

# **Mrs. Feuerstein**

A Play by Murray Mednick

*Mrs. Feuerstein was first presented at 2100 Square Feet Theatre, Los Angeles, California, on July 28th, 2001. It was directed by Roxanne Rogers and produced by Guy Zimmerman, with set by Jeffrey Atherton, lights by Rand Ryan, costumes by Bridget Phillips, original music and sound design by O-Lan Jones, and the following cast:*

**Adele Feuerstein:** Maria O'Brien

**Max Wohl:** Christopher Allport

**Frieda Wohl:** Lynnda Ferguson

**Dr. Samuelson:** Louis R. Plante

**Dr. Baum:** Drago Sumonja

**Jane:** Gwendolyn Yeo

*Mrs. Feuerstein then opened at the Chashama theatre space in New York City on November 16th 2001. It was directed by Roxanne Rogers and produced by Guy Zimmerman and Stephen Starosta, with set by Michelle Malavet, lights by Jeremy Morris, costumes by Harwood Lee, original music and sound design by O-Lan Jones, and the following cast:*

**Adele Feuerstein:** Maria O'Brien

**Max Wohl:** Daniel Ahearn

**Frieda Wohl:** Lynnda Ferguson

**Dr. Samuelson:** Dana Gladstone

**Dr. Baum:** Kevin Shinick

**Jane:** Samantha Quan

## **Characters**

**Adele Feuerstein (Adele and Mrs. F.)** *A lovely, middle-aged woman; a poet and playwright.*

**Max Wohl** *German immigrant; handsome, aristocratic. A teacher, fifties.*

**Frieda Wohl** *Max's wife; tall, blonde, beautiful. In the "realistic" scenes, she has difficulty walking. In Adele's play, there is no difficulty; she stands and walks freely.*

**Dr. Baum** *Thirties, school counselor and administrative assistant.*

**Jane** *An Asian woman; Adele's psychologist.*

**Samuelson** *Jane's advisor, a psychologist in his early sixties.*

## **The Scene**

A high school corridor; the WOHL apartment;

JANE's office; ADELE's apartment.

*Fieldsburg, PA. 1965*

# Act 1

## Scene 1

*Fieldsburg High School corridor. Eight-thirty a.m.*

**Max** "Feuerstein." German?  
**Adele** Yes.  
**Max** Where from, if I may ask?  
**Adele** My family was from Hamburg, originally.  
**Max** Oh! I am also from Hamburg!  
**Adele** Really?  
**Max** And so is my wife!  
**Adele** Well, what a coincidence.  
**Max** Do you know Hamburg?  
**Adele** Oh, no. My family moved away from there when my mother was a girl.  
**Max** Here to America?  
**Adele** No. To Poland.  
**Max** Ah.  
**Adele** Yes.  
**Max** During the war?  
**Adele** No. Before the war.  
**Max** Is she still living?  
**Adele** No.

**Max** I'm sorry.

**Adele** She was murdered in Poland.

**Max** I'm sorry. You must have been very young.

**Adele** Yes. Quite young.

**Max** Forgive me. (*Awkward pause*) We were told you had been to German universities.

**Adele** Yes. I studied in Germany.

**Max** History?

**Adele** Yes, history. Culture.

**Max** Then you must know German well?

**Adele** Academically. At the university, I studied the German philosophers. Chiefly Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Heidegger.

**Max** Oh, my.

**Adele** Martin Buber.

**Max** I'm most impressed.

**Adele** I wanted to understand their thinking.

**Max** And did you? Understand their thinking? (*Silence*) Pardon me, I don't mean to pry.

**Adele** No, no. (*Pause*) That's my answer: No.

**Max** Nor I.

**Adele** You don't?

**Max** No I have lost touch. We have been in this country for more than twenty years now. Now we are Americans.

**Adele** Well, well. Here we are in America. (*Starts off*)

**Max** Wait. We have a minute. These faculty meetings are always late.

**Adele** I didn't mean to be snide.

**Max** Not at all. And you are a poet?

**Adele** Yes, I am.

**Max** I, too, am a poet.

**Adele** Are you?  
**Max** Yes. Amateur, of course.  
**Adele** I am not one, myself.  
**Max** Pardon me. I thought...  
**Adele** Not an amateur.  
**Max** Ah. Touché, Mrs. Feuerstein.  
**Adele** Actually, I did want to ask about the grades here, Mr. Wohl, at Fieldsburg School.  
**Max** Please.  
**Adele** For history, A to F. Facts. That's the thing about history. Do they know the facts, the dates, and so on. But for creative writing, I don't think the same criteria should apply.  
**Max** No, of course not. You don't want to fail a child for lack of talent, do you? Not fair. It's not the child's fault, after all. Nothing he can do. In such a case, you may grade according to effort.  
**Adele** Effort.  
**Max** Yes. I would mention this at the faculty meeting. No problem. (*As they exit*) "Feuerstein."  
**Adele** Yes.  
**Max** And Mister Feuerstein?  
**Adele** There is no Mr. Feuerstein.  
**Max** Oh. Excuse me.  
**Adele** Thanks for taking the time, Mr. Wohl.  
**Max** Please. (*Out*)

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## Scene 2

*High school corridor, later, with DR. BAUM.*

- Dr. Baum** A good meeting?
- Adele** Yes.
- Dr. Baum** Good. I wanted to say, it's an honor, Mrs. Feuerstein, to have you here with us at Fieldsburg School.
- Adele** Thank you, Dr. Baum.
- Dr. Baum** We're lucky to have you. How do you find it so far?
- Adele** Fine.
- Dr. Baum** Your classroom all right?
- Adele** Yes.
- Dr. Baum** The office is small. They're all small.
- Adele** I don't mind.
- Dr. Baum** Well...Ah, here comes Mrs. Wohl. (*Enter FRIEDA using a walker, or a cane*)
- Adele** Excuse me.
- Dr. Baum** Oh.
- Adele** I have an appointment. (*Exits*)
- Dr. Baum** (*To FRIEDA*) That was Adele Feuerstein.
- Frieda** I see. Is she afraid of cripples?
- Dr. Baum** I don't know, I'm sure.
- Frieda** Some people are, you know.
- Dr. Baum** She said she had an appointment.
- Frieda** Good-looking woman, for her age.
- Dr. Baum** Quite handsome.
- Frieda** Max said she studied in Germany?
- Dr. Baum** I believe so, yes. With honors.
- Frieda** A poet.
- Dr. Baum** Yes.

**Frieda** Well known.  
**Dr. Baum** Quite.  
**Frieda** But not famous.  
**Dr. Baum** I suppose not, no, but well thought of.  
**Frieda** What's she doing at Fieldsburg School?  
**Dr. Baum** I believe she wanted a change in her life, Frieda.  
**Frieda** A change from what, Henry?  
**Dr. Baum** I couldn't say. Destitution? Here's Max.  
**Max** (*Entering*) There you are.  
**Frieda** The not-so-famous Adele Feuerstein has just fled from my sight.  
**Max** Oh, dear.  
**Frieda** We must discover her secrets, darling. (*Out*)

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### Scene 3

*JANE's office.*

**Adele** People are being nice.  
**Jane** Why shouldn't they be?  
**Adele** I'm the famous Adele Feuerstein. Little do they know. I'm at the end of my rope. You think I'm being hard on myself, don't you?  
**Jane** Yes.  
**Adele** It's a private school, so they didn't check.  
**Jane** Check?  
**Adele** They think I graduated from a prestigious German university.  
**Jane** Did you lie?



**Adele** Not exactly. Well, yes. But there's hope.

**Jane** I'm glad.

**Adele** I'm going to write a play. Which will save me from this humiliating situation.

**Jane** Why is it humiliating?

**Adele** Because I am a pauper, a beggar, without a penny to my name. I organized it that way. I foreordained it.

**Jane** Why?

**Adele** So as not to become a petit bourgeois. So much for poetry.

**Jane** Nothing redeeming, I take it. In the art of poetry.

**Adele** Not today, no.

**Jane** What will the play be about?

**Adele** Can I tell you next time?

**Jane** Yes. Why?

**Adele** So I don't jinx it. Okay?

**Jane** Sure.

**Adele** I'll tell you next time. *(Pause)* I can't pay you. Today. I can't pay you. All right?

**Jane** All right.

**Adele** I've changed my mind. I'll tell you about my play. There is this German couple. Max and Frieda Wohl. And me...  
*(Dim out as she gestures toward another part of the stage.)*

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#### Scene 4

*Art Deco apartment of Mr. and Mrs. WOHL. As seen in ADELE's play. In the play, FRIEDA WOHL has no problem with her legs and stands up straight.*

- Frieda** She's quite the little brunette.
- Max** Oh, Frieda.
- Frieda** Charming figure. How old is she?
- Max** Let me think. They moved from Hamburg to Poland. Before the war.
- Frieda** To Poland?
- Max** I have no idea how old she is. Why do you ask?
- Frieda** I seem to know her.
- Max** Really?
- Frieda** Yes. She seems younger than she is, perhaps.
- Max** Yes, like a doll.
- Frieda** It's her skin. It looks polished, or like porcelain.
- Max** She wants to meet you.
- Frieda** Oh? She ran away from me, Max. Don't you remember?
- Max** Just the three of us, socially.
- Frieda** Is she a Jewess, Max?
- Max** I don't think so.
- Frieda** Why not?
- Max** She doesn't feel Jewish.
- Frieda** Nonsense, Max. Feuerstein—it's a Jewish name.
- Max** It's a German name, Frieda.
- Frieda** German-Jewish. Where in Poland?
- Max** Many Germans moved to Poland in those days.
- Frieda** What town?

**Max** I don't know.  
**Frieda** Find out.  
**Max** It's not appropriate. The Jewish question. It's not appropriate. Here, now, it's not appropriate.  
**Frieda** What is she teaching?  
**Max** European history. And creative writing, as an elective.  
**Frieda** Ah. You have a lot in common, the two of you.  
**Max** What, Frieda?  
**Frieda** History and writing, yes? Ask her, Max.  
**Max** What?  
**Frieda** What town in Poland.  
**Max** No. I don't want to pry.  
**Frieda** Have her over, Max. I'll ask her myself. (*Out*)

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## Scene 5

### *JANE's Office*

**Jane** So, except for a few little incidents, it's going all right?  
**Adele** Anna. Except for her.  
**Jane** What's with Anna?  
**Adele** She can't stop talking. And she can't stop fidgeting around. Her body is in constant motion. She's fifteen, sixteen years old, and she can't stop moving.  
**Jane** Teenagers are like that.  
**Adele** I know. They haven't a clue. It's such a distraction.  
**Jane** You mean Anna?  
**Adele** They have no idea of the basics, like iambic pentameter.

Jane           And Anna?

Adele          She knows, she knows.

Jane           What?

Adele          But she couldn't care less, believe me.

Jane           About what?

Adele          Impatient, Jane?

Jane           I'm sorry.

Adele          What's good. What's right. She couldn't care less.  
(A silence)

Jane           Still writing your play?

