

NATHAN KATZ

ANNELE BALTHASAR

a Play in Four Acts
(version with the full original scenic instructions)

rights pending

Translated from the Alemannic (Alsatian) by

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PERSONAE

ANNELE BALTHASAR

VRENI BALTHASAR, Annele's mother

DONI, Annele's sweetheart

LÜWISLE, a girl from Willer, Annele's pal

FINNELE and MARIKELE, two children from the neighborhood

FINNELE'S MOTHER

THE MAYOR OF WILLER, father of Doni

THE MAYORESS OF WILLER, mother of Doni

A PEASANT WOMAN

A BEGGAR

THE SIX JUDGES OF MALEFICES of Altkirch

THE PRESIDENT OF THE TRIBUNAL

THE PROSECUTOR

THE DEFENDER

COURT USHER

SECOND COURT USHER

1. MAIDSERVANT

2. MAIDSERVANT

A LANSQUENET

Lansquenets, Girls and Lads from Willer, Peasants, Peasant women

PLACES AND TIMES

ACT I.

At Willer, in the house of Vreni Balthasar anno 1589

ACT II.

Three weeks later, at the home of the Mayor at Willer

ACT III.

Three days later, before the Tribunal of Malefices at Altkirch

ACT IV.

The following day, in the same place as Act I.

*It's but an echo
through our orchards
of the lukewarm nights.*

Prologue

How eves at times are freezing still;
Once more a log flares up in the stove;
The wind shudders against a barn door. –
You think of earlier times.

One sits and thinks and listens into the night
Into the dark, the vast of snow.
You mean to see, through centuries gone,
The people through the village trudging.

You see in dreams like summer nights,
When many a young pair found themselves.
You see a girl of eighteen years
There on her deathbed lying.

They spread flowers on her linen sheet;
Snow-white lilies and roses red,
Two days long she lay struggling,
She lay grabbling with death.

So long ago, a few hundred years. – – –
A log flares up in the stove blazing.
The wind tears at the barndoor outside. –
You think of earlier days.

ACT ONE

The den of Vreni Balthasar at Willer. Low-ceilinged peasant home. In back, to the left, a plain, rough-hewn table, on which stands a bouquet of field-flowers. In front, some plain wooden chairs, in back, wall-affixed benches. To the right of the table, a window opening onto a garden, with prune trees and red peonies a-bloom. On the windowsill, geraniums and fuchsias. To the right of the window, an old dresser, the traditional Sundgau "Chaisterle," with jugs and bowls. Against the wall to the right, a rough-hewn bed surrounded by a curtain, hanging from the ceiling. The walls are white, bare.

ANNELE BALTHASAR, VRENI BALTHASAR

ANNELE BALTHASAR: around 18, somewhat pale, her hair in braids, plain home-spun clothes: a large, colored skirt. The sleeves of her shirt rolled up - modest, Sundgovian, peasant-like.

VRENI BALTHASAR: a spry woman in her early forties, solidly built, flourishing. Mother Vreni is spinning. Annele is standing at an olden-time butter churn with a crank-handle, churning. She looks up from time to time and considers her mother, who goes about her work lost in thoughts.

ANNELE

Something's eating at you, mother! Me seems sometimes, you are not well!

MOTHER VRENI

Oh, but I am!

ANNELE

You're always like that! When you have something wrong with you, you speak up only when you're really sick. Must I help you to something?

MOTHER VRENI

But what are you thinking about. I'm well, for sure.

ANNELE

You don't stop thinking about it, about how at Altkirch they burned that witch of late.

MOTHER VRENI

Oh, I have it before my eyes all the time! All night I dream of it, as it were. It was dreadful, dreadful, it was!

ANNELE

You shouldn't have gone, Mother!

MOTHER VRENI

I wish, I hadn't been there. - How she screamed when they put the fire to the stake. How she pleaded, that one should have pity! That one should banish her from the land, that she would never come near again! That one should have pity on her four children! - If you had seen her, how she tore against her tricks once the fire reached for her! - It was dreadful!

ANNELE

I wouldn't want to watch. It must be an atrocious pain for sure, when one must burn like this, by one's wake senses.

MOTHER VRENI

And she was such a decent wife; one would never have thought that she was a witch.

ANNELE

But can one be sure, that she was one?

MOTHER VRENI

Listen, if she herself hadn't confessed to it before the court, I would never have believed it.

A noise is heard outside. Annele goes hastily to the door and opens. Seeing nobody, she goes out into the hallway. She returns after a while.

ANNELE

It seemed to me, there was someone at the door. That Doni, he will come by for sure, I hope, today.

MOTHER VRENI

I'll see it before me as long as I live: those eyes!

ANNELE

You'll get yourself sick, brooding over it.

FINNELE, a girl of eight, sticks her head through door.

ANNELE

It's you, child! I was sure I heard, there was someone outside!

ENTERS FINNELE, jumping into the den.

(To Mother Vreni) Mother, tomorrow I'll come with you, out to the fields.

MOTHER VRENI

So be it, I don't care!

FINNELE

Mother has already said that I can come!

MOTHER VRENI gets up from her spinning-wheel.

I'm going to fix dinner.

EXITS. Finnele runs to Annele and wants to take the crank-handle of the butter churn from her.

FINNELE

Let me churn a little!

ANNELE (fending her off)

No, I'm done already! *(She opens the lid of the churn.)* It's turned to butter now! We'll take it out later.

Annele sits down at the spinning-wheel and starts the wheel whirring.

ANNELE

Come, sit next to me for a little while, child!

FINNELE pleading

You'll sing to me, won't you?

ANNELE

I don't feel like singing right now!

FINNELE *pleading*
No but, sing!

ANNELE
What shall I sing?

FINNELE
Whatever you want!

Annele sings while spinning, dreamily:

The elderbush buds out again!
And everything's a'blooming.
One should not be alone like this
On fair days such as these.
One should have someone close by one!
How quiet are our alleys now,
Where they a'courting go!
Me seems, thou shouldst be near by me,
Oh, thou faithless lad,
By me thou shouldst do stay.
Blackbirds hop all-over the path.
Good God, it hurts one so,
when everything a'courting is,
to go around alone!

Finnele has seated herself next to Annele. She leans with her head against Annele's knee.

FINNELE
You're so pale since you've been sick!

ANNELE
Imagine, if I had died!

