

2 Handu -

4 parts

ALMA PHOENIX

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A Play for Two

by

Maurice Rowdon

CHARACTERS

HE

*(in the order of his appearances)*

SIGMUND FREUD  
GUSTAV MAHLER  
OSKAR KOKOSCHKA

SHE

*(in the order of her appearances)*

ALMA MAHLER  
ANNA FREUD  
A WAR NURSE

## ACT ONE

This is a various purpose set. There is an arch, at the top of three or four steps, upstage right (from the actor's point of view). It has lilac colored curtains which are closed at the moment.

Downstage of the arch is a chaiselongue, with a coffee table. Left and also upstage stands a desk with an armchair and perhaps one or two upright chairs. Behind it is the back wall which is set at a slight angle, disappearing behind the raised archway. There is a large window more or less behind the desk which we will be using as a frame into which to insert various messages, mostly to locate the scene---'LONDON', 'VIENNA' etc. If lights are used for these they should be made to resemble Broadway theatre signs.

Under the window is a group of canvases which lean against the wall.

On the wall by the window is a telephone of the earliest hook-up type. At the moment it is hanging off the hook.

A doorway leads off upstage left, that is left of the desk from the actor's point of view. There are two other entrances---one upstage center between the wall and the raised arch, the other downstage right between the extremity of the raised area and the proscenium arch.

On the desk there is a pile of musical scores, and on one of the upright chairs a pile of women's clothes.

At curtainrise the chaiselongue is downstage, with its back-rest toward actor's left. ALMA MAHLER is lying on it.

A banner has been lowered from the flies downstage just left of her head, and its base sits on the floor. Printed on it in somewhat Gothic script is a message: SIGMUND FREUD'S CONSULTING ROOM, VIENNA. This banner is used only for the 'analytical' scenes.

SIGMUND FREUD is sitting concealed just behind this banner but we see the top of his head, which is covered with a Tyrolean hat and feather. The actor underneath this hat is also going to play MAHLER and KOKOSCHKA.

ALMA is a striking blonde woman magically equipped with the ability to combine the sweet, wild and arrogant in her features and behavior without disharmony.

At curtainrise the set is in darkness except for a single spot that picks out the banner with its message. We hear the MERRY WIDOW waltz in the distance. The spot grows in intensity, holds so that the message may be read, then dims: as it does so the other lights come up, though they are maintained dim throughout the scene. The music too dims into silence.

ALMA: Not one of them was a good lover.

FREUD: Forgive me, did I hear you right? Not one of your many husbands and lovers---architects, painters, composers, novelists, army officers---ever satisfied you?

ALMA: You needn't pluralize like that, Dr Freud. *An* architect, *a* painter, *a* novelist, *a* composer. And every one of them a genius.

FREUD: Forgive me, I thought you always described Oskar Kokoschka as

The Perfect Lover.

ALMA: He was. But none of them gave me what I *wanted*.

A pause.

FREUD: What you wanted for *your* genius.

ALMA: Exactly. I was too busy looking after theirs.

FREUD: Is it the nature of genius to look after other people's all the time?

ALMA (*defensively*) So really I had no genius Dr Freud?

FREUD: A little thought will show you that I'm saying the opposite. You think those outstanding men found nothing in you---Gustav Mahler, Gropius, Werfel, Kokoschka? You weren't the notes in Mahler's music, the paint on Kokoschka's canvases?

ALMA: That sounds a little corny to me.

FREUD: I'm Viennese my dear.

ALMA: I had a certain power I suppose.

FREUD: A certain power! Alma Mahler could turn their heads with a glance---corny but true and how Viennese! But she only turned *artist's* heads. Doesn't that say something to you?

ALMA: The priest wasn't an artist. He *was* a visionary, I suppose.

FREUD: Good God, you had a priest?

ALMA: A Catholic one at that.

Silence as the Tyrolean hat shakes from side to side.

ALMA (cont.) Can you make this comprehensible for me, doctor: why should Mahler's falling in love with me after ten years of marriage be the signal for me to leave him and for him to die?

FREUD: What we desire unconsciously can't be comprehensible. It belongs to ancestors, gods!

ALMA: I thought you hated any mention of God?

FREUD: I said gods. They belong to the imagination, in which I'm very interested.

ALMA: Ah, you men! How precisely you settle on your mode of expression, make it your lifelong quest, how early you prepare for it!

FREUD: But what stood in *your* way in that respect? what stands in a woman's way?

ALMA: I wanted to *become* them. I thought, let me enclose myself in their genius and I shall grow in that male womb and be born one day. When Gustav Mahler conducted I felt inside him! Music is my medium you see, so I could sacrifice myself to him without effort. In the case of Walter Gropius I wanted to embryonize inside his Prussian aristocracy, so upright and unyielding, so proud and passionate and truthful! But they always concentrated on *me*, you see. Fell in love with *me*. They looked at *me*, even looked *up* to me! I was stranded again, aching for a womb to be quiet and grow in.

FREUD: So you betrayed them in proportion to their love for you. A kind of pro rata arrangement. When they were no longer masters of themselves you looked for a new master, to the degree of their love. Horrible forces play in your blood, Alma Mahler---too deep a love for masters, too deep a horror of being mastered! How the father-complex weaves its lifelong spell!

No reply.

FREUD (*cont.*,) Do you feel sleepy?

ALMA (*almost asleep*) I was always hoping that the next one... I was always ready for him...

FREUD (*his voice hushed*) Is that why you never wore panties?

The lights fade to BLACKOUT as the MERRY WIDOW waltz comes up, though still faint.

The spot picks out a new banner, also printed in Gothic characters: GUSTAV MAHLER IN CONSULTATION WITH ANNA FREUD, LONDON.

ANNA FREUD (formerly ALMA) is sitting behind this banner and we can only see the top of her head, which is covered with a cloche hat.

As the spot fades the other lights come up slowly. GUSTAV MAHLER (formerly FREUD) is now lying on the chaiselongue.

GUSTAV MAHLER is dressed for a concert and holds a conductor's baton. His eyes are closed.

He is small, rather pale and slight, with a longish face and an unusually steep forehead. His hair is intensely black, his eyes sharply aware and penetrating behind their gold-rimmed spectacles. As we shall see later, he has an irregular way of walking, tending to stamp his feet, to stop suddenly and then rush forward headlong; something is always pulling or halting him, it seems. His shoulders are rather hunched.

ANNA: Of course you realize, don't you, that you've been sleeping with your mother, while she's been sleeping with her father?

MAHLER: Indeed, yes, Dr Freud. Your father---I mean your real actual registered father Sigmund---told me as much. My mother was a sickly woman and it excited me to see my wife Alma drawn and wan and tired, as of course she often was, looking after my musical temperament and two children and two houses, and servants who had to produce my meals on the dot.

He conducts, his eyes still closed, his lips pouted in silent whistling.

ANNA: Forgive me, she, the mother, caused you great sexual excitement by betraying the father, despite the fact, or rather because of the

fact, that *you* were the father.

MAHLER: Good lord! Could you explain that?

ANNA: Alma was the daughter of a famous painter, yes?---her Viennese home was the scene of many artistic events---concerts, dinner parties, soirées. She no doubt witnessed her artist father betraying her non-artist mother, and vice versa perhaps, in that heady atmosphere of nocturnal adventure in which Nietzsche and nude models and Schubert quartets were mixed together, making sexual betrayal a stimulus for new ideas. The child is terrified by parental dalliance!

MAHLER (*with a little giggle*) What a rhetorical flourish! But yes, I agree, I agree! My childhood was a prolonged horror of possible, threatened, looming, imminent abandonment. A fearful parental row would be followed by copulation!

ANNA: We call it the primal scene. You witnessed the primal scene?

MAHLER: Oh indeed!

ANNA: You *think* you witnessed the primal scene. But then it's your *thoughts* we're after. Since, for you, abandonment was bitterly painful, in fact it created distress bordering on total breakdown, you were naturally less inclined to betray Alma than she, full of artistic memories, was inclined to betray you.

MAHLER: Well I had my little peccadilloes. Singers, you know. It was awfully easy in the sweat and push of rehearsals. So I wouldn't underestimate *my* power of betrayal, Dr Freud.

ANNA: But Alma, likewise, though nurtured in the Viennese atmosphere we both know---flirtations by candlelight, snatched fruits, sudden calamitous liaisons which provided hot talk for weeks---she too was terrified of parental divisions, and in such a way that it became, this terror, the very kernel of her sexual behavior.

MAHLER: Very nicely put. I *love* 'snatched fruits'.

ANNA: It put her on a lifelong search for genius.

MAHLER: You call Gropius a genius? The only real genius she had apart from me was Oskar Kokoschka. And she ran away from him as

she did from me---like water from fire! He *loved* her, you see. She recognized the same scorching heat she got from me---in a boy! He loved her with *my* heat as I lay dying!

ANNA (*alarmed*) When you lay *what*?

MAHLER (*animated, shouting, half rising from the couch*) Dying, dying! I'm dead, woman, don't you realize that?

Silence as he relapses into his former position.

MAHLER (*cont., quietly*) I mean, shit, you were a little girl when all this was going on. Are you there? (*No reply*) Isn't this 1938?

ANNA (*hushed*) Yes.

MAHLER: Well I died precisely twenty seven years ago. *She's* still alive. In Hollywood, isn't it?

ANNA (*the cloche hat trembling*) I think so.

