you agree? *(He polkas with her, first in the open then into the café. Yoram is left alone. He still holds the letter. Inside, an accordion continues noisily to play the polka. Sigmund enters. His face is hidden in his overcoat, an unlit cigarette is in his mouth. He approaches Yoram.)*

YORAM. Why do you follow me like a shadow? Who are you?

SIGMUND. A light!

YORAM. *(He takes out a pack of matches and strikes a match. It goes out.)*

He strikes another one successfully. All this time, Sigmund does not cease staring at him.) Here. (Sigmund walks away, then immediately returns.)

SIGMUND. (Extending his hand aggressively, as before.) One pound please! (He stares lengthily at Yoram.) What a resemblance!

YORAM. A resemblance? To whom?

SIGMUND. Purely imaginary. . . . To someone . . . over there. (He laughs an almost diabolical laugh.) Over there. . . . Do you know where "over there" is?

NURIT. (She comes out of the café. At first she is not aware of Sigmund.) Yoram, all our guests . . . (Suddenly she sees Sigmund. She walks over to them.)

YORAM. You're making a mistake, I was never there . . . I was born here, my whole family is here. (He senses Nurit's presence and becomes bewildered, caught lying.)

SIGMUND. Your whole family is here? Ha-ha-ha-ha! And mine— (He blows smoke from his cigarette straight upwards, following its progress with his eyes.) ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!

YORAM. Who are you?

NURIT. (Nervously.) Yoram, let's go inside!

SIGMUND. Why so nervous, my good man? One pound—and I'll be gone. (Yoram makes a motion with his hand as if to dismiss him. Sigmund responds by feigning as if he has really been given money.) Thank you, madam. (He bows to Nurit.) Thank you, sir. (He bows to Yoram, then to both of them, steps backward and again, from a distance, bows once more.) What a resemblance! (He disappears.)

NURIT. Who is he? He looks at you as if he knew you.

YORAM. I've never seen his face before.

NURIT. Are you sure?

YORAM. One doesn't forget a face like that.

NURIT. Is he crazy or just pretending to be?

YORAM. Anyone who can pretend like that is crazy beyond all insanity.

BERELE. Why did you tell him you were born here? Maybe he . . .

YORAM. (Nervously.) I'm not accountable to every lunatic. . . . I wanted to get rid of him . . . that's all.

NURIT. What are you so angry about?

YORAM. I'm sorry. . . . Something in his look gives me the creeps.

NURIT. Yoram, Let's go inside. It isn't nice . . . (She tries to pull him along.)

YORAM. (He speaks quickly and nervously, but it is a nervousness without irritation.) Nurit, I have to tell you . . . now!

A VOICE FROM INSIDE. Yoram!

NURIT. They're looking for us.

YORAM. I've got to! (He shows her the letter.) This letter is from . . . from . . . my parents. . . . They're coming to Israel . . .

NURIT. From your parents? I was positive. . . . You never mentioned them. . . . I was afraid to ask. . . . God, how could you hide a thing like that?

YORAM. I just got it . . . this morning. . . . All of a sudden, don't you see? . . . And especially today . . . it . . . the wedding . . .

BERELE. (From a distance.) You see, I managed to get off. I'm back . . .

NURIT. (Running over to him.) Did you hear? Yoram's parents are alive! He got a letter!

BERELE. (Surprised that she should be surprised.) Yes . . . I know . . . I . . .

VOICES FROM INSIDE. Nurit! Where are you?

YORAM. (Putting his arms around both of them, trying to look happy.) Let's go in, huh? It really isn't right . . . (Sigmund appears and stares at the three of them. They do not see him, and disappear into the café. Sigmund sits on a bench and writes. All at once, with Yoram's last words, the band bursts into a noisy melody. The doors of the café fold upstage, and the interior becomes visible through a transparent curtain. Whenever the action shifts to the boardwalk, the lights go off within the café, and vice versa. Inside—an atmosphere of dolce vita. Bohemian types. The women are partly in elaborate evening dress, partly in black slacks and black shirts. Cabaret music, a saxophone. Those present may dance or otherwise employ mimicry or mime. The atmosphere is unreal and grotesque. There is constant movement on the stage. Places and partners are changed about. There is room for continual improvisation. One of those present is wearing khaki shorts, a blue denim shirt, and an Israeli work hat. His manner is free and cynical.)

HAGAR. (Dancing with her bearded partner, a young poet.) Here comes Guilt-feeling. (She points at the man in the khaki shorts.)

POET. Is he here? When did he arrive?

HAGAR. Tonight I'm getting drunk with Guilt-feeling.

POET. You can drink with him, but in the morning you'll sober up in my bed.

DIURI. (To the nearest bystander.) Do you remember the Castle? (A girl comes up to him. He leans on her and begins to declaim.) Those were the good old days, little sister. I was a young hell-raiser then.

HAGAR. (To her partner.) There's Ziva, she's crazy about your poems. I'm going to dance with Guilt-feeling.

POET. (To Hagar, who is dressed in black.)

A blue denim shirt
Though covered with dirt
Is worth diamonds and rubies.
The shirt on your back,
My lady, is black,
But covers two fatally sharp boo . . .

(He tries to caress her breasts.)

HAGAR. You're not going to stab yourself to death on me, you poet of despair. (To Guilt-feeling, who is passing by nearby.) Want to dance? (She goes off to dance with Guilt-feeling.)

POET. Two-timer, all women are two-timers.

YORAM. (He holds a large glass in his hands. To Nurit.) Now he'll read his latest poem. That's what always happens when she dances with somebody else. (At the top of his voice, drunkenly.) Stop the music! Nobelus! Read us your latest poem!

CHANTING VOICES. We don't want to go to bed. We'll make whoopee till we're dead.

YORAM. Quiet, you dinosaurs! (Gradually they all fall silent, settling into bored poses, their eyes turned upwards, their chins on their knees. Yoram turns to the poet.) Nobelus, read to us, Nobelus, from your songs of . . .

A VOICE. Zion.

VOICES. We want Guilt-feeling! We want Guilt-feeling!

YORAM. Quiet, you dinosaurs! Sing to us, Nobelus, from your songs of despair!

POET. (He downs a drink, coughs. Everybody coughs.)

The sun's like a green frog
Croaking in the mud, in the sky.
The storks in their bills carry
A child, not yet dead.
Never born.
Why?
Tell your Grandma how she came into the world.
I'm a tired man,
I'm a clock,
Whose hands
Whose hopes,
Are like ships
Wrecked at sea
All of them.
Now rain is falling

The rain is falling now
Like currency.
The last of men
Swallows his shadow's shade.

VOICES. Bravo! Bravissimo! Universal! Cosmic! Decadent! A toast to Nobelus! (All lift their glasses. The poet leaves. The party is blacked out. The spotlight picks out Sigmund sitting on his bench, the poet on his way to the boardwalk, and the Balloon Seller, who is coming toward him. A heavy fog hangs over the boardwalk.)

BALLOON SELLER. (To the poet.) Balloons?

POET. One prick and our blown-up world . . .

BALLOON SELLER. Right you are, mister. My balloons are blown up fine. They're full of air.

POET. You poor dumb thing. I was almost going to say, you blown-up bag of flesh. But you are too thin.

BALLOON SELLER. What can I do? That's how it is.

POET. Let's sell them some balloons. Maybe they're better at that than they are at poetry. (He snatches the balloons from the Balloon Seller and pushes him in the direction of the café.)

BALLOON SELLER. Me? In there? Oh, no . . . I . . .

POET. Shake a leg, fool!

The night's getting cool,

This bog

Of a fog . . .

(To himself.) Not bad! Not bad at all! (The two of them disappear in the café. Sigmund remains on his bench, listening to the voices from inside.)

HAGAR. Now, Guilt-feeling.

GUILTFEELING. (Climbing on a chair.) What have I done that I should have to speak in this sexpool? The smell of dung, the sweet incense of . . . poetry. (Holds his nose.) Nihilism, my friends! We cannot go on any longer like this. What will we come to, my friends? What?, I ask. I see the pinnacles of our dreams bow down for shame. Is this what we dream of, my friends? This? It's true, I struggle with myself, but something must be done. Perhaps you know what must be done? No? Neither do I. Maybe Tolstoy. Maybe A. D. Gordon. Yes, don't laugh. A. D. Gordon. Yes. Perhaps I'm simple-minded. Granted. I'm a simple-minded man. Just the other day I ran into Yitzhak. "So what's new?" I said to him. "The refugees." There you have it. The Pan-Semitic front. I asked him, "Imperialism?" He said, "The Crusades. Sparta. Children in steel helmets." He began to cry and said, "Do you remember those surplus Czechoslovakian ri-

fles? We sat in mourning for the Internationale." Seven bottles of brandy. We wept. It was marvelous. "O little red apple, whither wilt thou roll?" So I ask you, my friends, can it be? Is it possible? No, my friends, it cannot be! It must not be! Perhaps I'm simpleminded. Granted. It had to be thought out. There you have it. It has to be thought out. But what? Have you nothing to say? Neither have I, my friends, but it hurts me to see the way you live. . . . Granted, I live it up, too, but it hurts, my friends, it hurts me that everything should be . . . that somehow, one way or another, perhaps, in general, yes, in general it's very, very sad. Oh, you generation of iconoclasts! There you have it. It's very sad.

EVERYBODY. (*Singing.*)

Oh, how sad, how very sad,
Was the fall the apple had.
The apple exploding on the ground
Nothing of it was ever found.

(*On the boardwalk. The lighting is as in the previous scene.*)

SIGMUND. (*To the Balloon Seller, who enters from stage left carrying nothing but a stick.*) Where are all your balloons?

BALLOON SELLER. I sold them. At the wedding. Ah, what wonderful kids . . . what kids . . .

SIGMUND. Are you acquainted with the bridegroom?

BALLOON SELLER. (*Looking at his dirty clothes.*) Me? What makes you ask?

SIGMUND. A resemblance. Words. (*The sound of a foghorn.*)

Ships anchor in harbors.
Ashes float off,
Turn white the hair
A corpse in river is what I hear.

(*The foghorn sounds again. Sigmund suddenly gets to his feet and leaves. The Balloon Seller is left sitting on the bench.*)

HAGAR. Yoram, sing us a solo! . . .

EVERYBODY. Yoram, sing us a solo! . . .