FINNELE
But you had no right to die.

ANNELE
Child, one is dead so fast. Noone can hold one back.

Both remain silent. Annele lost in thought. Finnele at her feet, begins to weep quietly.

ANNELE
Why 'you crying, child?

FINNELE
I'm so afraid, to think you could have died!

ANNELE *comforting Finnele*
Come on, little fool! You can see, I am still alive!

FINNELE
You see, I am so afraid when I sometimes see the lights pass by, when they carry the deadbox on white towels. - When they buried that child lately, I've hid in the shed under the faggots.

ANNELE *kissing Finnele on the brow*
Come on, you little fool! You see I'm not dying!

FINNELE *still in tears*
Yes, but I have heard them when they said, that you were so badly sick!

ANNELE
But you can see now: I am healthy again, now!

Someone is heard opening a door outside.

FINNELE *listening*
Someone's coming.

ANNELE *running to the door*
(joyously): It's that Doni!

She opens the door frantically. FINNELE'S MOTHER ENTERS.

FINNELE'S MOTHER
No, it ain't that Doni!

Annele stands embarrassed.

FINNELE'S MOTHER

Only wait, he won't be long to come! These young girls can't stand their sweethearts not hanging around their skirts one minute.

FINNELE *running up to her mother*

Mother, tomorrow I can go out to the fields. For sure, huh?

FINNELE'S MOTHER (*to Finnele*): Me seems, you don't want to come home any more. You're beginning to spend more time with Annele than at home.

ANNELE

Ay, let her be here from time to time!

FINNELE'S MOTHER

I believe for good, that she wants to be with you alone. You let her do, whatever she wants. At home, she gets by time a trouncing, when she won't behave.

ANNELE

Come on, she'aint at all misbehaven!

FINNELE'S MOTHER:

(*to Annele*) Is your mother in the kitchen?

ANNELE

Yes.

FINNELE'S MOTHER

I'm goin' to see, how she's doing.

Finnele's Mother EXITS. Annele seats herself at the spinning-wheel. Finnele has gone to the table. She takes from the bouquet on the table two red carnations. She climbs on Annele's knees and sticks the flowers into her hair. She seats herself at her feet.

FINNELE

So, now you're beautiful!

ANNELE *laughing*

Yeah? Am I?

FINNELE

If you had died, you'd look so bad!

(She climbs on Annele's knees) And the burial: then all the women would have been wearing these black clothes...

Finnele's mother and Mother Vreni ENTER from the kitchen.

FINNELE'S MOTHER

It's for sure dreadful, such a thing!

MOTHER VRENI

May our Good Lord guard all people from such a thing. For nothing in the world would I be part of this again.

FINNELE'S MOTHER

But one can accuse any womenfolk, can't one, and torture them, and beat them, all the way until they say that it was they who did it, and then one burns them. Once the evil spirit takes over one, it's difficult to chase him out again. Maybe, if one knew all the hallowed sayings to the effect! Maybe if one could swallow right away some hallowed salt and wax, I have heard said once... But our kind knows nothing about anything, what can one do!

MOTHER VRENI

When I went over the Roggenberg, one could still see the smoke get up over the roofs. One could still hear the people hooting and jeering. I would sure like to know, what they find so merry, to run there to watch! What kind of joy can one have, to watch another suffer!

FINNELE'S MOTHER

(to Finnele) Now come, child, let's go. I have work to do.

EXEUNT Finnele's mother and Finnele. Mother Vreni GOES BACK pensively to the kitchen. Annele at the spinning-wheel. Dreamily, she lets the wheel go still. She remains like this for a while.

ANNELE *thinking*

That's how I would like it to be right now... That he would come, like that... I would want to wrench him against me! I would like to sit all quiet next to him, and only watch how night falls around us: how the holy images on the wall, and the flowers before the window, and the cupboard and the bed flow into one single thing... O! When it gets to be quiet in the lane outside... when girls and lads sit one by another and sing and laugh...

Meanwhile, Doni has entered without her noticing him, hearing her last words.

DONI

But here I am, child!

ANNELE throws herself at his neck, exultingly

Doni! What a fine one you are! A whole long day he did not let himself be seen! And all the work I've done since: I have been standing at the kneading through, I've been weeding the garden!... When there's something to be done, he doesn't show up! The whole day, he won't come to his sweetheart!

DONI

Did you miss me?

ANNELE

Yeah, and how! Just think: one whole day...!

DONI coyly

Sure, you won't have thought about me all that time!

ANNELE

Maybe you think I'm like you, who don't think about one! – I bet you were with one much prettier than me!

DONI

Don't you know that there's not a one in the land more beautiful than you are?

ANNELE laughs out in joy

Oh, come on, you foxer!

DONI

But, isn't it true?

ANNELE

When you went on your journeyman's trip, then did you really meet girls... A poor peasant girl like me, indeed... Just look how I'm made up: an old frock...

DONI

One can't wear one's year-day's best every day!

ANNELE

When year in, year out, one does nothing but working and cleaning!

DONI

Look, that whole time, I was thinking only about you.

ANNELE

I wonder what you may have been thinking?!

DONI

“Now, she’s standing by the fireplace!” I would think. – “Now, she’s hanging up wash in the orchard!... Isn’t she a beautiful girl?! All the kitchen windows looking out into the fields are sparkling with glee! – Now she is watering the geraniums on the windowsill,” I sometimes thought. “How red, geraniums are!” – And nights, at times when I woke up, I thought: “Now she’s asleep! She’s lying under the linen bedcover. How thick her fair hair is lying on the pillow!... Now she is smiling in a dream!” Sometimes, I cried for joy in the dark. – Do you want to know more?

Annele has been sitting still, lost in thoughts, while Doni was speaking these last words. Doni looks at her.

DONI

Why are you so sad, child?

ANNELE

But I am not sad.

DONI

Something’s eating you!

ANNELE

It’s only because I love you so much!... I couldn’t even live without you!

DONI, *joyfully*

You dear girl!

ANNELE

When I sometimes think about you, and you aren’t here, then time seems so long to me. Then I think so: if only you came! And then when you are here, then I get all of a sudden so cheerful, and then, so sad, and then again cheerful,

and then again sad, and it changes like that a thousand times, one thing after another, and then I should only laugh and cry, all at once, only because I have you so dear... Is it like that for you too, sweetheart?