MAHLER: And this is London? Ah, but you can't speak! You're just like your father, your actual registered one, he passed out whenever the word death was mentioned. Just slid under the table.

ANNA (*girlishly*) I must be dreaming!

MAHLER: Corn, corn! The kind of thing old Werfel would say in one of his novels. Wasn't *that* a funny marriage? Alma brimming over with fascism and he a Jew brimming over with bolshevism. Aren't you on a bus at the moment, Dr Freud?

ANNA: I believe I am!

MAHLER: Travelling to St John's Wood, haunt of prominent men and women on Hitler's hit list?

ANNA: Yes.

MAHLER: And this is only happening in your head?

ANNA: I sincerely hope so!

He conducts something in the silence.

MAHLER (*stopping*) Isn't Kokoschka coming to London soon?

ANNA: Is he?

MAHLER: Oh yes. With no possessions in the world.

The MERRY WIDOW waltz is heard again  
in the distance.

MAHLER (*cont.*) There was a dark understanding between that young painter  
and me, not that he knew it. You see, I had to put my love  
*somewhere*, pass it on to a likely soul. It was burning me even in  
death.

He conducts again.

MAHLER (*cont.*) A little irresponsible of me perhaps, in view of the fact that  
he was a child of nineteen and Alma had enough experience for a  
grandmother, despite being only at the end of her twenties. I saw  
they were an equal match. *Nothing* could kill him, not even a  
bayonet twisted in his lung.

At these words the opening of Mahler's  
Tenth Symphony comes up loud and strong.

The lights fade to BLACKOUT. The banner  
is flown up and a new message is shown in the  
window: PAINTER'S STUDIO, VIENNA,  
1912.

The music dies as the light grows on the  
empty scene.

The silence is broken by the sound of water  
being poured into a bowl behind the curtains.  
Someone is washing, softly. The phone is  
hanging off its hook.

Together with paints and brushes there are  
newspaper cuttings all over the desk.

The arch-curtains open slightly and ALMA

emerges, rather tussled and in a lilac petticoat. She is holding a towel, with which she has just been drying her face. She closes the curtains carefully behind her and tiptoes across to the desk area. Then she begins dressing from the pile of clothes on the chair. She puts on a bracelet, a necklace of pearls and two rings, gazing at the rings with pleasure for a moment.

She sits and combs out and dresses her hair. Then she goes to the arch and pulls the curtains open. OSKAR KOKOSCHKA is lying in the bed, which is enormously disordered under a pile of brightly colored cushions---red, green, yellow, blue (his first favorite colors).

He is fairly tall, blond, slim, his hair cut short and his head held rather high. The deep blue of his eyes is, according to a friend, 'unbelievable'. He is given to brief outbursts of anger or enthusiasm. He continually springs surprises of tone, phrasing, movement.

He appears asleep. He has a carnival cloak on, and a mask is pulled up to his brow.

She wakes him gently---a hand on his shoulder.

ALMA (*softly*) Ko-ko.

He raises himself, blinking. She glances at her watch (on a gold chain) and returns to the desk area.

ALMA (*taking up her bag*) I'm going back to Semmering. Where I shall have a bath. And a change of clothes. There'll be fresh coffee waiting for me with the morning letters.

KOKOSCHKA: Very funny.

ALMA (*preparing to leave*) I'll pick you up at the art-school Friday evening.

She goes left.

KOKOSCHKA: Alma.

She stops.

KOKOSCHKA: You go for an eternity of three days and don't even kiss me?

ALMA (*delighted*) What a child you are!

She runs back to the bed and they embrace, kiss, laugh together.

KOKOSCHKA: You know what a student said to me yesterday---he said your name Kokoschka reminds me of ko-ko-ko-ko-ko! (he tickles her as he does a cock crow).

They roll on the bed and he begins piling bedclothes on top of her. She throws cushions at him and he stands up in the bed, leaping about, dancing and crying 'Ko-ko-ko-ko!'.  
*ko-ko!*'.

She breaks away from him and runs down the steps.

KOKOSCHKA (*clasping his hands together imploringly and falling on his knees*) Alma! My life! My work! My self!

He walks on his knees after her, scrambling down the steps.

ALMA: Get up you fool! Up!

He catches her and they laugh together. He points to his canvas **THE TEMPEST**.

KOKOSCHKA: Look at our picture! I'm going to change it from red to steel blue, how about that? Look how we float in the universe!

ALMA: What's the phone doing off the hook? (*replacing it*).

KOKOSCHKA: I was talking to Adolf Loos last night before the ball. We're no longer friends.

ALMA: Why?

KOKOSCHKA: I told him I shall never leave you. He thinks I should, must. Before that my mother called. She said I've become very short-tempered since I met you---also very reserved---as I never was before. Of course she's scared of you.

ALMA: She thinks I'm too old for you---too important.

KOKOSCHKA: That's correct.

He watches her as she moves about the desk.

ALMA (*taking up some of the newspaper cuttings*) Why do you take these seriously?

KOKOSCHKA: Read them for God's sake! (*Grabbing a couple of them*) 'This Oskar Kokoschka, using his ko-ko rays on people who have the misfortune to fall under his brush, is qualified to decorate brothels with harrowing pictures of syphilitics and paralytics. These paintings are disgusting plague sores and puddles that emit a foul stench.' And this is Mr Arthur Rössler on my Hagenbund exhibition---'He boils up his paints from lethally poisonous putridity, from juices that have been fermented out of diseases! Here are shimmering gall-yellows, fever-greens, frostbite-blues, hysteria-reds, and the chemicals binding them all together seem to be iodide of formyl, carbolic and asafoetida!' Do you hear that? Asafoetida, Alma---a horrible stink again! 'When he smears them on they set like scars. Perhaps this gauche portrayal of sick bodies in states of disgusting uncleanness, spongy, porous, leathery, flabby, dotted and spotted---'!

ALMA: Don't you see they're paying you compliments? You never wanted to paint pretty pictures like the French---so you have to take the rap!

KOKOSCHKA: Don't talk like that---it makes you look hard! (*Glaring at her*) Is it true you lost your virginity to Gustav Klimt, the pope of Viennese art and the most lascivious bastard in the city?

ALMA (*roused*) He fell in love with me!

KOKOSCHKA: I didn't ask you that. I can't imagine a man like Klimt not getting his way---Gustav Mahler did after two days flat.

ALMA: I won't have you talk like that! And I shan't be here tonight!

KOKOSCHKA: *What?*

ALMA: I promised my child. And my mother too. They've a right to see me alone sometimes.

KOKOSCHKA (*finding difficulty in speech*) But you leave them all the time!

ALMA: All the more reason to stay with them now!

KOKOSCHKA (*savagely*) It's that damned biologist Kammerer---he's got his water tanks and his toads all over your house---copulating toads!

ALMA: Don't be stupid. He has a wife!

KOKOSCHKA: But she says it too! Everybody says it! It's your reputation---flirting---decoying!

ALMA (*gathering up her bag again*) I won't hear any more of it!

KOKOSCHKA (*visibly trembling*) You slept with me after a couple of days too!---Mahler you married in a month with his child inside you---you've been hanging round that Viennese organ-grinder Franz Schreker---and how many others? (*Half to himself*) Even when we travel together you take a separate room.

ALMA: I'm Mrs Mahler---Mrs Gustav Mahler!---and I always will be!

KOKOSCHKA (*grabbing her*) You mustn't say it!

ALMA: Ever since his death-mask came to the house you've behaved like a fool!

KOKOSCHKA: I forbid you to think of him alive or dead! He was foreign to you---he robbed you of your body!

She tries to fight him off. Finally she manages to tear herself away and runs off, right.

KOKOSCHKA (*cont., shrieking after her*) Mrs Mahler---Mrs  
Kammerer---Mrs Schreker---Mrs Klimt---Mrs Zemlinsky---Mrs  
Gabrilovitch!

BLACKOUT

The MERRY WIDOW waltz comes over in  
the distance. A banner is lowered again and  
this time it reads: GUSTAV MAHLER  
STILL IN POST MORTEM  
CONSULTATION WITH ANNA FREUD.

As the lights come up to dimness we see  
MAHLER in concert clothes again lying on  
the couch, holding his baton. And again we  
see ANNA FREUD's cloche hat.

MAHLER: She had learned to betray by that time, you see. I don't mean she  
wasn't capable of betraying even at the age of eighteen. But now  
she'd learned *the art* of betrayal. A subtle sleight of hand is now  
at work which enhances her desperately in the eyes of her lover,  
the more she draws away from him while still protesting love. It  
enhances her to the degree that he worships her---enhances her  
beyond his safety, his sanity!

ANNA: Has a man never employed such sleight of hand?

MAHLER: Oh indeed indeed. But to my mind the mastery of it lies with the  
woman because after all he was born within her.

ANNA: You are saying that the maternal role is the key one?

MAHLER: The key one both in the sense that she is a mother and that she  
has learned from her mother, as at an early dancing school. You  
see, the mother observes the terror of abandonment in her child,  
even in the baby---the faintest flicker of the eyes, a hint of a pout  
on lips that cannot yet speak. Of course she could never inflict  
such a hurt on the child she loves, the child that *is* her, but she is  
heaping up wisdom for herself which increases her deposit, so to  
speak, in the central bank of betrayal year by year as the race  
grows older.