Adele          Yes, thank God. I have a character, Mrs. F, she's  
an Avenger, you know. She tracks these German war  
criminals to America. She's a killer, an assassin.  
She has killed before. She wakes up on the floor of  
a barn in Germany, and, uh, she gets a job in a  
high school, not in Germany, in America, not then,  
but later, because she's tracked this couple, so she  
becomes a teacher there.

Jane           Like you.

Adele          She's a teacher like me, so I can talk about some  
of my issues. Like the lack of confidence. Insecurity.  
Being afraid of the children.

Jane           Are you afraid of the children?

Adele          Yes.

Jane           Go on.

Adele          That's it. I hope I can teach them iambic pentameter.  
That's the whole secret, right there.

Jane           I'm sure you can.

Adele          I'm not so sure. (Pause)

Jane           Do you want revenge?

**Adele** In my play, yes. The character does, Mrs. F, she wants revenge. She has dedicated her life to it. She, along with others. Which is not entirely fictional, because there were some soldiers, from the Jewish Brigade, who lingered in Germany after the war, executing people.

**Jane** At random?

**Adele** Pretty much at random.

**Jane** Are you sure?

**Adele** Yes. I don't know why I'm doing it, exactly.

**Jane** You're exploring the idea, perhaps. Of revenge.

**Adele** Well, perhaps so. I don't know what I'm doing. I have to write something. A writer must write. I think there is something there. I think there is a theme there.

**Jane** The insufficiency of revenge? The pointlessness of it?

**Adele** Maybe that's you talking, not me.

**Jane** The obsessive quality of it.

**Adele** I don't know if its obsessive. Why obsessive?

**Jane** It's been more than twenty years now.

**Adele** So what?

**Jane** Who are they?

**Adele** They?

**Jane** The characters.

**Adele** I told you. Max and Frieda Wohl. Germans.

**Jane** What is going to happen to them?

**Adele** I don't know yet. I don't know what's going to happen at this point. (*Out*)

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## Scene 6

### *JANE's Office.*

- Samuelson** What does the word "Jew" mean for her?
- Jane** Something about her inmost self, her soul, her essence. Suffering. Martyrdom. There is a background of dread, which is from childhood, which is associated with the Holocaust.
- Samuelson** You believe her?
- Jane** Yes. I do.
- Samuelson** And her parents?
- Jane** She called them "trash Jews." Unter Juden.
- Samuelson** Interesting.
- Jane** Sub-Jews.
- Samuelson** Who were they?
- Jane** She hasn't said, really.
- Samuelson** No?
- Jane** No, not yet.
- Samuelson** Why not, do you suppose?
- Jane** I'm not sure. There is all that habitual self-loathing. And at the same time, pride. The superiority of the Jews. Talent, intellect. And something else, something erotic.
- Samuelson** Ah. And in her play?
- Jane** In her play she is an assassin. She told me one story, I can't get it out of my mind. About a town in Poland, where they started torturing and killing the Jews. The Poles did, they killed their neighbors, the Jews, who had been there for five hundred years. There were two young women there, they drowned their babies and themselves. These

two young mothers, they drowned themselves in a pond. But first they drowned their babies. And then all the rest of the Jews, they were beaten and herded into a barn, and then the Poles burned down the barn.

**Samuelson** I believe I saw something about that recently.

**Jane** Where?

**Samuelson** I don't recall where, exactly. A learned journal. Somewhere she might have seen it as well.

**Jane** Oh. *(Pause)* A thousand Jews were burned up in the barn, apparently.

**Samuelson** Yes. By the Poles.

**Jane** While the Germans looked on.

**Samuelson** Yes, they looked on. According to the document.

**Jane** I don't know what to make of it. I don't know how to absorb it, how to realize it. I can't get it out of my mind. Just think of it, she said, those two young beauties, drowning themselves and their babies. Their courage, their martyrdom.

**Samuelson** Yes.

**Jane** It's a difficult thing to do, to drown your baby, and then to drown yourself. *(Pause)* I can't get that moment out of my mind. You know? That moment of choosing. She wanted you to know the story, especially.

**Samuelson** Me?

**Jane** Yes. "Tell your shrink," she said, "tell your analyst."

**Samuelson** Oh. I see.

**Jane** "I wonder if he knows. I wonder if he realizes. That which happened." *(Out.)*

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## Scene 7

*At the high school.*

- Max** Ah, Mrs. Feuerstein!
- Adele** Good morning.
- Max** How are you?
- Adele** Very well, thank you.
- Max** And how are your classes going?
- Adele** So fast! I mean the periods. They go by so quickly. It's hard to establish anything, or to dig very deeply.
- Max** Yes, I know. You'll find that you get used to it. You'll make the necessary adjustments, I'm sure.
- Adele** I hope so.
- Max** And your students?
- Adele** Oh, I love them. I adore them. And how is your wife?
- Max** She is well, thank you.
- Adele** Is her name Frieda?
- Max** Yes.
- Adele** I was supposed to meet her...Dr. Baum was about to introduce us, but I had to go to a meeting. Sorry for that.
- Max** Oh, no matter. Another time.
- Adele** Do you have children?
- Max** Well, no. No.
- Adele** I'm sorry.
- Max** But the school children are our children, of course.
- Adele** Nice for you, then.
- Max** I was wondering, Mrs. Feuerstein—
- Adele** That you can give your love to the children.
- Max** Thank God.



**Adele** God?

**Max** To have such opportunities.

**Adele** Yes, God did it. Just for you and Frieda.

**Max** Well, please feel free to call on me. Or my wife, for that matter. Anytime. Anytime at all.

**Adele** I will. She's at home?

**Max** Yes, she is an invalid, as you know.

**Adele** What's wrong with her?

**Max** It's her legs.

**Adele** What's wrong with her legs?

**Max** No one knows.

**Adele** Oh, I see.

**Max** Mrs. Feuerstein, I've been meaning to ask you.

**Adele** Yes? (*Period bell*)

**Max** Oh. There's the bell. Never mind. (*Out*)

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### **Scene 8**

*JANE's office.*

**Adele** I think she's serious about it.

**Jane** Who is?

**Adele** Mrs. F. I think she means business.

**Jane** What is she doing?

**Adele** I can't make up my mind what kind of story it is. Is it a detective story? A murder mystery? Who is tracking who here? You must have surprises. Twists and turns. What did I mean by my mind?

**Jane** You meant your thinking.

**Adele** The story must be telling itself. What's happening is, I think she's falling in love with this woman. Mrs. F. She's a woman, as I am. She's a woman in love with a woman. People like that sort of thing.

**Jane** Is that why she's a woman?

**Adele** I don't know why. In actual life she's an invalid, a recluse. Mrs. Wohl.

**Jane** And in your play?

**Adele** In my play she stands up straight. Frieda. Tall and straight. Nordic. Elegant. A woman from the master race. Is that realistic, psychologically?

**Jane** Yes, that is one of the attributes of the slave, of the inferior.

**Adele** What is?

**Jane** Adoring the master. Wanting to serve.

**Adele** You say she's in love with her superior? Like a slave? Mrs. F.?

**Jane** You said it.

**Adele** Is that credible?

**Jane** It happens. Of course, the relationship is not one of equality.

**Adele** I believe she might already have been in love with her. I'm not sure. She wants her. She wants to, uh, get into her pants. Passionately.

**Jane** What do you mean, "already?"

**Adele** Maybe it started back in Germany already, I mean, Poland.

**Jane** I don't follow you.

**Adele** Maybe her passion for Frieda goes back to the days of Poland, in Korskowala, when she first laid eyes on her.  
*(Dim down as she looks at another part of the stage.)*

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## Scene 9

*The apartment of MAX and FRIEDA, as envisioned in ADELE's play.*

**Frieda** Did you ask her?  
**Max** What, darling?  
**Frieda** Where in Poland.  
**Max** Why?  
**Frieda** You know why.  
**Max** No, I don't, actually.  
**Frieda** I'll have to ask her myself.  
**Max** Yes, and be nice.  
**Frieda** Why don't you ask her?  
**Max** It's none of my business.  
**Frieda** You must be joking, Max.  
**Max** And it's none of your business, either.  
**Frieda** She stares at me, Max.  
**Max** What does that mean, she stares at you?  
**Frieda** She looks at me.  
**Max** What does that mean?  
**Frieda** How many meanings can that have, Max?  
**Max** Where is this?  
**Frieda** We were having lunch in the cafeteria. You were there. It's very aggressive.  
**Max** Don't imagine things.  
**Frieda** You didn't notice?  
**Max** No.  
**Frieda** I'm not imagining. She stared at me. She wanted eye contact.  
**Max** And?  
**Frieda** I looked away.

**Max** Why? Why not acknowledge her?  
**Frieda** Her attitude seemed too aggressive. It's inappropriate, and it's embarrassing, Max. What does she want?  
**Max** To be friends, I'm sure. Why not try?  
**Frieda** I don't like it, Max. It's too aggressive. Very aggressive behavior on her part. (*Dim out, and come back up on JANE's office.*)

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### Scene 10

*JANE's office*

**Jane** (*Pause*) What are you thinking?  
**Adele** I was thinking, I wonder how that happened? How it turned so erotic. And then I was thinking, Is it revenge through seduction? Does she wish to destroy this woman through sex, instead of killing her?  
**Jane** Does she?  
**Adele** I don't know. Mrs. F. could be Mr. F. It makes no difference. Except a man could drive her, of course, with a real penis. It would still be a love story. Wouldn't it? But then it's not so chaste, is it? It's more complicated. A man and a woman, it's as complicated as nature. And I was thinking, since forgiveness is out of the question, because of the magnitude, and the murder of our children. But that's not what I was talking about. I get this nervous twitch. In my arm. He could be a man. I could make him a man. Do you think I should? This is the last time I write about this

stuff. I want to write a play about a woman who steals husbands. A destroyer. What is that all about? In the meantime, I'd better think about my job. That's why I came to you in the first place, isn't it? Am I ranting?

Jane Are you?

Adele I feel like I am.

Jane I'm here to listen.

Adele You're looking at your watch.

Jane Sorry.

Adele You mentioned ego before. What did you mean?

Jane I mean the sense of yourself. I mean autonomy.

Adele I feel that in myself, as an artist.

Jane That's where you have something. But otherwise, no.

Adele No?

Jane Not enough.

Adele What do you mean?

Jane Your students walk all over you.

Adele They do not.

Jane Anna walks all over you.

Adele Did I say that?

Jane Last week.

Adele What did I say?

Jane She takes advantage of you.

Adele I'm not a strict disciplinarian. And you always make something out of it. I don't think there's anything wrong with me. *(Pause)* I'm not insecure, and I'm not afraid of the children. Not really. I think I'm supposed to be, but I'm not. But I come here, so there must be something wrong with me. Unless I'm playing a role. I am the patient. I'm playing the role of the patient. I'm the patient. So I act like the patient.

And in school I'm the teacher, I'm Mrs. Feuerstein, the teacher. And Anna walks all over me. She's cute and she's bright and she walks all over me. So what? *(Pause)* A third of the lineage was wiped out Forever. The genes. Irreplacable. If genes have no meaning, no sanctity, then life has no meaning, and no sanctity. Do you agree?