DONI *laughing out joyfully*

Aeh, naturally, it's like that for me, too!

ANNELE *beats up on him; exulting*

Oh, you!

DONI *after a while*

Aeh, it's natural, it's because I love you so!

ANNELE

Then tell me now: did you then always love me?

DONI

Oh, for such a long time, already! Long before I went on my journeyman's travels. And when you walked by in the street, I stood sometimes in the barn or in the shed and then I would have wanted to scream at the top of my lungs. How one day the prune trees were blossoming in the gardens along the lane! All the way into the road, they were leaning! And then you came walking by, all through this sparkle and blossoming. One might have thought, everything was screaming for joy around you... A princess, you were!

ANNELE

And not once did you come up to me and said a word to me! Even sometimes you avoided me.

DONI

Yes, and I was thinking of you!... And I was wishing, a thousand times, to be only one time together with you like this... only a little while!... And to tell you everything... And then you walked by again, in your plain dress... Everything bloomed more fiery in the gardens; all the windows sparked louder... There was like a revelry over everything! - and I was so bewildered. - And then I stood alone somewhere in the back of a shed and cried my heart out...

ANNELE

And you didn't know that I was walking by for your sake!... - And some good day I might have had another one for a sweetheart... But how can boys be so dumb? - Yeah, what would you have done then if I had married another one?

DONI

I can't think what would have happened...

ANNELE

And I would have been the wife of another!... And I would have been together with another one for life... And you would have come back from afar and you could only have looked on, when sometimes we drove by on the hay wagon, and were working together! Then tell me, what would you have done, then?!

DONI

Maybe I could sometimes have constrained myself. – But I believe that sometimes nevertheless my heart would have burst! Do you think, it wouldn't sometimes at night have driven me out into the dark... And then maybe I would have stood in front of your house and would have seen how your windows were all lit, and maybe I would have heard your voice, as you were laughing, and being happy! I think, it would have been dreadful!

ANNELE *laughing gaily*

And I would have been laughing inside, and I wouldn't even have known that you were in pain because of me!

A noise is heard outside.

DONI

Listen, isn't there someone outside?

They sit a while, listening.

ANNELE

Yeah, I think so, too!

Annele goes to open the door: A BEGGAR ENTERS: an aging man, in rags, his sorrow-worn features and his pale, sunken face show a deep misery. He utters his words haltingly and timidly.

BEGGAR

For the love of our Good Lord God, I beg you for an alm.

ANNELE *gives him a coin*

Have you had something for dinner, yet?

BEGGAR

No, not yet, Maiden!

ANNELE

Be seated, I'll get you something!

The beggar sits down. Annele hastens into the kitchen. She comes back with a bowl of milk and a piece of bread.

ANNELE

Here, come to the table.

The beggar brings his chair closer to the table. With trembling hands, he breaks the bread, then eats. One can feel a deep sorrow weighing on him. He seems to be reflecting while eating and fighting with himself. – Annele has seated herself next to Doni again. They giggle. Doni caresses Annele's hair. Annele laughs loudly. – The beggar stops eating. He sits, brooding.

ANNELE

Is it not to your liking?

BEGGAR

Forgive me, every time I see young people like you, all my wretchedness comes back to me!

ANNELE

You must have gone through a lot, then?!

BEGGAR

I haven't always been roaming around like this, in rags, pitiable! – Despair will throttle one's throat, when one comes to think of it.

ANNELE

Tell us, then!

BEGGAR

I too have had my house, once, and my wife!... We also sometimes, when I went courting, like you, sat close together, necking. – She became my wife and we worked together. – A hundred times a day, when I was working in the barn,

I would walk into the kitchen, to be with her for a wink... – And then we laughed out: “Oh, but we shouldn’t have to be away from each other at all!”

ANNELE

And did she die, your wife?

BEGGAR *with passion*

Worse than that! How can one not but lose one’s mind!... They’ve taken her from me, they’ve burned her!

ANNELE *gets up, frightened*

Burned?!

BEGGAR

They came to fetch her here... and they brought her before the court at Altkirch: that she should be a witch!... That she should have bewitched a stable! That someone should have looked through a harrow tooth during Christmas mass, and seen that she was looking behind her back, because she couldn’t stand to look at the altar. – They have tortured and questioned her, until she confessed to having done all this... After that, they’ve burned her at Altkirch, outside of town. – Me, they locked me up, one month in the tower, then they let me go.

DONI

One should scream for woe when one gets to hear such things!

BEGGAR

I no longer know how I carried on with life – for four weeks, like a beast, I wandered about the forest. When a man showed up, I went out of his way! I cried as loud as I could, like a small child! For hours, have I laid on the ground and dug my hands in the dirt. I’ve gone back to the square where they had burnt her, a hundred times, a thousand times, thinking, it could not be true, it couldn’t! She had to come back – she had to – it has been thirty years!...

ANNELE

Thirty years!

BEGGAR

I’ve wandered about, broken in my best years. All work was loath to me. – For whose sake would I have worked? The fields lay fallow. – In the den, in the kitchen, it was all so bleak!... Everything standing there, lost! – Then I went

away. – Who could stand to stay at home, where everything reminded one of her!

ANNELE
What misery!

BEGGAR
It lasts not only a year or two! It's for a long time! For one's whole life!

ANNELE
That I will believe, that something like that one can't forget!

BEGGAR
One goes up and down across the land, and everywhere one sees people who work the fields, and people who are merry, and one's heart would want to burst! *(After a while)* That was sometimes the worst: in the spring nights, in those mean, warm, fair nights: one is lying, and thinking – and harks to the outside, and outside there's that sweet smell everywhere – and outside, it's spring! – Spring! – Everything sprouts and greens, and one little beast goes after another, and one worm after another, and the gardens are full of flowers, and all the windows and all the churchyards! – And she doesn't even have a grave, with a few flowers on it, that's what one thinks. – And so, one is lying, and grinds one's teeth, and weeps. – And one thinks: how everything could have been so good, – and how she had had to die in the midst of the cruellest pains – and how everything could have been, if one could have lived together! – And that's how one is lying and thinking! And one cries on in silence, and one's heart would want to break all along. --
One seeks, to constrain oneself: "I believe, I could finally become master over myself again!" – One asks oneself if one might not come back to one's senses! – But nothing helps: the heart must howl itself out. It was so painful, at times! So painful!

DONI
It's dreadful!