ANNA: But, Mr Mahler, let us investigate the role you, the male, play in

all this! You are simply describing your mother complex as they are fulfilling the terms of their father complex! You have made a great study of the mother in all her disguises---

MAHLER: How rightly you use the word disguises!---singer after singer twisted my baton into a knife that entered my heart while I thought it could never bend to anything but *my will!* The only ones who left me with a straight baton were those who didn't make a great career, I broke *them!*

ANNA: Alma never made a great career because of your demands on her!

MAHLER: Indeed, indeed! Only when I fell in love with her at the end---I regard my love for her when we married as an infatuation---only then did she get her freedom and became the femme fatale, which killed me.

ANNA (*with a sigh*) Thank God these are only thoughts in my head, on a bus, in 1938, with me wearing an out of date cloche hat and my father Sigmund waiting for me at home, to console us about this war that is looming and which seems to leave him quite unmoved and unafraid.

MAHLER: I thought when I incited Kokoschka to love her that she would get more than she could chew. But alas---!

ANNA: You are telling me you *incited* him to love her? Had he no eyes of his own?

MAHLER: Well of course he did! That's why I incited *him* and not somebody else.

ANNA: Allowing for the fact that this is all on a bus, and I'm nearly at St John's Wood, can the dead do that sort of thing?

MAHLER: If the dead can't who can, my dear? Consider the fact that most of the people who have ever been alive are dead---they represent the mass of humanity, numbers infinite, and you, the living ones, are a pitiable minority indeed. You eat and drink on mountains of corpses!

ANNA: Oh dear!

MAHLER: Your cities, thoughts, books, music, expressions of face, of walk

and talk and flirtation, your most intimate habits from the way you blow your noses to how your egg must be done, not to say the language you talk in, the forms and images you think in---they are all the work of the dead, my dear, yet you tell me that this tiny morsel of life in the rapidly expiring year of 1938 which will in not many years be unknown history to most of the *next* tiny minority, you mean to say that the creaking, croaking bus and the clatter of plates in St John's Wood in preparation for one more (which is also *one less*) meal, you tell me that all this is the only thing alive, in anything but a most perilously tenuous sense? You believe that all the power and meaning lies *there* and that in my dying hour I was unable to find the perfect heart to put my love in---a heart so strong that even on the battlefield, even with a bayonet turning not a centimeter away, that heart continued to beat triumphantly---you tell me that a *living* individual could do that? With what would a living individual do it---with his walking stick, or an inflatable cushion perhaps? Don't you see that nothing short of an *enfant terrible* would do for Alma, both to bring her back to life after my disappearance and to get her away from that damned architect who used to haunt me everywhere I went, send her telegrams, spy on her (*growing frantic and shouting and sitting up as before*) from my own garden, yes, he came to Maiernigg, he came to the Carinthian lakes to smell her out and cause my heart to fail!

A harrowing passage from his Sixth Symphony comes up as the lights quickly die to BLACKOUT.

The message at the window is: THE PAINTER'S STUDIO, VIENNA, 1914.

As the lights come up we see ALMA in the chaiselongue, sleeping.

KOKOSCHKA is singing to himself, off, *Ach du lieber Augustin*, in a burlesque manner, like a drunkard.

He enters from the left with a tray of coffee things, swaying and playing the fool.

KOKOSCHKA (*indicating the desk as he puts the tray down*) You leave his scores everywhere---your little babies (*pouring her coffee*)!

They cry to you all day (*hooing and booing like a baby*).

She smiles sleepily.

KOKOSCHKA (*cont., grasping her hand*) You came to tell me I'm a king, didn't you? That the prince and heir is on his way! And you're feeling well! You saw the doctor?

ALMA: Yes.

KOKOSCHKA: We'll marry at once---a full cathedral wedding, I'll paint the Dom throughout, a new reredos, a dozen ravishing tryptychs and a cycle of frescoes that are going to plunge the chancel into a sea of Hellenic light!

She places a hand softly over his mouth.

ALMA: I'm tired and not quite healthy, Ko-ko. The doctor noticed that. I don't know how I can face a child!

Silence.

KOKOSCHKA draws back.

ALMA (*cont., speaking in little staccato bursts*) A connection like ours---it's too powerful! Such connections drive people apart. Much more often than you think. When it's so deep---deeper than anything you've ever thought possible. Can you imagine that it makes the woman afraid?

KOKOSCHKA: Of what?

ALMA: I don't know, of stagnating.

KOKOSCHKA: It's barely human what you say!

ALMA: Perhaps I don't mean it.

KOKOSCHKA: I almost hope you love someone else---rather than say such barbarous things!

ALMA: Perhaps men love more than we do--it provokes you all to wonderful work---makes you great---but the woman feels diminished.

KOKOSCHKA: So, feeling diminished, she must look for another man to undiminish her and so it goes on and on!

ALMA (*rising briskly*) I won't hear that discussion any more!

KOKOSCHKA: All your friends are telling you to leave me! It's because Mrs Gustav Mahler can't be seen with a man who lacks poise!

She walks, left.

KOKOSCHKA (*cont., feebly*) You're going the wrong way.

ALMA: I left the car at the back.

KOKOSCHKA (*afflicted with difficulty of speech*) To conceal your visit. (*Quietly*) Yet you allow Hans Pfitzner in your apartment. For the night! (*Seizing her hands*) Alma, he got into your cells---you say it yourself---everything for his music, music, music, never you! You say it yourself! And you're trying to bring yourself back to life with all these men---but only I can do that!

ALMA (*quietly*) If Gustav Mahler killed me, is my body dead---does it feel dead to you?

KOKOSCHKA: No.

ALMA: I make love like someone dead?

KOKOSCHKA: No.

ALMA: So how did Gustav Mahler kill me? And who brought me to life? *He did!*

KOKOSCHKA (*humbled*) He wore you out---!

ALMA: He *burned me alive*---he fed the flame that I gave to you!

KOKOSCHKA: You say it now. But I had to hold you like a corpse after his death, you were cold, in my arms the life came back to you!

ALMA: I was *grieving!* Don't you understand that? I had *my* feelings, not yours!

KOKOSCHKA (*almost in a whisper*) So he's back again. I feel him with you all the time. In your clothes. He watches us.

ALMA (*still very quiet*) What's wrong with death watching us?

She turns away and hums the MERRY WIDOW waltz.

ALMA (*cont.*) Do you hear it?

KOKOSCHKA (*weakly*) No I don't hear it!

She laughs as she goes, quickly now.

BLACKOUT

A banner is lowered and it bears the following message: ALMA WITH SIGMUND FREUD, VIENNA.

As before, ALMA is lying on the chaiselongue and FREUD again has his Tyrolean hat on.

ALMA: You see, at that time Walter Gropius was slowly being killed by the thought that I might not marry him. He was all I could wish for. He could give me all I needed. I needed a stable home once more.

FREUD: But you had a stable home at Semmering. Your mother and child were there.

ALMA: It had no man.

FREUD: It had no *father*.

ALMA: Yes, I suppose.

FREUD: The moment Mahler laid himself at your feet as a dying man he could no longer fulfil that role. He became a lover, that is abhorrent to you! You said so yourself---you complained that he woke you up in the middle of the night and made love to you---he disturbed your sleep, no less! And the new aristocratic, non-Jewish father could be depended on at least to observe the

proprieties---even perhaps to the extent of giving you a bedroom of your own, even a suite in his Berlin mansion.

ALMA: Gropius *bored* me you see!

FREUD (*with a chuckle*) The nature of fathers, my dear, once they have been conquered! A poor, gentle creature like Gropius you transform into God knows what lumpen mediocrity! (*After a pause*) I imagine Kokoschka never bored you.

ALMA: There was never any time, he was always making a scene.

FREUD: Lucky for you he knew nothing of your architect, much less of your proposed marriage to him. Otherwise the scene might have been your last.

ALMA: You know, in a funny way, I wouldn't have minded dying at Koko's hands. I wanted him too late. I searched for him everywhere. I couldn't find him.

FREUD: Yet he's still alive.

ALMA: Yes.

FREUD: We look everywhere, frantically, but the lover has gone! My unconscious is hiding him from me! (He chuckles) *Eros finds, Thanatos veils.*

A theme from Mahler's Fifth steals over as the light dims.

The following message is seen in the window:  
THE PAINTER'S STUDIO, 1914.

As the lights come up we see KOKOSCHKA putting his picture THE TEMPEST on the easel in the area by the window.

He sits, gazing at it. He rubs his thumb in his oils and thumbs in a line (a painting habit of his). There is silence. He paints on.

Suddenly we hear ALMA's voice from behind the arch curtain.

ALMA (*off, behind the curtains*) I'm ready.

He jumps, looking this way and that.

ALMA (*cont., off*) I'm ready Ko-Ko.

KOKOSCHKA (*galvanized into action*) Oh my God!

He dashes to the arch and, after a moment's renewed hesitation, pulls the curtains aside. The canopy bed is now tidy, and ALMA is seated on a corner of it, a laurel wreath round her head.

KOKOSCHKA (*cont., gazing at her*) Splendid! (Stepping back) Splendid!

ALMA (*laughing at his nervousness*) What's the matter? What were you doing?

KOKOSCHKA: I---forgot you were here!

ALMA: *Forgot?*

KOKOSCHKA (*hurriedly going back to the easel*) My head spins sometimes! I feel I'm somewhere else!

ALMA: Does it frighten you?

KOKOSCHKA: Not at all! Not at all! It excites me. It excites me greatly. You remember when we were out walking round the Prater and I pointed out a boy at one of the stalls and said he would murder his father one day and he did a week later?

