DREYFUS IN REHEARSAL

ACT ONE

SCENE i

The house lights fade out, music fades in from afar; in space, and in time.

Music: a spirited Yiddish folk song: "Morgen, Morgen" (Tomorrow, Tomorrow).

Lights come up on the front curtain. An impression of the outskirts of Vilna, Poland. The date—1931—is fixed in the design.

The curtain is lit for night.

The music becomes a French military march played on a portable phonograph.

The curtain rises on a Jewish meeting hall, sometimes used as a theatre.

Chairs and tables, arranged haphazardly. A pile of benches. A dismantled platform in sections. A large porcelain stove.
A rehearsal is in progress. Morris, the author-director, sits beside the phonograph, watching the music. He is an intense young man, wearing eyeglasses.

At one side, Zina sits, studying the script. She is middle-aged, lively and attractive. Arnold, in a rocker, conducts the music, semi-professionally. He is a barber and the senior member of his amateur company.

Stage Center: Michael (playing Captain Dreyfus) and Mendl (playing the Adjudant of the Republican Guard). Michael is the youngest member; Mendl, a tailor, is in his forties, and serious.

Both stand at attention, stiffly. The march ends. Morris shifts his attention to the players and gives them a hand cue.

Mendel salutes, Michael salutes. Mendl executes an exaggerated left-face. Michael repeats the action with a right-face. They face each other. Mendl begins to mime the degradation ceremony. With larger-than-life gestures, he pretends to tear off one of Michael’s epaulets, then another. Now the buttons, one by one; the braid; the trouser stripes. Michael stands expressionless.

Mendel holds out both hands. Michael pantomimes pulling his sabre from its scabbard. Mendl takes it, breaks it dramatically across his knee, throws down the two pieces, and resumes his position of military attention.

A pause. Too long.

MORRIS. Nu? What’re you waiting?
MICHAEL. (As himself:) I thought they—
epaulets, throws them aside. Morris mimes along with him.
Mendl hesitates.) The buttons. (Mendl is confused and
checks his fly buttons.) The buttons. (Mendl mimes tearing
off the buttons, quickly.) Slower. One at a time. Build it up
to the sabre. (Mendl follows.) There are nine. Slowly. Each
one like tearing off a piece of skin. (Mendl is offended by this
idea and swats it.) React, Michael. (Michael reacts. Morris
continues to direct.) Now the sabre. (Mendl holds out his
Dignified, contemptuous. (Michael overacts.) Not too much.
A little contemptuous is enough. (Michael holds out his
imaginary sabre. Mendl takes it and breaks it across his knee.)
Now, Dreyfus. Michael, you. “But I'm innocent!” (Michael
concentrates. A silence.)

MICHAEL. Why did he shout, “Long live the Army!”
MORRIS. What?
MICHAEL. Why did he shout, “Long live the Army!”
MORRIS. Why don't you say first your line and after ask
questions? God! (He walks away.)
MENDL. You'll see. When we'll have the real costumes—
I'm going to make him such a costume—and the braid and
the buttons—

ARNOLD. (Rising.) It could be, you know, that Michael—
he's a fine boy—but what I'm saying is—it could be that
this Dreyfus—could be too much for him. A question
of lack of experience—
MORRIS. (Sitting down on the bench.) Aw-haw! Goodbye
rehearsal!

ARNOLD. I'm only saying—hear me out—if Michael can't
do it—it's nothing against him—it's, after all, a big role. An
important character. (And important characters are always
hard. That is to say—not easy. (Mendl sighs.) After all. A
Captain is a Captain—even a Jewish Captain. And a beginner
is a beginner—even a Jewish beginner.
MORRIS. So who could play it?
ARNOLD. (After a shrug.) A more experienced actor,
tell you a professional secret. I personally have never felt anything—but has that stopped me from playing every kind of character in every kind of play? No. You don't "feel" a character, you "feel" a girl's behind. Look, what does a Captain do? (He brandishes an imaginary sabre and yells. The surprise is how well he does it.) "Forward...march! On my order...charge! At the ready...bayonets! Ready—aim—fire! Death to the enemy!" (As himself.) That's all there is to it. (A final leftover thrust.) "Sabres! Advance! Victory!" (He all but takes a bow and puts his sabre back into its scabbard.) You see?
MICHAEL. Yes, but here in this scene he can't do that. They're degrading him. So how can he—?
ARNOLD. It's the same, the same. (Improvising.) "Soldiers, hear me. They're degrading an innocent person. They're dishonoring a blameless man. Present arms!" (As himself.) And then, if we have trumpets—(Mendel creates a fanfare)—everybody in the hall will cry. I guarantee it. Cry! Well, you keep trying. I'll help you if I can. But when it gets to be, I mean, if it gets to be too much for you, listen, if that happens, and Morris agrees, we can change parts. That's to say, you play Zola—a better part, but easier—and I'll take over this Dreyfus.
MORRIS. Finished?
ARNOLD. I was only—
MORRIS. I'm the director. I do the casting. And Captain Dreyfus, by the way, wasn't like your idea of a Captain. He was a sensitive man—modest, humble.
ARNOLD. (He falls to his knees.) "Innocent! I'm innocent, General. Have pity." (He weeps.)
MORRIS. Why don't you go home? I won't get to you tonight, anyway.
ARNOLD. No, no. I like to watch. Actually, you sometimes learn from watching other actors' mistakes.
MORRIS. Places! We'll begin again from—
ARNOLD. As long as we stopped—there's one little obser-

vation I'd like to make. Do you mind?
MORRIS. Yes, I do.
ARNOLD. Thank you. It's only—now, I've read the whole play—not just my part the way most actors do. I like it. I don't deny I'd rather be playing Dreyfus—but well, all right. You landed me with this Emile Zola-Shmola. All right. I don't complain. I'm a good soldier—in fact, I would be a good Captain—ha, ha, ha—but, well, all right. Morris. Be fair. Be professional. Dreyfus—we see him with his wife. Yes? We see him when he's emotional. No? And the moments of love. Good. The public likes that—but. What about Emile? Mr. Zola? He hasn't got a wife and children? No friends, no family? So what kind of man is he? Why isn't there a scene—say one little scene where they could see him in his own home, not making speeches for a change? Maybe a scene where he's playing cards—two handed pinochle with a friend. No? Maybe alone—playing my violin. The public likes that. (Suddenly.) Oi! In the whole piece—not one song, not one dance. Oi, oi, oi. Who's going to come to see a play without even one little bit of some kind of music? Who? MORRIS. But we have—
ARNOLD. I know—you're going to tell me about your bugles, about your marches. But here—the public doesn't like military music. It reminds them of the Army.
MORRIS. Can somebody make him stop?
ARNOLD. Why couldn't Zola sing something instead of that little thing about "I accuse!" And, by the way, wouldn't that be better in French? I can say it in French. "J'accuse!" It's, after all, a famous little thing.
MORRIS. It's not a little thing! It's an open letter to Monsieur Felix Faure, President of the Republic of France. One of the greatest letters of all time.
ARNOLD. Who said not? But maybe too great for this town. Too long. He was a writer, your Mr. Zola-Shmola. And the trouble with writers, they know too many words. Believe me, a little song—this is theatre, not history. And what's
theatre? Theatre is pleasing the public. **(He improvises—or borrows—a mournful tune and sings.)**

"Yaw, baw, baw, baw, boi.
Baw, baw, baw, baw, boi.
Yaw, baw, baw, oi, oi.
J'accuse! J'accuse! J'accuse!"

ZINA. So long as everybody's having their say—let me ask you. Why is it I have no part in this play?

MORRIS. You have, Zina, you have.

ZINA. That's a part? I come on twice screaming, "Death to the Jews!" Some part. **That'll** make me popular in the neighborhood. I can see myself in the market the day after the show. Everybody'll say—ah—. By me, that's not a part. The crowd. Why couldn't they see Dreyfus's mother? **"A soldier. My son—a soldier." (Her eyes to heaven.) "What have I done, dear God?" (To her imaginary son.) "They'll** beat you. They won't ever accept you. Why? Because you're a Jew. Why don't you be a tailor like your father? Learn the trade, work a while with him and after, you can work for yourself. What's better? Your own business, your own boss. The way things are that's always best for a Jew. Not the Army. In the Army no matter how high you go, there's always somebody higher who's an anti-Semite. Oi, vay! My Dreyfus! Don't become a goy. Stay with us. All right, so we're not so rich, so we're not so happy, but we're free. Free as Jews can be in this world. And if some day things go wrong, God should forbid, a pogrom—so we'll run away to another country. Elsewhere. Anywhere. People always need a tailor. But a Captain? What country wants a Captain? Or if they do want a Captain, do they want a Jewish Captain? No. They don't want you, but they won't let you go—they treat you like a dirty Jew and tear off your buttons, and break your sword in half, and you have to stand there and salute, and say,"Yes, General, thank you General. Long live France! Long live the Army! Long live the Pope! Long live the anti-Semites, the Inquisition, the pharaohs!" Listen to your

mother, mein gold. Don't go be a soldier, or a Captain. That's not a good job for a Jew." That's what it needs—so they'll know his mother wasn't for it.

MORRIS. But she was!

ZINA. **Was what?**

MORRIS. **Was for it.**

ZINA. All right. So things weren't like that in the real story—but in a play—who will you get to believe that a real Jewish mother—?

MORRIS. For God's sake! Alfred Dreyfus's mother was **not** a real Jewish mother. She was **no** kind of a Jewish mother.

ZINA. She wasn't?

MORRIS. No.

ZINA. So why're we putting on this piece of shit?

MORRIS. Because—what I'm trying to tell you is that the Dreyfuses in France in 1895, they were not the same kind of Jews that we are—here in Poland in 1931. They were French. They felt as French as all the other French. Why not? Alfred Dreyfus had no trouble in the French schools—and his father wasn't a little tailor—his father was big—a mill owner. Textiles.

ZINA. So that's not Jewish? I'll bet you whatever you want his parents **cried** when he joined that army.

MENDEL. I know a mill owner, not really big, but also not really little either. More or less in the middle. He's in Lodz. He's more or less of a kind of cousin. So, he has two sons. And never, never, never—that I can swear—never would he let one of his sons—he had two—be in the military—even in the French military.

MORRIS. Now listen to me—I mean all of you. The way I've been listening to you. In this play I don't want to talk about Dreyfus's parents or about Zola's family. I want to show how—in a highly civilized country where Jews felt secure—safe—how suddenly—you might even say overnight—on account of one terrible mistake—there started an anti-Semitic campaign—and grew and developed to a point where the
whole country was divided into two camps—and all good sense and all justice was swept away—drowned.

ARNOLD. (Applauding.) Bravo! That's why we're doing this? That's what you want to say?

MORRIS. Well, try at least.