The beggar gets up. Annele gives him two eggs and a piece of bread.

ANNELE
Here, take this along on the road, now!

BEGGAR *leaving*

God may repay you many times, Maiden!

DONI (*to himself*):

Doesn't one feel sometimes, like one would want to drive into it all like a storm! That one should take on all that's evil, all that's base, all stupidity! Oh, to take it up with all of them, for life and death, to the last drop of blood... They would be many: thousands, millions!... Their numbers would be too great!... One would have to go under!... and yet... at night: Doesn't one lie and roll around, and can't sleep, as if someone were calling one for help, someone who is in torment and misery, who can no longer fight it off!... Who is calling on one for merciful help... One should want to yell, sometimes, in the middle of the night!... Dreadfully weighs on them the dark, the night! --

There will come One sometime: a big One! He must come! The world cannot for sure remain in such despair!... I can already see him sitting all night long in his silent chamber! Tormenting himself and thinking, all night long! Full of pity for the people, who are going down in wretchedness. The despair of their lives will crush his heart! And the people will hear his word! They will spit on him! Spit, if they merely hear his name!... -- But he, doesn't even hear their mean talk, that's how he hangs with love onto mankind! Everything he says is so big, so good; -- he bends their hearts despite everything, the hearts of millions!... Stakes shall burn no longer! Sighs no longer die along the dank walls of torture chambers!

(*With enthusiasm*) Like a fiery glow it will come over the world!

ANNELE *standing by the window*

But come to me, then! We are asking for nothing else, are we, than to be together! We only want to live together and work together! We only want to have our home and our bedchamber and our hearth and our bed! Is it not all one needs of life, for these few hours, that we are allowed to be together...

Annele puts her arms around Doni. They stand embraced in silence. It is getting dark. The bells are ringing the Angelus.

ANNELE

I have you dear so much, so much...

(*As in a dream*)

Oh, but come you closer!... Now you're mine... All of you... now... for all the time... You are dear to me so much!... That's how one should be able to be: to open up all into one another, to be all one... one body, one soul... one inside all eternity!

She embraces Doni with passion.

They stand in silence.

DONI

Do you see the prune trees in blossom?!... One can smell them all the way down in one's heart!... How silent the hamlet is lying now!... do you hear close by in the forest the little owls shrieking!...

ANNELE *after a while, in a low voice*

Sweetheart, are you also happy, like that?

They stand hushed, leaning against the window, in front of the geraniums. The bells are still chiming.

A pause.

ANNELE

Now the rosary is over! Now they're coming out of church! Soon the people will all be sitting in front of their houses and call it a day, and get a rest, and talk, and laugh, and sing songs...

DONI

Folks are better, on a summery night! One wouldn't even think that there should be day again! That soon misery will take over the people again: avarice, envy, evil talk, feeling glee, when the neighbor comes to harm!... If only it didn't get to be day again!

ANNELE

But I'll be holding on to you, even if the whole world should waste into evil.

DONI *holds Annele's head between his hands*

That's how I would love to live, my life... This way, here, in our corner of the world! To have our house, and our chamber, and our bed. And hold wake together during winters' eves, with a fire and a good heat going, and in our summers' eves sit in front of the door, and listen how somewhere in the hamlet boys and girls sing their old songs, and giggle together, and laugh... And so would I like to work for you, and walk merry and free through the streets, holding my head up!... Like that... With you... here, at home!

A pause.

It has become darker. MOTHER VRENI brings a burning fatwood and sets it on the table. She returns into the hallway.

Doni and Annele seat themselves on the bench behind the table. Doni plays with Annele's hand. Annele looks blessedly absorbed into the flame. One hears the last echoes of a popular song from far outside.

ANNELE in dreamy bliss

Like that it's so beautiful, to be together like that! One feels so good that way!
How quaint the lights flickering in the dark!

She lays her face content on Doni's hands.

ANNELE after a while

I am always so afraid for you... We could sometime be torn apart so all of a sudden... as if something could happen!... As if one could die and be lost to the other... I sometimes suffer so much, when I think about it.

She embraces him.

DONI

You dear, dumb girl! Why bring up thoughts like these?

ANNELE

I can't help it; such evil thoughts come strike at me!... But it seems to me that one should always be allowed to be together like this. You, beloved, you...

The song outside is interrupted. MOTHER VRENI ENTERS running.

MOTHER VRENI

What might this be?!... The Altkirch lansquenets are in the village... Could it be that they want to drag someone before the court? *(She hastens to the window. – After a while:)* They are coming up the street!... But where might they be going? *(After a while, startled, in fright)* They are coming towards the house!!

ANNELE getting up, scared

Here, towards the house?!

Voices are heard outside. The door gets torn open. LANSQUENETS ENTER.

THE LANSQUENETS

Here she is, the witch!

They walk up to Annele.

ANNELE *screaming*

O thou, merciful God in heaven!!

DONI *stand in front of Annele.*

What do you want from this maiden?

(The lansquenets push him aside and want to get hold of Annele. Doni throws himself desperately between Annele and the lansquenets. Screaming:) Keep away from this maiden, I say!!

The lansquenets throw themselves over Doni. Struggle.

ANNELE *screaming, falling down.*

O, God! Doni! Doni!

ACT II.

Home of Mayor at Willer. An orchard, densely planted with apple and pear trees, in bloom. To the right and left a hedgerow. In the background, the back wall of a barn: a stud wall, with a steeply slanting roof. A door and a small stable window are opening onto the garden. Under the roof, a long ladder is hanging. Against the barn wall, faggots are piled up. The orchard is covered with high, flowery grass. One part of the orchard has been mowed. A path goes diagonally through it.

Morning sun beaming over the treetops, painting streaks of gold onto the green background. The air is full of birdsong. – The MAYORESS is carrying a basket of laundry into the orchard. She is a peasant woman of around 50 years, robustly built, healthy, thriving. She starts to hang her wash above the mowed-down part of the orchard: good peasant items made from handwoven cloth. She is wearing a plain dress in peasant colors, with a white kerchief around her head.

Another PEASANT WOMAN COMES UP on the path crossing the garden. She is carrying an empty basket.

PEASANT WOMAN

Some fine wash, you've done today.

MAYORESS

One must bring things in order, while the weather is holding. I do think that we'll have more good days coming.

