

Act II

Scene Five

The **COMPANY** strikes the canopy and hall and rearranges the stage for **DAVID** and **BIELE's** parlor.

HEYMAN

(Entering with a few books, a pen and paper.)

Heyman had come to America with the definite purpose of studying medicine—

TAMARA

—which had been forbidden to him in the old country.

ASRIEL

He had landed penniless, and saved his meager wages from sweatshop work—

NATHAN

—so that he had recently found himself in a position to pay his first year's tuition.

HEYMAN

Accordingly, he had left piecework behind and supported himself as a tutor while he studied—

SHAYA

—teaching English and Mathematics in the parlor in the afternoons when he didn't have lectures to attend.

HEYMAN places the books and writing materials on the table, where **SHAYA** joins him. **BIELE** enters with a flowerpot and places it on the table.

BIELE

Biele was impressed.

DAVID

Hardly a fortnight had elapsed since he had installed himself and his scanty effects in David and Biele's apartment—

BIELE

—yet he seemed to have grown into the family, and the three felt as if they had dwelt together all their lives—

FLORA

—and altogether his presence did not in the least encroach upon their privacy—

TAMARA

—while, on the contrary, it seemed to have breathed an easier and pleasanter atmosphere into their home.

DAVID

(Crossing to **BIELE**.)

Well, was there any ground for making so much ado? We are as much alone as ever, and you are not lonely all day, into the bargain.

BIELE

True—

(Aside.)

—and Biele found that she enjoyed Heyman's company.

NATHAN

He neither intruded too far into other people's souls—

FLORA

—nor allowed others too deep into his own confidence—

HEYMAN

—so he was at peace with himself and those around him.

TAMARA

This sort of people give the world very little, and ask of it still less—

TZALEL

—but always seem to get more than they give.

DAVID

Meanwhile, despite his best efforts, David found himself still unemployed.

ASRIEL

He searched further and further afield for employment—

NATHAN

And when he came home, he was so worn out that an English grammar was out of the question.

DAVID

He felt stymied in his plans for the future, and grew more morose every day.

BIELE sees **DAVID** out with a perfunctory kiss. **HEYMAN** and **SHAYA** settle themselves over a book at the table.

BIELE

And Biele found that she was becoming irritable with him—

FLORA

—in spite of all her best intentions.

HEYMAN

So you see, Shaya, if we construct a triangle with one side measuring three inches and the other side measuring four inches, the hypotenuse must be—

SHAYA

(Eagerly.)

Five inches!

HEYMAN

Yes—but why?

SHAYA

The Pythagorean Theorem: three-squared is nine; four-squared is sixteen—and the sum of nine and sixteen is twenty-five, and twenty-five is five-squared, so the hypotenuse is five-inches!

HEYMAN

Exactly: 'the sum of the hypotenuse—

SHAYA

—is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides.' It's perfect!

HEYMAN

Well, it's Geometry. And it's the end of the lesson also. At least for today.

(He stands and closes the book.)

I'll see you Tuesday?

SHAYA

Tuesday—yes!

HEYMAN

Good. Until then.

HEYMAN sees **SHAYA** out, then returns to the table, where he picks up the flowerpot.

BIELE

What are you looking for, Mr. Heyman?

HEYMAN

Nothing—do not trouble yourself—I've got it. It is high time to give my flowerpot its dinner. It must have grown hungry.

BIELE

Certainly. I've been meaning to ask, what sort is it—the plant?

HEYMAN

Ha! More's the pity, in English they call it a Wandering Jew—like its owner, I suppose: always moving from place to place.

BIELE

But you have a place here with us.

HEYMAN

Well. I do, for the moment.

BIELE

It gets good board with you, your little wanderer.

HEYMAN

Oh! Speaking of board, I have a contribution—

(He fishes in his pocket and produces a lemon.)

Here! I found a whole pile of them at a market uptown near the college this morning.

BIELE

A lemon!

HEYMAN

Even so. I'm told they ship them up from the southern parts—from Florida, where there are no Jews, wandering or otherwise.

BIELE

This early in the year?

HEYMAN

But only for the uptown crowd.

HEYMAN hands the lemon to **BIELE**, who cradles it gratefully.

BIELE

It must have been expensive?

HEYMAN

For a lemon? Maybe it is. I wouldn't know. My eyes were caught by the color—a whole pyramid of them on a table on the sidewalk. I couldn't pass it by.

BIELE

It's a blessing! And it is time for its master to have his dinner, too. Shall I set the table, Mr. Heyman?

HEYMAN

Please! It smells delicious. All through the lesson I worried my stomach would rumble and give me away. What are we having tonight?