ARNOLD. Excellent... Now. Let me tell you then the best way to say that. You have a meeting—right here in this hall without setting up the stage, and so forth. (You can have it with or without a buffet, with or without an orchestra. You come on, you say your say the way you said it just now to us—no tralala, no frills—you develop your idea, deliver your message for, say, half an hour, with or without notes. Then after, everybody can dance if they want—or the old people can talk and ask questions—with or without answers. And then—about 9:30, 10 o'clock—everybody goes home happy. But a thing like your thing—with no music and instead—what—letters, memos, shmemos, appeals, counter-appeals, trials, re-trials—and who knows and what else)—fuh! First—nobody will understand a thing. Second—nobody will believe it. You want an advice? Try it out first in the street.) Ask somebody—anybody, if they ever even heard of this Jewish Captain who got himself into trouble in France—when?—thirty-five years ago. Ask! And you know what they'll say? They'll say, "Who cares? He had no business being a French Captain. Whatever happened, good for him!"
And they'll be right.

MORRIS. And what if I tell them that last week, thirty miles from here—not even thirty—a gang of Polish patriots beat up some Polish Jews. Yes. And burned down their houses—after first naturally ransacking them and taking whatever was worth anything. What will they say? "Well, that won't happen here, not to us, because we know how to stay in our place"? We have no place—anywhere—as long as this kind of stupidity and hate lives in man. A question. Why did Emile Zola defend Dreyfus? He didn't know him. He'd never seen him. He wasn't even Jewish himself. So why? For his own sake? No. He was fighting stupidity and hatred and prejudice... and listen—hear me out—as long as men don't do what Zola did, as long as they say, "Aah, to hell with what happens to others"—then nothing will go right—anywhere—and not only for Jews. All men—and women—they must love and respect each other—or try—and that's what Zola tells them in his play. Love.

ZINA. (Singing.)

"Love, love
I love you only,
My heart is true."

MORRIS. Exactly!

ARNOLD. Pish-pash!

MORRIS. Yes, and if you don't like it—we'll do it without you!

ARNOLD. Why are you upset? Of course I like it. Your play is good. Maybe very good. So you want to say things that are good, why not? That's good. Only when they're out front, the audience—sitting in front of us—if they come, that is—will they understand what they can do about it all... Listen. About ten years ago—maybe eleven—I was playing with Blomski's Troupe in Warsaw. In some farkoekte play—I can't ever remember the title—and I must tell you—I played a terrible son of a bitch—

MENDL. Ha! That Blomski, always type-casting.

ARNOLD. Well, this son of a bitch I played was always beating his wife—for no reason—and in one scene a man comes in—a neighbor—and he asks him, "What are you beating your wife? Why?" And the dirty bastard—my part—answers: "So whose wife should I beat?" And you know what the audience did?

MENDL. They laughed.

ARNOLD. Wrong. They applauded. You hear me? Applauded. It was the biggest moment in that whole farkoekte play, I can't even remember the name of. There.
ARNOLD. People—by nature—are cruel and selfish—and don’t want to love each other. Or respect.
ZINA. Maybe in Warsaw, but not here.
ARNOLD. Here, too, like everywhere.
ZINA. No, not everywhere, not here.
ARNOLD. Everywhere. Idiots and sons of bitches everywhere! (Morris throws his script between Zina and Arnold.)
MORRIS. The rehearsal is over! Good night, ladies and gentlemen. (He leaves.)
ARNOLD. What, I said something? (Mendel picks up Morris’s script and runs out after him. The rest stand about in confused silence. As the lights go down, music begins: “Spatzieren.” The music continues for two choruses until the beginning of the next scene.)

ACT I

SCENE i

Zalman, an old, bearded man is at the stove, stoking the fire. He is the caretaker of these premises.
Michael has come in and is studying his lines.

MICHAEL. Zalman, in 1895—how old were you?
ZALMAN. To tell you the truth, I’m not sure. My father was never in a hurry to register our births. He’d wait till there were three or four so he’d only have to make one trip. But anyway—in 1895, I was between twenty-five and thirty—say twenty-eight.

MICHAEL. Ah hah! so you must’ve heard a lot of talk about Captain Dreyfus.
ZALMAN. About who?
MICHAEL. Captain Alfred Dreyfus—this Jewish captain—in France—who had a lot of trouble there at the time—
ZALMAN. Yes—could be. So what about it?
MICHAEL. Nothing—just that Morris has written this play about him—and we’re going to put it on.
ZALMAN. An old story like that?
MICHAEL. Morris wants to point out that even as a Captain—a Jew isn’t safe from getting peed on—
ZALMAN. A whole play he wrote for this?
MICHAEL. He’s trying to show that as long as people don’t share respect and feeling for each other—they’ll always have things like the Dreyfus affair and pogroms and all kinds of other filthy, inhuman things like that—if they don’t love each other.
ZALMAN. Why should they love each other? (A silence.) Did you say the Dreyfus affair? . . . Yeah, yeh. There was some talk about it and then some time went by and listen—we had our own troubles, who needed French ones? I must have been still in Crakow then—yeh—up till 1902. And you didn’t have to be a Captain there to have a hard time—so we forgot about all that faraway nonsense. (Morris comes in, hangs up his coat and stops to listen to Michael and Zalman.)
MICHAEL. But what did you think about it? You were twenty-eight, after all.
ZALMAN. (He thinks hard.) Nothing . . . Mind you—at the end—when they pardoned him—we all got good and drunk all the same. At that time, any occasion was an excuse. What a stomach I had! Cast iron! Today, it’s all rusty.
MORRIS. (Coming over the Michael.) So tonight the letter scene. Do you know it?
MICHAEL. The words, yes—but I still haven’t found the character. Why did he do what he did?
MORRIS. Don’t you see—during the degradation—at the
very moment they're ripping off his braid—he's still a captain in the Army of the French Republic. All around him—the troops in full dress, the music, the ceremony—all that is the Army, *his* Army that he served and still loves. And even after—without his rank, without his sabre, he still feels himself to be a soldier among other soldiers. But then he hears the shouts from the crowd—"Dirty Jew!... death, death to all Jews!" (The journalists begin to shout, too.) The soldiers join in—and the officers—you hear?—the officers—his old comrades—all shouting together—some spit in his face—and it's only then everything falls in on him, collapses: honor, rank—he doesn't know where he is, who he is—he's falling, falling—the sabre is broken, the epaulets and buttons ripped off—he feels naked—and the noise of the crowd finally tears his spirit to shreds... Understand?

MICHAEL. Yes... well, no. Maybe. I mean how does all that help me? To find the character?

MORRIS. God Almighty! He's no longer a Captain. He's no longer a soldier. He's no longer a Frenchman. He's *nothing*! His army has just banished him—thrown him out as though he were the plague. He's not a *character*, he's a *person*—like you. Like me. In trouble. He doesn't know who's accusing him or what he's accused of. He's a Jew. Can he help that? Is it his fault he was born a Jew? No. But that's why he's been found guilty. He's alone, lost, screwed! Yes! Life has screwed him. If you don't— (Arnold comes in with his daughter, Myriam. She is attractive in a small-town way, and possessed of unmistakable sexual magnetism.)

ARNOLD. "Present arms! At ease!" (To Michael.) How's it going, boychick? (*Michael shakes hands with Myriam, too formally.)

MORRIS. Let's begin, please.

ARNOLD. I know all my lines. Already.

MORRIS. Good—but tonight we're rehearsing only Dreyfus and his wife...

ARNOLD. And me?

MORRIS. I'm doing what was scheduled. (*Confidentially.) Anyway, you don't need as much rehearsal as the others.

ARNOLD. (*Loudly, bringing it out in the open.) Excuse me, Morris, but I don't agree with you. Because one actor is better than the rest doesn't mean he doesn't have to...

MORRIS. Your turn'll come. (*Arnold whips out his beribboned pipe-nose, puts them on, and launches into his Zola.)

ARNOLD. "Justice, M'sieur President! We claim only justice. Nothing more, nothing less. I have never met the prisoner, never seen him, never heard the sound of his voice, but I must raise my voice, M'sieur President—"

MORRIS. Why don't you sit down and let your daughter rehearse?

ARNOLD. (*Somewhat petulantly.) You're the director. I always respect the director. (*Morris and Michael have set the furniture for the scene. Two small tables at some distance, the chairs behind them.)

MORRIS. All right, Michael. Read your letter. Places, please. (*Michael and Myriam go to their chairs.) A bit closer. (*They move.) Now. Have confidence, children. Give it some life—real feeling, not stage feeling. (*Michael sits. He will pretend to write as he speaks while Myriam pretends to read the letter as he is "writing.")

MICHAEL. (*Mechanically, continuously accelerating.)

"Wednesday, five o'clock.

My darling,

At last they have given me permission to write to you. It was so good to have been able to see you, even though it was through those damn bars. (When I came close to you, I was so moved that I had to make an effort not to fall. I am suffering a great deal, mainly because of my worry concerning you. I know how much you love me—you have proven that during this living hell—and I know that your heart must be breaking.) For my part, dear love, my thoughts are all of you—night and day.

To be innocent, to have led a blameless life and to see myself
condemned for the most monstrous crime that a soldier can commit—what could be more dreadful! There are times when I believe it is all a horrible nightmare from which I shall awake and find you sleeping peacefully at my side, in our bed—smiling, as you sometimes do—on certain of our nights—one side of your dear mouth upturned slightly in contentment. But then I realize that all this horror is real. I hear those voices swaying out the lies about me and—"

MORRIS. Not so fast!

MICHAEL. It's no use. Even with all those fine words—I feel empty.

MORRIS. It'll come.

MICHAEL. The trouble is—one of the troubles—that during the day, when I work—I sit like this—all hunched over. (He leans over and mimics a shoemaker's actions.) And that's bad for the character. A captain sits up straight, doesn't he?

ARNOLD. Aw-haw! Of course. Chest out, eyes front, toches tight—like a Polish policeman giving an eviction order to some poor Yiddle.

MORRIS. (To Michael.) So who's stopping you from sitting up straight?

MICHAEL. I tried it. I hit my fingers—(He demonstrates.)—but that was nothing. The work was a disgrace. Appelbaum—a good customer—even brought me back a pair—brought—what brought?—he threw them at me—right in front of everybody. (He rises.) No, you can't make shoes with a straight back and a chest out and a tight toches.

MORRIS. Who says Dreyfus sat up straight when he wrote this letter? And besides—it's not a matter of a stiff back or eyes front—you find the character—from the inside—then the body follows naturally! So. Again. (And this time—a little more.—(He makes a vague gesture.)

MICHAEL. I'm trying, Morris. I'm trying, but—(He makes the same vague gesture.)

MYRIAM. Michael, think about your wife—and how you love her—and how you're separated from her. And now you're writing to her. (Michael looks at Myriam furtively but meaningfully. He goes back to his letter. He begins slowly and well, but nerves overcome him and before his speech is over, he is reading fast again.)

MICHAEL. "Everything that has been said to me and about me is the most dreadful mortal torture—worse than bodily punishment—because in my soul and in my conscience I know that I have done nothing wrong. But whatever happens to me, what matters most is to unearth the buried truth—move heaven and earth to find it—use up all our money if necessary. I cannot rest, I cannot live as a man should live—until my name—our name which has been so cruelly and unjustly besmirched—Forgive me, my love, my strength fails—I can write no more."

MORRIS. Myriam.