**Jane** I don't know.

**Adele** What do you mean, you don't know? You have no opinion?

**Jane** It's not for me to say. But I wouldn't be sitting here with you if I thought life had no meaning.

**Adele** Yes, you sit here all the day long and people come to you for consultation. And then they pay you money. I guess that's meaningful. For you. *(Pause)* I lived in camps. D.P. camps. Max Wohl is not my equal and I intend to kill him.

**Jane** What did you say?

**Adele** That was a line. From my play. Mrs. F. She's an anxiety neurotic, with no steady sense of "I." Like me. Of course. Everyone is their character. Psychology can be defined as the study of character. Or the study of lying, rather. For example, I'm playing a role now. And you're the therapist.

**Jane** Yes, I see.

**Adele** How do you see it?

**Jane** I think you're right. The situation is artificial, and there is role-playing going on.

**Adele** But?

**Jane** But I can see you more objectively than you can see yourself. Because I have the training. And because I'm not you.

**Adele** It's not necessarily an act.

**Jane** No. You need help.

**Adele** I can't pay you.

**Jane** Let's talk about that. Next time.  
**Adele** Thank you. (*Rising*) I think she runs into Max in the school corridor, Mrs. F., in my play. (*Dim out as she goes downstage.*)

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### Scene 11

*High school corridor, as seen by ADELE in her play.*

**Max** Mrs. Feuerstein!  
**Mrs. F.** Yes?  
**Max** Excuse me. You're in a hurry?  
**Mrs. F.** Yes, I'm late.  
**Max** Oh, forgive me.  
**Mrs. F.** What did you say? That's absolutely impossible. Don't just stand there. What do you want?  
**Max** Please. What town?  
**Mrs. F.** What town?  
**Max** What town in Poland?  
**Mrs. F.** What town in Poland?  
**Max** Yes. Before the war. My wife is curious. She had relatives there, in Poland.  
**Mrs. F.** Really?  
**Max** Yes.  
**Mrs. F.** So what? (*No answer*) Why doesn't she ask me herself?  
**Max** Oh. She is shy, perhaps.  
**Mrs. F.** Korskowala.  
**Max** Thank you. I'll tell her.

**Mrs. F.** Yes, and tell her we would not have known any relatives of hers. That would have been entirely impossible. As you know, Max.

**Max** I see.

**Mrs. F.** And tell her not to be so shy.

**Max** It's nothing, really. She doesn't go out much.

**Mrs. F.** I won't bite her.

**Max** She asked me to inquire. Nothing important.

**Mrs. F.** *(Aside)* Because of Korskowala! *(Bell rings. He starts to leave.)* Mr. Wohl!

**Max** *(Stopping)* Yes, Mrs. Feuerstein?

**Mrs. F.** I'd like very much to get together with your wife.

**Max** Certainly, and she, you.

**Mrs. F.** No need to be shy.

**Max** We must all get together! Yes! Soon! Very soon! *(Dim out as MRS. F. returns to JANE's office.)*

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## Scene 12

*Office.*

**Adele** So, I informed him about Korskowala. I mean, Mrs. F. She tells them, the Wohls, about Korskowala. He asks her, and she tells him. And then I rewrote it, so it went like this: *(As MRS. F.)* "So stop being such a gentleman, such a reformed German. I know you for who you are." He answers, "Really? Who am I?" "You're a killer," I say. "Like me." And he smiles or something. *(Pause)* But who is tricking whom here?



Jane Excuse me?

Adele Who will be the first to know? In my play. Who will know more than the other?

Jane Is that the question?

Adele Who knows more than the other?

Jane Yes.

Adele Well, I'm just saying. Who kills the other? There are so many options. One hopes for the only one to appear.

Jane The only one?

Adele Yes. The one above all others. The way it must have been. Do you understand?

Jane I think I do, yes.

Adele Do you have a bias?

Jane Not really. No.

Adele There is no other way of knowing. The right way has to appear. You can't make it up. It's not a lie. It has to be real. Do you follow?

Jane Yes.

Adele Good. *(Pause)*

Jane Did you notice how you came through the door today?

Adele I know it by voice. The truth.

Jane That's not what I asked you.

Adele I'm sorry. What did you ask?

Jane Did you notice how you came in today?

Adele How?

Jane You bowed your head like a servant.

Adele Did I?

Jane Yes. And you didn't look at me.

Adele And I didn't smile.

Jane No.

**Adele** I appeared grim.  
**Jane** Yes.  
**Adele** I'm sorry.  
**Jane** It's not a question of apology.  
**Adele** (*Looking across stage*) Oh!  
**Jane** What are you thinking of? (*Out, and come up on*)

\*

### **Scene 13**

*Apartment of the WOHLs, as imagined by ADELE in her play.*

**Max** It was a mistake to mention Poland.  
**Frieda** Was it, Max?  
**Max** A terrible mistake.  
**Frieda** She's a Jewess, Max. From Korskowala. That's why she's here.  
**Max** All the more reason to leave it alone, Frieda. (*In German*)  
All the more reason!  
**Frieda** Don't speak German.  
**Max** Now we have to socialize with her.  
**Frieda** No. I refuse.  
**Max** You can't refuse.  
**Frieda** I absolutely refuse. Korskowala. It's not a coincidence,  
Max. It's no accident.  
**Max** You don't know that.  
**Frieda** What does she want?  
**Max** I told you. She wants to socialize. She wants to make  
friends.  
**Frieda** It's not what she wants, it's how she wants it.

**Max** What does that mean?

**Frieda** It's very simple.

**Max** Yes. It's simple. She has come far. Very far. She is alone. She is German.

**Frieda** I don't think so.

**Max** We are also German. So, it makes sense.

**Frieda** It's revenge, Max. You must ask.

**Max** That's absurd, Frieda.

**Frieda** Directly. What she wants. What she wants and how she wants it.

**Max** No. Get hold of yourself. This is an insecure woman. A poet. A German. We'll make friends with her. That is what we will do. We'll make friends.

**Frieda** Friends? You don't know what you're saying, Max.  
(*Out, back up on*)

\*

## Scene 14

*Office.*

**Adele** Maybe they are Christians. Converts. These people, Max and Frieda Wohl, maybe they're Christians. Then the whole thing is not about revenge. Then it's about repentance. And I don't have to write about evil Germans. Max, he said to me, in passing, he says, "If only Hitler had been shot, in 1938, there would have been no Holocaust," he said, "Can you imagine, what has been seared upon the soul of mankind, would not have occurred." He says this to me, almost under

his breath, even though he knows, or because he knows, I am investigating him, myself, "Of course, the German people participated, but it was one man, Hitler, one man's will, who made it happen. Can you imagine? The significance of that? Of will? It's bizarre." And it is. One must feel the absolute horror of that. And go on living, I suppose. You act like that's not a question. Like that's not a real question.

**Jane** It's not for me.

**Adele** Yes, you have no idea. You don't have a clue.

**Jane** Are you angry?

**Adele** Now?

**Jane** Yes.

**Adele** I am. But I don't like it. I want to get over it.

**Jane** You will.

**Adele** When?

**Jane** I can't say.

**Adele** Maybe never.

**Jane** Perhaps that's why the shift in you.

**Adele** What shift?

**Jane** The shift from revenge to repentance.

**Adele** I don't know. Those are just words. I don't like to hear that. Because how would one know unless they took revenge? Whether or not it was enough? Perhaps it is essential, but never enough.

**Jane** I don't know.

**Adele** Because you can never avenge a bizarre horror, can you? But you can avenge the honor of your people, can't you?

**Jane** Are you asking me?

**Adele** Yes.

**Jane** I don't know.

**Adele** We'll have to see. *(Pause)* We'll have to see.

**Jane** Tell me about your mother.

**Adele** No.

**Jane** That's fine.

**Adele** She hit me. She beat me. We lived on mattresses. In the street. My brother pissed on me. All right?

**Jane** All right. Well... *(Looks at her watch)*

**Adele** They weren't neurotic. The German people were not neurotic. Except insofar as they felt inferior. They felt inferior and tormented by envy. I can see that. They were intimidated by the Jews. Is that what you're saying? Is that your theory?

**Jane** I was talking about fear.

**Adele** Yes, fear. You're afraid of these people, so you try to kill them all. I see. Are you a Jew?

**Jane** Of course not.

**Adele** You never know. There are converts. Your analyst is, of course.

**Jane** Yes, he is. I told him the story about the Polish women—

**Adele** That's right. He's the one. With the theory. Another assimilated Jew.

**Jane** He's an American.

**Adele** Who refuses to face the existence of evil. *(Pause)* I still can't pay you.

**Jane** Why not?

**Adele** Because I don't have the money. *(Out)*

\*

## Scene 15

*Office. JANE and SAMUELSON listen to a taped recording of JANE with ADELE.*

**Adele**        *(On tape)* The German people were not neurotic. Except insofar as they felt inferior. They felt inferior and tormented by envy. I can see that. They were intimidated by the Jews. Is that what you're saying? Is that your theory? Is it personality disorder? From the parents? Is it domination? What? *(End tape)*

**Jane**         I don't want to pressure her about the fee.

**Samuelson** I understand. You're worried you don't have the right.

**Jane**         Oh. True.

**Samuelson** I had a patient say to me once, "We talk, we shake hands, I give you money. Why is that? I don't see why I should give you money. Why? Why, after a talk between us, should I then give you money?"

**Jane**         What did you do?

**Samuelson** I waited to see if he would continue to pay. He wouldn't, and so I was forced to drop him.

**Jane**         How did you do it?

**Samuelson** We left the office. We went for a walk. We sat down in a cafe...we chatted, we smoked. I remember he had a twitch. His leg. That was it.

**Jane**         Sad.

**Samuelson** Yes. But necessary.

**Jane**         Why?

**Samuelson** It's a law of life. One must pay.

**Jane**         I felt in over my head, Morris, completely out of my depth, in talking about evil.

**Samuelson** There was a survivor in Israel, at the Eichmann trial—do you remember?—who was asked to testify. “I’m perfectly willing to talk,” he said, “so long as they don’t ask me what I had to do to survive.” *(Pause)*

**Jane** But what about the evil?

**Samuelson** I don’t know.

**Jane** It’s not all relative.

**Samuelson** I don’t know. I can’t say.

**Jane** But you’re a Jew.

**Samuelson** Yes, but I’m not a philosopher or a theologian. I’m a psychologist.

**Jane** She keeps asking.

**Samuelson** Let her ask. I don’t have an answer. I wasn’t there. *(Pause)*  
And what’s the latest with her pupil, Anna?

**Jane** Oh, Adele is totally dominated by her. Anna is coy and submissive one minute, and then challenging, and very demanding, the next. And Adele goes along with it.