BIELE

Soup, as always. But at least I'm getting better at it. And yesterday's bread.

HEYMAN

Your soup is always delicious.

BIELE

You're the luck. It seems to turn out better for you.

HEYMAN

(Unforgivably.)

I've been told I come of good stock.

They laugh and their eyes meet. A moment transpires between them.

HEYMAN

But first water for our poor Wandering Jew.

DAVID enters. **HEYMAN** places the plant on the table and crosses a few steps down left.

DAVID

You must excuse me, Biele, Heyman. I am really sorry to have kept you waiting, but I was unavoidably detained.

HEYMAN

Good heath, David!

DAVID

Good health! I met Herr Stern in the entryway, and you know how hard it is to shake oneself free from him.

BIELE

(Recovering herself.)

It is not late at all. What does he want, Stern? Some new scheme again?

DAVID

You hit it there, Biele—and you two are to play first fiddle in it.

BIELE

I? We? What is it?

DAVID

He has unearthed some 'remarkable' dialogue piece—you know everything Stern comes across is 'remarkable.' Well, he wants the two of you to recite it or act it—or at least he says, that's your part of the business—at the Passover gathering.

HEYMAN

A pantomime? Like a vaudeville show? Ridiculous.

BIELE

Why not? It might be pleasant.

(To **DAVID**.)

Did you read it?

DAVID

I would have said so much myself, and to his face, but for the fact that he speaks to everyone coming in and going out. He never fails to tell me what Biele's brought from the grocer's—cabbage, today, am I right?

BIELE is lost in thought, looking at **HEYMAN**.

DAVID

So cabbage—and only moderate salt?

BIELE

(Absently.)

Who else is going to participate?

DAVID

Well. What is the use of talking, since you are not listening anyway?

BIELE

(Defensively.)

Suit yourself! No salt. But we had a little extra this week, so there's cream for tea, after. And we have a surprise.

DAVID

What's that—a lemon?

BIELE

From Mr. Heyman, just now, for the soup. Or for your tea. Which would I spoil less?

HEYMAN

(Intervening.)

Well, it's no matter. In fact, it's just as well we won't do it. You see, I have to tell you something. I've come to a conclusion.

DAVID

Well, then.

HEYMAN

It's been on my mind for a few days, but I wasn't sure. I am afraid that devilish college is making it impossible for me to live downtown.

BIELE

What? But—

HEYMAN

The lectures and the work in the dissecting room are scattered throughout the day. I don't see my way out unless I get a room in the neighborhood nearby.

DAVID

Well, that's as good a reason as any, I suppose.

HEYMAN

And most of my students live uptown as well. I wouldn't have to travel to them.

DAVID

Of course. We'll look for another boarder, but you'll have to come down for dinner, now and again.

BIELE

Yes—dinner. Sometime. Let me set the table. Cabbage soup, with lemon.

BIELE exits right.

DAVID

High time! What a day I've had walking! Walking and walking and never a kind word.

HEYMAN

Something will come up. By Passover—you'll see.

DAVID

With luck. But while he's still out, would you speak to Stern about his dialogue piece, then? He called after me on the stairs to tell me he'd make a copy. I'm sure he has it by now—and the whole building's heard.

HEYMAN

He did? Then I'll fetch it. We can read it together after dinner.

DAVID

Yes—after dinner.

HEYMAN exits. **DAVID** crosses left as **BIELE** enters with bowls and silverware and places them on the table.

DAVID

I've sent Heyman down for a copy of Stern's little dialogue. Any letters from home?

BIELE

No.

DAVID

No?

(Noticing **HEYMAN's** plant on the table.)

What's this? Are we to have a centerpiece tonight?

BIELE

It's Heyman's. Have you not noticed? He keeps it on the parlor window sill. I was about to water it for him.

DAVID

So you wait upon him now?

She gives him a hard stare.

DAVID

What has come over you this evening, Biele? I simply fail to recognize you.

BIELE

If you understand, then it is foolish to ask.

DAVID

I understand nothing.

BIELE

Well, so much the worse. But I think you do understand; you are not so blind.

DAVID

I swear to you that I do not know anything. Tell me, and I will know.

BIELE

Very well, then; would you have me write it down?

DAVID

All right. Suit yourself. I'm going after Heyman—we'll soon see about this silly pantomime.

BIELE

(Handing him a bowl and ushering him out.)

Good. Ask Stern's wife to borrow a cupful of starch while you're there: it'll finish the soup.

BIELE sees **DAVID** out and crosses to the end of the table where she sits, extracts a piece of paper, and picks up the pen. She begins to write.