PEASANT WOMAN

In truth, it's a lordly weather, these days. Come to think of it: there haven't been many good days so far, this year. How nicely things are blossoming! If there ain't going to be any more late frost, there'll be fruit, this year, like we haven't had in a long time! A blessing of God, it is!

MAYORESS

I bet that everybody in the village is going to be at Altkirch tomorrow.

PEASANT WOMAN

I believe so, too! With a nice weather like that! And think, it has been a good thirty years since a womanfolk from our parts has been standing before the court for witchcraft.

MAYORESS

Who would have thought this of that Annele – any other girl I would rather have suspected.

PEASANT WOMAN

See how one can trust one's own self!

MAYORESS

And she has always shown herself to be such a good, decent girl. – I remember when she came to sit with us, at eve, in winter.

PEASANT WOMAN *scoffingly*

And I have been hearing that your Doni has been weaselling after her...

MAYORESS

But of course not! He only wanted to go over there once before he went on his wanderings. But we warned him off, and he did not go back thereafter.

PEASANT WOMAN

But they say that since he's been back, he spends all his evenings there... I say this only because the people are saying so.

MAYORESS *making herself louder*

It's not true! No! What' you going to make up in your head?!

PEASANT WOMAN

It occurred to me myself, that you would never stand for it.

MAYORESS

No! No! Of that rest assured!

PEASANT WOMAN

When I think of it: that time long ago, when they burned that Barbara! I was at that time just fifteen years of age. She lived in the house just next to ours... All the people were saying that she was the most pious soul in the village. She wouldn't do harm to a thing... Oh God! What she didn't all confess to, before the court!

MAYORESS

See, how one can be mistaken...

PEASANT WOMAN

For ten years, she had been going about it. More than a hundred times, she had gone to that hideous, evil witch dance. A hailstorm she brought down, which destroyed all our crops...!

MAYORESS

That's how misfortunes happen to one, and nobody knows wherefrom.

PEASANT WOMAN

When I think of it again, how the cattle had been restive at times, in the middle of the night... how they would tear at their chains, it was in truth as if a wind had come driving down the chimney... Before the court she then admitted to it, that on the order of the evil spirit, she had bewitched our house... and with that, she gave herself out, as if she were a saint! Everybody would have put their hand in the fire for her. – It's the same thing now with that Annele!

I must go now get some vegetables in the field. It's high time, that I make the meal.

MAYORESS

Will you come sit for a little while tonight?

PEASANT WOMAN

Yeah, I'll see!

EXIT THE PEASANT WOMAN. The Mayoress goes on hanging her laundry. After a while, ENTERS THE MAYOR, coming up the footpath.

MAYORESS *noticing him*

Did you finish off in the fields?!... Where is that Doni?!

MAYOR

I'll bet anything, that we're going to have a bad time, with that boy!

MAYORESS

Didn't he come along?

MAYOR

The whole morning again, he has been moping! He won't speak!... He sits around. – We should have stopped him earlier, from going after that girl.

MAYORESS

We have nothing to reproach ourselves. We have warned him enough: he can't go bind himself to a girl, whom they want to burn as a witch!

MAYOR

But he won't have anybody say a word against her! I am ready to believe anything, that we have bad things coming, with him.

The Mayoress picks up her basket and EXITS. The Mayor FOLLOWS HER.

The stage remains empty for a wink.

SOME GIRLS AND LADS come up on the path, on their way to the fields. The lads carry scythes; one girl carries a basket, covered with a little piece of white cloth.

The girls, singing:

Now fair spring is coming
and everything's a-blooming!

There blooms a flower on the low,
The plague is in the world by now.

The plague is a hard penance
I know that I must die,
Four men are a'coming, to carry me out;
they'll carry me out to the churchyard.

They'll bury me deep and cover me up,
then I'll be sleeping for eternal rest,

Three little roses will flower on my grave,
Come thou, my sweetheart, come pick them for keeps!

The first is white, the second is red,
the third stands for a bitter death.

One lad utters a loud scream of joy. He takes one of the girls around the hips.

ONE GIRL (*beating him back*)
Will you be quiet, now?

ONE BOY
Show me, do you have other goodies in your basket?

ONE GIRL
There's nothing to be looked at here! (*She takes the basket back from him, laughing. He grabs her again and wants to kiss her. She resists and strikes back at him, laughing*) Will you be quiet, in the end?

They ALL EXIT, laughing. One still can hear their voices from afar, and the shouts of the lads.

The stage remains empty for a while.
DONI and LÜWISLE, Annele's friend, ENTER on the path.

DONI
And so, she is a witch, Lüwisle!

LÜWISLE
Rather would the whole world be made of witches, than she should be one!...

DONI
And yet, she's there, imprisoned between these dank walls, thrown into despair and anguish! And can see nothing before her, but death! Isn't it dreadful?!

LÜWISLE *fighting with herself*
You must not despair yet. I still have this feeling in my heart, that she will come back. That she will be found to be innocent...

DONI *in utter dejection*
Look, I wish I would die!

LÜWISLE
But one cannot give up so quickly!

DONI

It's in my head all night! I scream sometimes! Sometimes, I walk to the window and howl into the dark.

LÜWISLE

But listen, one must not think the worst.

DONI

I mean, it cannot be, no, that they'll take her away from me and kill her!... For whom have I lived? What for working?! Over all that I did... all that I thought... There was a brightness because it was meant for her!... And now, nothing means anything to me anymore!

LÜWISLE

The poor girl!

DONI

Look, Lüwisle, I sometimes thought we would live here together! Here, I wanted to work for her! I wanted to make, that she should be happy all her life! – and now, what's to come of it?! – She won't even be able to live through this, in there, where they have brought her, when she's already been ill to death, one year ago. – –.

LÜWISLE

But don't make your heart so heavy; you must think: not everything is lost yet. (*Lüwisle presses Doni's hand.*) Sure, we won't lose hope, won't we?

She EXITS slowly. Doni sits down on a tree trunk, brooding.

DONI

How she must be suffering now... there, inside... on a litter of straw, there! Mustn't she be screaming for me day and night?!... And I am here... idle, and can do nothing for her!... And, with my hands in my lap, I must watch them go about, to kill her...

Enters the MAYORESS.

MAYORESS

But listen, Doni! Let your mother have a word with you... You'd better go and help your father, rather than to sit here by the light of day and ruminate.

DONI

What use is working to me!