MYRIAM. (Simply and sincerely.) "21 December 1894... Above all, I suffer when I think of the horrible tortures to which you are being submitted. You are never out of my thoughts—not even for a moment. I can see you alone in that gloomy prison. I can imagine your thoughts. I live in misery without you near me. My darling, we must, we must somehow find each other—live for each other—because it is now more clear than ever that we cannot exist without each other. You must resign yourself to everything. You must find the strength to bear the terrible trials that lie ahead. I beg you—don't be concerned about the crowd about mass feeling—you know how opinions change. Think of all the men of good will who believe in you—who are on your side. Our side... Our little angels are so good; they are happy and busy. What a consolation that in the midst of our awful misfortune—they are so young, so innocent... Our Pierre talks about you with such feeling that I cannot hold back my tears... Your Lucie."

MORRIS. Good. All right, let's take it from the ending. You get up. You go to each other. (They do so.) You stop, face
to face— (*They do.*) —almost touching. There! (*In a new voice, he acts the stern guard.*) "The visit is over!" (*In his own voice.*) Both step back—slowly, slowly—(*They follow direction.*) —still looking at each other—eyes speaking—eyes—now, Myriam.

MYRIAM. (*Moving backward, her arms outstretched toward Michael.*) "My love, my love... Alfred..."

MICHAEL. (*Tonelessly.*) "Lucie... my Lucie... My love... my love..."

MORRIS. No!... No! (*He walks away, then back. He goes to Michael.*) Are you made of wood—or what?

MICHAEL. I'm no actor and I'm no soldier—so it's no use! (*He throws his script down on the table, then goes to get his scarf.*)

MORRIS. Wait! I'm sorry. I don't always mean what I say. (*He tries to take Michael's scarf away from him.*) And what? We're doing it tomorrow? We've got all the time in the world. It'll come—you'll see. Anyway, in this scene—he's not a captain or even a—he's just a man—just a man separated from his wife. They've only been allowed to see each other for a few moments. They couldn't even touch, there was a partition. They only had time to say a few tense words, and then—the visit was over—they parted—I mean they were parted—they shouted out their love—and that's all.

MICHAEL. I know, I know. (*He makes a helpless gesture. Moriss begins pacing again. A pause.*)

ARNOLD. Moriss?

MORRIS. Yes?

ARNOLD. No, nothing.

MORRIS. Well, go ahead—as long as we've stopped.

ARNOLD. Couldn't he resign?

MORRIS. Who?

ARNOLD. *What this name.* (*He points to Michael.*) Alfred What this name. When he saw how things were going worse and worse for him—he couldn't send a letter to his General? They did things like that—I've read about it somewhere...

"Dear General Soandso: As long as we don't seem to agree about things—why should we prolong this matter that's as painful for me as for you? So I'm sending you therefore here-with or however—my resignation—definitely—goodbye Army. Please accept my best wishes, Shalom, good health to you and Mrs. General, kiss my ass—respectfully yours. Captain What this name."

MORRIS. For that you interrupt my rehearsal?

ARNOLD. A silence I interrupted—with permission to speak.

MORRIS. All right, but close your mouth now, will you?

ARNOLD. (*Rising.*) What I started to say—you didn't let me finish—is why is it we never think of the most simple things? What's complicated? He sends in his resignation like I said—it's all over—and hooray—we can put on another play.

MORRIS. Michael!

MICHAEL. Yes?

MORRIS. Go take Myriam in your arms.

MICHAEL. What for?

MORRIS. What for. She's your wife—yes or no?

ARNOLD. What's happening?

MORRIS. (*Pushing Michael toward Myriam.*) Come on. Before we see them separated, we have to see them happy. Together.

ARNOLD. One daughter I've got with a beautiful education and he's pushing her together with a shoemaker. MORRIS. (*To Michael, who holds back.*) What's the matter?

MICHAEL. Well, it's just that—

MYRIAM. (*Holding out her arms tantalizingly.*) Are we going to rehearse or not?

MICHAEL. (*As he is being propelled.*) In the play they're never—yes, they're married—but always apart—so—MORRIS. Do it. (*Myriam and Michael are in embrace. She is enjoying it, he is embarrassed.*)

MICHAEL. (*To Arnold.*) Excuse me, Arnold, but—
ARNOLD. Go ahead. Either we're people of the theatre or not.
MORRIS. (To Michael.) Hold her closer—closer—what're you afraid of? She won't bite you. (Myriam playfully bites his ear.) Tender, be tender. Let yourself go. Melt into her. Both melt. She's your wife, you're her husband—you love each other—(He presses them together at the hips.) You're happy—you have children—life is wonderful—you're rich, handsome, you own horses. Stroke her hair, you love her hair. (He takes Michael's hand and shows him how to stroke Myriam's hair.) There. Everything is perfect. Tender—tender—tender for God's sake! (Softly.) Now kiss her. (Arnold clears his throat nervously. Morris silences him with a gesture.)
MORRIS. (Acting the part of the guard.) "The visit is over!" (Michael and Myriam continue to kiss.)
ARNOLD. (He has had enough.) "The visit is over!"
MORRIS. (To Michael.) Did you feel something? (Michael, with a dazed grin, nods slowly.)
MICHAEL. Yeah.
MORRIS. (Triumphant. He grabs Michael and hugs him.) Good—now—while we've got the mood—let's do it—the letter scene. Go on, Michael—read your letter—read it like you mean it—don't think of anything but your wife's kiss—let yourself go. Go on, Michael.
MICHAEL. (Walking over to Arnold.) My dear Arnold, I have the honor to ask you for your daughter's hand in marriage. Myriam! For life!
MYRIAM. (Throwing her arms around Michael, kissing him, and crying.) You did it! Oh, Michael! You did it! (They are in a kiss that seals it. Arnold goes to Morris and looks at him, balefully.)

ACT ONE

SCENE iii

The schmatta is lit for day. Music from the previous scene continues as the curtain rises to reveal Michael and Myriam.

The hall. Michael and Myriam are alone, deep in a kiss. It ends.

MYRIAM. (Acting.) "The visit is over!" (They move away from one another, walking backward, arms outstretched.) "My love, my love... Alfred..."
MICHAEL. (Acting.) "Lucie... my Lucie... My love... my love."
MYRIAM. Curtain. (They relax.) Good, darling. Very good. Michael. I don't know—I still can't swallow the whole story. The scenes on Devil's Island or in prison—fine. I can handle those. But when he starts in about his love for the flag and France and the Army—I'm lost.
MYRIAM. But—
MICHAEL. So calm, polite, why? Why did he become a Captain? So he could wear that elegant uniform? No. It was the taste for blood. "Vive la France! Vive l'Armée!" (He
points his forefinger at his temple and whirs it about.) Far-choozted! Your Dreyfus was farchoozted.
MYRIAM. Suppose you had a home and a family and they were attacked—
MICHAIL. Yes?
MYRIAM. Wouldn't you fight to protect them?
MICHAIL. If I could find the courage—I'd take them and run.
MYRIAM. But you can't keep running. What kind of life is that?
MICHAIL. Didn't you hear your own father? (He imitates Arnold.) "Keep your toothbrush in your pocket and stay near your children because you never know what could happen!"
(Myriam laughs.) No. I'll never be able to play this part. But I'm not sorry I got into it. It taught me a good lesson: the worst thing that can happen to a Jew is for him to feel at home somewhere. Anywhere.
MYRIAM. Oh, so we're never going to settle down?
MICHAIL. Who said anything about settling down?
MYRIAM. "Whither thou goest, I shall go." A wife must follow her husband.
MICHAIL. Who said anything about marriage?
MYRIAM. You did, boychick. And in public!
MICHAIL. Do you have witnesses?
MYRIAM. (Smiling and holding out her arms.) Come here. (He moves to her. She swings on him in an attempt to slap him, he ducks, she is thrown off balance. He grabs her from behind. They wrestle, laughing. He pushes her on to the floor, and they go into a long kiss. Arnold and Zina come in.)
ZINA. Mazel tov! (Michael and Myriam get to their feet, embarrassed.) When's the honeymoon?
ARNOLD. I think they just had it! (Zalman comes in, escorting a tall, dignified man. The stranger is beautifully dressed in black.)
ZALMAN. What're you doing here, all of you?
ARNOLD. What we do every night, you old billygoat.
ARNOLD. You want a little direction?
WASSELBAUM. In a manner of speaking, yes. (*They all look at Morris. He is not interested, but stops at the door. The rest stop around Waselbaum.*)
MENDL. (Checking the fabric of Waselbaum's suit.) Your little chat is about what, exactly?
WASSELBAUM. The Promised Land. (*A whistle of admiration.*)
MENDL. A good subject.
ARNOLD. Interesting, interesting.
WASSELBAUM. The actual place does not matter. According to Theodore Herzl's definition, there is only one Jewish State, and that is The Promised Land. The Jewish State, sovereign and independent.
MENDL. (*To Arnold.*) Oi, oi, oi—a Zionist! We'll never get the hall back.
ZINA. The Jewish State. Hoorah! But where is the Jewish State?
WASSELBAUM. In the heart of each one of us.
ZINA. Good. At least it won't get cold there.
WASSELBAUM. In a manner of speaking, that is the theme of my lecture—how this State we carry in our hearts can become tomorrow—a glorious reality. I expound—in a few words—upon the magnificent effort, about the admirable devotion of a handful of pioneers—our brave brothers who are preparing for us—down there—the great return.
ZINA. Where's "down there"?
ARNOLD. Palestine. Where do you think?
MORRIS. Personally, I don't want to return anywhere. Better to try and get—as Jews and equal human beings—the rights and obligations like any other persons. In whatever country chance and our parents landed us. Or is that asking too much?
MICHAEL. You mean like the rights Dreyfus got in France?

MORRIS. He ended up a Colonel, didn't he? Anyway, Jews aren't the only ones to worry about. Hate isn't healthy for anybody, and if some day the anti-Semites could some way be cured—the world would be better off.
WASSELBAUM. (*To Michael.*) My dear young man, you spoke of Dreyfus. Do you know that it is precisely because of this dreadful Dreyfus affair that Theodore Herzl—who chances to be in Paris at the time—recognized the desperate necessity of an independent Jewish State? And if one day this dream is achieved we shall owe it to the ordeal, to the suffering of Captain Alfred Dreyfus.
MICHAEL. And in your State there—there'll be an Army?
WASSELBAUM. I beg your pardon?
MICHAEL. Soldiers, officers, guns, cannons—an Army?
WASSELBAUM. I can't say—I suppose so—like other countries, no doubt. It will be a country, like any other.
ZINA. For the Jews, a country like any other? So what's the use of being Jewish?
WASSELBAUM. You must understand . . .
ZALMAN. Can I just finish the hall before you start fighting?
ARNOLD. A moment, please. We haven't done our rehearsal with the doctor. (*To Waselbaum.*) Tell us quick your whole spiel and we'll tell you quick how to do it.
WASSELBAUM. Very grateful.
ARNOLD. Just sing out your whole megilla.
WASSELBAUM. I beg your pardon?
ARNOLD. —like we're the audience. (*All sit.*)
WASSELBAUM. You're really too kind. I have already delivered a few lectures—but in Switzerland and in English. When I said first, I meant my first in the Yiddish tongue. (*He goes up on the platform and begins to prepare by taking out voluminous notes, setting up a map, pouring a glass of water. He takes off his hat. The men follow suit. He then puts his hat back on after putting on his glasses. The men are surprised, but do the same. He appears to have misplaced his*
speech, but finds it. He stares at the ceiling to compose his thoughts. The others do the same. All are unnerved.)