YORAM. (*Drunkenly.*) Something happy? Okay, I'll sing you something happy. Happy as hell!

(*The spotlight is on Yoram. He sings.*)

Samarkand's a hot, hot city,
But then it hailed and snowed.
They call us Children of the war,
'Cause we're the donkey that it rode.
The war rode piggy-back upon us

Traveled round the world on us.
At night we sleep in alleyways.
We raid the markets when it's day.
We crawl like lizards through the stalls,
And steal and laugh and run away.
And while the Uzbek shouts: Thief! Stop!
We fill our bellies from his shop.

And all night long we dream and dream,
and usually the dream's the same!
The world's a mountain of fresh bread,
and all of it is ours to claim.
And usually the dream's the same!

The more we eat, the more we crave.
And all of it is ours to claim.

Our little brothers two years younger.
Our home's the marketplace, the street.
We pick their lice. We soothe their hunger.
And if at night they wake and cry,

We sing to them a lullaby
So hush, my child, you cry in vain;
They say we'll go to Tehran,
And then to where the orange blooms.
So hush, we'll go to Tehran.

Hush, hush, my child, we'll soon be gone
To where it's green all winter long.

(*When Yoram is through singing his song, the stage is darkened and one hears, with increasing force, the noise of the seawind and the waves breaking. When the lights go on, Sigmund is looking at the spot Yoram occupied while singing. The Balloon Seller appears behind him.*)

BALLOON SELLER. What are you looking at?

SIGMUND. The stars.

BALLOON SELLER. There's not a star in sight. It's a hell of a night.

SIGMUND. He's right. The stars are all in hell.

BALLOON SELLER. Who's he?

SIGMUND. He is he, and I am I.

BALLOON SELLER. But you're talking to me.

SIGMUND. I'm talking to you, but he's answering me. (*He points to someone standing, as it were, behind him.*)

BALLOON SELLER. You're getting me all confused.

SIGMUND. (*Again pointing behind him.*) Now he's confusing him.

BALLOON SELLER. Who? Me?

SIGMUND. No. Him. (*This time he points to someone standing, as it were, on the other side of him.*) No matter. The winter is coming on.

BALLOON SELLER. Maybe you'd like to come live in my shack? Come on, I'll show it to you. It's a good shack. It's got a tin roof.

SIGMUND. Rain beating on a tin roof drives me crazy.

BALLOON SELLER. It's better for it to beat on a tin roof than for it to beat on your head.

SIGMUND. That depends on the head. If the head is on fire, the rain puts it out.

BALLOON SELLER. I don't get it.

SIGMUND. You don't get it? That's bad, or rather . . . very good. (*There is a sudden crash of waves.*)

BALLOON SELLER. I think there's going to be a storm. My shack is as snug as Noah's ark.

SIGMUND. Noah was a poor righteous man and you're a poor righteous man, and so God told you to build an ark like Noah's. But methinks for the righteous rich He makes more Noah-ble provision than that. And so I bid you good night. (*He takes a last look at Nurit's window, then lies down on the bench.*)

BALLOON SELLER. (*Shrugs his shoulders.*) He's crazy as a loon. But he's sure an interesting talker. I didn't understand a word. I swear he's out of his mind. (*The crash of waves. A sliver of moon. Fog.*)

SIGMUND. Give me sleep without dreams, O my Lord. All the dead rise up against me when I dream. Ever wakeful. Only no dreams, my Lord.

Scene 6

A simultaneous dream scene. Yoram and Nurit are in their room, in bed. Her face is turned toward the wall. His face is turned toward Esther, who is in the center of the stage. Sigmund lies on the bench. He, too, faces Esther. The sound of the sea. Churchbells ring. A reddish-blue moon. Esther has her back to the audience. Her voice comes over a tape-recorder, deep and distant and restrained. Her movements are rigid. In the course of the dialogue, Yoram and Sigmund sit up; they lie down when the dream is over. The light that falls on them is cold and clear. No extra effects should be added.

SIGMUND. Let me be, my wife,
Angel full of eyes.
Let me be.
Depart from me!

ESTHER. Into the water, Sigmund.

SIGMUND. Depart from me!

Remove from me your dead fish-eyes.

Remove your eyes from me!

Let me be!

ESTHER. (*To Yoram.*) Come down from the tree.

YORAM. I won't.

ESTHER. You'll fall.

YORAM. What do you care? Sister, take me to you.

ESTHER. I live in the river.

SIGMUND. I'm not to blame. Leave me be!

ESTHER. (*To Yoram.*) All right, I'll get into bed with you, move over. I'll tell you about the Eskimos and then you'll sleep. What are you looking for up in that tree?

SIGMUND. My God!

ESTHER. (*To Yoram.*) What are you looking for up in that tree?

YORAM. For the head of the rooster. The tin weathercock. They came toward the crack of dawn, just when he was about to pray the morning prayer. They came glittering like knives, angels of steel with swastikas on the wings. Suddenly they swooped over the roof and sliced off his head. Now, he's here. In the treetop. Don't touch my rooster, don't make a blood offering of him!

SIGMUND. I'm not to blame for her death. Leave me be. Why are you following me? No, I'm from Lvov, you're mistaken, you're wrong . . . no . . . Shameless mortal . . .

YORAM. Don't make him a blood offering, don't touch my rooster.

ESTHER. He wore a gray uniform. He caught me by the leg and swung me about his head and shouted, "This very rooster shall go to its death! This very rooster shall to its death!" (*Churchbells. The sound of waves.*)

SIGMUND. I'm coming, Esther, I'm coming.

ESTHER. This very rooster shall go to its death.

YORAM. I had nothing to do with it. Why are you yelling at me?!

ESTHER. Nothing? Nothing? So why don't you lend me a helping hand? I'm cold. He undressed me. He shot me and bled my body dry. You've got the whole blanket to yourself. I'm cold.

YORAM. Is it cold inside the igloo, too?

ESTHER. Inside the igloo it's warm.

YORAM. When I grow up we'll go to the North Pole.

ESTHER. Don't grab the blanket. (*To Sigmund.*) Resign from the Judenrat. Run away.

SIGMUND. I must play a role as horrible as this bloody spectacle.

ESTHER. You're afraid for your own skin?

SIGMUND. No! I have done my best to stop the epidemic. To gain time.

ESTHER. There's not a trace left of us. When I walked in the street I was pelted with stones. I can't bear the shame of it. Join the revolt.

SIGMUND. The community is not in revolt, there are only scattered rebels. The rebel is to hasten our doom.

ESTHER. You're blind, Sigmund, our doom will not be long.

SIGMUND. Remove your eyes from me! I'm not to blame. Be gone! *(The last word he emits with a shout. A policeman appears on stage left and rouses him. He awakes at once, jumps from the bench, and says to the policeman.)* I'm not to blame! *(He starts to run and disappears. The policeman shrugs his shoulders and walks slowly after him.)*

YORAM. The ship! Esther! the ship! *(His shouts awaken Nurit.)*

NURIT. *(Shaking him.)* Yoram, you're shouting!

YORAM. *(The dialogue that follows between him and Nurit is for him, essentially, a monologue. Yoram hears her, but it is as if he doesn't see her.)* No Esther, no! *(To Nurit.)* Esther, you . . . who are you?

NURIT. Yoram, you. . . Wake up, Yoram.

YORAM. Yoram? . . . Yoram? . . .

NURIT. You're dreaming, Yoram.

YORAM. I'm dreaming? It was only a dream? Only a dream! Only a dream!

NURIT. You don't have to tell it to me.

YORAM. I wanted it to happen! I wanted it to!

NURIT. Nobody is master of his dreams.

YORAM. The ship sank and I wanted it to! Oh, God!

NURIT. You scare me.

YORAM. Both of them scared me with their eyes. Whenever I sat down to eat I saw their eyes: "You see? You have enough to eat! You have enough to eat!"

NURIT. Forget about it, Yoram. They'll come and everything will be all right. I'm sure it will. It'll certainly be a surprise for them.

YORAM. *(As if he has just now awakened to the truth.)* They know about you, Nurit, I lied to you. It wasn't their first letter. It wasn't the first lie, either. I wasn't born in Warsaw. I was born in Goray. A dirty little town. We weren't rich—we were miserably poor. I didn't lose my parents in a railroad station and I wasn't brought up by my uncle the artist in Samarkand. I was the head of a gang. We used to

steal food in the market. I fed my parents on what I got. But I remained hungry. That's why my parents put me in an orphanage. Don't do it, I begged them, I'm not an orphan! And when I came to this land and it fed me from the tree of forgetfulness, I burned my lice-infected clothes along with myself. Along with Yossee. And Esther. And my parents. And when I was through being disinfected, I was a new man, a superman like Dubi by the name of Yoram! That life-of-the-party who's making you eat his offerings of the dead. Charming, isn't it?

NURIT. I never realized you hated your new clothes so much.

YORAM. I don't feel any hatred, Nurit, only contempt, the contempt that a clown feels for his costume and his mask.

NURIT. There's no denying you've played your part well. But if you want to know why I was attracted to you in the first place, I'll tell you: because you never really managed to be Yoram to the end. *(Triumphantly.)* Now I'll make you coffee, and then we're going to stay in here and you're going to begin to peel. Peel after peel . . . until you're naked. This time, you'll talk. No more evasions.

YORAM. Spiritually naked? Why not. I think it's time. Maybe then I'll be able to find my true clothes.

NURIT. And in the meantime—coffee? *(Yoram nods in agreement. She goes into the kitchen. He lights a cigarette and smokes it, thoughtfully contented.)*

CURTAIN

ACT II

Scene I

Twilight. The sound of the sea. The Balloon Seller appears on stage from the direction of the boardwalk. He sings a popular Yiddish song. When he is finished with his song, he sits down on a bench.

BALLOON SELLER. By the roadside stood a tree,
Its roots were bare and jagged;
A single tree, alone it stood,
Its head was white and ragged.
The tree was there hundreds of years,
Its roots were in the water;

They say its heart was made of earth
From Jerusalem, Zion's daughter.
In this earth, so people say,
There lived a bird, a wonder!
It could not die by any death,
This bird of sand and wonder.
Then one day, the bird was killed,
A blaze reached up to heaven;
It burned the holy seat of God,
Destroyed the tree for ever.
The leaves alone, they did remain,
Like little birds a-flying;
They flew to Israel's promised land,
And there they still are lying.