ALMA (*calmly*) Yes Ko-Ko.

KOKOSCHKA: Well, that excited me.

He pulls out his portrait of her and takes away THE TEMPEST. At last he settles himself, gradually recovering his calm, making bold strokes with his brush.

KOKOSCHKA (*cont.*) They deny I have a god's eyes but I have. That's why they

call my portraits horrific. For instance, the moment I set eyes on that Ludwig von Janikowsky I knew he was round the bend.

A regimental band passes below the window, accompanied by the sound of horses' hoofs and marching feet.

ALMA: Or is it the war that frightens you?

KOKOSCHKA: Declarations don't scare me. The actual fighting might.

They listen to the band, and the sounds gradually fade.

ALMA: I was twenty minutes behind this curtain before you came to. Where do you go?

KOKOSCHKA: All over the universe as a matter of fact.

ALMA: Will you take me with you?

KOKOSCHKA: They wouldn't recognize your social position, they don't speak Viennese.

ALMA; Who's they?

KOKOSCHKA: All those beings that play inside you and me and all around us.

ALMA: If they're beings in that sense they should speak *every* language.

KOKOSCHKA: Let's put it this way---they could but they don't want to waste their time. I mean what would they want to hear Max Burkhart talking balls for?

ALMA: Is that what you think of one of Vienna's most brilliant men?

KOKOSCHKA: Oh you and your Viennese tittle tattle!

He paints on.

ALMA: When we lost our little one I saw her many times afterwards, in New York. She helped us through a difficult period. Gustav had just been to the doctor in Maiernigg and been given his death sentence, as he called it---a throat full of streptococci. He had

everybody intriguing against him in New York---including Toscanini---can you believe it? Toscanini actually wanted to do a version of Tristan and Isolde a few weeks after Mahler's, which was the best ever heard. It really was an insult!

KOKOSCHKA: The streptococci came from being in love with you.

ALMA (*without resentment*) Yes, I'm aware that's what you think.

KOKOSCHKA: But *my* throat's all right.

He paints on.

She hums the waltz.

ALMA: He said he breathed for me, at the end. You're right---he got sick for me---he actually said it. He said 'It's because you're no longer with me'. Those were his words.

KOKOSCHKA: Don't start crying for christ's sake, I've got a difficult bit here.

ALMA: Not at all. I realize perfectly well that if he'd been in love with me all those years he'd never have done those symphonies. (*After a pause*) He was everyone for me---father, family, Vienna.

KOKOSCHKA: And what am I?

ALMA: I simply love *you*.

He gazes at her for some time, stopping his work.

ALMA (*cont.*) I was twenty when we met---do you expect me to have held my own against the most famous man in Vienna, and twice my age?

KOKOSCHKA: Vienna's most famous man with Vienna's most famous woman. It ought to have been a thoroughly idiotic match oughtn't it?---but somehow wasn't.

ALMA: Isn't that a little to my credit?

KOKOSCHKA: A *lot* to your credit.

He goes on painting.

KOKOSCHKA (cont.) I was at the station today. I heard a woman say to her husband with a laugh 'Don't kill too many Serbians!'. He was drunk. He told her quietly to go, he couldn't bear to say goodbye. (Watching her) These are the fiercest partings of all aren't they Alma---the war ones?

ALMA: I don't know.

KOKOSCHKA: He looked frightened as he walked to the train. Not of death but separation. What are you thinking?

ALMA: Nothing.

He sits back, puts his brush aside.

KOKOSCHKA: I can't stand to see all this tragedy and just flit around it, I mean my old life can't go on anyway.

ALMA (*furtively*) Do you want to go?

KOKOSCHKA: Do you want me to go?

ALMA: I want what *you* want.

KOKOSCHKA: I'll join the cavalry.

She watches him.

ALMA: People say it'll be over by 1915. Russia's not strong enough for us.

KOKOSCHKA: There are forces at work people know nothing about.

He sits doing nothing, brooding, his head lowered. Suddenly he spits at her portrait and throws it to the ground. She jumps up terrorized.

KOKOSCHKA (*cont., throwing himself into the air*) You aborted my child! You damned she-devil! (*advancing on her*) Why don't *you* fight on the Russian front---they need baby-killers!

She tears off her laurel wreath and flees behind the bed. He dashes up the steps after her. She is nowhere to be found. He even looks under the bed. But he finds something else---a bottle of Benedictine and a glass. He takes the bottle and glass and gazes at them for some time with resignation before going off left.

**KOKOSCHKA** (*off*) **BABY KILLER! DRUNKARD!**

We hear him smashing the bottle etc to pieces. But the smashing doesn't stop at a bottle. It seems to extend to his crockery, even, apparently, to all of it.

**ALMA** steals onto the scene from behind the bed, staring toward the kitchen area, watching **KOKOSCHKA** destroy his plateware, off.

She becomes more and more frightened as the sounds of fury increase. She wants to go into the kitchen and stop him and nearly does but as the fury increases she begins withdrawing.

Silently and slidingly **MAHLER** appears center, to one side of the archway. She has her back to him, and is still retreating from the kitchen.

**MAHLER** is frail, hunched, pale. He sits on the arch-steps softly and slowly, perfectly collected, remote, as she retreats towards him. He appears not to hear, or at least not to be in the smallest manner troubled by the sounds of destruction from the kitchen.

Suddenly she walks into him, turns and, seeing him, screams.

The smashing sounds cease abruptly.

MAHLER (*very quietly*) Sit down.

Staring at him, she sits on the chaiselongue.

ALMA (*almost inaudible*) Gustl, I'm so frightened!

MAHLER: You have help.

ALMA: Where?

MAHLER: In the architect.

ALMA: I only want you!

MAHLER (*without emotion*) You slept with him on the night of my Eighth symphony, in Munich. You slept with him again on your way to join me in Paris for our trip to America, when I was dying.

ALMA: You knew!

MAHLER: No.

ALMA: You think I'm selfish and stupid.

MAHLER: First you'll want his child. Then you'll want to marry him.

ALMA: No!

MAHLER: He'll be away many months, fighting in the war. It'll last four years.

ALMA: Four years! That's impossible! How can people fight about *anything* for four years? Will we all die?

MAHLER: Your husband won't. But by the time the war ends you won't much care whether he's alive or dead. In all you'll live with him a couple of weeks.

ALMA: Then I shan't marry him. Help me resist!

MAHLER: Oh, by the way, an interim matter---your stepfather will be inviting a young painter to dinner. Tonight. Sit for him. Take him to the piano after dinner and sing something that mixes death and love. He flinches at nothing. Thanatos and Eros are the twin

poles of his life. And he'll give you your body back, so it's no mean bargain.

ALMA: But---Gustav! A young painter! Not *another* one?

MAHLER: Another one?

ALMA: I already know an Oskar Kokoschka.

MAHLER: Then it's happened already? You know, it's the most confusing thing, getting the dates right. You followed directions then?

ALMA: I sang the *Liebestod*.

MAHLER: Then you did follow directions. The *Lieberstod*!

He closes his eyes and begins conducting with his fingers, hardly moving, as if conjuring the music up.

The music steals over and they begin singing together from Act Two, Scene Two. They move about in a ghostly fashion under following spots.

MAHLER (*cont., as TRISTAN*) 'Must I awaken?'

ALMA (*as ISOLDE*) 'I shall not wake!'

MAHLER: 'Must the dawn awaken Tristan?'

ALMA: 'Let the day be given to death!'

MAHLER: 'Can daylight's menaces be met so lightly?'

ALMA: 'If only we could fly from its lies!'

MAHLER: 'Then the glimmer of morning would frighten us no more!'

ALMA: 'If only the night were for ever!'

The music fades. He continues conducting in the silence. The spots fade.

ALMA: Gustl, a little question. How will the world see his art?

MAHLER (*surfacing gently*) Whose?

ALMA: The painter's.

MAHLER (*after a pause*) Well, they have to acknowledge the great somehow---even the small have to do that, somehow.

ALMA: *Great*, you say!

MAHLER: But he'll never have a social position. It's the one thing he's dead set against. At the age of sixty he'll own no more than the painting under his arm. (*Gazing at her as she goes through a complexity of feelings*) It's difficult isn't it?

ALMA: I feel so isolated Gustl! (*As MAHLER continues to gaze at her---rather ironically*) But it's true---

MAHLER: Did I say it wasn't?

ALMA: He isolates me Gustl!

MAHLER: Which one? Not the architect, for god's sake, with all his forbears and retainers!

ALMA: The painter!

MAHLER: With armies of musicians round me and receptions and opening nights and hectic rehearsals, contracts, appointments, with all Vienna watching you you were isolated my child!

ALMA: Yes! You isolated me too! Who was I compared to the great Mahler? I simply got his meals on time!

MAHLER: And the painter? He's a nobody! A Czech! Vienna fails to watch him, except to scorn him! He too isolates you!

ALMA: Yes!

MAHLER: When you've finished with the architect you'll look for the painter again---mark my words!---he's your body, your life!

ALMA (*urgently*) Will I find him? (*He doesn't reply*) Oh Gustl put a good

spell on me---let me perform the role I feel waiting for me, if only I knew what it was!

MAHLER rises and is about to go.

MAHLER: Do things in their proper order. Go to your architect.

ALMA: But he's an ordinary man, bless him, a wonderful, ordinary man and you know I can't stand ordinary men!

MAHLER: They don't exist if you did but know.

