

The door closes behind her.

ASCH. Mr. Peretz—it is because of you that we are creating a Yiddish renaissance—

PERETZ. Come, come—Yiddish is our mother tongue. The language of our myths, our songs...

ASCH. Our streets. Our gutters. Our desire.

LEMMML. Yes...

PERETZ. At the end of every day I come home from work, kiss my wife and go into this study. And four nights of the week I try to write something for the Jewish people. It may get no further than this living room but it's for us.

ASCH. I am not happy to produce one slim volume of poetry every two or three years that gets read in your living room. I am not ashamed because I want our stories to be on every stage in every language.

PERETZ. You cannot translate...this hateful play. If you must throw stones, throw them outside the tent.

NAKHMEN. Oy vey iz mir. This is a play written by a Jew who hates Jews!

ASCH. Do you know what a minyan is? It's ten Jews in a circle accusing each other of anti-Semitism.

PERETZ. Sholem! You will be torn limb from limb if the public sees this play. Listen to me: about your manuscript?—BURN IT.

ASCH. Mr. Lemml, may I buy you a drink? I'm taking my stones outside the tent with me. I've always wanted to see Berlin.

We suddenly find ourselves in a Berlin cabaret, early twentieth century. The atmosphere is saturated with erotic tension. The troupe dance with their suitcases, and display every vice to be enjoyed by a tourist on the prowl. Even the musicians get into the act.

Song: "Ich hab noch einen Koffer in Berlin."

TITLE: 1907 / BERLIN / A CABARET

HALINA.

WUNDERSCHÖN IST'S IN PARIS

(It's wonderful in Paris)
AUF DER RUE MADELEINE.
(On the Rue Madeleine.)
SCHÖN IST ES IM MAI IN ROM
(It's beautiful during May in Rome)
DURCH DIE STADT ZU GEHN'N
(To stroll through the city.)
ODER EINE SOMMERNACHT STILL BEIM
(Or during a summer night to quietly)
WEIN IN WIEN.
(Drink wine in Vienna.)
DOCH ICH HÄNG,
(But I'd rather hang out,)
WENN IHR AUCH LACHT,
(Even if you laugh,)

ALL.
HEUT' NOCH AN BERLIN.
(Today in Berlin.)

OTTO.
ICH HAB' NOCH EINEN KOFFER IN BERLIN
(I still have a suitcase in Berlin.)
DESWEGEN MUß ICH NÄCHSTENS WIEDER HIN.
(That's why I have to go there soon.)
DIE SELIGKEITEN VERGANG'NER ZEITEN
(The joys of days gone by)
SIND ALLE NOCH IN MEINEM KLEINEN KOFFER DRIN.
(Are all still in my little suitcase.)

AVRAM and OTTO.
ICH HAB' NOCH EINEN KOFFER IN BERLIN.
(I still have a suitcase in Berlin.)
DER BLEIBT AUCH DORT UND DAS HAT SEINEN SINN.
(It stays there, and that makes sense.)

HALINA.
AUF DIESE WEISE
(In this way)

CHANA.
LOHNT SICH DIE REISE

(It's worth a trip)

ALL.

DENN WENN ICH SEHNSUCHT HAB'

(So whenever I have a longing)

DANN FAHR' ICH WIEDER HIN.

(Then I can go back again.)

Violin/viola duet.

AUF DIESE WEISE LOHNT SICH DIE REISE

DENN WENN ICH SEHNSUCHT HAB'

DANN FAHR' ICH WIEDER HIN.

TITLE: 1907 / BERLIN / THE DEUTSCHES THEATER
Freida Niemann and Elsa Heimes

TITLE: in German

A young woman reads in a corner. Freida enters.

FREIDA. And you must be Fräulein Elsa!

ELSA. I cannot believe I get to be in a play with the legendary Freida Niemann!

FREIDA. Please, please—The legend is flesh and blood, I assure you.—Have you read the script?

ELSA. Oh yes, several times. It's very daring, I think.

FREIDA. Oh good. You can explain it all to me.

ELSA. You haven't read it?

FREIDA. Oh, no. I like to find the role through intuition.