(Enter Sigmund, hurrying.)

BALLOON SELLER. What's the rush? Sit down for a minute.

SIGMUND. I said I'm in a hurry.

BALLOON SELLER. What's on fire?

SIGMUND. The sea.

BALLOON SELLER. Sit down, sit down for a minute.

SIGMUND. I said I'm in a hurry.

BALLOON SELLER. Ah, nothing's on fire.

SIGMUND. The hat . . .

BALLOON SELLER. I don't get it.

SIGMUND. I don't get it . . . I don't get it . . . That's all you know to say.

BALLOON SELLER. I don't get it.

SIGMUND. All right, then, let's sit for a while. *(They sit down.)* Well?

BALLOON SELLER. Eh . . .

SIGMUND. Eh . . . That's a great deal. . . . And what else have you got to say besides eh?

BALLOON SELLER. *(Sighing.)* Hhhhh . . .

SIGMUND. Now you've said it all. . . . Hhhhh . . .

BALLOON SELLER. Things are sad.

SIGMUND. You're not telling me anything new.

BALLOON SELLER. I wanted to ask you, what are you writing all the time?

SIGMUND. I am a certified accountant.

BALLOON SELLER. You're an accountant? Really? And you dress like that? I once had a friend who was an accountant for a very big firm. Boy, it was a very big firm.

SIGMUND. I'm a certified accountant for the biggest firm in the world, the biggest that you can imagine.

BALLOON SELLER. Really?

SIGMUND. That's what I said.

BALLOON SELLER. What's it called?

SIGMUND. God Almighty.

BALLOON SELLER. You're making fun of me.

SIGMUND. Making fun of you? Really, now. . . . To prove to you that I'm not making fun of you, and that we're friends, I'm going to read you something from my account book.

BALLOON SELLER. Will I get it? *(Sigmund takes a notebook from his briefcase.)*

SIGMUND. No, but that doesn't matter in the least. *(He reads the poem with the utmost simplicity, and without the histrionics that are characteristic of his manner and speech.)*

I shut my eyes.

The same weak voices make

Movements without noise.

In stockinged feet

Children of the shadow.

They skirt circles of the sun.

As I skirt dead rats on the road.

And never say a word.

At night they come

Stealthily through memory's thin slats.

And always in that moment of recall

I hear the sound of railcars

Emptied of their children as of coal.

Their warm, sweet smell.

A ragdoll left behind.

A paper boat no one will find.

Buttons.

And threads

Angels with wax-colored faces.

They're taking off. They've done it. Now they rise.

And still upon my back I feel their eyes.

BALLOON SELLER. Are you crying?

SIGMUND. *(To Nurit who enters.)* Shameless mortal, sinful one . . . *(Nurit takes fright, drops her wallet, and quickly sinks in a chair. Sigmund picks up the wallet.)* Madam, you lost your wallet. *(She takes out a bill.)* Thank you, madam, it's not necessary. A pleasant evening, madam.

NURIT. Why are you always following me? Who are you?
 SIGMUND. A rat! A rat leaving a sinking ship. A rat, madam.
 WAITER. (*Entering. To Sigmund.*) Are you here again? I've told you a thousand times to stay clear of here. (*Sigmund returns to the Balloon Seller.*)
 WAITER. (*Turning to Nurit.*) Where do they come from? All these nuts? It's enough to drive one crazy.
 NURIT. The war.
 WAITER. War. So what's war? Why don't they find work? When people work there aren't any wars. Are you waiting for Mr. Eyal?
 NURIT. Yes. He's in Haifa. He went there to meet his parents.
 WAITER. Back from a tour abroad?
 NURIT. New immigrants.
 WAITER. What? Mr. Eyal wasn't born here? I was sure . . . Coffee and a paper?
 NURIT. Yes. (*The waiter leaves.*)
 BALLOON SELLER. (*To Sigmund.*) First you were crying. Now I'm crying.
 SIGMUND. Nonsense, I was laughing.
 BALLOON SELLER. No, you were crying. I saw you crying. Maybe you'd like to sleep at my place? There's room for both of us. You don't have to pay me.
 SIGMUND. I snore like a thousand trombones.
 BALLOON SELLER. That doesn't bother me.
 SIGMUND. And I shout in my sleep, terribly.
 BALLOON SELLER. You too? That's why I wanted us to live together. . . . It's horrible to wake up shouting. It's even more horrible than dreaming. . . . To wake up with nobody to touch. . . . My youngest son always used to get into bed with me. It's nice when a little boy gets into bed with you at night. . . . Did you ever have children? (*Sigmund gets up.*) Why are you leaving?
 SIGMUND. We agreed that you weren't going to interrogate me.
 BALLOON SELLER. I'm not interrogating, I just asked. (*Sigmund walks away, passes in front of Nurit, to whom he bows, and disappears.*)
 NURIT. Hey! Balloons.
 BALLOON SELLER. Balloons! Balloons! A balloon for a young miss?
 NURIT. I'll buy five balloons from you every day if you tell me who was the man you were talking to. (*The man with the newspaper enters and sits down in the café.*)
 BALLOON SELLER. I don't know, miss. He doesn't allow any questions. When I asked him if he ever had children, he got up and left. He was real mad. What for? I don't get it. I told him he could live with me in my shack. I've got a little shack, it's not far from here.

Over in the slums. I don't get it. He writes and writes. He's always writing. He said he was an accountant . . . for a big firm . . . for God Almighty. He cried when he read something. So did I.
 NURIT. What did he read to you?
 BALLOON SELLER. I swear I don't remember. Something about a rat. A railcar. A ragdoll. Angels. He's out of his mind. I don't know what's wrong with him.
 NURIT. If you find out, tell me. I'll pay you.
 BALLOON SELLER. No! Only balloons.
 NURIT. Well, here's for five. I'll take them tomorrow. Ok?
 BALLOON SELLER. Ok. (*Moves out.*)
 WAITER. (*Enters.*) Another one? (*The Balloon seller moves away when he approaches, but comes nearer when Nurit calls for him.*)
 BALLOON SELLER. (*To the waiter.*) You see?
 NURIT. And in case you know anything don't forget to inform me.
 BALLOON SELLER. Certainly, madam. (*To Yoram, who enters and appears on his way.*) Balloons?
 NURIT. (*Seeing the wound on Yoram's face.*) God, what happened to you? Seems as if you came back from hell.
 YORAM. No, not from hell, only from Shaar Haaliya* and this is just the first gate. (*To the waiter who remains standing on stage.*) Double coffee. Black. (*Waiter moves out.*)
 NURIT. You won't be able to sleep.
 YORAM. For the better.
 NURIT. Are they in Shaar Haaliya?
 YORAM. They are.
 NURIT. I should have gone with you.
 YORAM. What for? (*Sips from Nurit's coffee.*)
 NURIT. Don't drink, you won't be able to sleep, let's go home.
 YORAM. Wait a few minutes.
 NURIT. If you don't want to, you don't have to tell me now.
 YORAM. And if I do want, could I? What do you know?
 NURIT. I understand.
 YORAM. (*Angrily.*) You don't understand a thing! Not a thing!
 NURIT. I know.
 YORAM. (*Still angrier.*) You don't know anything.
 NURIT. How did you hurt yourself?
 YORAM. On the fence. For fourteen years I haven't seen them, and when they come I'm allowed to look at them through a fence.

*Transit camp for newcomers.

There were thousands of people there, thousands. On both sides. (*The waiter brings the coffee and leaves.*) A whole hour I walked along the fence. Back and forth. I didn't recognize anyone. No one recognized me. Suddenly, someone grabbed me by the arm and pulled me toward the fence. At first I thought it was my brother. I called him by name and he let go. It was a mistake.
 NURIT. And you didn't see them?
 YORAM. About two hours later. Am I badly cut?
 NURIT. It's not so terrible. (*She takes a mirror from her bag. He looks at himself in it.*)
 YORAM. I vaulted over the fence and began to look. Block after block and tent after tent. Who here knows the Goldschmidts? Who here knows the Goldschmidts? A woman bares her breast and sticks it in the mouth of a screaming baby, and right next to her there's a couple naked as the day they were born, and they don't care and she doesn't care and I don't care. I go from tent to tent, like Orpheus in Hades. And suddenly there's a familiar smell in my nostrils, and I'm in a railroad car, and above me and below me people are eating and drinking, children crying all night, and next to me, right next to me, a couple lying down laughing: "Look, how he is staring at us! Sonny, you should be ashamed!" And I was ashamed! I wanted to scream, but the locomotive . . . the locomotive . . . the locomotive . . .
 NURIT. Yoram, come on home.
 YORAM. (*Sarcastically.*) Home! The railroads are my home and all the rest is a lie! God, why must I torture you? Why didn't you go to Paris with Dubi?
 NURIT. You're insane.
 YORAM. Yes, I'm insane. For fourteen years I didn't see them, and when they embraced me I felt as though they were embracing a statue. "He's changed," my mother said, and her voice broke. I ached to cry, to give them the feeling that I was their son. "You swine," I said to myself, "You swine, be a man!" But nothing happened inside me. Like stone! (*His head sinks onto the table. She caresses him. The light fades out slowly.*)

Scene 2

A telephone rings in the darkness. Nurit comes running into the room and switches on the lights.

NURIT. (*Picking up the receiver.*) Mother? . . . I just got in. . . . Lovely. . . . For how long? . . . Two months? . . . I wouldn't have any

objections. . . . How are things there? . . . You know, it's hell. . . . But what are you talking about? . . . That's all very fine, but we're not living in the days of the pioneers and they're not eighteen. . . . His father is very sick. . . . He mustn't go on living in a tent. . . . How do I talk to them? . . . I don't talk. . . . Yoram translates. . . . Yes, his brother knows a little Hebrew. . . . It's not so nice of you not to have invited them all this time. . . . When aren't you busy. . . . Father? No, I haven't spoken to him. . . . He arranged for them to get an apartment? Are you sure? . . . Yoram? . . . He's with them now. . . . What? . . . I didn't hear. . . . Don't you think you should keep out of it? . . . If worse comes to worse, they'll live here, but they'll manage to get by. Yes. . . . Exactly . . . And when you're in South Africa, don't forget to tell the Jews there all about it, all right? . . . Since when am I such a Zionist? . . . I don't lose any sleep either over Zionism, or over the Jewish people, the way you do. . . . I'm simply his wife. . . . That's all. . . . Oh, I'm sure you are. . . . Absolutely. . . . It's all for my own good, what you're saying. . . . Yes. . . . Absolutely. . . . Someone's coming. . . . I'm hanging up. . . . (*She hangs up. Yoram enters.*) Did you talk to the doctor?