**Samuelson** There you have the real Mrs. Feuerstein.

**Jane** I’m not so sure, Morris.

**Samuelson** And she should be in therapy also, that Anna.

**Jane** No doubt she is. The taping is an issue for Adele. The taping, the money.

**Samuelson** Doesn’t the taping reduce her fee?

**Jane** Yes.

**Samuelson** Well, best to leave it alone for now. *(Out)*

\*

## Scene 16

*High school corridor*

**Max** Mrs. Feuerstein.

**Adele** Yes?

**Max** I wanted to apologize.

**Adele** What for?

**Max** For my impertinent prying. Forgive me.

**Adele** Not at all.

**Max** I beg your pardon.

**Adele** *(Laughs)* Really?

**Max** If I've offended you.

**Adele** Please, I think it was your wife, Mr. Wohl.

**Max** Call me, Max.

**Adele** You were on an errand for your esteemed wife.

**Max** True.

**Adele** One must obey, after all. Not to worry.

**Max** No, I apologize. My behavior was *unhöflich*.

**Adele** Do not speak German.

**Max** My behavior was rude.

**Adele** Rude? *(Giggles)*

**Max** Do you know "The Sleepwalkers?"

**Adele** "The Sleepwalkers?"

**Max** Yes. A novel. By Hermann Broch.

**Adele** Yes, of course. In German. By a Jew.

**Max** Yes.

**Adele** Why do you ask?

**Max** Oh. No special reason. I am just now reading it myself, and I thought... "Well, I wonder if she's read this...Mrs. Feuerstein."



**Adele** Did you, Max? (*Half-aside*) Such suitable reading for the modern Kraut.

**Max** I beg your pardon?

**Adele** The Jewish survivor, the Jewish literary genius, exposes the German bourgeoisie, who will later try to kill him.

**Max** Yes.

**Adele** How ironic.

**Max** Ironic?

**Adele** How justifying.

**Max** No, not justifying. I beg to differ with you there.

**Mrs. F** I've never read the book, actually.

**Max** Oh well, then. Allow me to recommend it.

**Adele** What is it, "Mr. Wohl, Herr Wohl, or Max?"

**Max** Max, please.

**Mrs. F** Okay, I would love to meet Frau Wohl, Max. As I've said. Though I do feel that I know her.

**Max** Do you?

**Adele** Yes, I feel as though I do.

**Max** And how are your classes going?

**Adele** I'm doing the best I can. With the children. The problem is them. They are the problem. They have no control. What they say, it's not appropriate. They're asking too much of me, these children. They can't help it, how they defend themselves, how they try to make an impression, how they can't hear anything.

**Max** No, they cannot help it.

**Adele** I must make a better preparation, a new approach, less serious, less attentive. Be lighter, not so heavy. Not so identified with them. Who cares what they think, after all?

**Max** Well, one must care.

**Adele** Yes, one must care. About the children. They don't know what I'm talking about. Poetics. Iambic pentameter. I'm so disappointed.

**Max** I'm sorry.

**Adele** No. The problem is me. I'm the problem. Adele Feuerstein. I love them, but I am imagining. They don't know what I'm talking about. Poetics. Iambic pentameter. I'm so disappointed. What I say, it's not appropriate. I'm asking too much of them, these children. They can't help it, how they defend themselves, how they try to make an impression, how they can't hear anything.

**Max** You just said that.

**Adele** What?

**Max** Never mind. Can I be of use?

**Adele** What?

**Max** Can I be of some use?

**Adele** Use?

**Max** Yes.

**Adele** No. Not you, no.

**Max** Have you met with Dr. Baum?

**Adele** Dr. Baum?

**Max** The school counselor, the psychologist.

**Adele** Yes.

**Max** A very nice man. He can help you.

**Adele** Go away. Leave me alone. (*Breaks into tears. The bell. WOHL backs away in horror. Out.*)

\*

## Scene 17

*Light and sound for the WOHL apartment, as written by ADELE in her play.*

- Max** She's hysterical. She repeats herself. She weeps.
- Frieda** I'm frightened, Max.
- Max** Why not ignore this woman?
- Frieda** Ignore her?
- Max** She is a troubled person, Frieda.
- Frieda** The woman is dangerous, and I'll tell you why.
- Max** Why?
- Frieda** Because of what she knows.
- Max** What?
- Frieda** She knows that we were having fun there, Max. There, in Korskowala. While we watched the slaughter. And then the cleansing, finally. And then the sunset over the trees. And then the moonrise, the starry night. Do you remember?
- Max** Yes.
- Frieda** So, we need to find out more, Max. Who is she, really? And then we can decide something. Don't you think so?
- Max** She's a poet, Frieda. That's all. I don't think she knows anything else. Her secrets are in her work.
- Frieda** You don't want to know, Max.
- Max** She makes no mention of Korskowala.
- Frieda** So what?
- Max** In her work. As far as I know.
- Frieda** What are you saying?
- Max** I'm saying that in this situation we should ignore her or befriend her. And we cannot ignore her.
- Frieda** No. Some other way.

**Max** What?  
**Frieda** Get rid of her.  
**Max** How?  
**Frieda** She's not right in the head, Max. You said so yourself.  
(*Out*)

\*

### **Scene 18**

*High school corridor, with DR. BAUM.*

**Adele** I'm very grateful for this job, you know. It's been...difficult for me.

**Dr. Baum** In what sense?

**Adele** In the sense of feeling all right, you know, about being a part of things in this way. A sense of value.

**Dr. Baum** I understand.

**Adele** Feeling of some use, some value as a person.

**Dr. Baum** I'm sure I understand.

**Adele** Yes, I think I am coming to understand. As well. You know.

**Dr. Baum** What?

**Adele** My value.

**Dr. Baum** And your pupils?

**Adele** I love them. I adore them.

**Dr. Baum** I'm glad.

**Adele** They are wonderful children, absolutely wonderful. I'm so glad. All I want to do is love them, engage with them.

**Dr. Baum** You have excellent credentials. And you are an artist, after all.

**Adele** Thank you. I'm extremely grateful. But the teaching, the teaching is the most important thing.

**Dr. Baum** I understand.

**Adele** You understand? Again? What do you understand?

**Dr. Baum** That teaching is the most important thing for you.

**Adele** It's a lie. *(Pause)* I'm a poet. *(Pause)* Vanity and ignorance. *(Pause)* That's all that's going on.

**Dr. Baum** Are you a religious person?

**Adele** No.

**Dr. Baum** Excuse me for asking. It's in your work.

**Adele** Oh. Yes. Judaica.

**Dr. Baum** No matter.

**Adele** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Dr. Baum** I beg your pardon?

**Adele** Religion is nice. Art is nice.

**Dr. Baum** We try.

**Adele** What do you try?

**Dr. Baum** We try to hire poets to teach poetry, for example, and artists to teach art.

**Adele** Yes, art. Art and poetry. *(Pause)* I love my job. And to eat regularly. Such decent food.

**Dr. Baum** You mean in the cafeteria?

**Adele** Yes, of course.

**Dr. Baum** Are there any particular problems, let's say with a student?

**Adele** You mean Anna? Oh, she has a lot of talent, that one. But she's chicken meat, you know.

**Dr. Baum** I beg your pardon?

**Adele** A birdbrain. She's good at chirping.

**Dr. Baum** But she does have talent?

**Adele** Yes, some people have it.

**Dr. Baum** Like yourself.  
**Adele** Yes. A sacred flame.  
**Dr. Baum** Are you being facetious?  
**Adele** Yes.  
**Dr. Baum** Some things are more important.  
**Adele** That's right. Honor, for example. Revenge. And the ability to walk long distances in the snow.  
**Dr. Baum** It's hard for me to follow you.  
**Adele** I'm German.  
**Dr. Baum** So am I.  
**Adele** The genuine article.  
**Dr. Baum** I suppose we must put our problems aside and see to the students as best we can, Mrs. Feuerstein. (*Bell*)  
**Adele** Yes, I suppose so. Pardon me. (*Out*)

\*

## Scene 19

*Office, with JANE.*

**Adele** The school psychologist paid me a visit. Baum, another German. Half the people in America are Germans. He was stupid and I let him know it. I can't pay for this. I don't have the means to pay for this.  
**Jane** How do you feel about it?  
**Adele** About what? About the money? About Baum?  
**Jane** Either.  
**Adele** I feel terrible. I feel terrible about both, about everything. And I refuse to be taped, like an experiment.

**Jane** I'm not taping you anymore.

**Adele** Good. I feel terrible.

**Jane** Tell me.

**Adele** I should have been nice. I should have played up to him.

**Jane** Why didn't you?

**Adele** I don't know why. That's why I come to you, which I can't afford.

**Jane** Have I said anything about money?

**Adele** No, because you don't have to. You don't have to mention it. You just give me a bill. And I don't have the money! (*Breaks into tears*) I don't know what came over me. I'm sorry.

**Jane** There's nothing to be sorry for here. Why didn't you cooperate with him, do you think?

**Adele** Because I'm afraid of him.

**Jane** Are you?

**Adele** Yes. Afraid that he'll find me out.

**Jane** What would he find out?

**Adele** That I'm false. That I'm there on false pretenses. That as a matter of fact I'm not up to the job, and their precious little prodigies, like Anna, and that pedagogue, Max. Because I know his game, the sonofabitch. He's trying to be complicit with me, he's trying to implicate me. How dare he! Hermann Broch! A great writer! Among the hundreds, the thousands of writers who suffered at their stupid hands! Paul Celan! Who drowned himself in the Seine! Bruno Schulz! Primo Levi! Ours! They belong to the Jews! May God bless them, may they rest in peace! (*Weeps*) I'm sorry.

**Jane** Is it true?

**Adele** What? That I'm totally unworthy of taking a single dime from them?

Jane Are you?  
Adele Yes! (*Pause*) No! No! No! (*Out*)

\*

## Scene 20

*High school corridor.*

Adele It's my turn to apologize.  
Max Yes?  
Adele I'm sorry.  
Max Please. There's no need.  
Adele And so, I want to be friends. I know that all new faculty must be approved by the, uh, faculty.  
Max Yes, that's true.  
Adele Please mention to Mrs. Wohl, my apologies and best regards.  
Max I will do so, gladly.  
Adele And about the teaching.  
Max The teaching?  
Adele Yes. How important.  
Max Oh, of course.  
Adele I read "The Sleepwalkers."  
Max Did you? Excellent!  
Adele Yes. And I know why.  
Max Why?  
Adele You recommended it.  
Max It's great literature, of course!  
Adele Yes! The brutal Germans in their shitty bourgeois world!  
How redeeming for you now.