ALMA: Oh Gustl I want art to come true, I ached for your music to draw me into its life and change me, and this young man's paintings are the same, his hands color me and touch me into life and I wish to be changed, I don't want the smell of coffee in the morning and the rumbling of carriages outside, all the ordinary things of life---!

MAHLER (*with scorn*) You call them ordinary---the *miracles*, the daily *miracles*?

He begins walking off.

ALMA: Tell me Gustl! You believe in the painter?

MAHLER (*leaving, right*) Ko-ko-ko-ko-ko.

She walks slowly left, off into the kitchen.  
We hear her treading through the smashed glass and crockery. A door closes. Silence.

BLACKOUT.

The sound of the bugle at the beginning of Mahler's Fifth symphony.

We hear horses' hoofs and the rumble of a cart from the street below, then the sound of a car. And again there is silence.

The sound of a steady bombardment comes over, accompanied by MAHLER's bugle

theme.

A terrible scream from KOKOSCHKA is heard, off.

The light grows on the scene but remains very dim.

KOKOSCHKA's screams turns into laughter. He literally screams with laughter.

A WAR NURSE (played by ALMA) flits across the scene huddled in a greatcoat with a red cross. She goes straight to the phone with hushed steps. The distant rumble of gunfire continues.

NURSE: Get me district headquarters....Hullo.

KOKOSCHKA's scream of laughter again.

NURSE (*cont.*) Did you hear that? He's dying....What?....Crying? No he's laughing. He's been doing it all day....Yes I found some champagne. Don't tell that new girl, she gives me the pip. I've had fifteen dead already, I don't need her as well.  
(*KOKOSCHKA's laugh again*) I wish somebody would do him in. I mean he can't *really* be enjoying it.

The guns continue to rumble.

NURSE (*cont, raising her voice*) Is your line all right?....There's a new lipstick, matron was telling me, made of blood, she said, Satan's Rouge, they're marketing it, I don't believe a word do you? I think the old cow says these things to make us shiver....That's right! And the dance orchestra, she said, the one that's coming tonight, she said they're called the Royal Canon Fodder because the Russians find out where they are and drop a shell right on 'em! That's why they have to be reinforced every few days, new violins, lots of woodwind, clarinets and piccoloes....I dreamed last night, it made me feel very black this morning, I made love to my father....I said MY FATHER, I wouldn't have minded if I'd been underneath but I was on top and giving all the orders, it was that officer upstairs in Ward 3, the one on the mend, I pulled the sheets back and sat on him....What's that?....No, in the dream!

You know, that lieutenant colonel up there who looks like my father but this one in the dream *was* my father!  
 (KOKOSCHKA's laugh again) Oh do shut up and die! It shows you where my desires really lie doesn't it, and why I go for certain men, I mean why leave home and look around if it's there on the spot? Sometimes I wonder how anything can turn out right if we've got these funny things going on inside us that we know nothing about until they come up in the dead of the night, I mean do you think it would be a thrill to sleep with your father or would you feel too bad afterwards?....What's that?....Your father's dead? Well, that settles *one* of your problems, doesn't it? Yet my mother's never been really happy with him, she never desired him, she told me so herself, she said she married him because she had no choice, she said her desire to marry him was what left her no choice, isn't that grim when you've got no desire for a man? It's the same thing all over again isn't it, funny things happening inside you?....What's that?....Perhaps she wants to sleep with *her* father? Well, yes, I suppose it's a possibility though I never thought that about my own mum. I mean I like to think of her as not having *any* desires. But I bet she loves her dad like I do mine, only secret. I love daddy's eyebrows though I hate the way he slaps his hand down on the kitchen table when he wants something, I mean I'd like to do what I did in my sleep *plus* slap him hard, I'd like to whip him with his riding crop, I mean with the lieutenant colonel's riding crop upstairs, I wouldn't mind flaying his bare ass with it!

KOKOSCHKA appears wrapped in white,  
 left, at the very edge of the scene.

KOKOSCHKA (*in an urgent whisper*) Make love to me quick!

NURSE (*screaming*) He's talking! It's a ghost!

She flees, right, leaving the phone hanging.

KOKOSCHKA drifts across the scene in a white sheet, his head streaming with blood.

We hear him singing, off, *Ach du lieber Augustin* in a mournful-grotesque manner.

ACT TWO

Silence. The message is: 1918. KOKO IS CONVALESCING FROM ALMOST FATAL WOUNDS SOMEWHERE IN GERMANY.

It is followed by a second message: BY THE WAY---

A third message: ---ALMA DID MARRY GROPIUS THE ARCHITECT.

The spot dies and the lights come up to reveal KOKOSCHKA seated stage left, facing what appears to be ALMA MAHLER (the light is dim), who is sprawled on the chaiselongue.

The curtains at the arch are open, revealing the double bed.

KOKOSCHKA (*quietly, watching her*) Ko-ko-ko-ko-ko.

No response or movement from ALMA.

KOKOSCHKA (*cont.*) Ko-ko-ko.

He chuckles.

KOKOSCHKA (*cont.*) Nothing's easier than dying. You just let yourself go, like turning over in bed. Ko-ko-ko-ko-ko. ((Rising and putting his hand on her leg, then her hip). Come my lady! Enough of this silence! Asleep or sulking---which is it?

He holds her carefully but seems none too steady on his feet.

KOKOSCHKA (*cont., reeling*) Easy does it!

We see that it is A LIFESIZE DOLL OF ALMA. Its head lolls on his shoulder.

KOKOSCHKA (*cont., gazing into the doll's face*) What a personality---emanating divine right wherever she goes (*as they walk to the double bed*), the divine right of ever-open legs, beautifully formed asses. Even your farts are a blow to the democratic principle!

He bears THE DOLL to bed, mumbling excitedly to himself. Then, with her on the bed, he pulls the curtains of the arch sharply closed.

KOKOSCHKA (*off, talking to THE DOLL*) There! Damn, asleep again!

He coos to her, makes caressing noises.

Meanwhile the lights die to BLACKOUT. His cooing noises continue, together with sudden laughter, excited gasps, giggles.

These giggles are joined by ALMA's. We hear them romping about on the bed, kissing, gasping.

As they make love noisily new messages are seen in the window.

The first message is: HE HAD THE DOLL MADE WITH AN EYE---

The second message: TO THE UTMOST DETAIL. IT WAS DIFFICULT---

The third message: FOR A SEAMSTRESS TO FOLLOW INSTRUCTIONS LIKE---

The fourth message: 'THIGHS SOFT AND

## YIELDING YET RESISTANT---

The fifth message: WITHOUT BEING HARD'.

The telephone rings, interrupting the love noises.

Silence. It rings again. THE DOLL'S HEAD appears between the curtains and withdraws again.

KOKOSCHKA (*imitating ALMA*) Answer it like an angel Ko-Ko!  
(*In his own voice*) Yes darling.

He appears, closing the curtains carefully behind him. He limps down the steps to the phone.

KOKOSCHKA (*cont.*) Hello...Yes doctor!...Quite well. A little giddy sometimes...A tendency to stagger, yes...What's that? *Alcohol?* (*Tearing open a drawer of the desk and pulling out a bottle of wine and a glass*) Well of course not (*pouring himself a glass*)! Never touch it (*drinking it in one go and smacking his lips noisily*)! In fact I hate the taste---especially wine. I wouldn't mind a schnapps but *wine---ucch* (*as he pours himself another glass*)!...What's that?...Listen, if people find it funny to see me with her at the theatre that's *their* lookout isn't it?...Alma Schindler... Yes...No not Alma Mahler, she's dead...I mean, *he's* dead...No, not Alma, Gustav...No, I haven't seen her since 1915, men were killing each other on the Russian front you remember and she thought it an excellent occasion to get rid of me by demonstrating patriotism for the first and last time in her life....But you don't understand! She's a thousand mothers for me, a thousand sisters and angels! Our love was an offence against nature, it broke all laws! There'd been nothing like it since the Middle Ages...Find my balance doctor? But *she is my balance*! You see I chose the cavalry because I thought she might prefer me on a horse. Women prefer to think of their lovers on horseback on the whole don't they? Do you remember that painting of Alma and me called *The Tempest*...Yes that's Alma and me. Well, I sold it in the spring of 1914 and bought a horse with the money. To join the cavalry in those days you had to have your own horse....What?

Oh do get off that subject, it's only a totem after all...I said a (*pronouncing it in a burlesque manner*) *to-tem*....I carry it round as a *to-tem* and if people think I'm mad because I have a hole in my head I can assure them that western civilization has a hole far bigger than mine!

ALMA screams, off.

He drops the phone, leaving it hanging, and stares at the arch.

Silence.

KOKOSCHKA (*cont., rushing to the arch and throwing the curtains back*)  
Alma! Alma!

THE DOLL is lying on the bed. He rushes to it and promptly lifts the skirt up and tries to bend the knees. He looks round in a panic-stricken way.

KOKOSCHKA (*in a soft, rushed voice*) Don't worry! Just push darling!  
Push!

He dashes back to the hanging phone.

KOKOSCHKA (*cont.*) Doctor, doctor, it's a delivery---I'm doing my best!

He replaces the phone and dashes here and there in his panic. He makes a scream as if it were ALMA's. At last he finds what he's looking for. He pulls two small blank canvases from the pile under the window and rushes with them to the bed. He uses them as supports for the doll's legs, so that they are bent and raised in the manner of stirruped legs during delivery. He puts cushions under the feet, and we are now staring into THE DOLL's procreative area, which is simulated with accuracy.