Of course, when Rudolph came to me: "Freida, we have a role, this young boy must have been thinking of you when he wrote it."

How do these women live? How do they dress? What do they do in bed and how do they do it?

ELSA. You mean prostitutes?

FREIDA. Oh good god, no! We all know what prostitutes do!

ELSA. Oh—so you asked him about...lesbians?

FREIDA. You'd better learn how to say the word out loud, my girl. Four weeks from today we will be kissing Center Stage. (By the way, my left profile is my good profile.) I mean, I haven't read the play yet,

SCHILDKRAUT. Morris Carnovsky?! You are not in this scene!

CARNOVSKY. I'm here to help translate...

SCHILDKRAUT. Sha! Where was we?

DOROTHEE. She's hugging me like her fiancé—

SCHILDKRAUT. —Sha! Sha! Miss McFadden. Now you are gonna kiss Dorothee the way you gonna kiss your husband on your wedding night...

CARNOVSKY. Lucky young man!

DOROTHEE. Are you all right with this?

VIRGINIA. (*Scared.*) Yes.

Carnovsky and Schildkraut lean in. Dorothee kisses Virginia, gently. Virginia takes a breath and kisses Dorothee back with a bit more conviction.

SCHILDKRAUT.

Wunderbar!

CARNOVSKY.

Nice work, nice work!

ESTHER. (*Who just wants her cigarette break.*) Oy!

SCHILDKRAUT. So you want to just lay yourself against her...it is now the morning after and you are two happy cats who lecken the kreme...

VIRGINIA. Excuse me, Mr. Schildkraut, but could you tell me in English?

SCHILDKRAUT. I am speaking in the English!

DOROTHEE. Place my hand where you feel comfortable.

Virginia does so. The two settle into each other...

SCHILDKRAUT. Can you move your hands up to her bristen more Dorothee?

DOROTHEE. —I am not a happy cat...

LOU. —I don't got nothin' like that in my pages, Mr. Schildkraut.

SCHILDKRAUT. *Sukin syn. (Untranslated.)*

LOU. Ten minutes, ladies, gentlemen.

DOROTHEE. Thank you, Lemml.

VIRGINIA. Thank you, Lemml.

LOU. —Just call me Lou.—And may I say, Miss McFadden, I have

been wit' this show from the first show, and I seen all the shows of this show... You are gonna be magnificent!

(Calling out.) Ten minutes!

He leaves. A blink.

DOROTHEE. I know this must be hard to step in like this, but you are doing a great job.

VIRGINIA. I don't mean to terrify you, but...this is my first show.

DOROTHEE. *(Terrified.)* That is brave. I mean—this show!

VIRGINIA. I'm hoping it shocks my parents. When can I meet the playwright?

DOROTHEE. Sholem Asch has practically become a recluse on Staten Island! He works very hard on his novels. I love his work. Sholem Asch shows women as flesh and blood! How hard it is—it was—

...Mr. Schildkraut compares the rain scene in Act Two to the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet*. The scene in the rain for me is...is just so...I'm having a hard time with English today.

VIRGINIA. It's lesbian, right?

DOROTHEE. What?

VIRGINIA. Did I misread the play? I thought we were lesbians.

DOROTHEE. I—I—

VIRGINIA. Did I say something wrong?

DOROTHEE. I like to think all the layers of love—sister, mother, daughter—

VIRGINIA. —Should we practice kissing?

DOROTHEE. What?

VIRGINIA. I mean, before we have to do it in front of everyone—should we try it by ourselves?

DOROTHEE. I thought you did a great job of it before the break.

VIRGINIA. I just thought. Sorry. You certainly do not need any practice, I must say.

DOROTHEE. *(Starting to sweat.)* Why don't we first just try it on the cheek in rehearsal...and then, and then we can, we can—

VIRGINIA. Yes. Perhaps we should save the lips for opening night.

DOROTHEE. Do you have any training? In acting I mean?

VIRGINIA. My parents would never have let me. And at Smith there was no theater really—

DOROTHEE. Oh. Smith. As in College?

VIRGINIA. Yes. I've been around lots of girls, so that should help... in *this* play.