**Max** No, no, I meant the accuracy, the rhythms, the thoroughness of his text.

**Adele** Yeah, yeah. The thoroughness of his text. Now, excuse me. And my regards to Mrs. Wohl.

**Max** Tell her yourself.

**Adele** Pardon?

**Max** Tell her yourself.

**Adele** You'll let me into your house?

**Max** Yes.

**Adele** You'll give me dinner?

**Max** Of course.

**Adele** (*Half aside*) Your wife will wait on me?

**Max** Yes.

**Adele** (*Aside*) You won't beat me?

**Max** Please?

**Adele** (*Aside*) You won't piss on me?

**Max** Mrs. Feuerstein?

**Adele** Call me, Adele. (*Period bell*)

**Max** Adele.

**Adele** Alright. I'll come.

**Max** Excellent! (*Out*)

\*

## Scene 21

*The WOHL apartment, as imagined by ADELE in her play.*

**Max** I think she was jealous.

**Frieda** Of what?

**Max** Of Hermann Broch, who could truly write. A case of literary jealousy, Frieda.

**Frieda** But she's coming?

**Max** Yes. At first she was abrupt, quite cold. An hour later, she apologized. Expressly to you.

**Frieda** That means she wants me to hang myself.

**Max** No, it doesn't.

**Frieda** I'm ready. Tell her she can set the knot.

**Max** Baum spoke with her.

**Frieda** And?

**Max** She is very happy for her job.

**Frieda** Good.

**Max** She seemed repentant.

**Frieda** Max?

**Max** What?

**Frieda** Are you joking? Are you joking about repentance?

**Max** I think she was genuinely repentant, that she is grateful for her job, and that she loves her students.

**Frieda** Are there Jews? In the class. Are there Jewish students in the class?

**Max** Of course, Frieda.

**Frieda** Watch. She will feed them honey, milk and honey. They, especially. The Jewish ones. Watch.

**Max** He found her difficult.

**Frieda** Baum? Ha!

**Max** Neurotic, perhaps.

**Frieda** Ha! (*Apartment door bell rings*)

**Max** The door, Frieda.

**Frieda** No.

**Max** I'll go.

**Frieda** I won't see her.

**Max** Frieda!

**Frieda** Alright. Be quiet. (*Dim out as she goes to the "door."*)

### End of Act One

## ACT 2

### Scene 1

*WOHL apartment. Real time. The doorbell rings. FRIEDA uses a walking aid as she receives ADELE FEUERSTEIN.*

- Frieda** Mrs. Feuerstein! Welcome!
- Adele** Oh, thank you. I was afraid...
- Frieda** This is the place! Please, come in.
- Adele** Thank you.
- Frieda** *(Offering her hand)* Frieda Wohl! How do you do?
- Adele** *(Breathless)* Oh. Adele Feuerstein.
- Frieda** Here is Max.
- Max** Hello, Mrs. Feuerstein. You've met my wife, Frieda Wohl?
- Adele** *(Timid)* Of course. Frau Wohl.
- Frieda** Please, call me Frieda.
- Adele** Frieda. I am Adele.
- Frieda** Adele. What a nice name.
- Max** Max.
- Adele** Max, I know. Max and Frieda.
- Max** Let me take your coat.
- Adele** Thank you.
- Max** Would you like a drink, Adele?
- Adele** Yes, thank you.

**Max**           Scotch? Vodka? Schnapps?  
**Adele**           Scotch and soda.  
**Max:**           Ah. Excellent. And you, darling?  
**Frieda**         A glass of white, dear. (*To MRS. F.*) Do you smoke?  
**Adele**           Uh, yes...I do.  
**Frieda**         Would you like...?  
**Adele**           No, thank you. I have these...  
**Frieda**         American.  
**Adele**           Uh, American, yes.  
**Frieda**         So. You are originally from Poland?  
**Adele**           No. Germany.  
**Frieda**         Oh. Max said—  
**Adele**           Hamburg.  
**Frieda**         Hamburg?  
**Max**            I told you, darling. (*Fixes drinks*)  
**Frieda**         When did you leave Hamburg?  
**Adele**           My father owned a shoe store there. In Hamburg. They  
                  broke our windows. We went to Poland to get away from  
                  those people. My father and mother and I, and a brother  
                  and a sister.  
**Frieda**         You are a Jewess.  
**Adele**           I am.  
**Frieda**         Of course, you are.  
**Adele**           But then they came after us. There, in Poland.  
**Frieda**         Max?  
**Max**            (*Off*) Yes, darling?  
**Frieda**         Did you hear?  
**Max**            Yes, I heard.  
**Adele**           My father worked in his shoe store from seven in the  
                  morning until nine in the evening. Every day but Saturday.

He did everything. The books, the inventory, customers, the display, everything. He worked his heart out. My father was a wonderful man, serious and humble, learned and practical. Are you all right?

**Frieda** Yes. Quite.

**Adele** I'm glad.

**Max** (*Entering, with the drinks*) Here you are.

**Adele** Thank you.

**Max** Cheers.

**Adele** *L'Chaim*. This is wonderful. I've been so looking forward to meeting you. You can't imagine.

**Frieda** And I.

**Adele** Really?

**Frieda** Yes. Max has told me all about you. It's hard for me...

**Adele** To go about.

**Frieda** Of course.

**Adele** Oh, you musn't be ashamed of your legs.

**Frieda** (*Startled*) Oh!

**Max** She does very well, really.

**Frieda** I do go about, you know.

**Adele** Yes, I saw you in the cafeteria.

**Frieda** Oh?

**Adele** And at the faculty orientation, or whatever that was.

**Frieda** The barbecue. For faculty and their families.

**Adele** So American.

**Frieda** And I rarely miss church. You attend...?

**Adele** I'm a Jew.

**Frieda** Oh, yes. I just thought...

**Adele** We don't believe in Jesus.

**Frieda** Of course, forgive me.

**Adele** Do you?

**Frieda** *(Cold)* Yes, Mrs. Feuerstein, I do.

**Adele** Adele.

**Frieda** Adele. And how are you liking our school?

**Adele** It isn't easy for me.

**Frieda** Oh, how so?

**Adele** The level. I'm not sure how to work on this level. The high school level. The discipline, they don't read, this is difficult for me.

**Frieda** Max?

**Max** I'm there for her, Frieda. Any time, dear.

**Frieda** Good. What level are you used to, if you don't mind my asking?

**Adele** The graduate level, actually.

**Frieda** I see.

**Adele** Yes, I have quite a lot of experience with that.

**Frieda** What experience do you have, actually?

**Adele** In Germany. I miss it so much. Germany. Do you?

**Frieda** No. I love it here. Here everyone is equal.

**Adele** There is a lot of race prejudice. And the rich are more equal than the poor.

**Frieda** That goes without saying. But you are left alone here, to do what you like, to be yourself. And if you work hard, you will succeed.

**Max** There are the taxes, of course.

**Frieda** Don't you agree, Mrs. Feuerstein?

**Adele** Adele.

**Frieda** Adele?

**Adele** No, I don't agree. Necessarily. Good people can sometimes fail. *(Pause)* And you? What do you do?

**Frieda** I tutor, Mrs. Feuerstein. And I write...papers.  
**Max** She is a scholar!  
**Adele** Oh. Good. (*A timer goes off*)  
**Frieda** That will be the roast, Max! (*MAX stands, MRS. FEUERSTEIN heaves a huge sigh. Out*)

\*

## Scene 2

*JANE's office.*

**Adele** I lied to them. About my father. I told them he ran a shoe-store. A petit bourgeoisie. In actual fact, he was an idiot.  
**Jane** What kind of idiot?  
**Adele** Good-natured. A good-natured idiot. (*Pause*) Am I being harsh?  
**Jane** You are. Yes. (*Pause*) So how was dinner?  
**Adele** It was awful.  
**Jane** How so?  
**Adele** She dominated me. The woman completely dominated me.  
**Jane** And you were of aware of it.  
**Adele** I was aware of it every instant.  
**Jane** And Max?  
**Adele** Max served the roast. When I got home, I wrote another scene, a different scene. (*Crosses to the WOHL apartment—light and sound as imagined in her play.*)  
**Frieda** Max?  
**Max** I must go out for ice cream, Frieda.  
**Frieda** Must you?



**Max** Yes. I'll be back. *(Exits)*

**Frieda** What do you want?

**Mrs. F.** I want you.

**Frieda** I never saw you before you came here.

**Mrs. F.** No. But I saw you. In Korskowala. You piece of shit.

**Frieda** How dare you. To speak to me like this.

**Mrs. F.** But I couldn't find you. What a honey you are, Frieda. What a sweetie-pie. What legs. I can't wait to get my hands on you. I'm crazy about you.

**Frieda** *(Falling to her knees)* Forgive us. Forgive us and leave us alone. Please.

**Mrs. F.** Not that, darling.

**Frieda** Please.

**Mrs. F.** Get up.

**Frieda** Please.

**Mrs. F.** Although I like you like that.

**Frieda** Tell me! Are you Israeli? Is there a group, or a team? Are you alone?

**Mrs. F.** No, Yes, and Yes.

**Frieda** You are tormenting me.

**Mrs. F.** Yes.

**Frieda** What do you want?

**Mrs. F.** Max, I'm not so sure, but you, I want you to lick my ass. After that, I don't know. Maybe I'll fuck you. Would you like that?

**Frieda** No!

**Mrs. F.** Bitch! *(Grabs her by the hair)* Get up! *(Pulls her to her feet and kisses her wildly. FRIEDA goes limp. MRS. F. lets go of her and she collapses to the floor.)* All right. If that's how you want it. But I won't participate in this

sort of thing. It's disgusting. (*Exits. FRIEDA struggles to her feet. Out*)

\*

### Scene 3

*High school corridor.*

- Dr. Baum** Mrs. Feuerstein!
- Adele** Oh! Dr. Baum!
- Dr. Baum** How are you?
- Adele** I'm fine.
- Dr. Baum** Good! Are you writing?
- Adele** I beg your pardon?
- Dr. Baum** Are you writing something these days?
- Adele** Oh. Yes. I am.
- Dr. Baum** Good! Poems?
- Adele** Uh, no.
- Dr. Baum** Ah. Something new?
- Adele** Yes. I never know how to answer that question.
- Dr. Baum** Which one, Mrs. Feuerstein?
- Adele** About writing. What do people mean by it? I'm always writing. I have been writing since I was a girl.
- Dr. Baum** You are so fortunate to have a creative faculty, Mrs. Feuerstein.
- Adele** Oh. Thank you.
- Dr. Baum** The special talent, the ability. Not all of us have it, you know.
- Adele** No, that's true.

**Dr. Baum** I think the rest of us feel curiosity. And envy, perhaps.  
As it happens, I just read some poetry of yours.

**Adele** Oh! Did you?

**Dr. Baum** Yes. Max gave it to me, a little pamphlet...

**Adele** Max?

**Dr. Baum** About the Cathars, and revenge. Wonderful!

**Adele** You think so?

**Dr. Baum** I think so!

**Adele** Really?

**Dr. Baum** Oh, yes. But, tell me...

**Adele** What does it mean?

**Dr. Baum** Well, no, not that...

**Adele** It means what it says. It is a text, evoking historical Karma.

**Dr. Baum** Yes, that's right. That seems exactly right.

**Adele** The sound of words makes another dimension. In the case  
of my little pamphlet, there is the dimension of history.  
Like an echo. It is what is meant by text.

**Dr. Baum** Ah. Of course.

**Adele** Well.

**Dr. Baum** I understand.

**Adele** Do you?

**Dr. Baum** I think I do.

**Adele** I don't mean to...

**Dr. Baum** No, no...

**Adele** Sound superior... (*Tearfully*) They have taken away the  
text...

**Dr. Baum** Excuse me?

**Adele** I feel sorry for the young, for the Annas of this world, for  
it will be a world without meaning. (*Recovers*) Forgive me.

**Dr. Baum** Of course.

Adele           Actually, who cares? Certainly not Anna.

Dr. Baum       And how is Anna doing?

Adele           As well as expected, I think.

Dr. Baum       Good. And her writing?

Adele           Oh, she is a prodigy, that one. *(Bell rings)* Dr. Baum!