MAYORESS

If you have what it needs to live, without working...

DONI

For whom shall I want to work?!... The one I want to work for, they are taking from me, they are killing her!...

MAYORESS

And for the sake of us, you can't work, can't you!... Haven't we raised you and worked for you?!...

DONI

Yes, you've worked for me! I know! I want to be grateful to you! But I'll go mad if I have to live through another night.

(He stands up, stricken.) I see everything so dreadfully before me!... like a desert, life shall be for me, without her!... –

(Dejected) Listen, if they kill her, on the next beech tree, I'll hang myself!

MAYORESS *(crying out in pain)*

O God! Have I deserved this from you!...

DONI

Did she deserve, to be martyred like that?!

MAYORESS

I've been seeing it coming for a long time, that we'll be living through some evil times, with you! I've told you long enough, you shouldn't have anything to do with that girl!

DONI

Mother! Like a ray of light, she has entered my poor life, that girl! What was I, before I knew her?!... Like an angel, she has been wandering among those small, vindictive little folks...

THE MAYOR has entered the orchard.

MAYOR

We have warned you. More we can't do! If you don't want to listen...

DONI

You've warned me?!... Isn't she worth more than me?!... Isn't she better than me, Father?!

MAYOR *forcefully*

You've gotten yourself hung up on a witch! You'll be our undoing!

DONI

She is like a saint, father, who has come down on our earth.

MAYOR

That's what we'll see at court, tomorrow!...

DONI

How high above it all she is, above your resentment and your wickedness!

MAYOR

You can't be helped!

DONI

No, I can't be helped! She is dearer to me than all of you!... than the whole world! What did she want from you?! Her heart didn't wish for more than for a home, where we could have lived together and be happy, for the few days that we are here, on earth. The only thing she wanted was to be with me! She was so happy when she could make me happy! She had such joy when she could help someone!... that's the extent of her crime! -- what did you do to her in exchange! Between dank walls you have thrown her, and you want to kill her! She is to die a horrible death! It's dreadful!

MAYORESS *despairingly*

My boy, I pray you, listen to your parents!... We don't mean you bad!

DONI

Haven't I sometimes been lying in the orchard behind the sheds, and have laughed out loud, and have cried for joy, and no longer known, why I was crying?!... Only because she was living here, in these parts!... Only from the moment I've known her, have I become aware, what a heaven we are living in! Haven't I walked sometimes all the way to the end of the meadows and have thrown myself into the grass and have howled for joy!... For no other reason that the sun stood in the sky and shone upon the roofs? That she could have

done that, to me! That she could have brought such happiness onto me! This cannot be of this Earth, of us, poor humans, something like this happening to one!... It's a miracle of God!...

MAYOR

You are wickedly possessed by her!

DONI

Was I not myself a mediocre, narrowminded little man, as they all are, before I knew her! Through her only, have I started to feel inside me, what life is in truth! Through her have I seen clearly for the first time how they live, these million folks here on earth! How they tear each other up, so that one could hang a heavier stone around his neck, a heavier chain... just as dogs fight each other over some gnawed-up bone!... And none remembers, how happy they all could be, if they weren't so intent upon dragging each other into hell, for the sake of what, a miserable metal, a stone!...

(with passion) Oh! Instead of seeing how a millionfold brightness enfolds them, high above the gardens, above the mountains: a light against which, the shine of their precious stones is as nothing! When all the splendor and all the glory is here for all people, as long as they live within it, and open up!

Didn't I sometimes lay through the night, thinking how she is so much better than I am... and sometimes couldn't grasp it, how one could be as good as she is!... Through her have I felt that this cannot be all there is, this life here, with these miserable, petty quarrels between people. There has to be a better life than that! There has to be something: a life, far beyond anything we can imagine. — — Something like the last splendor of our gardens blooming... Something, like a drone which at night would vibrate through the timbers... far away beyond anything we can grasp... And yet to be alive: a way of being together inside something, which is through and through a soul... in a great love...

MAYORESS *begging*

Let yourself come back to reason!

DONI *in highest exaltation*

No, you shall not tear her out of my heart! She is despairing in there!

And you want to bring me to abandon her now that she is in wretchedness!

When she is in pain and a thousand times a day thinking of me!

Enters the PEASANT WOMAN, with a basket of vegetables. She listens for a while.

PEASANT WOMAN

Heaven, Doni, you should listen to your parents! They don't mean bad! One cannot get hung up on a witch!

DONI

Who dares to say anything against her?

PEASANT WOMAN

I know your parents ever since we have been children... I sure don't wish you any wrong. But I can't stand, watching you driving yourself into misfortune because of a witch!... the whole village is talking about you!

DONI

But what does the whole village know about her?

PEASANT WOMAN

They would stone her if she were at hand! That she could have done harm to a poor child in his crib?

DONI

Because she has done harm to a child?

PEASANT WOMAN

One time, she came to sit at Peter Lütz'! The moment she came in, the child started crying in his crib. She went to the crib and took him up on her arm. For four weeks after that, the poor little wormlet grabbed away between life and death, that our Lord himself should have felt pity. Must not a human being have a stone inside her chest, in place of a heart, to be able to do something like this?!...

MAYORESS

That's for sure!

PEASANT WOMAN

Must not something like that get to one? And many other things are told about her! It's a good thing, it's finally coming out. Not long ago, that witch from Fulleren, whom they burned at Altkirch, said that she had been at the witches' dance, at Fulleren.

DONI

For sure, everybody in the village knows something about her.

MAYORESS *fiercely*

Go listen then to what people say about your girl!!

DONI *in anger*

That one should have the gall, to say something about her in my presence! Oh, now, I can see it all clearly, what you're about!...

MAYORESS

Let yourself for the will of God be brought back to reason!

DONI

Now I can see it before me, all the harm we have already done, we humans: thousands of stakes burning! Thousands, and again thousands, of poor tortured women in your torture chambers, chained in your dark towers!...

(Painfully, pressing his fists against his brow, despairingly:)

Now I can feel it, what they have suffered, the many, many, when they heard you jeer outside, drooling! If only you could feel some time their mortal anguish!!... One wouldn't want to live at all. Are you so sure of yourselves, about your witches?! ... it's all some blinding of your miserable puny brains!... Now I understand! You are dreadful!

MAYOR *very upset*

You shall bring us into trouble, saying what you're saying.

