

Act I, Scene 4

Evening. MELCHIOR's study. A lamp burning on the table. MELCHIOR sits alone, writing in his journal.

MELCHIOR

(Reading aloud as he writes)

16 October. The question is: Shame. What is its origin? And why are we hounded by its miserable shadow?

Does the mare feel Shame as she couples with a stallion? Are they deaf to everything their loins are telling them, until we grant them a marriage certificate? I think not.

To my mind, Shame is nothing but a product of Education. Meanwhile, old Father Kaulbach still blindly insists, in every single sermon, that it's deeply rooted in our sinful Human Nature. Which is why I now refuse to go to Church —

FRAU GABOR (from off)

Melchior?

MELCHIOR

Yes, Mama?

FRAU GABOR (from off)

Moritz Stiefel to see you.

(MELCHIOR sits up. MORITZ enters, looking pale and agitated)

MELCHIOR

Moritz?...

MORITZ

Sorry I'm so late. I yanked on a jacket, ran a brush through my hair, and dashed like some phantom to get here.

MELCHIOR

You slept through the day...?

MORITZ

("Yes")

I'm exhausted, Melchi. I was up till three in the morning — reading that essay you gave me, till I couldn't see straight.

MELCHIOR

Sit. Let me roll you a smoke.

(MELCHIOR rolls MORITZ a cigarette)

MORITZ

Look at me – I'm trembling. Last night I prayed like Christ in Gethsemane: "Please, God, give me Consumption and take these sticky dreams away from me."

MELCHIOR

With any luck, he'll ignore *that* prayer.

MORITZ

Melchi, I can't focus – on *anything*. Even now, it seems like... Well, I see, and hear, and feel, quite clearly. And yet, everything seems so strange...

MELCHIOR

But all those illustrations I gave you – didn't they help illuminate your dreams?

MORITZ

They only multiplied everything ten times! Instead of merely seeing Stockings, now I'm plagued by Labia Majora and –

(FRAU GABOR enters with tea)

FRAU GABOR

Well, here we are, with tea. Herr Stiefel, how are you?

MORITZ

Very well, thank you, Frau Gabor.

FRAU GABOR

(Skeptical)

Yes?

MELCHIOR

(Busting him)

Just think, Mama. Moritz was up, reading all through the night.

MORITZ

Uh, conjugating Greek.

FRAU GABOR

You must take care of yourself, Moritz. Surely, your health is more important than Ancient Greek.

(Indicating his books)

Now, what have *you* been reading, Melchior?

MELCHIOR

Goethe's FAUST, actually.

FRAU GABOR

Really? At your age?...

MELCHIOR

It's so beautiful, Mama.

MORITZ

(*"Indeed"*)

So haunting.

FRAU GABOR

Still, I should have thought...

But surely, you boys are now of an age to decide for yourselves what is good for you and what is not.

(*Sighs*)

If you need anything else, children, call me.

(*FRAU GABOR goes out*)

MORITZ

Well, your mother certainly is remarkable.

MELCHIOR

(*"Yes, but"*)

Until she catches her son reading Goethe.

MORITZ

I think she meant the story of Gretchen and her illegitimate child.

MELCHIOR

Yes. You see how obsessively everyone fixes on that story. It's as if the entire world were mesmerized by penis and vagina.

MORITZ

Well, I am. All the more so, I'm afraid, since reading your essay. What you wrote about the... *female*... I can't stop thinking about it.

(*Pulls out the essay*)

This part here — is it true?

MELCHIOR

Absolutely.

MORITZ

But, how can *you* understand that, Melchi? What the *woman* must feel.

MELCHIOR

(*"Why not?"*)

Giving yourself over to someone else?... Defending yourself until, finally, you surrender and feel Heaven break over you?...

(*MORITZ nods*)

MELCHIOR

I just put myself in her place – and imagine...

MORITZ

("You've got to be kidding")

Really?!

(Flipping through the essay – one diagram after another – increasingly mesmerized)

What it feels like?... for the woman?...

#6 – Touch Me

(A twelve-string guitar sounds – subtle chords, a world of longing. The BOYS and GIRLS gather around MELCHIOR and MORITZ in radiant light, singing and moving as a CHORUS. The BOYS hold copies of MELCHIOR's essay)

MELCHIOR

WHERE I GO, WHEN I GO THERE,
NO MORE MEMORY ANYMORE –
ONLY DRIFTING ON SOME SHIP;
THE WIND THAT WHISPERS, OF THE DISTANCE, TO SHORE...

MORITZ

WHERE I GO, WHEN I GO THERE,
NO MORE LISTENING ANYMORE –
ONLY HYMNS UPON YOUR LIPS;
A MYSTIC WISDOM, RISING WITH THEM, TO SHORE...

BOYS & GIRLS

OOOOOO...

ERNST

TOUCH ME – JUST LIKE THAT.
AND THAT – O, YEAH – NOW, THAT'S HEAVEN.
NOW, THAT I LIKE.
GOD, THAT'S SO NICE.
NOW LOWER DOWN, WHERE THE FIGS LIE...

(MELCHIOR turns back to MORITZ. The lights shift back to the lamplit study, but the BOYS and GIRLS hover, singing quietly, underscoring the scene)

MORITZ

(Still in his private moment with the diagrams)
... Still, you must admit... with all the differing...
(Mispronouncing, with a "hard g")
geni... geni...