YORAM. He told me what we already knew . . .

NURIT. My mother called, she said that Father arranged to get them an apartment.

YORAM. I know. He arranged to get them an apartment that they could have had anyway. . . . They don't want it. They want to be near the city. Near me. . . . Ya'neck doesn't have a chance of getting a reasonable job in that hole.

NURIT. Somehow people manage.

YORAM. In your father's speeches. . . . He's got a brilliant future there, a day laborer with a university degree. It's heartwarming. (*Shouting.*) Isn't it?

NURIT. What are you shouting about? Why are you always picking on my father? I'm trying to be patient, Yoram, trying, trying. . . . But if you think I am going to be a scapegoat for all your problems, you're wrong. . . . You suffer more than I do, I know that, but I haven't done anything! No one's going to wave the banner of suffering in my face all the time. . . . If you've been crucified by life, that doesn't mean you have to make me a present of your crown of thorns. I'm not to blame for anything that's happened, not to them and not to you!

YORAM. Nobody's to blame for anything, just me! They have no apartment—I'm to blame! When they get an apartment, it's out in the sticks—I'm to blame! Helenka walks around as if she's been

played for a sucker—I'm to blame! And my wife has three rooms—I'm to blame!

NURIT. Why does your wife have three rooms and not you, too?

YORAM. Because.

NURIT. They can live here until they set themselves up.

YORAM. Never!

NURIT. Why not?

YORAM. Because. . . . So as not to have to see Helenka's eyes every day, as if I'd stolen something from her, as if it were my fault that I didn't go through what she went through, my fault that I came to Israel before she did, that I'm here! . . . (Bitterly.) Live with them. . . . You'll talk with your hands and I'll translate. . . . I rented a room for them in Natanya, just for my parents. . . . If they all left the immigrants' camp, they'd lose their right to get government housing. . . . Someone promised me to get them a place near Tel Aviv. . . . (The doorbell rings.) It must be Yanek and Helenka. . . . (Yoram goes to the door.) Hey, what are you doing here? (Dubi enters.)

DUBI. Dubi's here, Dubi's there, Dubi's everywhere. (To Nurit.)

How are you, *chérie*?

NURIT. *Merci, mon ami*, how's my French?

DUBI. *Magnifique, mademoiselle, ah, pardon, madame.* (To Yoram.)

How are the old folks?

YORAM. Who told you about them?

DUBI. I put them on the ship in Marseilles. . . . You know how it is, people begin to ask questions: Who here knows, who's seen. . . . Are they still in the camp?

YORAM. Yes. . . .

DUBI. Is there any way I could help you? True, it's against my principles, but . . .

NURIT. Actually, you could . . .

YORAM. No thanks, it's not necessary. . . . Are you here for long?

DUBI. No, I'm going back tonight. . . . When are you coming to Paris? There's a lot to see in the world, a lot to see. . . .

NURIT. Would you like to stay and eat dinner with us?

DUBI. Sorry, *chérie*, I've got to be at a meeting and from there straight to the airport. (He notices the chessboard on the table.) It's too bad, we could have finished the game.

YORAM. You mean we never finished it?

DUBI. Have you forgotten?

YORAM. For my part, we can call it quits. (The doorbell rings. Yoram goes to open it. Yanek and Helenka enter.)

DUBI. Isn't this your brother?

YORAM. Yes, it is. Why don't you sit down?

YANEK. Avram's not here?

YORAM. Who's Avram. (Dubi goes into the kitchen.)

YANEK. You don't remember Avram?

YORAM. No.

YANEK. Avram, the owner of the flour mill. I gave him your address. He was supposed to meet me here.

YORAM. I'm sorry, he hasn't come. (Nurit enters, followed by Dubi.)

NURIT. (To Yoram.) Ask them to excuse me, I'm making dinner. Ask them what they'll have to drink.

YANEK. No. . . . Thank you. . . . I, we. . . . (He smiles confusedly.)

DUBI. So long, I've got to go. I'll give you a call before I leave. (To Yoram.) I can see that you're literally engaged in the absorption of immigrants. (He leaves.)

YORAM. Will you have something to drink?

HELENKA. Yes.

YORAM. (To Nurit.) Something cold for everybody. (Nurit goes into the kitchen.) So who is Avram?

YANEK. The one who owned the apple orchard. . . . don't you remember? Your old gang used to mess it up.

YORAM. Right. . . . Right. . . . Something. . . .

YANEK. Once, you really hurt him. . . . It cost papa a small fortune. Well, do you remember now, you bandit?

YORAM. Something having to do with snow.

YANEK. With snow.

YORAM. A snowball?

YANEK. That's somewhat inexact. It was a rock that you covered with snow.

YORAM. (In a moment of recall.) His watchdog tore my pants.

YANEK. You apple thief.

YORAM. And then I decided to avenge myself.

YANEK. And do you remember his daughter Rachel?

NURIT. (From the kitchen.) Helenka, could you come to the kitchen for a minute? (Helenka goes into the kitchen.)

YORAM. Rachel?

YANEK. You were in the same class in school.

YORAM. That's right, she had blond hair.

YANEK. She had black braids. . . . You used to pull on them, like reins.

YORAM. Is she in Israel?

YANEK. She had black braids just like our Esther.

YORAM. Yanek, I didn't exactly understand what you wrote me about Sigmund.

YANEK. Sigmund? Yes. . . . Well. . . . you see. . . . After the Liberation I went to Lvov. I wasn't laboring under any illusions, but. . . . I walked the streets for three days. On the third day, it was at dusk, closer to dark than it was to light, I came to a ruined street. Only one house was still standing on it. The house was dark, and then in a window a woman appeared and lit a candle. (Helenka enters with two lit candlesticks and puts them on the table.) Then she disappeared. (Helenka leaves.) All of a sudden, I saw a man standing across from the window and staring at it as though he were bewitched. I walked up to him. (While talking he moves closer to Yoram.)

"You're a Jew?"

"A Jew? Yes."

"From Lvov?"

"No," I answered him. And he says to me, "I thought perhaps one more Jew from Lvov had been saved." And with that, he went back to looking at the window, in which the woman had appeared again. (Nurit comes in carrying a tray full of dishes. She puts it on the bookshelf and leaves.) And then she was gone. "I come here every day at six," he says to me, "every day. For the last two weeks. Sometimes it seems to me that face is my wife's, blessing the candles on Sabbath eve." Suddenly, he begins to shout: "Lord of the Furnaces! So many houses were destroyed during the war, on this street there's not a single house left standing, and this house had to remain? It had to?"

"What's the street called," I asked him.

"Nickiewich."

"What's the house number?"

"Seven."

"My brother-in-law lived there, Dr. Sigmund Rabinowitz."

"Your brother-in-law?" He began to laugh hysterically. "You can find him in prison. What did he do?—He was in the Judenrat!" And then he began to laugh in a way that I'll never forget. "His wife and son are gone, too." (Yanek completely changes his mannerisms. He goes on talking, but very softly.) What was I supposed to do? To visit him in prison after Esther and the child. . . . No, that would have been too much, even for me. I preferred to think that I was dealing with a madman, or

that even if there was a Sigmund Rabinowitz somewhere in jail, that it was someone else. . . . Do you know how Sigmund was? He had nobility. A man of intellect.

YORAM. That's exactly why I would want to find out more.

YANEK. It's easy for you to talk, you were never there.

NURIT. (From the kitchen.) Yoram, come help me open this can. (Yoram goes into the kitchen and Helenka comes out.)

HELENKA. Talk to him. He'll be able to do something. He knows his way around here.

YANEK. But what can he do?

HELENKA. I want to live in Tel Aviv. I just have to. There must be something that can be done.

YANEK. You're hiding from reality, you're talking as though you were dreaming.

HELENKA. You promised to bring me to the land of dreams. I can't go on waking up morning after morning to the stench of that camp.

YANEK. You know very well that it's temporary, that it won't last for ever. Everyone says so. Even Yoram.

HELENKA. Yoram. Yoram. Always the same refrain: Yoram says. I have to live in Tel Aviv. In a big city. I need to have crowds around me. Crowds and crowds of people. Oh Jesus, talk to him. (Yoram returns, carrying glasses and a bottle of cognac.)

YORAM. (Pouring.) Shall we have a drink? Dinner will be ready soon. (They drink. Helenka drinks several glasses.)

YANEK. Helenka, that's enough.

NURIT. (Brings a bowl of apples, and leaves.) Helenka picks up a large apple and turns it around her hands.

HELENKA. (To Yanek.) What a nice apple!

YANEK. It's very nice, but it's nothing like the ones we used to have back home.

YORAM. How long before you'll learn to enjoy things here, the way they are, without always comparing them to what used to be?

YANEK. Why get angry? I happened to remember, that's all.

HELENKA. (Listening only to herself.) What a pretty apple—just like the ones there. In the convent.

YORAM. More memories of paradise!

YANEK. Yoram.

HELENKA. Yes, of paradise and paradise lost. At the age of six. When was that? Many, many years ago. . . . After God created the Germans and God beheld that they were good. . . . What am I talk-

ing about? Everything is suddenly all confused. . . . Maybe it's the cognac. . . . It was in the year seven according to the German calendar. (To Yoram.) Don't be shocked by my knowledge of the Bible, I was educated in a convent. Wasn't I? Everything there was white, like the birth of Jesus. My mother was named Mary, too. We ran away. She wrapped me in her shawl and ran all night through the snow. We're going to be caught, we're going to be caught. And afterwards . . . what happened afterwards? . . . I awoke in the cottage of an old farmer. Mother wasn't there.

NURIT. (Entering.) Coffee?

YORAM. That's a good idea. Make it strong, very strong.

HELENKA. Do you think I'm drunk?

YORAM. What kind of question is that?

HELENKA. In any case . . .

YANEK. It wasn't right of you, Helenka. He didn't say a thing.

HELENKA. All right. It wasn't right. He didn't say a thing. Why is Nurit taking so long in the kitchen?