DONI *eagerly*

I should put my hand in the fire for her!

MAYORESS

Don't come with this kind of talk!

PEASANT WOMAN

There have been witches since the world exists!

DONI

Almost everything in your lives is nothing but blindness and delusions.

MAYOR

There are people who know more than you do, who say that there are witches. Go ask one of our learned masters if you think you're so knowledgeable. --
Anyway, we don't want to brood over such things, at this time.

DONI

Your learned masters grope their way through old, dusty books! They get ever more stupid, wading through their Latin drivel. None of them remembers the sun shining in joy over the beeches! None of them remembers that it's everything, to feel inside us the splendor of gardens, during those few days when we are in health before we rot in the grave!

MAYORESS

It seems, you know more than the doctors!

DONI

I am, thank God, not one of your doctors, I am just a man with a heart in his body, that I am!

PEASANT WOMAN *EXITING*

God beware us from heretics!

MAYOR

You shall be our end, with your seditious talk! Ever since you were on your wanderings, you've nothing in your head but the schemes of this heretic, about whom you are sometimes blabbering!

DONI

If only you had seen him, that heretic! He's a like a great peace going through me when I think of him! He was an honorable, learned master! He came to the square, where they had burned a witch. He showed them a cross, to the people standing there. "Do you still dare to look up at This One, here?" he called, "when you commit such crimes? Your belief in witches is a lie, it's an affliction! Turn around, and become human again!"... They put him in jail! Brought him to court! They tortured him until he confessed in agony that the evil spirit had ordered him to talk the way he did! Until he took back his words, which he had uttered in great compassion, and stated that yes, witches existed. They burned him as a heretic outside the city... A thousand times have I seen his image before me since! How often it came to strike me in the night!... There was one among you, who was human, and you killed him!

MAYOR

I pray you, Doni! Don't say anything against the authorities!

DONI

The authorities are just the same as your peasants. They are poor, stultified people... -- if only things could change!... Go then to your authorities and do something for her. You don't act like a father to me!...

MAYORESS

Your father surely doesn't mean you evil! If only you would listen to us...

MAYOR

We don't act like parents. It hurts, to hear something like that from one's child!... If only everybody else meant you good, as we do.

DONI

But why don't you understand how I am bound to her! Like that, bound to her from the depth of my whole soul!... Won't you do anything for that poor creature?!...

MAYOR

I can see nothing that I can do! --

DONI

You, as the mayor of the village! But go, you, to the lordships! Tell them that you vouch that she has never done any harm! Surely, you can do that: you can vouch on your life that she is not a witch! Can't you even do that?!... If I could do anything for her, I would go to the ends of the world!... -- I pray you! Please, go!...

MAYOR

And even if I go! She will be brought before the court anyway!

DONI

Look at life around you! Through thousands of little veins, it circulates through the world! It trembles at the end of the leaves of grass! Through all the bushes, through all the branches the sap is rushing now! It brews in them! It almost makes them burst! Everything wants to grow, now! Now, that spring is here!... Must not one be seized in one's heart when everything around one is alive!... One cringes even to tear off one leaf... to reach with a rough hand into what is most alive! I mean, as if a vein of the world would be torn open!... And you are throwing her, who is what I love most, who is more precious than anything, between these dark walls, and you want to take her away from me and kill her, when she has the right, doesn't she, to live for a few years in this splendor... inside this beauty...

MAYOR

Before court, it will be established for good if she is innocent.

DONI

Do I see the world differently from you?!... Above all your thoughts, all your deeds, everything that you produce, above all your joys, all the misery that you inflict upon each other - above all the thriving gardens, all the torments in your dark towers, I hear time heavily striding, on its way to eternity... All the time, like a clock... Isn't this the deepest, that we can grasp: that everything is alive, and everything is passing.

MAYOR

There may be many things which we humans do not comprehend.

DONI

Have you never seen Him, right in front of you – as it is said in the gospel, – standing there on the mountain, preaching: “Help each other! Stop tormenting one another!”... If only you wanted to live according to this!! Think about it: spring here, when in the blossoming trees the houses lay buried, when some kind of grace lies over the roofs of the sheds, on the steps leading to the kitchens!... Summers, when in the brooding hot air, the wheat ripens!... Falls, when the leaves turn; – when one goes to pick the wood; – when every house is standing so still in the fog as if wondering about itself!... Winters when one hears the whole day flails being beaten!... Would it not be paradise, this place, if only the people wouldn't torment and plague one another.

MAYOR

This is all well seen, but there must be a justice.

DONI

There's not much to it, to your justice!

MAYOR

Yet, nobody can complain about it... We have our laws! We have our judges, who are men of honor: mayors of these villages!... There must be a right... one cannot be without a justice!

DONI

I can see her before my eyes, your justice! There, at Lupstein, lie thousands of our fathers murdered; at Dammerkirch, they are filling the whole churchyard; at

Oberlarg... they are still lying, rotting for the sake of right and justice!...
(sneering) They have all been killed for the sake of right and justice, haven't they!... it makes one's heart stop when one passes by a churchyard. How much misery has come into the world, for the sake of what you are calling "the right!"... What crimes haven't you committed, in the name of your justice?!

MAYOR

You will be our ruin.

DONI *(stomping with his foot on the ground)*

Wretched people!... Is there nobody left, who dares to take a scythe in his hand, to help tear a poor child out of the murderers' claws?

MAYORESS

Do you want to bring us harm on purpose? Don't you know that the walls have ears?

MAYOR

We are your parents! We don't want to be thrown into misery because of you. If you carry on with this rabblouser's talk, you have nothing to do with us any longer...

DONI *(screaming)*

What can they do to me, your lordships?!... I am standing here! On this spot! Against all injustice, against all the misery of our time!... What can you do to me?!... I cannot do much more than die! It's worth despairing, to watch the way you live among yourselves! If you kill her, you can kill me as well! It all goes together!!

MAYORESS *(begging him)*

For heaven's sake, Doni!...

MAYOR

Do you mean, maybe, that we should revolt like our fathers did, seventy years ago?