KOKOSCHKA (*cont.*) Calmly my angel, calmly! Grip the bed--here!  
(*Rushing to pull back her arms so that she can hold onto the head of the bed while pushing*) There! Push! (*He*

*screams in imitation of ALMA's scream and at once grabs THE DOLL's hand to comfort her*) Only a moment more---a moment! (*Putting his head between her legs*) I can see the head, Alma! Only a little more! A little more and dawn will come! (*Shouting with triumph*) IT'S A BOY! IT'S A BOY and all heaven will sing in choirs---a light will fall on earth such as men have never seen!

He comes to the top of the steps radiant.

KOKOSCHKA (*cont., announcing*) Oskar Kokoschka has a prince and heir!

A triumphant passage from MAHLER's Second Symphony crashes out.

BLACKOUT. The music dies. A light grows beyond the curtains, leaving the rest of the set in a mellow, unreal dimness.

ALMA enters in an evening gown. She looks everywhere. She pulls the curtains of the arch aside. There is now no bed.

ALMA (*hushed*) Gustl! Gustl!

The Merry Widow waltz comes up. She dances alone. Then MAHLER enters. They dance together, up and down the steps of the arch and beyond it, disappearing and then reappearing center. It is all much like a dream.

When the music ceases they come to a halt center, happily out of breath. They begin singing a snatch from the *Merry Widow*, he taking the part of Danilo and she answering him as Hanna. Here, as in the Liebestod scene, they move about the stage and are followed by spots.

They break off the duet with a laugh, unable to remember any more.

ALMA (*cont.*) Look it up.

MAHLER: You don't imagine I've any Franz Lehar in the house do you?

ALMA (*putting her arms round him and half-dancing again*) Our one night out in five years! There ought to be articles in the paper about it. The Mahlers went to the Merry Widow, not Lohengrin or Parsifal!

MAHLER (*cont., striding about*) What an evening, eh? I imagine it's the kind of evening Richard Strauss has all the time. Do you notice how smooth everything is with him? Just two rehearsals and he gets a marvelous performance. Rosy-cheeked relatives bustling round him! And that happy way he has of worrying over his accounts, so many marks from this production, so many schillings from that. Then look at me---God knows how many rehearsals, all of them a fearful tussle, the orchestras hating me, tears and calamities and upsets! Born in a family of thirteen children---so many deaths---having to look after the brothers and sisters who managed to survive! Sending them money all the time (*shrugging quite gaily*)!

He goes to his music at the desk. A phrase from the Seventh Symphony comes over. He begins composing. ALMA tiptoes off, right. The lights fade as the music comes up strong.

There is the sound of children playing, a dog barking in the distance.

A distant clock strikes seven. The music fades.

MAHLER (*without looking up*) Alma! (*No reply*) Alma!

She appears, left.

MAHLER: Is dinner ready?

ALMA: Has it ever *not* been ready in this house?

He looks up, on guard.

MAHLER: What's wrong?

She considers this in silence, gazing at him with a certain diffidence.

ALMA: I suppose it's the way music pours out of you. It never stops!

MAHLER: Jealous?

ALMA (*in full fury*) You told me to stop composing my songs before we got married, you said there couldn't be two composers in the house! So *your* flow is stopping *mine*!

MAHLER (*also roused*) *Your* flow be buggered! Do you think I *like* never being free---always some bloody theme squeezing its way into my brain, pushing against all the others, shrieking 'Write me down! Write me down quick!', night and day. at meals, at coffee, at play! Do you think I don't feel dragged along by the flow until I'm drowned and lifeless? You dare to claim that your bloody little songs compare with my massive obsession? Flow indeed! It's the trickle of a drainpipe!

ALMA (*as she advances on him and he flinches back*) But your obsession's killing *me*! as well as *you*! (*Grabbing a score from the desk*) Look at that! Songs on the death of children! What death? What children?

A harrowing passage from the *Kindertotenlieder* comes over. They speak almost in rhythm to it.

MAHLER (*shouting above the music*) It's a setting on Ruckert! He lost his child---and his child's name was Ernst---and that was my brother's name---he died of heart disease! And I lost nearly all the others---eight in all! Haven't I a right to lament?

ALMA (*also shouting over the music*) What about *our* children? Don't you see you're tempting fate?

MAHLER (*savagely, still with the music over*) What do you mean? Children die all the time! Aren't they dying while they're alive, can't you see it in their eyes, the world's unfit for children, they die I tell you, die, die, die on their feet! My children were alive once, before they were born, but they've death in their eyes now, like you and me! The best children go, they get out! They can't bear acquaintance with the earth any more!

The music fades quickly.

ALMA: That Siegfried Lipiner put you against me, didn't he? He told you I flirted with the president of the Society of the Friends of Music all through your Fourth symphony!

MAHLER (*with a tired shrug, half looking at his scores*) Why do you hate Lipiner?

ALMA: I admire him tremendously as a matter of fact.

MAHLER: *He* doesn't think so.

ALMA: He *never* thinks. Nietzsche does it for him. He gets all his talk out of books.

MAHLER: It's marvelous talk though, the best in Vienna!

ALMA (*turning away rather sulkily*) I flirt with *everybody*, not just the president. It's a habit I have. (*Bearing down on him again*) Your disgusting friends have started a campaign against me! I *still* don't like your First or your Fourth, and your Third isn't all that much better! Your music has to *win* me---not plough me over!

MAHLER (*in full fury again*) You don't even like Verdi! Anybody who claims to have an ear and doesn't like Giuseppe Verdi has to have his ear examined! All this stuff about 'German' music! You're just like Cosima Wagner! Won't have me near Bayreuth because I'm a Jew---won't even look at my production of Tristan and Isolde! Another Christian! What's the matter with you all? Muslims and Hindus and Buddhists bow their heads in wonder to Christ but not you lot!

ALMA (*through pursed lips*) I hope you *never* get to Bayreuth.

MAHLER: Most likely I won't. For fifteen years I put my music in a drawer and nobody looked at it! I sent my songs to Liszt and he returned them with the remark that they were quite pretty in parts! And Brahms---called my music 'conductor's music'! So even the great are deaf! Even *you*! You don't like my First and you don't like my Fourth---you said it at dinner with Siegfried Lipiner there and you made an enemy of all my closest friends---they hate you

because they *love* the First and they *love* the Fourth, and until you understand my work you *daren't* call yourself a musician, much less a composer!

She has her head bowed. He relents and approaches her.

MAHLER (*cont.*) I used to rage at my mother like that.

ALMA: I've nothing to wear, Gustl, that's why I turn down invitations!

MAHLER: You look so beautiful! Everybody says so!

ALMA: But it's always the same dress!

MAHLER (*returning to his work*) Who are you going to marry if I die? Hans Pfitzner, Ossip, Charpentier? There's not one of them wouldn't drive you mad in a day. Aren't I the safest bet in the end?

ALMA: Not if you die! (*With a sigh*) What a night that was, when we danced I had the impression we floated---you held me up---you---!

A child's cry---disturbed sleep---in the distance.

MAHLER stares at her.

Silence.

MAHLER: Who's that for God's sake?

ALMA: It's Anna.

MAHLER: It's Putzerl!

ALMA: It's Anna I tell you! She scalded her fingers this morning.

MAHLER: For God's sake go and see!

She leaves, left, while he watches her.

The savage phrase from the *Kindertotenlieder* is repeated.

He continues to stand there, waiting tensely.  
The music dies.

ALMA reappears.

ALMA: She has a slight fever. Mummy's looking after her.

MAHLER: Tell me about Putzerl! (*Gripping her and staring close into her eyes*) The *truth* damn you!

ALMA: Putzerl has a fever too.

MAHLER: It's diphtheria.

ALMA: Yes!

MAHLER: And she must have a tracheotomy.

ALMA: Yes!

She rushes off, left.

The savage passage from the  
*Kindertotenlieder* comes over once more.

ALMA (*cont., screaming, off*) Gustav!

He stands trembling.

BLACKOUT as the passage from the  
*Kindertotenlieder* dies away.

A banner is flown down again, with the words  
SIGMUND FREUD'S STUDY, VIENNA,  
EARLY THIRTIES.

ALMA is lying on the chaiselongue and  
FREUD is behind the banner with his  
Tyrolean hat.

FREUD: In New York he was failing, you tell me?

ALMA: Oh yes. Do you remember the Gibson girl, Dr Freud? You would have been fascinated. Stank of money---no brains at all

but very beautiful, if that's possible. The whole of New York was talking about her. She asked me in her limousine one day on Fifth Avenue, what made a lovely young woman like you marry that hideous and impossible old man? I sat in the car and talked and talked---I tried to say all of his music as my reason for marrying him but of course it didn't mean a thing to her. And he wasn't old. Hardly fifty-one. He was worried I might be yearning for a younger man. I believe he came to you with that question, doctor.

FREUD: I told him rubbish, she's so much in love with her father she'll never leave you.

A sound of rifle fire in the distance.

ALMA: Where will you go?

FREUD: London.

ALMA: I have it on good authority---by the end of the year he'll be here in Vienna.

FREUD: Does it excite you somewhat, the settlement of arguments with guns?

ALMA: I think perhaps once he has what he wants he'll calm down, become accessible to advice.

FREUD: Is that what your priest says?

ALMA: It's what Mussolini *hopes*.

FREUD: You speak to Mussolini then?

ALMA: Through his woman, yes.