YORAM. She's getting dinner ready. Besides, you forget that she doesn't speak Polish.

HELENKA. You're right, I forgot. . . . (To Yoram.) Will you permit me to have one more glass?

YORAM. There's no need to ask permission. (He pours her a drink.)

YANEK. (Trying to take the glass away from her.) You've had enough!

HELENKA. (Holding on to it.) Don't you worry! (She drinks, then picks up the apple and begins to play with it again.)

YORAM. And afterwards, what happened?

HELENKA. Afterwards? You mean you really want to hear more? I thought I was boring you. They put me in a convent. . . . Let's go to the movies, okay?

NURIT. (Entering with cups of coffee.) Soon we'll be ready to eat.

YANEK. (To Nurit.) No coffee for you?

NURIT. Later, I have to finish up in the kitchen. (She leaves.)

HELENKA. (After taking a sip.) It's good coffee . . . so sweet and strong.

YORAM. Nurit's an expert at making coffee from our days in the Palmach.

HELENKA. Ah, underground commando, the Palmach. (Sings.) "F-o-r we are the Palmach." That's the right melody, isn't it? A boy aboard ship taught it to us. You know, I think it was the fellow who was just here. . . . Maybe. . . . The other words I don't remember. Just "F-o-r we are the Palmach." He taught Israeli dancing too. . . . The polka . . . (She bursts out laughing.)

YORAM. Helenka, you still haven't told me what happened afterwards.

HELENKA. You're a funny one. On the one hand, it's memories of paradise, and on the other—you want to know so badly. Well. . . . It happened in the convent before the communion.

YORAM. Communion? What's that?

YANEK. It's a Catholic ceremony.

HELENKA. They starved me half-to-death. The light's too strong in here, could you soften it? (Yoram turns out the lights. A single spotlight shines on Helenka alone. The others have disappeared, as it were, from her field of vision. She is alone with her memories and sees no one.)

HELENKA. In the courtyard of the convent, there was an apple tree. I kept peeking at it between prayers. When it was night, I left my room and snuck out to the tree. I took off my shoes (She unconsciously takes off her shoes.) and tiptoed silently over to the tree. (She picks up the apple and regards it carefully.) The tree was heavy with apples. There was an apple there that was the biggest and nicest of them all. It hung on a low-lying branch. I reached for it, but the tree was too high. I couldn't get at it. It was so near. I looked for a stick. I couldn't find one. I tried climbing the tree. It didn't work. The tree was covered with barbed wire. Like snakes. I had an uncontrollable desire for that apple. I started to climb again. My hands and feet were bloody all over. I stood at the foot of the tree. Suddenly, I began to plead with the God of my father and mother, "Please, throw me one apple. Just one apple." But the tree was too high. And God was even higher. I got down on my knees and whispered, "Jesus, sweet Jesus, if you are really so good, please, sweet Jesus, just one apple." All of a sudden I began to laugh . . . Fingers gripped me by the neck. I went on laughing. "Jewish filth!" . . . The mother superior dragged me off to her room and beat me. She beat me and beat me. (The lighting reverts to what it was before. Helenka snaps out of her reveries and says, calmly, quietly, half-smiling.) And what do you think happened in the end? They starved me for three more days. (Silence, Yoram, who has picked up an apple halfway through Helenka's story, now, in his excitement, absentmindedly bites into it. Helenka stands up stiffly, snatches the apple from his mouth, and throws it on the floor.)

HELENKA. I want to get out of here.

YANEK. (To Helenka.) We'll go outside, Helenka. . . . (To Yoram.) We'll be back later. (They go out. Yoram starts to go after them, then stops and comes back. He sees Nurit, who has been standing in the kitchen door and watching the proceedings.)

YORAM. (Losing control.) What are you looking at me that way for?

. . . What are you . . . (Nurit runs into the kitchen. Yoram begins to pound his forehead with his fist. He walks over to the table and turns off the light. In the darkness, one hears him strike the table with dull thuds. Muffled noises. Nurit re-enters.)

NURIT. What are you doing? . . . Yoram! . . . (Another thud. Nurit crosses over to him in the dark.) Yoram! . . . (She turns on the light.)

YORAM. You simply must have a look at me, mustn't you? . . . I suppose I look lovely now. . . . Don't I?

NURIT. You make me sick!

YORAM. Shut up!

NURIT. What are you shouting again for? You think you're the only one who ever suffers? . . . I can't understand it any longer . . . I can't. . . . After every visit of theirs, you drive me crazy. . . . I didn't look at them the right way. . . . My gestures weren't right. . . . I didn't smile enough. . . . I wasn't nice to them when they came in. . . . What do you want from me?

YORAM. All right, it's my fault . . . just leave me alone now.

NURIT. After every visit you say it's your fault and then you go right on. . . . I've had enough. . . . I left home because I couldn't stand the way they fought. . . . Now it's the same thing all over. . . . Let's get away from here.

YORAM. Where to?

NURIT. Anywhere. . . . But if we don't leave here together, somebody's going to leave by herself.

YORAM. Nurit, I promise you that this is the last time. . . . Everybody will be all right. . . . When they get settled. . . . Right now I can't . . .

NURIT. But to make wrecks of us both, that you can? It's not they who have to get settled, you've got to decide what you want.

YORAM. I promise you that this is the last time . . .

NURIT. This is the thousandth time that I've heard that from you. . . . Try not to be naïve. . . . See things for what they are . . .

YORAM. O Lord! . . . If I only knew why I behaved this way, damn it. . . . Who am I? . . . Their tales of horror make me the guilty one. Guilty without having done anything. And then I close myself off from the world. Like a fortress. And the more they try to break their way into me, the tighter I close myself off. I close myself off, the guilt grows worse. The guilt grows worse, I close myself off. What have I done? What? . . . "You've already got roots in this country," Yanek once said to me. As if it were an accusation. And you, you're pulling me up. . . . He looked at me and didn't understand.

. . . And you, too. . . . You said to me, "Since they've come here, you've begun to escape into your past." . . . In fact, I've only now stopped escaping from it. . . . And you also looked at me without understanding. . . . You were right . . . There was no need for me to present you with my crown of thorns, but they, they present me with their thorns, day and night . . . with my past full of corpses, my past that isn't mine anymore . . . (The doorbell rings, Yoram hastens to open it in the hope that it is Yanek and Helenka returning. All his anger and disappointment are taken out on the Balloon Seller, who enters.)

BALLOON SELLER. (To Yoram.) Mister . . . (He sees Nurit.) Miss . . . I found this. . . . (He is holding Sigmund's notebook.) It's his . . .

YORAM. (Angrily.) You're all that was needed here—get out!

NURIT. Yoram, I asked him to investigate that man who . . .

BALLOON SELLER. That's right, mister, the lady asked me to, and so when I found this. . . . Here . . . it's his notebook. (He waves the notebook in the air.) You can see for yourself . . . (Yoram takes the notebook and begins to read.) I read it. . . . I don't get it at all, but there's some horrible things written there . . . that I . . . I mean that he, together with the Germans. . . . I don't understand all the words that he uses . . .

YORAM. (Reading aloud, but as though to himself.) Lvov, 1942 . . . (To the Balloon Seller.) Do you know what his name is? I need his name, do you understand? His name?

BALLOON SELLER. I am sorry, mister, you can't get anything out of him, nothing . . .

YORAM. See if you can find out, and meanwhile—don't say a word about the notebook being here. Do you follow?

BALLOON SELLER. Sure I do, mister, I know how to keep my mouth shut. . . . What'd he write in there, huh?

YORAM. I don't think he wrote anything out of the ordinary.

BALLOON SELLER. I'll go now. If I find out anything more, I'll let you know. So long, (As he is about to leave, Nurit puts some money in his hand. He exits.)

NURIT. (To Yoram, who has been looking in the notebook all this time.) Is it interesting?

YORAM. Very. . . . At any rate, the style is unusual. And the title, it's called:

"The Heritage of Ashes" . . . (He reads.)

Another planet, a planet of fire.

Words that touch it are burned to ashes.

Beginnings of another creature.

A new being.
Not in the image of God, not in the image of beast.
Something new, different, new and different.
You, here to judge my deeds
On the planet of fire.
Inscribe my sentence with words that are dead
Petrified. Remnants of another age,
Like footprints of dinosaurs in rocks.

BLACKOUT

Scene 3

On the boardwalk. Sigmund is lying on the bench. The man with the newspaper is sitting in the café and reading.

BALLOON SELLER. (Waking Sigmund.) I'm glad I found you. I haven't seen you for a long time. People ask about you.

SIGMUND. About me? Who?

BALLOON SELLER. The boy who always sits there. (He points to the café.) The girl, too. She's asked about you several times. She's a good girl, she buys a lot of balloons.

SIGMUND. To hell with him and his balloons, what did he want?

BALLOON SELLER. I don't know. . . . Well, he wanted to know . . . why you're always going around with that dog. (He points to the stuffed dog that Sigmund is holding in his hands.)

SIGMUND. Never mind that dog, you'd better tell me everything, and not . . .

BALLOON SELLER. Well, he asked about your name. And where you came from.

SIGMUND. What else?

BALLOON SELLER. That's all.

SIGMUND. And what did you tell him?

BALLOON SELLER. I said to him, "I don't know what his name is."

Now that you mention it, what is your name?

SIGMUND. Medusa.

BALLOON SELLER. Your name is Medusa? It's a nice name. Come to think of it, what kind of a name is it? I never heard of it.

SIGMUND. It's nice, yes it is. Did you ever hear a fish singing in the water?

BALLOON SELLER. No.

SIGMUND. A fish talking?

BALLOON SELLER. Never, so help me.

SIGMUND. You may tell them, if they ask you again, "He's as silent as a fish in a pelican's jaw."

BALLOON SELLER. A pelican? What's that?

SIGMUND. It's a kind of water bird. And what kind of bird are you? (Aggressively.) Do you have your papers?

BALLOON SELLER. My papers? Of course. What for?

SIGMUND. Permit me to examine them. (He seizes him by the lapel.)

BALLOON SELLER. Why?

SIGMUND. (Slyly.) Aren't we friends?

BALLOON SELLER. Sure we are.

SIGMUND. Well, then? Permit me. (The Balloon Seller shows him his papers.)

BALLOON SELLER. Does it mean anything to you?

SIGMUND. Righteous, perfectly righteous. (He produces his own papers.) Would you care to see mine? Help yourself.