Dr. Baum       Mrs. Feuerstein?

Adele           I'm sorry, I was just wondering—should Anna be allowed,  
in class, to take the time there?

Dr. Baum       Anna?

Adele           To do homework? In my class?

Dr. Baum       Of course not.

Adele           Because they should all try to write in class.

Dr. Baum       I quite agree.

Adele           It's pointless to lecture about such things. And they won't  
do it otherwise.

Dr. Baum       It's your class, after all, Mrs. Feuerstein. *(Leaving)* You  
must do what you think best.

Adele           Thank you, Dr. Baum! *(Out)*

\*

#### Scene 4

*Sound and light cues: FRIEDA and MAX in the WOHL apartment, as imagined by ADELE in her play.*

Frieda          We're on some sort of list.

Max             How do you mean?

Frieda          A list, Max. A list. I got down on my knees. Now it's  
your turn.

Max I don't know if I can do that.  
Frieda Sure you can, Max. You just fall.  
Max Yes. I will. Why not?  
Frieda She'll kill us anyway, Max. Eventually.  
Max Then we must bear this, and go on.  
Frieda Oh, you're such a Christian, Max.  
Max Yes, now I am a Christian.  
Frieda Not really, Max.  
Max Well.  
Frieda Who can obey the Commandments.  
Max I try.  
Frieda Yes, you try.  
Max I have given up my hatred, I have given up my fear.  
Frieda Of the Jews.  
Max Of the Jews.  
Frieda And now you're a martyr.  
Max No, it's you, Frieda.  
Frieda Me?  
Max Yes. We'll give her what she wants.  
Frieda You don't know what you're saying.  
Max I do, perhaps.  
Frieda Do you?  
Max We must play our parts, Frieda. (*Out*)

\*

## Scene 5

ADELE in the high school corridor. Enter MAX.

- Adele Sit down, Max! (*Startled, he looks around, remains standing*)  
Oh, how is Frau Wohl?
- Max She's very well, thank you.
- Adele Good. I'm glad. Do your students do their homework?
- Max Yes, for the most part they do, yes. Why?
- Adele I don't give homework. Is that a problem?
- Max Well, of course, for European History, they must have homework. That must be understood from the beginning.
- Adele But not in creative writing—
- Max Otherwise, it's an impossible situation.
- Adele Not in creative writing, which is an elective, and they don't do it. So they learn in class or they don't learn anything.
- Max Ah. I don't think it can be taught at all.
- Adele No, not that it can be taught. I do try to make an impression, give a sense of values, of discovery. What do they say?
- Max They don't talk about anyone the way they talk about you.
- Adele Oh, I'm glad. It's positive?
- Max Yes.
- Adele What do they say?
- Max Intense.
- Adele Oh. Do they mean "too intense?"
- Max I think they mean intense.
- Adele Sometimes it's not what they mean. Sometimes it's an annoyance. But they like it?
- Max They like you.

**Adele** They do? You see, I'm very insecure. I want their love. I'm desperate for it. I don't think they're learning anything. I'm embarrassed. I'm embarrassed to have spoken so forcefully, to have cared too much, to have exposed my intelligence... and my vanity.

**Max** We all have our difficulties, Mrs. Feuerstein. *(Bell)* I'm sorry.

**Adele** No, no.

**Max** My class.

**Adele** Too much stinking self-pity. *(He starts to go)* Max?

*(MAX stays. Light change and sound cue for ADELE's play)*

**Mrs. F.** Is she fucking you, Max? Your wife, Frieda, is she fucking you?

**Max** You must think I have no sensitivity at all.

**Mrs. F.** I think you're autistic, basically. Even now, standing there, you can't think of something to say, you can't think, you're trying to find a reason for me to respect you—you toy. In Korskowala, in '41, the German Army was passing through. Very nice, really. Very courteous. Young men, boys, very polite, pleasant. And we, we tried our best to accommodate them. We smiled, we shared. And then, one day, overnight, they changed. These nice young men became cruel and nasty bullies. They started cursing us and threatening us, and pushing us around. Overnight. What had happened? They had discovered that Korskowala was a Jewish town. Someone had thrown a switch, and the minds of these automatons were changed. Now, they saw "Jews" in the town of Korskowala, which from that moment on was

doomed, of course. Toys. Little piggie toys. Little toys with a “Jew” button on its head. You press the button and the eyes light up and it makes a fist. Yes, history these brats must study. There I give assignments. There I crack the whip.

**Max** Are there others?

**Mrs. F.** You mean Avengers, like me? I’m not going to tell you, Max. *(Bell)*

**Max** Excuse me.

**Mrs. F.** When you make love to her, when you fuck her, Max? Do you lose yourself in her? Do you die in her, Max? Do you drown yourself in Frieda? *(He exits. Out)*

\*

## Scene 6

*MRS. F. appears in the WOHL apartment, as imagined in ADELE’S play.*

**Frieda** Oh.

**Mrs. F.** I thought you must be thinking about me.

**Frieda** You have a nerve.

**Mrs. F.** My nerves are shot, Frieda. So I came over. May I?  
*(Enters)* Relax. I won’t force you to do anything. It’s up to you. Whatever you’d like. You can kiss me, embrace me. Whatever you’d like, Frieda.

**Frieda** Max will be home at any moment.

**Mrs. F.** Oh, you’re a tease. The way you murmur, the way you pose. You’re a kitten, Frieda.

**Frieda** No. Wait. I’ll come to you.



Mrs. F. Oh! When?

Frieda In the afternoon. Perhaps tomorrow.

Mrs. F. Give me a kiss, then. Give me a kiss, Frieda. (*FRIEDA kisses MRS. F. lightly on the mouth.*)

Frieda There.

Mrs. F. Please don't hurt me. Please. I love you.

Frieda Don't say those words to me.

Mrs. F. I love you.

Frieda You must go now.

Mrs. F. Sit down you kraut cunt or I'll wring your neck. (*FRIEDA sits*) You want to know what I was doing in Germany after the war?

Frieda No. I don't care what you were doing in Germany.

Mrs. F. You're a liar. In April of 1945, I was still alive. In a barn. I didn't know I was alive. I was delirious. I heard voices, the voices of angels. These voices were in Yiddish, in Hebrew, and in English. I thought I was in paradise. Such beautiful voices, human voices. These men were from the Jewish Brigade of the British Army. We were on German soil. The war was over. Sunlight was shining through the door. These men had deserted the British and were on a campaign of revenge. They were a team of nine, well armed, with jeeps. Most went on ahead. You see, I was so sick in that barn. I could not eat. I could not move. Along with thirty-seven other Jewish women, I had been marched from Neuengamme to Sandbostel, Germany, without food or water, without shelter, in rags. It was a way to kill us off before the Russians set us free. Oh! (*Gags. Frieda gets her water*) Rage overcomes me. Those two were the first on my list.

Frieda Which two?

- Mrs. F.** Ah, you do care. A man and a woman. Huber, a cop from Hamburg, and Frau Buchmann, who had been a Gestapo typist. I killed them both, eventually. (*Long silence, MRS. F. lights a cigarette*) Max's whole batallion, of course, had come to Korskowala. Lieutenant Brand was the commanding officer.
- Frieda** This is true.
- Mrs. F.** He's next, Frieda. Lieutenant Brand. Him and, of course—his little wife. And he has kids, I understand. Is that so?
- Frieda** I think you should go now. (*Noises off*)
- Mrs. F.** Here's Max.
- Frieda** Go.
- Mrs. F.** Just a minute.
- Frieda** We're expected.
- Mrs. F.** You're expected? Where? (*Enter MAX*) Where are they expecting you?
- Max** Ah, Mrs. Feuerstein.
- Mrs. F.** Sit down, Max. I'm not finished. (*MAX sits*) I want to share with you what the problem is with the list, yes?
- Max** The list?
- Mrs. F.** Your wife wanted to know if I had a list.
- Frieda** I did not.
- Mrs. F.** May I?
- Max** Yes.
- Mrs. F.** Well, Herr Huber and Frau Buchmann, as they walked us around Germany, barefoot and starving, they had to stop and eat themselves sometimes, have a few beers, take a nap, go to the bathroom, etc. We would come to a town and they would put us somewhere, a park, a train station—starving, emaciated, freezing women who meant no one

any harm at all—just leave us to the townsfolk. They knew we would be watched. Not only watched, but abused. Not only abused, sometimes murdered. Ordinary Germans and their children, spitting, throwing rocks, setting little fires to burn us with...So, I would have to include whole towns, wouldn't I? Then why not the whole country? Why not every single German pig in Germany? You see? You see the problem? Well, it's a question of appetite, really. I suppose. Of course, the hope was that we'd obliterate the place. I really think so. I think the Jewish scientists who made the atomic bomb, they had in mind a little present for the Germans, not the Japanese. What could the Jews have against the Japanese? So...Excuse me. I'm ranting. My friends, in those days, the young lions, they got their fill of revenge and they went home to Palestine. They went back to their lives in the Holy Land.

**Frieda** And you? Why not you?

**Mrs. F.** Good question, Frieda. It must be that I still have an appetite. I'm insatiable.

**Frieda** Please go now.

**Mrs. F.** I'm going. Tomorrow, Frieda? (*FRIEDA looks at MAX, nods.*) Good. I can't wait. (*Exits*)

**Max** There are no others.

**Frieda** How do you know?

**Max** She seems to me to be completely alone. Utterly and completely alone.

**Frieda** She's an assassin, Max.

**Max** I think she's mad, Frieda. An assassin, and quite mad. (*Out*)

\*

## Scene 7

Office.

**Adele** Now I'm thinking she's not even a Jew. Mrs. F. *(Pause)* Maybe I'm losing heart. Maybe she's frightened, or stupid. But then it would mean she is imagining the whole thing. And it's a true story that I'm telling. How she walked across Germany in the snow. But I feel I have no right. I feel guilty.

**Jane** Why?

**Adele** Nobody cares anymore. They don't want to know about it. They don't want to hear about it. *(Pause)* It's sacred. More than sacred. Unspeakable. Beyond language. *(Pause)* I'm practically a Gentile, the way I live. That's another reason. This causes me anguish, but there's nothing I can do about it. Now I'm an American, agonized by failure, by choices, tormented by sex. Thank God I don't drive a car. I refuse to watch television. I think the whole country is mildly insane because of television. I try to consider my future, but what future can I have? Mrs. F., she has a reason for living. She has an agenda.

**Jane** You're an artist.

**Adele** That doesn't count.

**Jane** Your work counts.

**Adele** For what?

**Jane** Yourself.

**Adele** That is not an agenda. *(Pause)* For anyone but me. Mrs. F., she has a bigger idea than self-development. In my opinion. *(Pause)* She was put in a camp, she was in a labor camp for three years. It's true.

**Jane** Yes, I know.

**Adele** I can't...I have difficulty...I have difficulty writing my name. Something gets between me and my hand. My own hand. I want to cry, thinking about it.