ZINA. (Crossing to sit near Arnold, in a stage whisper.) How do you like it so far?

WASSELMANN. My very dear brothers . . .

ARNOLD. (Jumping up and interrupting.) May I? Let me tell you first something very important. Here in this hall everybody talks. Oh, do they talk! If it's a play or a lecture or a bar mitzvah. They talk. So unless you say, "Quiet, please. Quiet, please!" And clear your throat like this . . . (He clears his throat noisily.) If not they won't even begin to listen. Your opening line. What is it?

WASSELMANN. "My very dear brothers."

ARNOLD. "My very dear brothers," huh? (He obviously doesn't think very much of the line.) Anyway, you have to say it in a strong voice—not quiet—not into your beard—not subdued. You have to let them know you're starting, that you're off with a boom, boom, boom. (In a very strong voice.) "My very dear brothers!" You see?

MORRIS. No, no, no. You sound like a drunken wagon-driver insulting his horses. (To Wasselmann.) You don't have to yell. You said "My very dear brothers" plenty loud enough—what was missing was conviction. Con-vic-tion! It didn't sound like you were addressing your very dear brothers. Not to me.

ZINA. And why "My very dear brothers"? (She is now on the platform.) What does that mean, "My very dear brothers?" They're not his brothers. And it leaves out women. Why not, "Good evening, people," or "Hello, everybody"?

MENDL. (Joining Wasselmann on the platform.) You know what's good? "Welcome, comrades." There was this speaker, talker, something—I heard him one day, two or three years ago. I can't remember exactly and I can't remember where it was or what it was about—but that part I remember, "Welcome, comrades." I can still hear it. "Welcome, comrades."

ARNOLD. Hey, dumkopf! "Welcome, comrades" means—either he was a Bundist or else a Bolshevik.

MENDL. They own the word "comrade"? A Zionist can't say it?

ZINA. "Welcome, comrades" right away you think of Bitribidan and Little Father Stalin wants us all to go there and dig rocks.?

ARNOLD. Wait!

ZINA. Start with "Welcome, comrades" and you'll see, they'll stand up and get the hell out of the hall and barricade themselves in their houses.

MENDL. To me, "My very dear brothers" sounds like right away a collection. (To Wasselmann.) You're going to ask for money? (Wasselbaum, lost, does not reply. The whole onslaught is too much for him. Zina shouts.)

ZINA. Are you?

WASSELMANN. That depends on the local committee, not me. They are in charge of details. In a manner of speaking. My role is merely to—

ARNOLD. My God! He's right. The local committee. I'm on it. I forgot.

ZINA. You're a Zionist?

ARNOLD. Why not?

ZINA. You're going there?

ARNOLD. What am I, an idiot? Me in the desert with those savages? (Zina laughs.)

WASSELMANN. Not desert exactly, no. And as for the savages, we have excellent relations with them—excellent—with some of them. We love them and some day they're going to love us.

MYRIAM. We still don't know how the Doctor's going to start his speech.

ARNOLD. You're right. She's right. I forgot.

MICHAEL. How about, "Good evening, ladies and gentlemen"?

ARNOLD. No, no. "Ladies and gentlemen" could only be
goyim. Come to think, "My very dear brothers" isn't so bad—if you say it with con-vic-tion, the way Morris said, and loud, so that everybody stops talking.
MENDL. (From upstairs.) "Dear brothers," maybe. Shorter.
ZINA. Why not plain "Brothers"?
ARNOLD. Because by itself, it doesn't mean anything.
ZINA. Why not?
ARNOLD. "Brothers." Where's the verb?
ZINA. And where's the verb in "My very dear brothers"?
ARNOLD. (Throwing a small temper tantrum.) That's not the same.
ZINA. Yes, it is!
MORRIS. Let him say what he wants. It's your business?
WASSELBAUM. Well, actually, everything you have said—in a manner of speaking, I am a bit shaken. It is true "My very dear brothers" is a rather banal—in a manner of speaking. Rather outmoded. Perhaps a more lively, more up-to-date locution?
MENDL. (From upstairs, where he has, apparently, been to the bathroom. He is buttoning up his fly.) "Jews!" (Arnold jumps a foot and upsets a bench.)
ARNOLD. (To Mendl.) Lunatic!
MENDL. "Jews!" Perfect.
ARNOLD. I'm going.
MENDL. He says, "Jews!" then goes into his blablabla. That's not up-to-date?
ZINA. Maybe a little shocking?
MENDL. To who? There'll only be Jews there?
ZINA. That's why shocking.
WASSELBAUM. Might one suggest "Dear friends"? (Zina joins him on the platform once again.)
ZINA. "Dear friends"? You walk in, you don't know anybody, and right away "Dear friends"?
WASSELBAUM. Simply a figure of speech.
ZINA. In Switzerland, maybe. Here, no, no. Here it's hard to make friends. In fact, I haven't got a single one. Anyway, what's all this about your Jews in Switzerland that speak English?
WASSELBAUM. It was the World Congress.
ZINA. Congress, shmongress. They can't talk Yiddish like everybody else?
MORRIS. Doctor. Say what you like in any language you like. What's important is the sincerity. (Morris leaves.)
ARNOLD. Also good and loud. If not, they talk.
MENDL. If you want, I'll holler, "Silence, silence! Shah, shah!" while you clear your throat.
WASSELBAUM. That's most kind but I understand that the Chairman of the local committee plans to make an introduction, in a manner of speaking.
ZINA. Who's the Chairman?
ARNOLD. Wajsbrot—the son. He's got asthma—nobody'll hear him.
ZINA. Wajsbrot, the son, is a Zionist?
ARNOLD. Why not?
ZINA. But before, wasn't he—
ARNOLD. What's the difference what he was before? What was I before?
ZINA. A putz! And you haven't changed.
ZALMAN. So. Settled, the opening. Now go and let me please finish the hall. (Wasselbaum shakes hands with Mendl, then Zina, whose hand he kisses. She likes it so much, she comes back to have him kiss it again. Arnold's turn.)
WASSELBAUM. From the bottom of my heart, may I—
ARNOLD. Please, Doctor, nothing. If Jews can't help each other, who will? You're in a great cause, Doctor. My respects. (They embrace. Then to Zina as they are leaving.) You'll see. He'll fuck up the whole thing. (The lights dim to black. Music: "Mezinkah" [3 choruses], which continues into the beginning of the next scene.)
ACT ONE

SCENE iv

As the schmatta rises, the members of the company enter, dancing. They set up the benches to indicate Dreyfus's prison cell. Inside it, a makeshift stool and cot. Michael lies on the "cot" and stares at the ceiling. Mendl stands outside the "cell" waiting for his cue.

The company watches.

Michael, on a signal from Morris, gets up, sits for a moment, head in hands—then begins moving about, restlessly.

Morris gives Mendl a hand cue. Mendl stamps over with military precision, pretends (with sound effects) to be opening the "prison" door. He enters. Michael and he salute each other.

MORRIS. Go!

MENGL. "Captain Dreyfus, I trust that you wish to spare our country the shame of showing the whole world the sordid spectacle of dragging an officer of Staff Headquarters of the French Army before a military tribunal for the foul crime of high treason. I hope you have at least the courage to accept the consequences by seeing that justice is done—not by forcing your Army or your country to lower itself to punishment—but by atoning for your sins in the way of an officer and a gentleman." (He reaches into his pocket and brings forth a wooden revolver. Michael, on a hand cue from Morris, recoils. Mendl slaps the revolver down on the stool, salutes again. Michael returns the salute mechanically. Mendl leaves, closes the door, making the creaking sound again. He looks over to Morris for approval, then returns to where he had started from. Michael moves to the stool, stares down at the revolver. He looks up, trying to remember his next line.)

ARNOLD. (Prompting) "They want me to kill myself."

MICHAEL. "They want me to kill myself... They dare to talk of—" (A pause.)

ARNOLD. "—justice."

MICHAEL. Ah! (Myriam runs over with his script and he starts to read.) "But what have I done? My Chief orders me to put an end to myself—and as a good soldier, I should obey, but... why? Why? Is this justice? Why does he wish me dead? For the good of our country, did he say? My country wishes me dead?" (All the time he is reading, Arnold is mouthing the lines at the same time. Michael picks up the revolver, looks at it for a moment, puts it to his temple, hesitates, then all at once, throws it to the floor.)

MORRIS AND ARNOLD. Bang!! (Mendl, off, makes an exultant sound and rushes into the cell. He forgets to pantomime the opening of the "cell" door. He rushes out again, makes his creaking sound again, and enters. He stops, shocked, as he sees Dreyfus.)

MENGL. "Oi! So. I might have known! This is what the French Army must suffer when it makes the mistake of accepting your kind into its ranks: dishonor, shame!"

MICHAEL. (From his script. Arnold is still mouthing the words.) "You, Commander, talk of dishonor? You? You who accuse an innocent man of high treason? You who insist that I take my life—when I have done nothing? I am no coward.
I will face military justice. And France? I am ready to lay down my life for her—but in the face of the enemy—like a soldier—not like this, like a coward! No!"

MENDL. "Put the handcuffs on this traitor."

MORRIS. Mendl, please . . .

MENDL. What "please"?

MORRIS. Make at least some kind of—any kind of gesture.

MENDL. What "gesture"? To who? Nobody's there!

MORRIS. There will be. There'll be standing there a soldier—and you beckon to him—(He demonstrates.)—and he comes with the handcuffs.

MENDL. So why isn't he there why?

MORRIS. Later.

MENDL. So I'll do the gesture later.

MORRIS. Oh, for God's sake!

MENDL. Not only do I have to play the son of a bitch—but I get bawled out for not making a gesture to somebody isn't even there! (He sighs, then makes an exaggerated gesture.) "Put the handcuffs on this traitor!" So. Satisfied?

MICHAEL. (Reading.) "Handcuffs? On me? An officer in the French Army. How can I live through such an outrage? Commander, on my honor, on my wife, on my children—I deny all these accusations!"

MORRIS. Good. We'll stop now for a minute.

ARNOLD. Thank God! A glass of tea. (The company lends a hand, setting up the table for tea.) Tea is all right, but it's not vodka. Hey, Zalman?

ZALMAN. So bring some.

ARNOLD. Me, I don't need it. But anybody wants to bring some—let them.

MORRIS. (To Arnold.) So how's the scenery? Finished?

ARNOLD. Almost all built. Now we're painting, Zina and me, painting, painting.

ZINA. Every night, painting. (They sip their tea. Michael, studying his script, seems discouraged. Morris slaps him on the back.)

MORRIS. We're coming along—little by little. Some good things in it already—like what we just did.

MICHAEL. I didn't even know it.

MENDL. You'll see. When we'll have the real—

MORRIS. Please, don't say it!

MENDL. The costumes always help!

MORRIS. When will they be ready?

MENDL. Trust me. You'll be very happy.

MORRIS. You're using those prints?