BALLOON SELLER. Benjamin Apfelbaum. Born in Vilna. You look a lot younger in this photo. . . . Arrived in Israel: 1947. (Impressed.) You've been here eight years. An oldtimer.

SIGMUND. Mm-hmmm . . . I was wounded in the war. . . . Nerves. Get it?

BALLOON SELLER. You're crazy?

SIGMUND. No, no. . . . My sickness is I call myself all kinds of names, particularly those of animals. (Confidently.) Now you mustn't tell a soul. . . . It's strictly between the two of us, you understand. . . . I'm fondest of calling myself rat. (He contorts his face and begins to whistle through his teeth like a rat.) Rat! (To the dog on the bench.) After him! After him!

BALLOON SELLER. But that's not a real dog.

SIGMUND. There is nothing as real as unreality.

BALLOON SELLER. Why do you call yourself rat?

SIGMUND. In China they eat them for dessert. Ha, Ha, Ha!

BALLOON SELLER. BTTTT . . .

SIGMUND. BTTT . . . it's cold. . . . This rat is being called by another hole. The wind's at my back. It's time to sail.

BALLOON SELLER. To sail? Where to? Why?

SIGMUND. It's cold.

BALLOON SELLER. You may come live in my shack.

SIGMUND. There's a cat by the shack.

BALLOON SELLER. You can sleep in my bed. I'll give you a blanket.

SIGMUND. I'll lay me down in some other hole. (To a passerby.)

Shameless mortal, sinful one. Give me a pound and I'll be gone. (The passerby tosses a coin on the ground. Sigmund picks it up.)

BALLOON SELLER. It's not nice to beg. You shouldn't do it.

SIGMUND. You're wrong—anything can be done. Pettiness disgusts people. Bigness makes them want to forgive.

BALLOON SELLER. I don't get it.

SIGMUND. I'll tell you a little story: There was once a tiger who ate a whole lot of sheep. But the tiger bit off more than he could chew, and sent a challenge to the lions, too. The lions defeated him and wounded him terribly. They brought him to trial and accused him, among other things, of eating the sheep. They punished him, not too severely, to be sure, but the tiger decided that he was sorry. As for the dead—why worry? He announced that he was repenting. And then a big fat she-lamb proclaimed, "The tiger was changed. He's not the same." (He snatches away the Balloon Seller's balloons and disappears on the run backstage.) Balloons! Pretty balloons! They come in all colors you like! Dirt cheap! Balloons! (The Balloon Seller runs after him.)

BALLOON SELLER. Give me my balloons! Give me my balloons! (From backstage comes the sound of balloons bursting and of Sigmund laughing.)

SIGMUND. (Returning.) Ha-ha-ha-ha! (He sits down and rubs his back against the bench. To the dog.) Did you see how he ran from me? Ha-ha-ha-ha! What are you staring at me for? Run, my friend, run while there's time. (He pets him.) Poor thing, you're so neglected. You would have been worth hundreds of gold teeth over there. Figure it out, how many gold teeth does an average man have? . . . Four hundred people. Ridiculous! Much more than that. . . . And what are you worth here? Just another dog. You see? You've got to know where to be born. You don't understand a thing. Not a single thing. (He continues to pet it.) Whew . . . you have bugs. You bite (Scratching.) Stop biting! . . . All right. . . . All right. . . . You're forgiven. You see? Men forgive dogs, but not men. Do dogs forgive dogs? The sheep are a funny nation, they forgave the tigers, but they never forgave the tiger's stooges. Unwilling stooges. You understand me, don't you? (He pets the dog.) I asked you not to bite! (He scratches himself again.) All right, no need to be insulted. It's not your fault. You're filthy. Want to take a bath? (He gets up.) In the water? (He strides toward the sea.) No. . . . No. . . . Come to me, you good little dog, come. You have beautiful, good eyes. Why do they say that dogs have eyes like people? Don't you think that's an insult? (A passerby appears and stands on the railing. Sigmund gets up and crosses over to him.)

PASSERBY. (Taking a coin from his pocket and putting it in Sigmund's out-stretched hand.) Take it and beat it! (He himself exits.)

SIGMUND. Do you see how they treat me? Like a dog. No, no, a thousand thousand pardons, thou glory of creation. Are you insulted? (He glances at the coin in his hand.) Want some ice cream? (He pets the dog.) You have wonderful curls, just like Esther's. My curls were nice, too. What, you don't believe me? Get away, get away from me. I'll have nothing to do with you. (Lets the dog drop.) All right, you can stay. (He picks the dog up.) If you only knew who I was you'd run from me, too. Believe me, I'm not to blame. (The bark of a dog is heard from backstage.) See, now you're angry at me, too. Listen, I have an idea. You'll be my judge. Agreed? I'll be the prosecutor myself. There'll be no lack of witnesses, they'll be like raindrops in wet weather. Well, then. (He places the dog on the bench.) Get up on the bench. They called me a dog. . . . Should I get down on all fours? (He gets down on his hands and feet. Another bark from backstage.) I tell you, that's a fine beginning. You're an excellent judge. We'll begin. (In the hardened tone of an interrogator.) Your name?! (Submissively.) My name is Dr. Sig . . . (He strikes the dog as hard as he can, then throws it over the railing.) Come back! Come back! I have to be judged by someone, I have to be! (Suddenly, facing the audience.)

Shameless mortal, sinful one.

Take a pound and I'll be gone.

(He throws, as it were, a coin into the audience.)

BLACKOUT

Scene 4

On the boardwalk. It is Independence Day. Enter the Balloon Seller with a bunch of balloons. The noise of celebrating crowds. In the background, backstage or over the sea, fireworks are set off. Over the radio in the café come the intermittent sounds of announcers, celebrating children, ceremonial speeches, ice cream vendors, and insistent paper horns.

The time is twilight. The sky over the sea is blue and reddish gold.

BALLOON SELLER. (Blowing a paper horn.) Business is going to be good tonight, Mr. Greenstein . . .

WAITER. Yes, it looks like it might. God willing.

BALLOON SELLER. Two straight nights like this and you'll be a millionaire, Mr. Greenstein . . .

WAITER. God should only be so good. Amen.

BALLOON SELLER. Tell me, Mr. Greenstein, did you ever dream that we'd have a Jewish state, huh? It's a great day, Mr. Greenstein, a great day. Look at me, who am I and what am I? Just a Jew selling balloons, I have nothing to my name, I'm as lonely as a stone, but I'm a happy man. It makes me rejoice that we've lived to see this day. I tell you Mr. Greenstein, it calls for a prayer of thanksgiving . . .

WAITER. Tonight you can sell your balloons inside.

BALLOON SELLER. Is it crowded inside?

WAITER. No, not very.

BALLOON SELLER. Then, I'll wait till later. (*He notices Yoram and hurries toward him.*) I saw him . . .

YORAM. Who?

BALLOON SELLER. That man, he's up above. . . . I asked him what his name was, he said it was Medusa. But on his identity card it says: Benjamin Apfelbaum, born in Vilna, a long time in this country, an oldtimer. . . . He lied to me, he also busted all my balloons . . .

YORAM. What did you say his name was?

BALLOON SELLER. Benjamin Apfelbaum.

YORAM. Thank you very much, happy Independence Day. (*The Balloon Seller walks over to the café.*)

YORAM. (*To the waiter.*) Max, (*The waiter comes over.*) I'm waiting for a phone call. . . . I'll be out on the boardwalk. Will you call me?

WAITER. I certainly will.

YORAM. (*Crossing over to Sigmund.*) Listen, mister . . .

SIGMUND. Can I have a light?

YORAM. Sure. (*Yoram hands him his cigarette.*) Their eyes meet.)

SIGMUND. Thank you. . . . The light is so strong. . . . There's too much light, too much. . . . Do you mind if I put on my sunglasses? (*He puts them on.*)

YORAM. Why should I mind? There are many lights, all right, tonight's a holiday. Happy Independence Day . . .

SIGMUND. A holiday? . . . I completely forgot, that is, I completely didn't remember that today is a holiday . . . (*A siren sounds. Everyone stands at attention. Sigmund sits down.*)

SIGMUND. This siren—does it signal the start?

YORAM. It means that the day of mourning for the war victims is over. How come you don't know, you're not new here, are you?

SIGMUND. How simple it is. The siren blows and the mourning is over. (*The siren blows again.*) And now the holiday begins? It's brilliant, simply brilliant. . . . I should say, most impressively symbolic.

YORAM. Mister, would you mind leaving me alone once and for all? Who are you?

SIGMUND. You want to know about me? Kindly believe me, I'm not worthy of anybody's attention. . . . I am (*He points to himself.*) the equivalent of a corpse. . . . Permit me to ask whether you believe in ghosts. . . . No, of course not, well, then, think of me as a ghost; and now, since you don't believe in ghosts, I'm no longer here. . . . May I be excused?

YORAM. (*Angrily.*) Is anyone keeping you? Listen, friend, I have the feeling there's something you want to tell me, so why don't you spill it . . .

SIGMUND. Ah, but that would be unfortunate, so very unfortunate. . . . You're a young man, and I'm an incorrigible windbag. . . . If I began talking, there'd be no stopping me. . . . Should you be so kind as to lend me an ear, who knows, I might rob you of this night meant for women and wine. (*There are sudden noises of celebration.*) And should you interrupt me in the middle and leave, I'd be left without an audience, and that would distress me no end. . . . All in all, you can see that I'd best remain silent. (*More shouts.*) Well, that's how it is, isn't it? (*Shouts from afar. Voices chanting to the melody of a hora: "Everybody must be merry / Everybody must be merry."*) Words like a whiplash! . . . "Everybody must be merry." . . . But you're sad, aren't you? . . . It's a sin, you know, an unpardonable sin to be sad on a night like this. . . . Something about you, if I may say so, reminds me of something or somebody, your voice, perhaps, or your eyes. I can't place it, but it's remarkable. But our imagination forever plays tricks on us, doesn't it? Consequently . . .

YORAM. Perhaps you'll finally tell me who it is I'm supposed to resemble so much?

SIGMUND. Imaginary figments. . . . I, you see . . . sleep when I wake and wake when I would dream. There's an image another image conjures from the dead. A sin we thought went out like a candle flame, only to return. Then left the creditor aware of what lies ahead.