A silence.

ALMA (*cont.*) Your way of speaking comforts me, doctor. Artists are different. They speak with a rush, like men tossed about by waves. But their voices go on working in people's minds after they're dead! Aren't you envious? For all your world fame you can't hold a candle to them!

FREUD: My voice is going to die, is it? My voice but not my work. How many people will *read* me? Almost no one! Take my work on the oedipus complex---they'll prefer Hamlet because he's all of my theory, before their eyes! You see, I had to find my way into the market place, I had to be sure that at least my terminology will one day enter daily speech, if not my voice, my work!

ALMA: And how did you do it?

FREUD: I became a doctor, my dear. I declared that my work was medical. That was a clever move don't you think?

ALMA: But it *is* medical isn't it?

FREUD: Exactly, exactly, a measure of my success already! (*His Tyrolean hat bobbing up and down with excitement*) My dear lady, I wrote my Hamlet in analytical terms and---well, what theatrical management would act *my* work? I had to find suitable theatres, impresarios, directors. I found them in hospitals! I knew that only there would my work be given an untouchable status so that even people who can't read a newspaper let alone a book would be using the words father complex. I shall be endowed with a far more fearful authority than Shakespeare! Happily for him, his work is still performed by cranks and rebels and iconoclasts! Mine is going to be starved of new and brilliant people as it becomes embalmed into a sort of first-aid kit for the nervous! Right-wing governments will espouse me, politicians will give me their kiss of death!

ALMA (*with a thrill*) So you have your passions---a doctor!

FREUD: You see?---ordinary brainless people like you think of us as scientists! You will call me a scientist one day too! And look at medical theory. For most people it isn't theory at all, it's absolute fact. The idea of infection having happened as a theory in Harvey's head is the grossest absurdity for most people. This is how my terminology is going to be---so unchallenged and undiscussed that no one will think any more of the man who first used it, or even realize that a man invented it at all. Even when they debunk and attack me they will still use the terminology, the bitterness of their attack will only prove my stature. Talking of the father complex, I shall become the sternest father of the century. Do you notice how the journalists photograph me already? They will say 'those cold eyes', 'that penetrating gaze'!

They will make up stories that one look from me used to paralyze my grandchildren with inhibitions! Imagine trying to inhibit a Viennese, even at the age of three---in the old days not a chambermaid in the house was safe when nurse had her day off!

ALMA: So in the hands of doctors and hospitals your ideas are going to be popularized, which means pulled down. Now that can't happen to Shakespeare. You can't pull him down whatever you do!

FREUD: Wicked creature, you think of everything! I dread the day---which is surely on its way---when a glance from a Freudian analyst is going to be that of an inquisitor. All I can hope is that people will return to my work for its style---which is all, in the end, an artist has. But what a hope! (*with a sigh*) The revolutionary of today becomes tomorrow's mediocrity!

ALMA: And the whole world starts analyzing itself!

FREUD (*nodding mournfully*) They'll all be going on about paranoia and repression.

ALMA: Thank God we Viennese escaped you!---the last bearers of the libido, free and unashamed! Do you wonder I have so many lovers? When I'm dead and gone they won't know what a libido is.

FREUD: They'll have to look it up in my books.

ALMA: Or read my memoirs.

FREUD: Except that in your memoirs you won't be honest.

ALMA: Why ever not?

FREUD: Because you *aren't* free and unashamed, no human libido ever is!

ALMA (*artfully*) Are *you* honest, doctor?

FREUD: I wrote my Hamlet in analytical thoughts---which is dishonest! I put my autobiography down in the form of shamelessly objective and impartial theory---a hundred times dishonest!

ALMA: Analysis isn't going to be a patch on Hamlet, is it? It won't move men to any strange thoughts.

FREUD: Damnable woman! But I shall have my revenge! For all your libido how you all delight in piercing each other with your knives! And leaving the other prostrate! A kiss and a knife wound, an embrace and blood! All in the service of the mother and father you invented! Let an element of sex come in and there you will find a worm nourishing itself on the death of the beloved! But there won't be beloveds because, bowed low by ghosts, the human mind will know no love. How exorcise ghosts when ghosts are the exorcisers? Only my analysis will give a true picture!

ALMA: So you came to witness and record the death of the human libido.

FREUD (*with radiance*) Wait a few years and you will see Nietzsche's prophecies fulfilled---blood and carnage will have taken the place of sex in man's libidinous satisfactions! That's how the libido will roar---not in kisses and playful slaps and naughty stares but torture and screams and houses laid flat until every thought is criminal, every imagining cruel and bloody and bent on harm as a ghostly game! The derelict creature will even glorify war but in somebody else's land so that he can read the ghostly news of it and gloat on the pictures and terrified testimonies of it because these will send him more secure to bed! His mind will be drunk with every form of gleeful punishment and hate---but do you think there will be a single creature in the world to tell them it is due to *premature ejaculation*? Even the analyst won't dare, for fear of ridicule, supposing that even he, himself a ghost, can recall to mind the Freudian fact that a ghost can't hold it, the sperm runs out because it takes no account of the mate at all, it runs on its own ghostly steam in its own lurid drama which simply requires the mate's body as a reminder to the nerves to prepare the seminal flow. Or there is no flow at all, not a trace of life-giving moisture! The ghost has lost all trace of body and, yearning to find it again, dreams of drinking blood!

ALMA: But I tasted love not blood. For a time.

A pause.

FREUD: Are you crying?

ALMA: You paint such a terrible picture!

FREUD (*in a most mournful manner*) You see, I looked into his eyes.

ALMA: Whose?

FREUD: Man's, fool.

They are silent. In the very distance a soprano sings.

ALMA: Oh Gustl!

FREUD: 'Gustl' you say with such love! You a Christian entered the Jewish mystery of the loins, my dear. With each kiss an ancestor stirs, the race is born again---a solemn self-immolating sex of sorrows begins, feasting in a place where there is no longer self or individuality. You came among us, daughter of Rome, and tasted ancient things, more ancient even than Rome. Render thanks for that!

ALMA: Isn't that a song of mine?

The singing comes up. It is a passage from one of ALMA MAHLER's songs. As the light fades ALMA mouths the words.

BLACKOUT. This is simultaneous with the sound of London air-raid sirens and anti-aircraft guns and the hum of German bombers. The singing has gone.

A new message is revealed: ANOTHER BLOODY WAR.

The second message: LONDON IN THE BLITZ, 1942.

In the darkness we see a shaky flashlight coming from the left. It is held by KOKOSCHKA. He shines it on the easel. He begins clearing up paints that have fallen to the floor.

Hearing a movement, he searches round the

room with his flashlight until he finds ALMA. She is sitting on the chaiselongue in outdoor clothes (winter) and she has a large bag of American Indian weave.

KOKOSCHKA (*mildly*) Who are you?

ALMA: You don't recognize me?

KOKOSCHKA (*peering at her, his torch still trained on her*) Have you been bombed out? Are you from the Dorchester Hotel? (*Approaching her with the flashlight still trained on her*) My wife and I can put you up. It's dangerous here, we should go.

He stands close to her.

KOKOSCHKA (*cont.*) How did you get in? By the roof?

ALMA: Not even my voice do you recognize!

KOKOSCHKA (*recognizing her*) Good god! An old lady at last! What made you come here?

ALMA: They told me this was where you lived.

KOKOSCHKA: Wrong. I only paint here. What are you doing in London for God's sake? You're not the type to risk your life!

ALMA: A quick, secret visit.

KOKOSCHKA: To see *me*? That's impossible!

ALMA: You know, at my age, one may as well be an enigma---it's a way of creating interest.

KOKOSCHKA (*going to the window*) I'll fix the blackout.

ALMA: And when there's light I'll ask you not to look too closely.

KOKOSCHKA: Are you so hideous?

ALMA: Age is. It could give you a shock to think that---

KOKOSCHKA: I see *inside*.

ALMA: Oh don't do that---it's even worse! (*As KOKOSCHKA works at the curtains*) What were you grovelling about on the floor for?

KOKOSCHKA: Picking my paints up. It happens all the time. Last week the windows blew in.

Having fixed the blackout he turns on a dim desk light. Even against this degree of light she hides her face.

KOKOSCHKA (*cont.*) We'll give you some dinner by the way. My wife loves legends. Any news of Vienna?

ALMA: None. I close my ears to it.

KOKOSCHKA (*sitting at his easel*) Karl Kraus always said the Viennese would never take to Nazism, I told him they'd take to it like leeches. Weren't you a Nazi too, under the influence of that damned priest you fell in love with?

ALMA: He's in a concentration camp. Also I was more of a fascist. I had long idealist discussions with Mussolini's mistress.

KOKOSCHKA: While your husband dreamed about world bolshevism.

ALMA: That's right.

KOKOSCHKA: A darling man, though.

ALMA: Who---Mussolini?

KOKOSCHKA: Your husband, the novelist.

She makes no reply.

KOKOSCHKA (*cont.*) You don't mean to say you've left him as well!

ALMA: I happen to love him. That's another thing one is obliged to do at my age.

A bomb falls in the distance and shakes the

building.

KOKOSCHKA (*cont.*) I was really fighting for *you* on that dear horse of mine.  
While you were screwing Gropius.

ALMA: While *my young self* was screwing him.

KOKOSCHKA: Oh do get off your age.

They sit in silence. There is sporadic anti-aircraft fire.

KOKOSCHKA (*cont.*) Now we have the holy trinity of Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin. Would you tell me how a good world could grow out of that trio?