MENDL. Who, me?

MORRIS. Who else? With my own money I bought them—sent from France! Have you had a look at them? (Mendl coughs.) So will they look like that?

MENDL. What?

MORRIS. Will the uniforms look like the ones in those prints?

MENDL. Why do they have to look like that? Old prints, half-mouldy—you want half-mouldy uniforms?

MORRIS. Those are authentic, valuable prints. French officers in 1895 dressed like that. So you'll make them like that—style, form, color!

MENDL. Oi vay! (To Zina.) A little sugar, please?

MORRIS. What do you mean, "Oi vay"? (Mendl sips a mouthful of tea through a sugar cube, then speaks.)

MENDL. I mean: the style, yes. The color, no.

MORRIS. Are you crazy? (To the others.) He's crazy! (To Mendl.) I bought those prints so you'd have a model.

MENDL. How would you like me to bring you a real director so you'll have a model?

MORRIS. The uniforms were a certain blue. They must be this certain blue. We have to respect historical fact.

MENDL. You want a real historical fact? I've had—for years—a bolt of red wool. A bolt of blue wool I have not got. That's a real historical fact. So your uniforms will be red. (To all.) A good color for officers, no? (Some approve, some do not.)

MORRIS. Red?
MENDL. Well, not really red! More like, say—garnet. But not a pissy garnet. A regular garnet garnet. *(He laughs.)*
MORRIS. You're making fun of me, huh?
MENDL. Look at him—look! Anybody'd think I just threw a dead cockroach in his tea. Red, my dear sir, Red, with padded epaulettes and gold fringe. The kind of uniform that if a dwarf put it on, he'd feel like a giant! *(Going over to Michael.)* As soon as he puts it on, this one, the character will come up out of his gizzard and he'll holler out: "Innocent! Innocent!"—with such truth that in the dress rehearsal we'll all start in to cry. The costume makes the theatre. The rest is *bupkes*!
MORRIS. Your bolt of red wool, or as you say, *garnet* garnet?
MENDL. Yes?
MORRIS. I'll tell you what to do. Keep it stored, very careful, in naphthaline, yes?—till the next play—and then you can use it. In fact, we'll choose the play especially for the color of your material. *(His voice rising.* But for this play—for "Dreyfus"—I want *blue* uniforms. *Blue!* *Blue!* Like in the French prints!
MENDL. Is this some kind of a craze with you, or what?
MORRIS. The uniforms of the soldiers and officers in France in 1895 were—
MENDL. Don't tell me! Let me guess! Blue? Right! Blue. But who—except you and me—ever saw your farkoche prints? So if we use the garnet everybody will say—"Hey! The French soldiers and officers used to wear garnet." And if some nuderick hollers out: "Hey, stop! French 1895 soldiers were *blue*!" They'll think he's crazy and throw him out of the hall! And what's the difference? Blue, garnet, black, gray, green, yellow—what? A louse is still a louse. And a soldier is still a soldier whatever color the poor son of a bitch's got on his back. He can get blown to bits in any color. *(MORRIS loses his temper and attacks MENDL, grabbing him by the throat. ARNOLD, Michael, Myriam and Zalman try to separate them.)*
MORRIS. Blue! I want them blue! You hear? Blue! You bring me red or your goddamn garnet garnet garnet and I'll stuff 'em up your ass!
MENDL. *(Freed.)* All right already! I was only trying to give an advice. When did I start in being a tailor? Today, maybe? And when did I start in making costumes? Yesterday, maybe? Would you be surprised if I told you I've made robes for priests? You're surprised, eh? And with that same garnet! Yes. And not some little schlemiel priest. Oh, no! A big hoo-hah priest. High up. And you lose your control—and grab me by the throat and turn into a mad bull. You should be ashamed! Maybe what's good enough for a Cardinal—that's what he was—a Cardinal—what's good enough for him isn't good enough for your Jew-bastard spying captain? You know your trouble? You live in the clouds. Blue blue blue you holler. So. Well and good. I'll find you your blue but he'll never find you his character. And that, my dear sir, is a real historical fact. *(A silence, broken only by the sound of tea being sipped.)*
ZALMAN. How would it be if the pants were red and the jackets blue?
ARNOLD. Bravo, bravo. Our own King Solomon!
MORRIS. Let him do what he wants. How he wants. I don't give a damn any more.
MENDL. Wait, wait. *(He gets up to measure Michael.)* A yard and a quarter. Three and a half. Yes! I think it could be. You see, Morris, you talk a question over, you find an answer. *(To ZALMAN.)* Good, Zalman. Good what you said.
MORRIS. Let's take all the scenes with Zola and Mathieu.
ARNOLD. Zola! Present! *(Making the transition to his character.)* "J'accuse! I accuse! J'accuse!"
MORRIS. *(Setting furniture.)* Where's Nathan?
ARNOLD. Nathan?
MORRIS. The one who plays Mathieu Dreyfus—Alfred's
brother—you've read the play? Or not?
ARNOLD. (Offended. To the others.) Have I read the play he asks me?
MORRIS. Where the hell is he? Nathan. First he begs me for a part, then he never comes to rehearsal.
MENDL. (Confidentially, to him alone.) He's busy.
MORRIS. And we live on air, maybe?
MENDL. It's not work. He's training.
MORRIS. What training?
MENDL. Shhh! It's a secret. Him and a whole group—young boys and some not so young—they're all training, how to fight. To fight back.
ARNOLD. What are you talking?
MENDL. A defense group!
ARNOLD. But he must be crazy altogether. He'll get us all in terrible trouble! I can see it—feel it—a pogrom, God forbid. Oi, my heart. A chair. Please, a chair. (Myriam runs over to help him.)—it's getting dark in front of my eyes.
MENDL. It's in Lodz, this group, not here.
MORRIS. But you said Nathan.
MENDL. His brother has there a store. And his brother asked him to come over and help him in the store, he says—but the real reason is they have there a group—with the name—"The Lions of Zion"—and that's why Nathan—
ARNOLD. "The Lions of Zion"—oh, those shmucks! Those stupid shmucks!
MORRIS. So he's not going to play Mathieu?
MENDL. I don't see how he—
MORRIS. He walks out on us without telling anybody—
MENDL. What do you mean? I'm anybody—and he told me. And he told me to tell you—but confidential. He doesn't want people to know. Because if his mother—Nathan's mother ever... (Zina makes of gesture of despair and understanding.)
ARNOLD. What do they have to stir up trouble, hah? Then after, they're surprised when they kicked in the teeth.

MENDL. (To Arnold.) That's why—
ARNOLD. (Leaping up.) Why what, Mr. Goodnewsbringer? Those "Lions of Zion"—they'll get us all chewed up and spit out! In this life we have to stay in line and not look for lice in somebody else's head if he's bigger than you, and not try to pass yourself off as a man when you're really a horseball.
MORRIS. (To Mendl.) And you didn't tell me.
MENDL. I just did!
MORRIS. Two weeks too late! For two weeks I'm asking where's Nathan-Mathieu and everybody makes—(He does a big shrug.)—and all the time he's in Zion.
MENDL. In Lodz. With this group they call themselves—
MORRIS. Say one more word—one—you'll be risking your life. You hear? Your life! (An awkward silence.)
ARNOLD. Well, do we rehearse?
MORRIS. No! We've rehearsed enough. (He walks to the door.) Ladies and gentlemen. I have a company announcement. You can all consider yourselves free—permanently and completely free! So go home and as far as I'm concerned—stay there! (Lights dim to black.)

CURTAIN
ACT TWO

SCENE v

The show curtain is down. Music begins: it is a gypsy version of “Tomorrow, Tomorrow.”

The curtain goes up to reveal Zina and Arnold alone in the hall, painting scenery. She mixes the paint, he applies it.

ZINA. One thing I still can’t quite understand.
ARNOLD. (Smiling.) Only one?
ZINA. I’ve read the play, I’ve re-read the play, I’ve come to every rehearsal, and yet . . .
ARNOLD. And yet?
ZINA. It’s about Dreyfus—Dreyfus himself.
ARNOLD. A good character—big—but a little flat. Not too much variety—and, of course, he doesn’t have as much to say as Zola has. At least not with the same depth—or power—(He becomes Zola and thrusts that finger again.) “I accuse!”
ZINA. Oh! Will you stop yelling like that right in people’s ears?
ARNOLD. You like it in French? Or would it be better—“I accuse!”?
ZINA. Either way, only don’t holler.

ARNOLD. Excuse me, madam. That was not hollering—that was acting!
ZINA. My ears are still ringing. (Arnold goes to her and kisses her ear, tenderly.)
ARNOLD. Both ears?
ZINA. Both. (He kisses her other ear.)
ARNOLD. (Sitting down next to Zina on the bench.) Last night—when I got home—I was just on the point of telling—well, anyhow, talking to Myriam—about us. And then, I don’t know. At the last minute—I didn’t.
ZINA. You don’t think she knows anyhow?
ARNOLD. What makes you—? You believe she would think of me, her father—with you?
ZINA. Why not?
ARNOLD. True. But you understand why I—after all, you and me—what are we now? A couple of old-timers, that’s all. (He begins painting again.)
ZINA. I’m never going to be an old-timer! (They work in silence for a few moments, but Zina’s heart is not in it.)
ARNOLD. What did you start to say before?
ZINA. How should I know? You keep interrupting, and hollering, and after—you ask me what I was saying.
ARNOLD. So from one second to the next you can’t remember what you were talking about?
ZINA. If you didn’t keep on interrupting, I’d remember. Like this, I forgot.
ARNOLD. That shows how important it must have been. (Zina shrugs. A silence. They work.)
ZINA. Was it about Dreyfus, maybe?
ARNOLD. What?
ZINA. What I was saying?
ARNOLD. Me, she’s asking what she was saying.
ZINA. Yes! About Dreyfus. I’m right. There’s something I can’t understand . . .
ARNOLD. I’m listening with all my ears. (He sits on the floor at Zina’s feet.)
ZINA. What—exactly what did he do—this schlemiel—to get himself into prison and with trials and with the whole mish-mash?

ARNOLD. What're you talking, Mrs. Chicken-head? He didn't do anything, nothing, he's innocent—that's the whole idea of the whole play—innocent like a two-day baby. That's the play!

ZINA. You mean innocent like he didn't do it? Anything?

ARNOLD. Of course.

ZINA. So why did they make him all that so much trouble why?

ARNOLD. Why? Because he's a Jew—that's why. Jewish. You understand that?

ZINA. Jewish? I think so. Yes. I think I heard that word once or twice.

ARNOLD. So now you understand, I hope.

ZINA. What's to understand?

ARNOLD. You said you didn't.

ZINA. Let me finish. He didn't do anything. He's innocent. Good. That's what's in the play—in the play! Never mind the play. What I want to know—what I'm trying to find out and you can't tell me and nobody can—is what happened there in Paris? Not in the play—but in Paris!

ARNOLD. What happened is what happens in Morris's god-damn play!

ZINA. Yeh yeh! That Morris—he makes up a story he wants should make everybody cry. But me, it won't make me cry. I'm not an innocent like a two-day baby. I know some life. And I know in France, nobody puts a man in prison just because he's a Jew. Or Jewish. Here, maybe. In France, never.