YORAM. You may be a newcomer, but you're a rising talent . . .

SIGMUND. Not at all, or rather yes, I have a talent for rising . . . from the grave. It's a nice phrase, "a rising talent," . . . isn't it?

YORAM. Where are you from?

SIGMUND. From everywhere and nowhere. . . . "I sleep in the East. My heart is in the West." Rabbi Judah Halevi, if I'm not mistaken . . .

YORAM. Yes, but you're mistaken, it's the other way around . . .

SIGMUND. Around and around and around and around. . . . Your patience in listening to me blabber touches my heart, though my heart, as I say, burned in the West.

YORAM. And your ability to play a part is beyond all belief. A poet, an immigrant, and an actor . . .

SIGMUND. An actor? What a sharp eye you've got. . . . Allow me to compliment you. . . . I've practiced the most important act of the twentieth century, the art of staying alive . . . and as you can see, I've been a successful artist. Or have I? Are you familiar with the famous soliloquy in Hamlet?

YORAM. You mean, "To be or not to be—that is the question"? . . .

SIGMUND. Yes. . . . No. . . . Permit me to recite for you a variation on that soliloquy as Shakespeare would undoubtedly have written it had he lived in the twentieth century, "To be or not to be—some question!" . . .

YORAM. What did you say?

SIGMUND. Nice, isn't it?

YORAM. Terrible!

SIGMUND. Terrible? My dear young man, when I was your age and a lecturer at the university in Lvov . . .

YORAM. In Lvov? You were a lecturer in Lvov? What's your name?

SIGMUND. My name? 155370, and kindly note that the last digit is zero. And that, my fine fellow, is all you'll ever know. Zero.

WAITER. (*Entering.*) Mr. Eyal, telephone for you . . . (*Yoram turns to face the waiter and Sigmund disappears. Yoram enters the café. Holding his balloons, the Balloon Seller does a dance in pantomime, expressing the happiness felt by all on Independence Day. The hora music—"Everybody must be merry"—continues. . . .*)

SIGMUND. (*Returning to the dog.*) Why are you sad? (*He sings to the dog.*) "Everybody must be joyful, everybody must be joyful." If he comes back, I won't have the strength to act any more. . . . Stop being sad. It's Independence Day. Come, let's dance. (*He begins to dance with the dog.*) Don't be so lazy. Can you be hungry? Come along, perhaps we'll find you a bone. A bone of joy. (*A young couple enters. The girl has long black braids. They kiss. To the dog.*) Why do you stare at me as though I were the moon? (*Again the melody: "Everybody must be merry."*) They've learned to be joyful. And to forget. And why not? Why remember? There's too much light tonight. Much too much. (*He puts on his sunglasses. The couple, having crossed the stage and exited,*

now reappears. Sigmund springs toward them.) Shameless mortal, sinful one . . . (*The couple disappears.*) Ha-ha-ha-ha! I made them run away. Did you see that? I spoiled their fun. (*He strokes the dog. Again: "Everybody must be joyful."*) Listen to the noise they make. Is it because they remember that they make it? What do you think, my little philosopher? Why so quiet? Say something . . . (*The couple returns, Sigmund approaches them and sings.*) "Everybody must be joyful." (*They take fright and run off. To the dog.*) Run, damn you, run . . . if you don't . . . (*Yoram returns. Sigmund leaps in front of him.*) Shameless mortal. . . . Ah, it's you . . .

YORAM. It's I, but who in hell are you?

SIGMUND. I? A debtor, a repenting sinner who has no one to repent before. Do you know what the rabbis say about repenting sinners?

YORAM. (*On the verge of hating him.*) Listen, you!

SIGMUND. It's said that, in the place where repenting sinners stand, even the purely righteous may not set foot. Why? Nothing could be clearer: because of the stench. But what I would like to know from you is: Whose stink? Complicated isn't it?

YORAM. (*Grabbing him by the lapel.*) Why don't you tell me where you're from? What's your name?

SIGMUND. My name? I've already told you. 155370. Zero, and that's all you'll ever know about me. Zero. (*Sigmund slips out of Yoram's grasp.*) Good night and happy Independence Day.

BLACKOUT

Scene 5

Quiet blues are heard from the café. It is evening. Yoram and Yanek sit at a table on which there is a large bottle of whiskey.

YORAM. Maybe you'll have a drink with me after all?

YANEK. No thanks, just some juice.

YORAM. You don't drink. . . . You don't smoke. (*He lights a cigarette.*) One might think you'd come out a sterilized bottle at some school, rather than . . .

YANEK. Have you had a lot to drink?

YORAM. Drink big—forget big. Sleep big—escape big. I've got a big mouth.

YANEK. Are you under the weather, or what?

YORAM. And what weather. . . . You'll feel it soon enough.
 YANEK. I think we're in for a hot wind.
 YORAM. "Then blew the wind throughout the land" . . .
 YANEK. "Twelve." By Alexander Blok.
 YORAM. Hey, you know the poem . . .
 YANEK. From my days in the youth movement . . .
 YORAM. You know, sometimes you make me wonder how a person can go through so much and come out so virginal and antiseptic. . . . How's Helenka?
 YANEK. It's not been easy for her. . . . She's lonely. . . . Life hasn't spoiled her any . . .
 YORAM. Life's to blame for everything, isn't it? It's never anybody's fault . . .
 YANEK. More or less, although . . .
 YORAM. So you, too, are one of these? . . . I thought with you black was black and white was white. I am a chameleon. I take on every color and none of the colors is me. That's how it is when you try to understand everything and everybody, all the colors. . . . (*Unexpectedly.*) Have you ever killed a human being?
 YANEK. Why do you ask?
 YORAM. Answer me first, then you'll see why . . .
 YANEK. Does that term include Germans?
 YORAM. In this case, no.
 YANEK. Well, I've killed two half human beings . . . collaborators. At times they weren't any better than the Germans.
 YORAM. In the ghetto?
 YANEK. Yes, in Warsaw. . . . Right before the revolt . . .
 YORAM. The revolt. . . . Where was I at the time of the revolt? . . . (*He drinks from his glass.*) Wait a minute. . . . Let me think. . . . Right. . . . I was sitting here. . . . In this café. . . . They brought us to demonstrate. . . . That was my contribution. I had two free hours. . . . I sat down and enjoyed the sun. It was a lovely day. The girls went by and showed off what they had to show. (*Two girls go by.*) Just like now. After the demonstration, I went to the movies. The theaters were open. Just like now. The economy was booming. The war effort. Yes, things were good. Like now. Only no German reparations. Concerts. Culture. Like now, only on the news broadcasts they played different background music . . .
 YANEK. You can't tell me that that's the historical truth . . .
 YORAM. Do me a favor and don't speak to me about that whore. . . . Historical truth! I don't give a damn about her—or she about

me. . . . It comes to the same thing. . . . You're right about one thing, though; I'm trying to look smart in retrospect. And I don't give a damn about retrospective wisdom. . . . Listen, if someone presses a button and three-quarters of the human race (*He makes a liquidating motion.*)—the quarter that's left will go right on, it'll mourn a while or a little longer and it'll go on, and the poets will immortalize all those brave bearers of tradition, of mortality, of culture, of. . . . Right after the war was over, when the first of you people began to arrive and tell us what happened, I too began to ask: "Why didn't you rise up?" And with an accusing finger! Do you get me? With an accusing finger and with more than faint contempt. But of course it wasn't meant for people like you. You saved your honor . . .
 YANEK. We asked the very same question over there.
 YORAM. (*Angrily.*) You had the right to! I didn't!
 YANEK. It was possible to remain human even there. That's a fact.
 YORAM. You're talking about the ones who were strong.
 YANEK. Lets drop the subject.
 YORAM. But what kind of a world is this where you always have to be strong? Do you know what mistake the strong always make? They overestimate man's resources . . . and man is weak . . . weak. . . . (*He drinks.*) That weakness mustn't be put to the test, it mustn't be . . . (*At this moment, Sigmund appears. Yanek doesn't notice him. Yoram does, and his face shows apprehension. Sigmund approaches Yoram resolutely, as though to have it out once and for all. He sees Yanek and turns, disappearing in the direction of the boardwalk.*)
 YANEK. What's wrong?
 YORAM. Nothing. . . . Nothing. . . . Its from the . . . (*He points to the glass and takes a breath of air. He passes his hand over his forehead and says, suddenly and quietly.*) Sigmund's in Israel.
 YANEK. (*Taken by surprise.*) No!
 YORAM. Yes, Yanek, yes . . .
 YANEK. God!
 YORAM. It's true.
 YANEK. What will we do?
 YORAM. You mean, what will you do. It's your decision, not mine.
 YANEK. Why mine and not yours?
 YORAM. Because having the right not to forgive, you have the right to forgive, too.
 YANEK. Yossele, are you sure?
 YORAM. I'm sure, Yanek, I'm sure.

YANEK. You never knew him, how do you know? . . . Maybe . . .
 YORAM. I think he recognized me; and besides, (*He takes a photograph from his pocket.*) I went through your belongings and found this in Mom's album . . .
 YANEK. Mama destroyed all his pictures. (*He studies the photograph.*) She left this one because it was taken at the wedding. . . . Look what a noble face that dog has . . .
 YORAM. You should see what that dog looks like now . . .
 YANEK. Do as you like. . . . Kill him. . . . Get rid of him. . . . Let him go. . . . As you like . . . but not me . . . not me . . . (*Enter Nurit. From a distance, she seems happy. Then, as she approaches and hears Yanek's last words, her expression changes. The photograph is on the table.*)
 NURIT. What happened now? (*They don't answer. She sees the photograph and picks it up.*) Whose photo is this?
 YANEK. Esther and Sigmund.
 NURIT. Wait. . . . He's. . . . I know him from somewhere. . . . I've seen him . . .
 YORAM. Yes, you've seen him . . .
 NURIT. It's not . . . (*She points toward the boardwalk.*)
 YORAM. Yes . . . it's him . . .
 NURIT. That man is your brother-in-law? . . .
 YORAM. Yes! Yes! Yes!
 NURIT. I understand what resemblance he was talking about. (*To Yanek.*) Have you seen him?
 YANEK. Have I? No. . . . He has. (*He points to Yoram.*)
 NURIT. (*Suspiciously.*) Who is he?
 YANEK. He's. . . . Don't ask me. . . . I've done my share. . . . I have a right to rest, too.
 NURIT. (*Losing her temper at Yanek.*) What do you want from him?
 YORAM. (*Trying to quiet her down.*) Nurit!
 NURIT. They're ruining you, you know they are?
 YORAM. Go home!
 NURIT. Don't you send me to a nunnery, or to the kitchen either. Why should it be you and not him? (*She points at Yanek.*) You weren't there . . .
 YORAM. (*Sarcastically.*) No, I wasn't . . .
 NURIT. I know . . .
 YORAM. Something has to be done about him . . .
 NURIT. Something has to be done. . . . What? . . . And meanwhile you make a mess of everything . . .
 YANEK. I'm sorry, the mess has been our doing . . .