ALMA: They think they're fighting the devil.

KOKOSCHKA: You can't beat the devil. I'm a catholic, not a Christian, so I know about the devil.

ALMA: It figures. You used to be one.

She is rummaging in her bag.

KOKOSCHKA (*cont., watching her*) Shall I get you something to drink?

ALMA: I've brought my own.

She pulls a bottle of Benedictine and a glass out of her bag and sets them on the coffee table.

KOKOSCHKA: How can you bear that sickly stuff?

ALMA (*pouring herself a glass*) I think it must be the color.

She drinks with satisfaction.

KOKOSCHKA (*cont.*) Talking of Benedictine, there's a Benedictine monk called Macnab who lives round the corner. He goes wherever a bomb falls and he comforts the people and always has a kindly peaceful smile. These Londoners adore him. I learned the other day he's dying of cancer of the tongue. So he can't

eat---starving to death. So I count myself lucky.

She drinks again, having absorbed little of what he has said.

KOKOSCHKA (*cont.*) Thanks for sending the food parcel to my brother by the way.

ALMA: Is he alright?

KOKOSCHKA: He's not in Hitler's army, anyway. (*With a sudden sharp look at her*) Do they haunt you? your dead?

ALMA: I keep off the subject. Death's contagious, even the mention of it. (*Drinking*) I never went to their funerals, you know---not to Mahler's or any of the children's.

KOKOSCHKA: You lost two?

ALMA: Three.

KOKOSCHKA: When we met by accident in Venice in 1926 I told myself your figure had gone and that helped me a lot.

ALMA: Everybody in Hollywood's asking why don't you come to the States instead of this doomed country? They'll be finished even if they win. Anyway, they're philistines. They exhibited your finest oils in 1928 and didn't sell a single one!

KOKOSCHKA: I came here with a half a painting under my arm and ten pounds sterling in my pocket and above all my beloved wife. Socrates said 'integrity of mind is all that counts'. I haven't turned my back on the Germans either. I did well in Germany. They were the first to recognize me. They were starved and degraded and humiliated after the first war more than any people should be, and the result was that goose-stepping clown---a Viennese one at that!

ALMA is watching KOKOSCHKA with interest.

ALMA: I remember your mother threatened to kill me if I didn't give you up---she got hold of a revolver---do you remember how frightened I was?

KOKOSCHKA: I think *she* was the more frightened.

ALMA: Rubbish. She thought I was corrupting you.

KOKOSCHKA: So you were.

ALMA (*busy with her drink*) How do you keep your youthful look? When we met in Venice that time you looked like a boy, and you were forty. I thought who's he sweating out his vices onto now?

The all-clear sounds.

ALMA: What's that?

KOKOSCHKA: The air raid's over.

They sit musing in the silence.

KOKOSCHKA (*cont.*) Do you remember how the horses' hoofs sounded on the cobbles, and footsteps in the courtyards, and snatches of conversation echoing between the windows on a lazy summer night? And the wells with their ropes and buckets, and the way all our drinking water came to the house in great barrels on carts drawn by huge Pinzgauers? And the muslin nets across the windows against insects. The horsedung you could smell from inside the cafés...

ALMA: We were happy in Semmering. Do you remember the fresco you did over the fireplace? But you horrified us with your behavior over Gustav's death mask. The moment it came in the house you were the devil incarnate. You said Gustav was 'foreign' to me and all that silliness.

KOKOSCHKA: Do you expect good sense from a lover?

ALMA: I hope you learned something.

KOKOSCHKA: I did.

ALMA: What?

KOKOSCHKA: That a modern woman won't fight for the love of her life if the going gets hard.

She seems not to hear this, gazing upward.

KOKOSCHKA (*cont., rising*) I'll get you some tea. You drink it?

ALMA: I think I did once.

KOKOSCHKA (*going left to the kitchen*) My wife's expecting me for dinner. I'll take you along in a few minutes. (*Stopping*) He won't live long.

ALMA: Who?

KOKOSCHKA (*leaving, left*) Your husband.

ALMA: He's very sick.

KOKOSCHKA (*off*) Weak as Mahler was! Do you notice a theme?

ALMA (*handkerchief to eyes, hardly audible*) Oh do be quiet!

We hear KOKOSCHKA moving about in the kitchen, getting cups and saucers, putting the kettle on etc.

ALMA looks round her, drinks.

ALMA (*cont.*) You never went in for studios did you Ko-ko? None of that rubbish about the northern light and a room upstairs to fornicate in.

KOKOSCHKA (*off*) I call it my library.

She gets up and walks a little.

ALMA (*turning toward the kitchen to address him*) You used to make love like you paint (*with a satisfied little laugh*)---such close attention to detail!

KOKOSCHKA (*off*) Do you like it weak or strong?

Again her mind seems concentrated on something else.

ALMA (*surfacing*) Rather weak! I'm used to American coffee now.

KOKOSCHKA (*off*) This is tea!

ALMA: Oh!

KOKOSCHKA (*off*) You aren't going gaga already are you?

She makes no reply, still thinking of other things.

ALMA: I burned all the letters I ever wrote---to Gropius, Mahler, you, Werfel.

KOKOSCHKA (*off*) Idiot!

ALMA: Far too incriminating for a woman! I wasn't prepared either to expose myself or pass on my secrets, if you see what I mean.

KOKOSCHKA (*off, moving about*) You sound like a dowager!

ALMA: Did you know I went to Berlin while I was still married to the second one---looked for you everywhere and couldn't find you? Do you remember how you used to sign yourself 'Alma Oskar Kokoschka' when you wrote to me? (Chuckling) What a fool!

She walks about restlessly.

ALMA (*cont.*) People say I have diabetes. But I always remind them that diabetes is a Jewish disease so it's out of the question. (*Holding up her glass*) I wonder if it's the name that attracts me? Perhaps I should have married a monk. That priest you mentioned didn't turn out very well. He left the priesthood and started a family---after telling me I was the first and last woman of his life. I seem to have started a taste in him, don't I?

She sits again, sighs and closes her eyes.

ALMA (*cont.*) Do you remember that telegram you sent me saying we would always be together in that picture of yours? A little uncomfortable, I thought.

The kitchen noises continue.

MAHLER puts his head between the arch-curtains, behind her, right.

MAHLER (*quietly, a little apologetically*) Alma.

ALMA looks round and gazes at him for some time.

ALMA (*also quietly*) Gustl---can you believe it? I've just been talking to the Prince Rudolph---you remember Prince Rudolph?---and he wants a child by me.

MAHLER (*still largely behind the curtains*) And what did you say?

ALMA: I said that's asking a lot at the age of eighty-five isn't it?

MAHLER (*walking softly down the steps*) I don't agree. Not at all. In fact I'll take you straight to him.

ALMA (*delighted*) You will?

MAHLER: He's been a neighbor of mine for some time.

ALMA rises to greet him.

ALMA (*suddenly almost in tears*) Gustav!

MAHLER (*taking her hand gently*) Courage.

The kitchen noises cease.

She quietens with his touch. They both look out right, waiting, she with great anguish, trembling.

She gasps, trying to withdraw, as a trolley slides into view from the right with THE DOLL on it, its head appearing first. It comes to a halt before them as they face downstage.

He holds ALMA firmly.

They gaze down at THE DOLL, standing

close together.

MAHLER (*cont.*) It was diabetes by the way.

The sound of flames licking into the air comes from the right, simultaneously with a burst of bright red and yellow light. It is a roaring furnace and ALMA, but not MAHLER, is inclined to turn away from the brightness.

MAHLER (*cont., indicating THE DOLL*) Do you remember that photo when she was a child---with her mother and sister---she had to bend over sideways and peer into the lens and spoil the picture didn't she? Had to investigate *everything*! Perhaps these will help her now.

He takes off his glasses and puts them on THE DOLL's face. The trolley slides noiselessly off right into the flames.

The flames die. Silence.

MAHLER (*cont.*) Shall we go?

ALMA: Go?

He leads her to the steps. They walk with incredible lightness.

MAHLER (*as he leads her up the steps*) Alma Mahler-Kokoschka would have sounded quite dramatic wouldn't it? But---(with a shrug)!

He stops.

MAHLER (*cont.*) And what a funny coincidence that Mahler should be the German for painter.

He pulls the arch-curtains briskly aside.

The bed has gone. Instead there is a banner, colorfully designed, with the words LIBERTE EGALITE FRATRICIDE in bold block capitals across it, with bright red

flames round it in the KOKOSCHKA  
manner.

She stops when she sees it.

ALMA: What's that?

MAHLER: It's Koko's motto for modern life.

ALMA: When will he die?

MAHLER: 1980. He'll be ninety-six. It's his smoking you see. Otherwise he'd live his full span.

She stops again.

ALMA: And whatever happened to Dr Freud?

MAHLER: He was saying to me only the other day, 'What I now realize about my not believing in God is that it simply expressed my father complex'. Rather neatly put, don't you think?

ALMA: I don't understand.

MAHLER: Hating his father so much he denied his existence.

ALMA: Ah yes! And where *is* the father?

MAHLER: Oh. He doesn't exist.

They walk on, holding each other close,  
passing slowly under the banner. The Merry  
Widow waltz comes up.

The lights dim and the banner is the last  
message to be seen (under the spot):  
LIBERTE, EGALITE, FRATRICIDE.

Just before BLACKOUT a spot remains on  
the one word FRATRICIDE.