DOROTHEE. What will shock your parents the most: that you are playing in a Jewish company? That you are playing a Jewish girl? Or that you are playing a girl in love with a prostitute?

VIRGINIA. I hope all of it!

Virginia laughs.

A blink.

TITLE: OPENING NIGHT AT THE THE PROVINCE-TOWN PLAYHOUSE

We watch Virginia and Lou offstage and the performance onstage.

TITLE: in the wings

Offstage:

LOU. It's a wonderful job you are doing, Miss Virginia.

VIRGINIA. I can't stop my body from shaking.

LOU. It's only your first time onstage. The fright...

VIRGINIA. Whenever I see Dorothee...I feel her onstage so much I get scared I will go up on my lines.

LOU. You have to feel what Rifkele feels. Yes? This is what happens to actors. It's a good thing.

VIRGINIA. It's hard to breathe.

LOU. I know nothing about the Christian church. You was brought up in the church?

VIRGINIA. Yes.

LOU. Maybe how your Rifkele feels for Manke is a sin in your church. In this play, how you feel for her and she for you—to me—After the Messiah comes. No hate. No beating. No sin.

A blink in time.

TITLE: onstage

SARAH. Rifkele, Rifkele, I need your help. Your papa and the rabbi will be here soon with the Torah Scroll.

Offstage:

LOU. Ssssh. Breathe deep. Just look at Miss Dorothee while you shake. Your cue, it is coming...

Onstage:

SARAH. Rifkele, Rifkele. They'll be here any minute.

LOU. Now. Geht.

Virginia goes onstage as Rifkele. Dorothee appears for her cue. Together Dorothee and Lou watch.

Onstage:

RIFKELE. I'll call Manke to come up and brush my hair. I love it when she brushes my hair. My hair gets so smooth. (*Tapping on the floor.*) —Manke! Manke!

SARAH. Rifkele! Don't! Papa's gonna break our necks!

Sarah goes into another room and calls to Rifkele. We hear Sarah from offstage:

(*Off.*) I told you to stop seeing that girl! You got nothing in common! The guests will be here any moment... We're arranging a bridegroom for you.

RIFKELE. A bridegroom? Who is he, Mama?

SARAH. (*Off.*) A wonderful boy, a treasure from a wonderful family. Handsome like a rabbi.

Dorothee takes a deep, nervous breath and enters onstage.

Onstage:

Manke enters. Sarah is still in the other room.

Rifkele goes to Manke. The room starts growing dark.

RIFKELE. Where will we live, Mama?

The two actresses look at each other. Dorothee kisses Virginia ardently.

Virginia/Rifkele strokes Dorothee/Manke's cheek in Manke's

arms.

SARAH. (*Off.*) —in your bedroom right under your papa's roof! There beneath the Holy Scroll your papa bought, you will do your wifely duty!

RIFKELE. Will he love me, Mama?

SARAH. (*Off.*) Very much, my dearest daughter. Every night.

Lou and Esther watch the climax of Act One with baited breath.

TITLE: the curtain falls

Onstage, Virginia breaks from Dorothee's hold and faces her. This was not in the script. Virginia, shaking, throws herself on Dorothee, nuzzling her neck.

Offstage:

Lou waits with open arms for Virginia as she exits. She runs into his embrace. Dorothee walks into the wings behind her.

LOU. Beautiful.

Virginia starts to cry.

VIRGINIA. I don't ever want to stop acting. Ever.

TITLE: FULL COMPANY MEETING / THE PROVINCE-TOWN PLAYHOUSE

TITLE: in English

The troupe is assembled. Lou holds a stack of scripts.

SCHILDKRAUT. Ladies, gentlemen, I give you our producer at the Greenwich Theatre: Mr. Harry Weinberger!

The cast applauds.

HARRY. Of all the places in New York I have called home: the courtroom, the picket line, the labor unions—the best home for me has been standing in the back of the orchestra at the Provincetown Players.

I got in on the ground floor as producer of a little play by a wild Irishman, name of Eugene O'Neill—*The Hairy Ape*? So I have recently found a new home on Broadway.

And it got me thinking: what if a play came my way written by a fellow Jew that told our stories?