**Jane** Cry.

**Adele** It's a scrawl, that appears, very tense and awkward, and I do it wrong.

**Jane** Why wrong?

**Adele** Wrong. It comes out wrong.

**Jane** When does this happen?

**Adele** I'm correcting papers.

**Jane** And when you write?

**Adele** When I write, it comes, it just comes. And when it doesn't, I wait, or I pray, or I quit. Or I cry. (*Weeps*)

**Jane** There are tissues beside you.

**Adele** Thanks. I have no control. No control over my words, my feelings, my mind. None. Therefore I must be just.

**Jane** Go on.

**Adele** And not judge others. And have faith. And hope for the best. (*Pause. Start dim out*) Does that sound right? Does that sound good? (*Crosses to ADELE'S "apartment"—light and sound cue indicating scene imagined by ADELE in her play*)

**Mrs. F.** The old Fathers, they knew the truth. (*Silence*) Frieda?

**Frieda** The truth, yes.

**Mrs. F.** Yes, Adele.

**Frieda** Yes, Adele.

**Mrs. F.** Of course, it's beyond you. You're a Gentile.

**Frieda** What did they know?

**Mrs. F.** What did they know, Adele?

**Frieda** What did they know, Adele?

**Mrs. F.** They knew of helplessness, Frieda, in the face of temptation. What it must have been like for you.

**Frieda** No, not for me.

**Mrs. F.** Not for me, Adele.

**Frieda** Not for me, Adele.

**Mrs. F.** In a moment, you're committing horrors, burning children. And the next moment, you continue. The temptation is there. The moment has been arranged. Here is Frieda, she moves, she burns a child. And then the next in line. The next child.

**Frieda** No.

**Mrs. F.** No, Adele.

**Frieda** Please, I said, no.

**Mrs. F.** It requires a certain separation. Is that what you're doing now? Like a prostitute?

**Frieda** No. Please don't say that.

**Mrs. F.** You said no until I started kissing you, and then you said yes.

**Frieda** Yes. Yes.

**Mrs. F.** It's all been arranged, Frieda, and you have no choice. But I enjoyed myself, truly. You're wild. You're fantastic. I'm crazy about you. (*Out*)

\*

### **Scene 8**

*Office. JANE and SAMUELSON.*

**Jane** She's slipping away.

**Samuelson** How so?

**Jane** I don't know who she really is. I should call the school, but I don't want to interfere.

**Samuelson** That would be drastic, Jane.

**Jane** I feel like there's some confusion going on with her students and her colleagues.

**Samuelson** With Anna?

**Jane** Yes. With Anna, and one of the teachers there, a German, I told you about him, Max, Max Wohl and his wife, Frieda. *(Pause)* She knows them. In her play. The German couple, the Wohls.

**Samuelson** A fantasy, where Mrs. F. is no longer the inferior neurotic, but an Avenging Angel.

**Jane** It's the way she's been talking lately.

**Samuelson** She's not trying to talk to you, is what you're saying.

**Jane** Yes. She's working something out, but it's not for me.

**Samuelson** Well, it was never for you, was it?

**Jane** No.

**Samuelson** It was never for your benefit.

**Jane** Oh, I see. That's right. Thank you. *(Out)*

\*

### Scene 9

*Office. JANE and ADELE*

**Adele** Man is a predatory insect.

**Jane** That's not you talking.

**Adele** Why not? Why isn't it me talking?

**Jane** Because you're capable of love. You know what compassion is. You have ideals. There are things you care about.

**Adele** I am the sole survivor of my line. Therefore I have become a man.

**Jane** Was that you, or Mrs. F.?

**Adele** For thousands of years the Fathers wrestled with this question, Jane. The Jewish Fathers, the Sages of Old. *(Pause)*

**Jane** What question, Adele?

**Adele** The question of predation, Jane. Which is not so far from the question of ego, is it?

**Jane** I don't know. Maybe not. And what was their answer, the Sages?

**Adele** I guess the answer of the Fathers was discipline, observance.

**Jane** Where does that leave you now?

**Adele** Now?

**Jane** Yes.

**Adele** Sitting here. *(Pause)* I feel a longing, but it's impossible. How could I be Orthodox? Already, I'm *treyf*, unclean. How could I wear a wig? And in the second place, I'm still angry at this so-called God. Does he have a beard, like my grandfather? Of course, it must mean something more than that. That's what I think about the Fathers, that they knew something. About God. But they had to give up a lot, and I have deep weaknesses. And when I see a Jew who openly declares himself a Jew, I have contradictory feelings: "Don't be so conspicuous, don't act so superior. It's dangerous." On the other hand, I love the sound of Yiddish, I love the look of the Hebrew letters. I...I'm sorry. Is it time?

**Jane** Why are you sorry?

**Adele** I was raving.

**Jane** You weren't. *(Pause)* Well, we have to leave it there.

**Adele** Is it time?



**Jane** Yes.

**Adele** What would you say?

**Jane** I would say you feel unequal.

**Adele** We spoke about that. Max and Frieda and I. Equality in America. They are happy to be here in the land of freedom, safe and sound.

**Jane** Do you not qualify?

**Adele** The Jews are never safe.

**Jane** You are not safe?

**Adele** And as for soundness, I don't know. I think I'm sound, and then words jump out of my mouth. Or I become frightened. Anna teases me, provokes me. I said, "Why do you do that?" She said, "You bring it out of me. I can't help myself." (*Weeps. Dim out*)

\*

### Scene 10

*Sound and light cue for WOHL apartment, as imagined by ADELE in her play.*

**Max** Are you in love with her?

**Frieda** I don't know. I don't know what that means. Yes. I'm in love with her. I want her. I want to be with her.

**Max** You fool.

**Frieda** I think about her.

**Max** At the end of the term she'll be fired.

**Frieda** And then?

**Max** And then we'll be rid of her.

**Frieda** Remember Korskowala? On Niemen Street, near the plaza. They set up a little stand, a little box with seats. They served little ham sandwiches with champagne. Do you remember that? They brought in a roundup, some fifty Jewish men, and whipped and taunted and tortured them, and then they butchered them in the plaza, and then they hosed the plaza down. That was the entertainment for the cop from Hamburg and his blonde cunt.

**Max** And so now you repent?

**Frieda** Yes. And for you, too.

**Max** Yes, I see.

**Frieda** What else is there, Max? I serve her. I give her pleasure. What else is there? *(Pause)* She'll let us live, Max, in our Godless little hell together. And finally she will leave us, Max. And that will be all. We'll be desolated.

**Max** We can return to Germany.

**Frieda** Yes? And do what?

**Max** We'll find a school. We'll live simply. We'll be chaste.

**Frieda** We'll never be rid of her, Max, no matter where we go—  
until—

**Max** Until?

**Frieda** Until extinction, Max. *(Out)*

\*

## Scene 11

*High school corridor, with BAUM.*

- Adele** Next time you'll ask my permission before you come into my classroom.
- Dr. Baum** The principal suggests that I drop in sometimes, unannounced.
- Adele** Oh.
- Dr. Baum** But I don't think it's a very good idea, really.
- Adele** I'm sorry. So? What did you think?
- Dr. Baum** I was favorably impressed.
- Adele** Really?
- Dr. Baum** Yes. You are an excellent teacher.
- Adele** Thank you. What did you like the most?
- Dr. Baum** Well, I liked your commitment, your persistence.
- Adele** Ah.
- Dr. Baum** Your methods.
- Adele** Ah. Socratic.
- Dr. Baum** Yes.
- Adele** And the topic?
- Dr. Baum** Interesting.
- Adele** Yes, we made a little touch upon the Spanish Inquisition.
- Dr. Baum** Unusual, I thought.
- Adele** We call a spade a spade, Mr. Baum, I mean Dr. Baum.
- Dr. Baum** That's fine.
- Adele** People don't like the competition.
- Dr. Baum** Excuse me?
- Adele** As in the case of the Spanish Inquisition, in reference to the Jewish people.
- Dr. Baum** I see. An excellent point, Mrs. Feuerstein.

**Adele** The so-called *Conversos*. But that's not what you want to talk about, is it?

**Dr. Baum** I don't mind.

**Adele** I would like to take this opportunity to apologize as much as I can. I'm sorry, those words came out of my mouth wrong.

**Dr. Baum** No, no.

**Adele** I don't mean to sound so smart.

**Dr. Baum** Never mind.

**Adele** My family was destroyed when I was a girl, and sometimes I have...I'm sure Anna, for example, is twelve different people in the course of an hour. In fact I know she is, in forty minutes, which is entirely too short a period, Dr. Baum, in which to teach anybody anything.

**Dr. Baum** Yes, I agree. How goes it with Anna?

**Adele** Anna? Fine. What can I say? I think she's a peach one minute and a monster the next. And she? What does she say?

**Dr. Baum** Well, nothing, really...

**Adele** What is her background? I know she's Jewish. What do her parents do? Are they divorced? Do they have money?  
(*Period bell*) Oh! Excuse me. I apologize. Again. (*Out*)

\*

## Scene 12

*Mrs. F. and FRIEDA in MRS. FEUERSTEIN'S play.*

**Frieda** You smoke too much and drink too much.  
**Mrs. F.** Who asked you?

**Frieda** What's wrong?

**Mrs. F.** I have weaknesses. I'm entitled to my weaknesses. Before, I had no right. Vengeance was all I had. This gave me power. In exchange for power, I forbade weakness.

**Frieda** And now?

**Mrs. F.** Now I'm feeling weak, thanks to you.

**Frieda** Is it my fault?

**Mrs. F.** They knew. The Sages.

**Frieda** The Jews.

**Mrs. F.** Of course, the Jews. The Germans are an envious, money-grubbing, pagan people. Heathen. Christianity had no effect on them.

**Frieda** What did they know? The Sages.

**Mrs. F.** That only the love of God has meaning.

**Frieda** I agree with them.

**Mrs. F.** I forgot. You're a churchgoer. My husband, you know, jumped out of his hotel room in London, years ago.

**Frieda** Your husband?

**Mrs. F.** Yes, from the twenty-ninth floor. He put his phylacteries on, and a tallis, he said his morning prayers, and he stepped out of the window. I understand now very well. He had taken revenge, and it wasn't enough.

**Frieda** And you?

**Mrs. F.** What, darling?

**Frieda** Is it enough?

**Mrs. F.** No, it's never enough. (*Out*)

\*

### Scene 13

Office. JANE and ADELE.

- Jane Last time, Adele.
- Adele Yes?
- Jane I felt very uneasy.
- Adele I'm sorry.
- Jane So I've been thinking about you. You seemed depressed.
- Adele I was depressed.
- Jane You see how it colors your thinking.
- Adele I do.
- Jane Good. It's not a crime or anything.
- Adele I know that.
- Jane Neuroses is a mental condition.
- Adele A disease.
- Jane Yes, although I don't like the connotations.
- Adele An unease.
- Jane And you're getting better, much better.
- Adele Really?
- Jane Yes.
- Adele By talking about it?
- Jane Yes, you can see your way through it. See it for what it is.  
(Pause) What are you thinking?
- Adele I was thinking how Frieda came to Mrs. F. Mrs. F. didn't have to seduce her or anything. She goes to Mrs. F. and she submits. But I think it threw her, Mrs. F. I think it threw her a little bit.
- Jane It sounds like it threw you.
- Adele A little bit.
- Jane Why?