ARNOLD. You know, how it was and so by me, that's how it was. (He gets up off the floor and returns to his painting.)

ZINA. What is he, Moses? What does he know? He wasn't even born in 1895—and has he ever been to Paris? Huh?

ARNOLD. And you?

ZINA. Me. Yes, I was born in 1895.

ARNOLD. But have you ever been to Paris?

ZINA. Why should I go to Paris when all my relatives are in Belgium? . . . maybe I'll go there some day. Who knows? Maybe I'll go see them all. "Oh! Look who's here! Auntie Zina!" "Here I am, all the way from Vilna!"

ARNOLD. Go to Belgium, go. Bon voyage. It's right over there. (He points.) Straight ahead and turn left.

ZINA. And from there, maybe I'll go to Paris.

ARNOLD. Go, go!

ZINA. And then I'll find out what really happened there.

ARNOLD. Of course, Ask any policeman. In the meantime, you're helping me paint or not? Like always—you're talking and I'm—Aie! Aie!

ZINA. Again your back?

ARNOLD. Aie! Worse than last time. (He tries to move, pauses.) I can't bend forward!
ZINA. So bend backward.
ARNOLD. Bend—what? Some joke—I’m suffering and you
—ah!—all over.
ZINA. Shooting pains?
ARNOLD. Yes—ah!—yes—
ZINA. On the floor. Quick. Knees on your chest.
ARNOLD. You want to kill me? I can’t—
ZINA. Do it! Always the same arguments—
ARNOLD. But this time—(She fixes him with a look. He
starts for the floor. She helps him. He lies on his back. With
great skill, she bends back his knees. He is breathing pain-
fully.)
ZINA. Breathe slow—slow—that’s it—slower. (He breathes,
concentratedly.) Better?
ARNOLD. A little.
ZINA. And the shooting pains?
ARNOLD. I don’t know—yes, still—well, a little less
maybe. It’s all right so long as I lay still . . . What if I can’t
get up?
ZINA. Well dig a hole under you and bury you right here.
And also—when we do the play—we’ll be doing it right on
top of you so you can be sure we won’t forget you.
ARNOLD. Not funny.
ZINA. Maybe I’ll take over your part. (She leans toward him
and shouts into his ear, in a bass voice.) “J’accuse!!”
(He
jumps.)
ARNOLD. Aie! (They laugh together. He is suddenly
sober.) Zina . . .
ZINA. What, my love?
ARNOLD. What if it’s my heart? (She embraces him.)
ZINA. Your heart is not in your back. No, no. It’s the
painting.
ARNOLD. So why do we have to do it? You and me? Why
not somebody else for a change?
ZINA. You don’t remember? In the beginning, we asked if
we could do it together—we insisted. Why? So we could be
alone more often.
ARNOLD. Well, when you’re in love, you get foolish ideas.
(He gets up from the floor. Zina helps him.) So I think the
time has come when we should pass it on—this work—to
somebody else—somebody younger.
ZINA. You think?
ARNOLD. Michael’s got a strong back. No rheumatism.
Yet—
ZINA. And Mytiam can still talk to him without him biting
her head off.
ARNOLD. Well—you know—(He puts his arm around
her.) They’re still young, huh?
ZINA. And still new at it. (She goes back to work.)
ARNOLD. That’s right—but listen—there’s a lot to be said
for—hey! What’re you doing?
ZINA. Oh.
ARNOLD. Come on, my girl. Somebody else’s turn . . .
(They leave, holding one another and walking slowly, like
young lovers. Music begins: “Bekkilab” [2 choruses] as the
lights dim to black.)
ACT TWO

SCENE vi

Martial music is playing softly under most of the following scene.

A dress rehearsal. A few painted flats are in evidence (among them, the one painted by Arnold and Zina in the previous scene). The platform is assembled and erected. A sewing machine. Costumes and props are strewn about.

The painted flat is raised, revealing Michael, platform center, made up as Captain Dreyfus, complete with trim mustache and pince-nez. He is in full uniform—kepi, brass buttons, and decorations. The uniform is garnet garnet. Some of the others wear part of their costume. Mendl is fitting Michael's costume with excitement.

MENDL. What about under the arms?
MICHAEL. What?
MENDL. It bothers you under the arms or what?
MICHAEL. (Moving his arms.) No—not more than any place else.
MENDL. (To Zina.) And the whole everything—only three fittings. Three!

ZINA. To me it looks like four, the least.
MENDL. (Missing the barb.) Three! And look how it fits. A miracle, no? (Myriam enters in full costume. It is a lovely 1895 creation. She and Michael both suggest characters in an operetta.)

MYRIAM. (Moving to stand next to Michael on the platform.) And look how I fit!
MORRIS. The sleeves not too long?
MENDL. Please! Sleeve length is nothing. Let him first wear it in a little, then we'll see. (To Michael.) Wear it a couple days—it shouldn't look too much like a stage costume, but like the real man's real uniform. Put it on in the morning the first thing—and little by little—you'll begin to feel the character—find the character—you'll see—

MORRIS. Maybe he should go out and fight the enemy a few days—
ZINA. (To Michael.) You're already standing better.
MICHAEL. Because I'm trying to breathe inside all this.
MENDL. No, no—it's the big piece whalebone I put there in the back there—
MICHAEL. Whalebone?
ZINA. An artificial spine! (She laughs.)
MENDL. (Unwrapping a black cloth.) And now—please, everybody watch. Here is the star of the whole show. (Everyone watches as he brings forth a decorative scabbard containing a regimental saber.) This, I didn't make. This I rented only. (He pulls the saber from its scabbard, raises his knee, and breaks the prop saber across it. He throws a piece to the floor with a flourish. The company is as delighted as he is. There is a smattering of applause.) Is that a piece of workmanship? (Morris, anxious to try out the new toy, but behaving like a director, takes the saber and brings it down hard on his thigh. It does not break.)

MORRIS. Ow!
MENDL. No, no. There's a trick. (He takes the saber.) When you make like this— (He mimics the action.) —you push this
little jimjick—(He does so.)—and . . . kanock! (He demonstrates without actually breaking the sabre in half.) Like that.
(Morris takes it and goes through the whole routine again during the following.) It's a real professional thing, that. Not
for amateurs. (To Michael.) If you wouldn't be able to find
the character with that—(Makes a funny noise. Morris breaks
the sabre, using the jimjick. Zina grabs it and does the rou-
tine. Throughout the following, everyone in the company
has a crack at the sabre.)
MYRIAM. (Studying Michael.) It's true what they say about
a uniform—there's something—I don't know—masculine?
Or what? (Michael takes Myriam's arm.)
MICHAEL. How do you do, Mrs. Dreyfus?
MYRIAM. Fine, Captain, fine.
MICHAEL. Call me Alfred. So long as we're married, you
can call me Alfred. (During this entire exchange Mendl is
changing into his costume. His is also garnet garnet, but with
twice the decorations of Michael's. Also, his kepi has a long,
black feather decorating it.)
MYRIAM. Alfred . . .
MICHAEL. Dear Lucie . . . (He turns to Morris.) A hus-
bond, that I feel fine. But a captain, absolutely no. (For a
moment, they catch sight of Mendl changing, and laugh.)
MORRIS. Nobody's asking you to join the Army! There were
a lot of people on Dreyfus's side didn't like captains any more
than you do. There was one—the famous anarchist—Sebas-
tien Faure—you know what he said?
MICHAEL. How should I?
MORRIS. He said: "Dreyfus, as a captain, is my enemy and
I will fight to destroy him. But as a victim of this foul racial
attack, I will defend him in the name of decency and
humanity!"
MICHAEL. So go get your Sebastien Whatever-his-name-is
to come and play the part. I'm sure the uniform will fit him
as well as it does me—when Mendl makes a uniform it fits
anybody!

ZINA. What exactly is an anarchist, anyway? Somebody can
maybe tell me?
MENDL. Michael—the truth—it doesn't fit?
MICHAEL. It fits me fine. The trouble is, I don't fit it! The
more I think about it, the more I think if I'd lived in France
at that time—I would not have been for Dreyfus.
ZINA. Oi! Bite your tongue! How can you say a thing like
that, a nice boy like you? That's what comes from being too
intelligent. You end up saying stupid things!
MICHAEL. I've thought about it more than anybody here.
Not about the play—but my part—Dreyfus. And I now
believe that any Jew who enlisted in that Army could have
only had one reason—spying.
MORRIS. What?!
MICHAEL. That's what I believe—but. So long as you tell
me that, no—he was absolutely innocent and that he enlisted
because he wanted to be a military man, then he has my con-
tempt and I spit on him!
MORRIS. Right now, Michael, I don't need a philosopher,
I need an actor.
MICHAEL. You need an actor who can feel something—
MENDL. Wait a little—you just put it on!
MORRIS. No more discussion! Act Two from the beginning.
MENDL. And what's going to be with Arnold?
MORRIS. With Arnold? What?
MENDL. (Holding up a garment.) His costume. He's not
going to try it on?
MORRIS. He's not here, so how can he try it on?
MYRIAM. Where is he, Zina?
ZINA. Me you're asking?
MORRIS. But don't worry, when the time comes, he'll show
you exactly how to remake it.
MYRIAM. Maybe he didn't know about tonight?
MORRIS. Maybe not. We're so well organized here—like a
chicken coop. Mendl—you made notes what to do with
Myriam's?
MENDL. Yes.
MORRIS. And with Michael's?
MENDL. Please.
MORRIS. But you made notes?
MENDL. What then? Nothing. A couple of stitches—here, there. And my note book, I can't lose. (He taps his temple and laughs. Arnold comes rushing in. He wears his barber smock with combs and scissors sticking out of various pockets. He is in a state of great agitation. Myriam goes to him. Off stage is the sound of men's voices, mumbling threateningly.)
MORRIS. Ah-ha! Welcome, Mr. Zola. On time as usual. Your costume is waiting for you—
ARNOLD. (Out of breath.) You don't know! You just don't know!
MENDL. Your shop burned down and you've got no insurance? (Zina and Mendl laugh.)
ARNOLD. You'll soon stop laughing when I tell you.
MORRIS. Tell what?
ARNOLD. Some things I found out!
MORRIS. What things? Tell already.
ARNOLD. I came to warn you—to help you—and the thanks I get? Jokes and blabla.
MORRIS. What is it, Arnold? (The off stage voices can still be heard. They will be heard throughout the rest of the scene.)
ARNOLD. It's terrible!
ZINA. What is?
ARNOLD. A pogrom—maybe a pogrom—
MENDL, MYRIAM AND ZINA. Maybe! (Arnold looks around. They all draw near.)
ARNOLD. Somebody told me that the butcher—that the butcher's wife—
ZINA. Avrom or Baruch?
ARNOLD. Neither one. The goy butcher—the big one near the goy synagogue—I mean the church, near—
ZINA. Why are you bothering us about some goy butcher?!