NURIT. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, but I know him . . . how sensitive he is . . .
 YANEK. I never said to him that he should . . .
 YORAM. Whether I should or shouldn't—that's my business. Stop pitying me the two of you, quit worrying about your precious darling . . . (*To Yanek.*) Yanek, go home.
 YANEK. (*Getting up confusedly.*) Yossele . . .
 YORAM. (*Angrily.*) Good-bye, Yanek. (*Yanek leaves.*)
 NURIT. Yoram, what are you going to do? Turn him in?
 YORAM. (*Echoing her.*) Turn him in? I don't know. I don't know. I wish I did. . . . I have to understand it. . . . I have to . . .
 YANEK. (*Returning.*) Perhaps . . .
 YORAM. (*More gently.*) There's no need to justify yourself. Yanek, you're the last one here who has to do that. . . . You'd better leave us alone . . . (*Nurit attempts a confused, apologetic smile. Yanek leaves.*)
 NURIT. Let him go.
 YORAM. (*Echoing her.*) Let him go.
 NURIT. He's an unfortunate man.
 YORAM. Unfortunate! They're all unfortunate! . . . (*After a short silence.*) Esther couldn't have loved . . .
 NURIT. What can we know about it?
 YORAM. Because we can't know anything about it, we have to proceed with the agenda, is that it?
 NURIT. I didn't say we have to proceed with the agenda. Why do you think that none of this matters to me? It matters a great deal, but what matters to me now is you. For God's sake. . . . How can people live like this? . . .
 YORAM. Like what?
 NURIT. In constant hell . . .
 YORAM. That's how it is, either you live in paradise or you knock about in hell, and I like it better in hell.
 NURIT. Why do you think I'm less sensitive than you?
 YORAM. I never said that . . .
 NURIT. You don't always have to say something in order to say it. . . . There's no reason why I should feel guilty or make a saint out of myself . . .
 YORAM. Am I to take that as a hint? A saint? It's barely possible to be a human being.
 NURIT. You know very well that you like to torture yourself, to feel guilty . . .
 YORAM. I know, but something . . .

NURIT. Leave him alone . . .

YORAM. Leave. . . Run away. . . One day, when I was a child, it was a sunny day, I noticed my shadow. It was gigantic, long, black, behind me. I turned around and it turned around, too. I had a wooden sword in my hand. I began to strike at it. The sword broke. The shadow was still there . . . (He looks at the photograph.) I have to see him . . . to understand . . .

NURI. To understand. . . Understand everybody. . . All of them, Helenka, and now Sigmund . . . and me, me you understand? YORAM. You I love, Nurit. (Sigmund enters. Nurit bows her head and leaves. Yoram walks over to Sigmund, who stands as if awaiting sentence.)

YORAM. (From a distance.) And so, shameless mortal, sinful one . . .

SIGMUND. (He approaches.) I must say you're very clever . . . that is you, isn't it? It's not right of you, not right at all, you're causing me deficits. A light, please. (He becomes aware of the tension in Yoram's face.) I believe I'll light it myself.

YORAM. Come with me.

SIGMUND. Where?

YORAM. To have a drink.

SIGMUND. Am I hearing things? You're asking me to join you for a drink? You must be joking. You might as well have said that the mountain really came to Mohammed.

YORAM. I'm probably no mountain, but you're certainly not Mohammed.

SIGMUND. You're quite right, allow me to present myself: Dr. Medusa . . .

YORAM. Listen, you . . .

SIGMUND. Perhaps you've changed your mind?

YORAM. Come on! . . . There is no one here. . . Can we talk?

SIGMUND. Ah, as long as there's no one here, you're not embarrassed to share a table with Medusa.

YORAM. (Dragging him forcefully.) Move! Sit!

WAITER. (Entering.) But Mr. Eyal . . .

YORAM. He's my guest. (To Sigmund.) What will you have, cognac?

SIGMUND. Yes . . .

YORAM. (To the waiter.) Two doubles. (The waiter remains standing.)

Two doubles! (The waiter goes off.) Now, then, Dr. . . .

SIGMUND. Medusa.

YORAM. I've never heard a Medusa who sold his soul to the devil!

SIGMUND. If there is a God, there is a devil, too, and he's the whip in God's hands! (Deprecatingly.) God . . .

WAITER. (Returning with two glasses of cognac.) Here you are . . .

SIGMUND. (Putting a bill on the tray.) For your gracious service. (The waiter leaves.) Here's to you, you needn't drink to me. (He drinks.)

YORAM. Want another? (Sigmund drinks Yoram's glass. Yoram goes inside and returns with a bottle. In the meantime, Sigmund gets up as if to leave. He stops, comes back, and sits down in another chair, all before Yoram reappears.) I'm waiting for an answer.

SIGMUND. I've already answered you about where repenting sinners stand.

YORAM. I'm still waiting for an answer.

SIGMUND. You're a very stubborn fellow, my good man, and I'm soft . . . soft as a Medusa. . . What's already been broken is no longer breakable . . .

YORAM. I take it that you were a Medusa even in Lvov.

SIGMUND. I thank you, and now if you'll kindly permit me to be on my way . . . (He tries to go. Yoram forcibly restrains him.)

YORAM. Sit down, we're not through yet. (He takes out the photograph.) Do you recognize this photograph? Do you?

SIGMUND. I do, Yossele. I recognized you from the very first. By the eyes, the shape of the . . .

YORAM. Do you know that my parents are in Israel, and Yanek? . . .

SIGMUND. I know. . . I've wanted more than once . . .

YORAM. Then how could you go on pretending all the time to be . . .

SIGMUND. Mad? By virtue of that madness, I've somehow managed to preserve my last shred of sanity. . . Well, what are you waiting for? Call the police. Why don't you call them? Are you afraid? I can do it for you . . . (Shouting.) Hey! (Yoram covers his mouth.) So that you can remain the immaculate virgin that you are. You effeminate soul . . .

YORAM. And what if this virginal, effeminate soul should tear you into little pieces?

SIGMUND. So much the better, why don't you?

YORAM. I always knew I would do nothing . . . nothing . . . nothing . . . "True conscience does make cowards of us all." Consistency . . . If that's the proper name for this swamp (He passes his hand over his forehead.) into which one sinks and sinks, in which nothing is ever clear. . . But how could anybody sink as far as you have, you mad dog? . . .

SIGMUND. (To his dog.) Is that you, thou glory of creation? (To Yoram.) Don't you think there's a resemblance between us?

YORAM. Stop acting!

SIGMUND. What is it that I'm supposed to do? Tell you how it was there? . . . Burst into a Dostoevski-like confession? . . . Beg forgiveness? What do you understand about all this?—Zero!—You understand Zero! Forgiveness? From whom? The enlightened world? At least I know who I am: I'm a Medusa, a kind of jellyfish. Do you know why I insist on being a jellyfish? Because jellyfish have no words, they don't even have a voice. All they have is memories for which there aren't any buyers in this world of forgetfulness. Fill up my glass. (Yoram pours him a drink.) What do you want?

YORAM. To understand. . . To understand how a man like you, a man of principles, a humanist, Yanek told me about you—could end up the way you did. . . To understand.

SIGMUND. You want to understand, to understand. . . And if I were to tell you that in more than one way I was their biggest victim, would you understand? That silences you. . . You want to understand, what you want is to understand. . . (He suddenly takes out some papers and gives them to Yoram.) Here. Take them. Read them. Perhaps you'll understand. . . Here you'll find the life story of Medusa, erstwhile doctor of philosophy, authority on Renaissance art, fervid believer in humanism. Take them! Take this, too. . . (He pulls out another notebook.) Here you'll find the story of a certain commandant of a concentration camp. . . A boyhood friend of mine. . . A good friend. . . A German. . . We studied together at Heidelberg. . . A humanist. . . He had a special way of torturing me. Once a week, he would invite me to discuss with him the future of humanity. Once he said to me, "You Jews have given us Marx, Freud, Einstein, Heine. . . But only Heine grasped the essence of the German temperament . . . that we've remained fire-worshippers to this day." "In the end you'll be burned to death," I told him, "we'll consume you yet." "No one will consume us," he said to me, "we'll leave behind us a world so stripped clean of everything, that there won't be a rag of an ideal to cover the nakedness with." . . . And he was right. . . (After a pause.) He mustn't be right! He mustn't be! Do you hear me, he mustn't be! I want you to understand that I was a human being, and the most terrible thing of all was that they were human, too.

YORAM. (Shouting.) Everyone is human! You! Me! THEM! So what is a human being? What?

SIGMUND. Whoever still asks that question. They only knew how to execute, not how to ask!

YORAM. To ask. That's the most that can be. Never to understand . . .

SIGMUND. You're so much like Esther now. She loved you. Very much. . . I have to go. . . (He begins to walk away.)

YORAM. Where are you going, Sigmund? . . . Wait . . . I . . .

SIGMUND. Do me a favor, a favor I don't deserve; don't ask . . . don't talk. . . Anything you might say to me, I've already spent many long nights saying to myself. . . So many times I've wanted to end it. . . To . . . To end it. . . But I've gone on, as flesh-and-blood will go on. . . Now, too, I've gone on because I couldn't forgive. To die, to sleep, no more . . . is to forgive. . . There must be no forgiveness! None! I have to go. . . Take good care of yourself. (He rises suddenly, turning his back on Yoram. He sees Nurit standing, half-hidden, in the corner.) Here is your wife. . . She's waiting for you. (He walks toward the sea. Crash of breakers. The stage is slowly darkened. Yoram picks up the notebook, looks at it, and then to Sigmund. Nurit comes up to him. Both are looking at Sigmund as he disappears.)

CURTAIN