**Adele** She lost power, Mrs. F. She lost some of her power. (*Out*)

\*

#### **Scene 14**

*Light and sound cue: high school corridor, as imagined in ADELE's play.*

**Max** Watch out.

**Mrs. F.** Are you warning me, Max?

**Max** I'm warning you.

**Mrs. F.** I know. My job is in jeopardy. No one likes the competition. As I said to Dr. Baum. (*Pause*) From the Jews, Max. (*Pause*) I love it. My job, I mean. I just love it. It's the best, the very best one I've ever had. The only thing I enjoyed more was pushing people in front of trains and off of ferries. Some I threw from rooftops or out of windows. Others I poisoned. Germans, like you. Perfect strangers. At random.

**Max** Huber and Buchman.

**Mrs. F.** What about them?

**Max** Huber was killed on the Eastern Front.

**Mrs. F.** You scumbag. That's a lie.

**Max** Frau Buchman died in a firestorm after an air raid.

**Mrs. F.** Lies. I put a bullet through that fat sow's head.

**Max** I'm to make a report.

**Mrs. F.** One false move from you Max, and you'll be hanging from the nearest lamppost.

**Max** Who will hang me?

Mrs. F. I will. In honor of Korskowala.  
Max Korskowala no longer exists.  
Mrs. F. Yes it does, Max. In the mind. It shines like Heaven there.  
(Pause) Prepare to die, Max. (Out)

\*

## Scene 15

Office. JANE and ADELE

Adele So he comes back at me with Huber and Buchman. Not at me, at Mrs. F, in my play, in my own play. Which I think is hugely ironic. (Pause) Do you see the problem? Have you talked to your shrink about it? About evil?

Jane Yes.

Adele And what did he say?

Jane He felt incompetent to deal with it.

Adele Ha! That's good! Because it's outside the realm of human competence, isn't it?

Jane I don't know.

Adele Why don't you know? (Pause) There was the accusation of deicide, you know.

Jane What is that?

Adele God murder. (Pause) For which there was no possible explanation, but the accusation was made in the Bible. And so they were trapped, the Jews, by history. And now we are trapped again, because there can be no justice, no recompense, no just revenge.

Jane Why not let it go?



**Adele** Let it go?  
**Jane** Let it go.  
**Adele** I see.  
**Jane** There's nothing to be done.  
**Adele** No.  
**Jane** No.  
**Adele** But see it through.  
**Jane** See it through?  
**Adele** See it through to the end.  
**Jane** The end?  
**Adele** In my play. *(Pause)* And I'm going to lose my job.  
**Jane** How do you know?  
**Adele** Because of Anna, the little cow. *(Pause)* What's going to happen to me? I'm feeling sorry for myself. Higher animals, they're capable of anything. Ask your shrink about that, why don't you?  
**Jane** All right. Adele?  
**Adele** In the old Hebrew, there's no future, there's no tense, there is only presence, which is either perfect or imperfect, finished or unfinished, and the saying is an action. You see? The words are the meaning. *(Pause, bitterly)* That's what I'm thinking about, Jane. *(Spits)* Humanity. Anyway, Mrs. F., she wants to even the score. Okay? *(Out)*

\*

## Scene 16

ADELE's apartment, as imagined in her play.

- Frieda           What's wrong?
- Mrs. F           My arm is twitching. Oh, my. It's nothing. It's desire.
- Frieda           I'm here for you. Kiss me.
- Mrs. F           I hope it's not my nervous system.
- Frieda           What?
- Mrs. F.          I mean my arm, darling. I fear hospitals the most. I'm claustrophobic. I have to be able to move. (*Lights a cigarette*) Smoking is like moving. It's an escape mechanism, a privacy. I'm passive, but volatile. This could lead to murder. Why the Sages feared. God. The death rattle.
- Frieda           Adele? Why do you keep speaking about that, Adele?  
(*Silence*) You always make me pay.
- Mrs. F.          No, it's you. You judge me, you negate me.
- Frieda           Because I saw you. Therefore I must be punished.  
Is that right?
- Mrs. F.          No, you do it to yourself. You're alone, by yourself.  
Judging, negating.
- Frieda           Oh? I don't have to pay?
- Mrs. F.          I'm not doing anything to you. You are your own tormentor.
- Frieda           Shut up! You don't know! You can't see me!
- Mrs. F.          I do see you.
- Frieda           You are not above me!
- Mrs. F.          I'm trying to explain. But you don't listen. Do I have to scrape it into your skin?
- Frieda           You don't love me.
- Mrs. F.          I do love you. But see, the sky is changing, and so will my

mood. And tomorrow...who knows? It's nice, isn't it, that the gods have given us sex. Eros.

**Frieda** Take me with you.

**Mrs. F.** No. It's impossible.

**Frieda** Why?

**Mrs. F.** You'd be an encumbrance. I need to be nimble on my feet.

**Frieda** I must see to Max.

**Mrs. F.** Go, Frieda! Go! (*Out*)

\*

### **Scene 17**

*ADELE's apartment. ADELE reads.*

**Adele**

Dear Anna, as a refugee, I worked in a little hotel. This was a summer resort for the elderly Jewish working poor. The kitchen was small, and so was the dining room, which was white with tablecloths and napkins. When I remember the swatches of green through the windows and the sweetness of the rain, I feel a pain in my chest. The foliage was thick and the woods were deep and dark and silent. The air was so fragrant that to breathe was like eating an especially rich and spiritual food. You must know, my dear Anna, that the customers were also refugees and spoke Yiddish, and I could mostly understand them, but, how shall I explain it? In my memory these old people were not nice. They were sharp, they did not laugh. They were very demanding about their food. They did not like to wait. They ate hungrily and loudly and for the most part without speaking. Only

if I was not quick enough or if the food was wrong-tasting would I hear a stern remark from them, a rebuke. When the meal was over, they would sigh without smiling, as if to say, "So, we had another meal. That's done. Thanks be to God," stand, and walk slowly out of the room. Afterwards, some played cards in the lobby, some sat on the porch and rocked, looking into the darkness, some went right to bed. I wish I could impart to you what these people meant to me. At the time, I didn't like them. The regimen was harsh and the work difficult and they, with their unforgiving expectations, made it unnecessarily harder, or so I thought. And now? Now I am ashamed that I did not wash the feet of these old Jewish people, and serve them on my knees. All of them, like me, had once been children in a far-off land. They had endured much, and preserved their dignity. Well, that is all. I give you all my best wishes for health and well-being. Adele Feuerstein.

*(Out)*

\*

### **Scene 18**

*High school corridor. ADELE meets DR. BAUM.*

**Adele**           What do you want?

**Dr. Baum**       Just to speak with you.

**Adele**           Excuse my tone. I apologize. God, it's so boring.

**Dr. Baum**       The faculty has met.

**Adele**           Yes, I know. I wasn't invited, and I know what that means.

**Dr. Baum** Everyone admires your artistic talents.

**Adele** Yeah, yeah. But?

**Dr. Baum** But they feel your level is too high for these kids.

**Adele** Did I demand too much? I expected too much. I did, didn't I?

**Dr. Baum** This was an experiment, in any case.

**Adele** Was it Anna? What did Anna say?

**Dr. Baum** Oh, Anna was inspired by you.

**Adele** Was she? Did she say that?

**Dr. Baum** Yes, but she hasn't the time, you know.

**Adele** No. No time. No discipline. But she has talent. Remember that. She has real talent. And Max?

**Dr. Baum** Max was in your corner. He was a voice in your behalf.

**Adele** Yes, I'm sure he was. Good old Max. *(Tears)*

**Dr. Baum** I'm sorry. *(Enter MAX)* Excuse me. *(Exits)*

**Max** Mrs. Feuerstein.

**Adele** I wanted to thank you, Max.

**Max** Me? What for?

**Adele** For speaking up for me. I appreciate it.

**Max** Well, what else could I do?

**Adele** You could have denounced me as a liar and a fraud.

**Max** Why should I?

**Adele** I never attended a single German university, Max.

**Max** Well, we are great admirers of your work, my wife and I.

**Adele** Really?

**Max** You knew that, of course.

**Adele** No.

**Max** Therefore we could never denounce you.

**Adele** Do you never lie, Max?

**Max** I'm afraid I do. I hope you find refuge and fulfillment, Adele.

**Adele** Well said, Max. And the same to you.

**Max** (Aside) I already have. (To Adele) I already have.  
**Adele** You never know.  
**Max** But thank you just the same.  
**Adele** Somebody might get an idea into their heads.  
**Max** I hope not.  
**Adele** And all hell will break loose. (*He exits*) Give my regards!  
(*Out*)

\*

### **Scene 19**

*Office.*

**Jane** I called her. Her phone is disconnected.  
**Samuelson** And the school?  
**Jane** She's gone.  
**Samuelson** Was she fired?  
**Jane** I think she left before they could actually fire her. I talked to Dr. Baum. He described her role there as an experiment that failed. Which is exactly how I feel as well.  
**Samuelson** How did you fail?  
**Jane** A failure of imagination, of empathy. Of not being able to put myself into the shoes of her people. She was my responsibility, and I can't help feeling badly.  
**Samuelson** What outcome were you hoping for?  
**Jane** I was hoping she could keep her job.  
**Samuelson** No one could have done any differently. There may be no healing possible there.  
**Jane** Whether or not life had ended with the murder of the Jews.

That was her real question. Real life. Life worth living. Because if it was, if life was worth living, then one had to take the idea of revenge seriously, as a Jew, one had to remember, and make a choice. *(Pause)* She could be out on the street now, Morris.

**Samuelson** We have to let her go, Jane, wherever that might be. *(Out)*

\*

## Scene 20

*Light and sound cue for ADELE's play.*

**Max** You see what's wrong with them. They think they're smarter. They think they're better.

**Frieda** Not her. She's not one of those.

**Max** No? Since when?

**Frieda** Sometimes she was transfigured, Max, like a Christian saint.

**Max** When, Frieda?

**Frieda** During the passion, Max. Still, it's true, she was a Jewess. Smarter, better.

**Max** Exactly. Why Paul went to the Gentiles.

**Frieda** He went to synagogues, Max.

**Max** You don't know that.

**Frieda** *(In German)* It stands to reason, Max.

**Max** The obstinacy. The obduracy of the Jews.

**Frieda** If only, Max.

**Max** What?

**Frieda** They had drawn their swords and said, That's it.

**Max** They didn't do it.

**Frieda** Some who did. In Warsaw. Partisans in the East.

**Max** Too little, too late.

**Frieda** Perhaps I'll follow her, Max, and be her slave.

**Max** Do what you like.

**Frieda** She doesn't want me. Or I would.

**Max** Leave me alone, why don't you?

**Frieda** Max?

**Max** Leave me alone.

**Frieda** Anna is coming over.

**Max** When?

**Frieda** At four o'clock. She's coming regularly.

**Max** What for?

**Frieda** I will be tutoring her.

**Max** I see.

**Frieda** Call Lieutenant Brand, Max. Max? Call him. Warn him, Max, that Adele Feuerstein is coming from the Jews.  
*(Dim Out)*

**The End**