ARNOLD. So if you'll let me finish, so you'll find out!
MORRIS. (To Arnold.) Go ahead.
ARNOLD. Yesterday—it was only yesterday—this butcher—he found out his helper was putting it to his wife—to the butcher's wife—
MENDL. A Jewish helper?
ARNOLD. Who said?
MENDL. He's not?
ARNOLD. That's all we need. If he was—I'd be already on the train to Warsaw. This butcher—he happens to be a member—a big, high-up member—of The League for a Pure Poland.
MORRIS. So what's that got to do with us?
ARNOLD. A man gets mad—he's got to take it out on somebody! So today—a whole demonstration. And he's the leader. Marching and hollering and carrying signs and getting excited. (Men chanting in the background can be heard.)
MENDL. But for years, everything's been all right—well, all right enough.
ARNOLD. —putting on a play about the Dreyfus trouble and they can't see the same kind of trouble right in front of them.
MICHAEL. (Coming downstairs.) What's happening right in front of us?
ARNOLD. You'll soon see...
MORRIS. But in the meantime, can we at least rehearse at least?
ARNOLD. (To Morris.) No. The worst thing I didn't tell you yet. (They all give him their strict attention.) How they came to be marching. He went to his priest—this butcher—and he got him all excited. So this morning, the priest gave a big sermon—about morals and patriotism and, of course, a Pure Poland. And the next thing, they were marching in the streets.
MORRIS. What can we do? That's his job—the priest's job.
ARNOLD. (Rising.) What, to encourage pogroms?
ZINA. Arnold, calm down. You'll give yourself a heart trou-
ble. And anyway—in the end—like always—what'll be, 'll be.

ARNOLD. All right, let's rehearse. (Now, march music can
be heard from the street. On the platform, Michael and
Mendl, in full dress and under stage lighting, are rehearsing
the degradation scene. Myriam, in full costume, is watching.
Zina, also in full costume, is waiting for her cue. Arnold is
putting on his Zola beard. He then starts walking back and
forth.)

ZINA. "Death to the Jews! Death to the Jews!" (She throws
a head of lettuce at Michael's head.)

MORRIS. (To Arnold.) What're you buzz-buzzing around
like a lost fly? You'd like to go home, maybe?

ARNOLD. Too late. You can't hear them—those hoodlums?
They'll go on like that the whole night long—singing and
drinking—then after, the first ones they get ahold of— . I'm
staying here.

MORRIS. Stay as long as you want. Five years? Five years!
But stay quiet! (Arnold sighs and sits, but only for a mo-
ment. He gets up and resumes his earlier action.)

ARNOLD. Why didn't I go before, why? Why did I even
come, why?

ZINA. (Changing from her costume into a kimono.) Why
why why? You came because dress rehearsal. Sit by me. I
wouldn't let anybody hurt you.

ARNOLD. What, I'm afraid for myself? It's for you, for
Myriam. You hear?

MORRIS. What? Those drunkards singing?

ARNOLD. And that doesn't bother you?

MORRIS. The street belongs to everybody, no?

ARNOLD. On Yom Kippur, would I go in their neighbor-
hood, and right under their windows sing a Kaddish?

MORRIS. Maybe you should. Maybe if we had more cultural
exchange like that it would help us all understand one
another.

ARNOLD. Why should I want to exchange anything with
them? All I want is they should leave me the hell alone in my
own corner and that's all . . . (Out in the street, the men are
now singing a song. The melody is "Hatikvah":
"How do you make a Yiddle, a Yid?
You do it in the way that Devil did did!
You take a sick dog that's vomiting hard
You take a dead cat and rub it with lard
And then if you want a Yid, a Yiddle
You put them together till they start in to diddle!
To diddle!

MORRIS. So let's start again, yes? (The singing stops.) Now.
Mendl. The important thing, the only thing, is the feeling—
and the way to do this is— (Violent knocking at the door
silences him. The room freezes. They are all, for the mo-
ment, petrified.)

A VOICE (YANEK). Who's in there?

ARNOLD. (Whispering, with wild gestures.) Sha! Don't
talk! Still! (More knocking, as though with a piece of pipe.
Whispering more softly but more intensely.) Don't answer.
(A pause. More knocking.)

THE VOICE (YANEK). Hey! Hey you Yid bastards—you
going to answer—yes or shit?

MORRIS. All right, Zalman. Open.

ARNOLD. You're crazy or what?

MENDL. Maybe Arnold's right. After all—

A SECOND VOICE (BRONISLAW). Get away! I'm going
to kick their God damn Jew door in!

THE FIRST VOICE (YANEK). You hear that, you circum-
cised suckers? (Prolonged laughter from outside.)

ZALMAN. Get away, everybody. Hide.

MORRIS. Why hide? What are they, wild animals? They're
men. We'll talk to them—

ARNOLD. No, no—for God's sake! (The women take
charge, and everyone gets out of sight. Zalman is at the door.
He flings it open. Two men appear. They are untidy, the
younger one is drunk.)
ZALMAN. You're looking for somebody?
YANEK. Look at this old Jew-pig! He'd make a good mattress if he were stuffed, wouldn't he?
BRONISLAW. (Sniffing loudly.) What's that stink?
YANEK. Jew stink! (He grabs Zalman. Zalman makes no movement.)
BRONISLAW. (Moving to Zalman.) Hey, smell! What're you gawking at me for with your yellow Yid eyeballs? (Yanek has gone over to the light switch and turns it on.)
ZALMAN. Excuse me. I'm a little hard of hearing. Everybody's gone—so whoever you're looking for, you should better come back tomorrow, tonight there's nobody here...
BRONISLAW. (To Yanek.) Did he say, "Come back tomorrow"? I don't speak Yiddish. (He steps away, sees Myriam's picture-bat, picks it up and puts it on. He flounces about. Yanek howls with laughter. Zalman makes a move to grab it and Yanek grabs his hand.)
YANEK. Look at these hands—been skinning us for centuries! And these fingers, all they want is to grope a nice little shiksa—is how they say it? (Into Zalman's face.) You want to grope my wife, huh? You want to grope his daughter, huh? I ought to stick a hole in your guts!
BRONISLAW. Give me a knife or something—but be sure it's kosher! You think he'll bleed or would just a lot of gefilte fish come oozing out? (Morris starts out of the hiding place. Mendl pulls him back. Yanek finds Mendl's large tailoring shears. He gives them to Bronislaw.)
BRONISLAW. How about? (Bronislaw snips the shears down around the general area of Zalman's sexual organs. Morris can contain himself no more.)
MORRIS. (Emerging.) That's enough! (The men are startled. They stop and look at him.) Aren't you ashamed of yourselves? He's old enough to be your father!
BRONISLAW. Look. (He mimies eyeglasses with the handle of the shears.) A four-eyed one!
YANEK. Did you hear him insult your mother?
BRONISLAW. (To Morris.) You leave my mother out of this, Foureyes.
MORRIS. I had no intention of insulting anyone. I believe in brotherhood.
BRONISLAW. Brotherhood? (To Yanek.) Oh, I know this type. A four-eyed Jew-bastard intellectual. Any minute you'll hear him—"Share and share alike!" It's not enough they steal everything—now they want to share everything! (He punches a sudden, hard punch and hits Morris in the face. He hits him again, in the stomach. Morris falls, badly hurt. His glasses have been knocked off and, on all fours, he tries to find them by patting the floor.) How did that feel, you four-eyed Jew-bastard?
MORRIS. My glasses—please—my glasses—(Morris is about to pick up his glasses, when Bronislaw kicks them to Yanek, who crushes them under his heel again and again. Yanek grabs Zalman and holds him as Bronislaw begins to snip off chunks of his beard and throw them into the air. From the darkness, from the shadows—a figure in garnet emerges. It is Michael. He walks into the beam of one of the still-lit spotlights.)
MICHAEL. (A shout, in a new voice.) STOP! (Yanek and Bronislaw jump.) I ORDER YOU TO RELEASE THAT MAN AT ONCE!
BRONISLAW. Where the hell did he come from?
MICHAEL. NEVER MIND THAT. I'LL GIVE YOU UNTIL THE COUNT OF THREE TO GET OUT... ONE!
YANEK. But who the hell are you? (A moment. Michael salutes, clicks his heels.)
MICHAEL. I AM CAPTAIN DREYFUS—IN COMMAND OF THE VILNA REGIMENT AND I ORDER YOU TO LEAVE THESE PREMISES AT ONCE...
BRONISLAW. Jesus!
MICHAEL. TWO!
BRONISLAW. A Yid Army?
YANEK. You hold him and I'll kick his balls off.
BRONISLAW. Kick a Captain's balls off?
YANEK. Come on! A Jew-Captain's not a real Captain—
MICHAEL. THREE.
YANEK. He's just a—
MICHAEL. OUT! (Yanek and Bronislaw start for Michael. Michael holds his ground and suddenly yells:) SABRES—
READY! (He pulls out his sabre and brandishes it. He knocks Myriam's hat off Bronislaw's head. Yanek jumps back. Michael, encouraged, begins to move forward using his sabre as he has seen it done in films. The men back away, but suddenly and foolishly Yanek rushes at Michael's sabre. He runs into it. It breaks in two. Michael, nonplussed, waves his half-
sabre.) COMPANY—TO ARMS! (Mendl emerges, armed with the wooden revolver. He bangs Bronislaw over the head. Myriam picks up a pipe that Bronislaw has brought in with him and hits Yanek in the stomach. Morris jumps on Yanek's back and is swung around. Michael then turns around and kicks Yanek in the groin. Yanek falls on his back.)
BRONISLAW. (Being pushed out the door by Mendl and Michael and Zalman.) It's an army, I tell you! An army! (Zina suddenly emerges with a large pair of scissors.)
ZINA. I'll circumcise you up to your goddamn eyeballs!
(Yanek howls in fear and makes a run for the door.)
MICHAEL. CHARGE! AT THE COMMAND, FIRE!
BRONISLAW. (From outside.) Police! Help! Police! (Arnold, brandishing Myriam's parasol, runs across to the door.)
ARNOLD. Death to the enemy! VICTORY! (The door slams. From outside you still hear the men.)
YANEK. We'll be back—burn everything—kill you all! Bronnie! Wait! You son of a bitch—you left me! Come on. I'll buy you a drink, you son of a bitch . . . (Morris is still trembling with rage, breathing with difficulty. His face is bleeding. Zina goes over to comfort him. Arnold follows her. Zalman, seated, is being comforted by Mendl. Myriam, shaking, has turned her back to the door. Michael picks up the pieces of the sabre.)

MICHAEL. (To all.) Well . . . did I find the character? (Myriam comes to him, puts her arms around him. Music is heard: “Mames, Tates, Kindeleh [3 choruses] is heard as the schmatta comes down.”)

ACT TWO

SCENE vii

Mendl sits on the edge of the platform, his make-up box in front of him. He is trying out the effect of a red bulbous nose. He wears a long, period coat. A Rabbinical hat lies near him.

Arnold is getting into his costume.

ARNOLD. So? What're you waiting?
MENDL. For you I was waiting.
ARNOLD. It's your line the first line? Or mine?
MENDL. I mean I was waiting for you to be ready.
ARNOLD. So I'm ready already.
MENDL. So all right. (He indicates the action.) Walk, walk, walk. Bump! (A high, nasal voice.) “Aie! Reb Teyye—just who I wanted I should bump into.” (In his own voice.)
Laugh.
ARNOLD. “Why, I owe you money?”
MENDL. “Who said money?”
ARNOLD. “So if not money, so why do you push me?” (In his own voice, pointing.) Laugh.
MENDL. (In a female voice.) “That was not a push, Reb Teyye. That was a bump!”
ARNOLD. “So why do you push me?”
MENDEL. (Nasal voice.) "You don't recognize me?"
ARNOLD. "No!"
MENDEL. (Female voice.) "Boiborik! He's the matchmaker fin Boiborik!"
ARNOLD. "So why do you push me?"
MENDEL. (Nasal voice.) "It's true, Reb Tevye—you've got maybe a daughter to marry off?"
ARNOLD. "'A? 'A', he says. Not 'A'—seven I've got!" (In his own voice.) Laugh.
MENDEL. "Seven? Oi, oii!"
ARNOLD. (In his own voice.) Say one more oii.
MENDEL. I used to say only one. (He demonstrates.) "Seven? Oii!"
ARNOLD. But so long as you're adding, so add another one. "Oi oii oii oii."
MENDEL. That's two more, not one.
ARNOLD. From one "oi" you have to make a whole Dreyfus case?
MENDEL. I'm only—
ARNOLD. If you're going to add in to the text—let me know.
MENDEL. You don't want me to say "oi oii"—only "oi"—so instead of saying, "Don't say oii oii—only oii"—why do you say, "Say oii oii oii oii?"
ARNOLD. Ear.
MENDEL. What?
ARNOLD. A question of ear.
MENDEL. A question, but what's the answer?
ARNOLD. It sounds better. The best is "oi." One plain simple clear "oi." But if you feel you got to have two or four or forty—take! But tell me how many—don't surprise me. I don't like to stand like a schmuck while my co-star tries out new effects.
MENDEL. My dear Mr. Co-Star: I'm a stupid man. I admit it. I say what the director tells me and that's all. So either talk to me frankly like a friend so I can tell you drop dead. Or else talk to me like a so-called actor talking to another so-called actor and I'll still tell you drop dead. But if you decide to talk to me a like a director—that's different. Again, I'll tell you drop dead but I'll do what you tell me! (A pause.)
ARNOLD. People with no talent—the least little thing—they right away blow it up into something the size of their ego.
MENDEL. You blew it—you!
ARNOLD. Insults I don't need. It's hard enough I'm playing the lead in the sketch and directing at the same time so—
MENDEL. So who's forcing you?
ARNOLD. I'm beginning to see why our poor Morris couldn't finish putting on his beautiful Dreyfus play.
MENDEL. (Jumping up.) It's my fault maybe? It's my fault those son of a bitches came? It's my fault everybody decided to drop the whole thing? It's my fault they all left?
ARNOLD. What're you raising your voice? As a director, I demand respect!
MENDEL. As an actor, I demand a respectable director! (Zina comes in.)
ZINA. Ah-hah! Already working?
ARNOLD. Zina, let me ask you—
MENDEL. Excuse me. Me first, because—
ZINA. Not you and not you. I don't get in no middle, never. (To Arnold.) Guess from who I got a letter?
MENDEL. Morris.
ZINA. (To Mendel.) And guess from where?
ARNOLD. Warsaw.
ZINA. How did you know?
ARNOLD. Because he told us he was leaving to go live in Warsaw.
ZINA. The whole morning I've been crying from his letter. I read it maybe ten times.
MENDEL. That's a lot of times for one letter.
ZINA. And he wrote it to me.
ARNOLD. You personally?
ZINA. To all of us. Whoever is left. But he sent it to me — to my address — Oi — did I cry!
MENDL. (Looking at Arnold.) I'm glad you said only one "oi."
ZINA. What?
MENDL. Nothing, nothing.
ARNOLD. And one "nothing" is enough also.
ZINA. What is it here?
ARNOLD. So come on, already. You're going to get it out or sit or what?
ZINA. I just got here!
ARNOLD. When I get a letter that's for everybody — first I read it and after, I cry.
ZINA. You never get a letter.
ARNOLD. Haw-haw!
ZINA. Oh, you do? From who?
ARNOLD. If you'll read nicely your letter — maybe I'll tell you.
ZINA. If you heard something from Michael and Myriam and you didn't wake me up — I'm going to give you such a —
ARNOLD. Who would write to me?
ZINA. They're all right?
ARNOLD. Read your letter from Morris and right away, I'll read mine.
ZINA. They're all right?
ARNOLD. First read —
ZINA. (She takes out Morris's letter and reads:) "Warsaw. May third, 1931. Dear All: I've thought so much about all of you and about what we meant to do together with Dreyfus. I think now that we were on the wrong track. A man today — no matter if he's an artist or if he's a proletarian — must not get too involved in the past. He must build a life for tomorrow. Here in Warsaw, I'm now working in a big factory — no more in an exclusively Jewish community. I'm a man among men. A worker among other workers. I've been lucky enough to get to know several members of the Polish Workers' Party — some are Jewish — but that has no importance — not for them — and not for the ones who are not. We discuss many things — deeply and thoroughly, including you, my dear friends — and they have opened my eyes. To conquer anti-Semitism and all other forms of discrimination and oppression — we have to change the structure of society. When capitalism has been defeated, socialism will illuminate the world and free all men. That's our aim. That's our fight. Impossible you say? But if it's true that David conquered Goliath — what can resist thousands of Davids working together to make a better world? . . . As you can see — I'm far from the theatre, but patience; one thing at a time. . . . At present, not one second of my life can be devoted to anything else. My friends, my brothers, my comrades — all our happiness depends on this — so does our freedom and dignity; for us and for our children. . . . So until we meet again — soon, I hope — in a different world, more just, more beautiful — in another Poland, where all — Jews and gentiles alike — all mixed together can live and work in peace. This is what I wanted to say — and to tell you that I love you all . . . I can't give you my address. A militant has no address — but please know that we are united forever even though our roads do not cross again . . . Goodbye, my comrades — do what you think you must. I believe in you and even if Arnold puts on Reb Teyye for the thousand and tenth time — even if it's no good any more — do it as well as you can — the time for theatre will come back and it is best to be prepared . . . Long live the revolution! Long live the Polish Workers' Party! Long live the Soviet Union (where anti-Semitism has been wiped out by law) and long live — why not? — the eternal Jewish people. Yours forever, Morris." (A silence.)
MENDL. (Holding out his hand.) Let me read it myself. A lot I didn't understand. (Zina hands him the letter.)
ZINA. A lot I didn't understand also but — Oi, did I cry. (She blows her nose.) Look! Still.
ARNOLD. What's to understand? Nothing. He doesn't
want to have anything more to do with the theatre, that's all. Finished! ... For himself, believe me, he's right. If the theatre's not in your blood so it's better to go and play with the revolution-shmevolution—not only better, but easier!

ZINA. Come on. Now yours.

ARNOLD. I haven't got it with me.

ZINA. What?

ARNOLD. But! By heart I know it! What do you think? A letter from my daughter. It's here. *(He taps his forehead.) And here. *(He taps his heart.)*

ZINA. So let's hear it from here ... *(She taps Arnold's head.)... and here. *(She taps his heart.)*

ARNOLD. Generally speaking—everything is all right—in fact, fine. Our cousin Weiss found them an apartment near him in the Jewish quarter there in Berlin. ... *(They say there are plenty empty apartments there in the neighborhood. The only thing—so far—there isn't so much work around. But still, they've got plenty of hope. They say also the Germans are very polite, very correct with the Jews. Of course, like everywhere, there are a few extremists—but they think they'll be able to talk to them. Not like our ignorant Polacks here. In Germany—everybody knows how to read and write, everybody's educated. It's a civilized country, no?)*

ZINA. And what else?

ARNOLD. Nothing else. They're happy. Everything's fine.

ZINA. Are you sure they're managing?

ARNOLD. Well, you know Michael. Ability he's got—but he needs somebody should give him every so often a little push, yes? And Myriam—she pushes. Oh, yes. Also. They say—Michael and Myriam—they hope they'll find soon a troupe so they can do theatre. You see? They haven't lost faith. Because they're artists. It's in the blood.

ZINA. They asked about me?

ARNOLD. What then? Of course about you. And Mendl. And Zalman. And everybody.

MENDL. Well, as long as they can get along there, well and good.


MENDL. Why not?

ARNOLD. Because. What's an island? Surrounded by water.

MENDL. So?

ARNOLD. How would you like to have to swim with a sewing machine? *(They laugh.) Anyway, in Germany—remember—they lost the last war—so they're not going to start up again with anybody. They understand.

MENDL. *(Getting up for his hat.)* Positively.

ARNOLD. So there. You're happy, Zina?

ZINA. *(Now in full costume, bulbous nose, beard and hat.)* I'd like to see the letter—to touch it.

ARNOLD. What do you need the letter? I told you the whole everything. They're safe in Germany. They're happy. And they hope we'll all be together soon again. Forever.

ZINA AND MENDL. *(Together.)* Aw-main!

ARNOLD. All right? Ready? How about getting on with something more serious, now? *(Make-ups and get-ups complete, they take their places for the beginning of the sketch—all three. Mendl and Zina start from one side of the platform, Arnold from the other. They bump, almost fall.)*

MENDL. *(In his acting voice.*)* "Aie! Reb Tevye, just who I wanted I should bump into!"

ARNOLD. *(Acting voice.*)* "Why, I owe you money?"

MENDL. "Who said money?"

ARNOLD. "So if not money, so why do you push me?"

ZINA. "That was not a push, Reb Tevye. That was a bump!"

ARNOLD. "So why do you push me?"

MENDL. "You don't recognize me?"

ARNOLD. "No!"

ZINA. "Boiborik! He's the matchmaker fin Boiborik!"

ARNOLD. "So why do you push me?"

MENDL. It's true, Reb Tevye—you've got maybe a daughter to marry off?"
ARNOLD. "‘A’? ‘A’, he says. Not ‘A’—seven I’ve got!"
MENDL. “Seven? Oi, oil!” (Arnold nods his approval.) “Oi, oil!” (Arnold continues to nod in approval.) “Oi! Oi! Oi!”
(They both laugh.)
ARNOLD. “So why do you push me?”
ZINA. (She has gone over to the small phonograph.) Don’t worry. Keep your mind on tomorrow. (Zina starts the phonograph. Mendl, Arnold and Zina go into their song.)
ALL THREE. (Singing.)
“Tomorrow, tomorrow
We won’t have to borrow
The day after today
Will be better in every way!”
MENDL.
“Yesterday was full of worry,
Trouble and distress—”
ZINA.
“And today like other days
It’s just a little less—”
ARNOLD.
“The day we wait for patiently
Is not so very far—oh!
Tomorrow—row.”
(They are performing a dance merrily.)
ALL THREE. (Singing.)
“Tomorrow, tomorrow
An end to our sorrow
The day after today
Hooray! Hooray! Hooray!”
(The lights start to dim, as voices are heard all over the theatre.)
ARNOLD. (In his voice.) So why do you push me?
ZALMAN. So why do you push me?
MYRIAM. So why do you push me?
MICHAEL. So why do you push me?

CURTAIN