DONI

Revolts don't help anything at all if you don't become human! Even if all your wretchedness could be flushed out of the world! If your doctors could cure any illnesses, so that there would be none living in the world but who are healthy... When all your pains for your daily bread would cease to exist,... your souls

would again promptly fashion a thousand images, of things, which have no reality, which are nothing else but delusions, and you would torment each other for their sakes, and drive each others to the grave... Our fathers, seventy years ago: they took their scythes from the wall! They wanted to be free! What came of it? Blood and fire and wretchedness in the whole land. If only they had been free at first in their souls; if they had been good men to begin with, who knew, what they were fighting for!... The way they were, nothing could come out of it!...

(Enthusiastically:) Oh, I can see it before me: a time... when there will be another kind of uprising: it seethes in a million hearts! In millions, love comes to life! Feelings, that humans are finding back to humanity! It's like a brightness over the world! The peasant drives his plough over the field to grow bread for all! The weaver works to clothe all... the one lives for all the others, in brotherliness!

MAYORESS

That would be nice... yeah... if it could be like that!...

The Mayor stands unmoving, reflecting.

DONI

Through the villages I would like to walk! Through the cities! I would like to shout! I would like to have thousands around me... with blazing eyes! A hundred thousand! I would like to tear her out of their claws! I would like to throw myself at anyone, who would want to do harm to my beloved... And yet... yet I would not want to harm them... to inflict pain!... I don't begrudge anyone this little bit of sun, that shines on them, during these few days when they are in the world!...

Against whom would I have to go?! Against the judges?! The mayors of our villages around?!... No, I would have to go against all the people... against thousands of thousands... against our whole times!...

MAYOR

Come, get my clothes ready, I want to go!...

MAYORESS

Where do you want to go?

MAYOR

I am going to Altkirch. Maybe that I still can do something for her, after all! --

EXEUNT MAYOR AND MAYOR'S WIFE. Doni watches them going, sunk in thoughts.

DONI after a while

He's going. -- Maybe that it's not like that, after all, that they are all so full of wickedness. That they have sunk so low! --

She must come back, when my heart screams after her again and again, night and day - day and night!!...

Curtain.

ACT III

Hall of the Tribunal of Malefices at Altkirch. A gothic hall.

1ST MAIDSERVANT

The lordships will come any time.

2ND MAIDSERVANT

Let's close all the windows.

She goes to one of the windows.

At the door, which leads from the hallway, APPEARS MOTHER VRENI. She is wearing her peasant Sunday's best. She steps over the threshold: she looks around, anxious and distraught, then DISAPPEARS AGAIN into the hallway.

1ST MAIDSERVANT

That woman is still outside.

2ND MAIDSERVANT

Since four o'clock in the morning, she has been standing by the door, waiting.

1ST MAIDSERVANT

She's the mother of the witch.

Rumor of voices and heckling outside.

1ST MAIDSERVANT

I think, people have come from all the villages to hear.

2ND MAIDSERVANT

The whole of Altkirch is on its legs.

1ST MAIDSERVANT

If they are not gonna open the doors soon, they will break them down, they are so excited.

2ND MAIDSERVANT

But they can't all find place in the hall.

EXEUNT.

ENTERS a COURT USHER, followed by MOTHER VRENI, who looks around, fearfully.

COURT USHER

Here, seat yourself on one of the benches. The lord judges will soon be passing through here.

MOTHER VRENI

My Lord, can one also speak to their lordships...?

COURT USHER

Just get seated for a while, until they arrive.

MOTHER VRENI

My Lord...! Have they all been burned at the stake, those who have been brought here as witches?

COURT USHER

Quiet! Here they come!

The JUDGES ENTER. LANSQUENETS are posting themselves at the doors.

MOTHER VRENI

(Imploringly, to the judges.) My lords! Do have pity on my child!

PRESIDENT OF THE TRIBUNAL

(to the court usher, abruptly) What does this woman want here?

MOTHER VRENI

Your lordships, look at me, I have nothing but my child!

PRESIDENT *in a commanding tone*

Who let this woman in?

They all look at each other in silence.

PRESIDENT

Bring her out of the hall and watch her, until the proceedings are closed.

MOTHER VRENI *pale, trembling*
Your lordships!...

*She falls on her knees before the President. The President moves away.
Lansquenets grab her and lead her out.
The double wing doors open. PEOPLE STREAM IN and fill the benches. The judges
seat themselves at their desks.*

*The SIX JUDGES OF MALEFICES - THE PRESIDENT OF THE TRIBUNAL - THE
PROSECUTOR - THE DEFENDER - THE PUBLIC*

PRESIDENT

Judges of the Tribunal of Malefices, you are swearing before the Almighty God to judge on Truth in Justice, to make Right prevail, to punish the Evil Deed!

JUDGES

We swear!!

PRESIDENT

Judges of the Tribunal of Malefices, who have sworn before God Almighty, I require you speak judgement over Anna Balthasar of Willer.

*Two lansquenets BRING IN ANNELE. From her confinement in the dank prison,
Annele looks pale, half mad. Her clothes are hanging in tatters. She gives out
intermittent, pointless laughs.
Murmurs among the Public.*

PRESIDENT

Anna Balthasar of Willer! Thou art accused of having dedicated thyself to the thousand times accursed Devil! Upon his order, thou hast perpetrated all kinds of evil deeds against the people of thy village. Upon his order, thou hast renounced God and hast taken part in the accursed, lewd dances of the witches on the Fuchsberg at Fulleren. We the Judges of Malefices of Altkirch call on thee now to tell the Truth about it.

ANNELE *in rapture*

This light! All those many, many lights! God in heaven! This great shining light!... these million angels around one!...

PROSECUTOR

You can hear already the Evil Spirit speaking out of her, in order to confuse one.

PRESIDENT

(To Annele) You must now give an answer to our questions! You confess that you have dedicated yourself to the Evil Spirit, and that you have been at Fulleren on the Fuchsberg, to take part in a witches' dance.

ANNELE

Seven judges sit at court... years pass by... years are gone... Seven skulls rot underground...

PRESIDENT

You must answer what you are asked!...

ANNELE

But I am but a poor maiden from Willer... And now you want to hurt me... with you rough hands!

(Suddenly screaming)

How dreadful it must be inside the grave!... In this humidity, out there!... But not even that!... to burn by one's living body!

PRESIDENT

When did the Evil Spirit come to you? Now, answer!

ANNELE

He came to the little window... Don't be so wild, you bad boy... what if you break a windowpane... what then!

(Starts laughing) But don't be so wild, I say!... - You've stolen a little carnation from the windowsill!... Oh, you're so sly, you!... You only wanted to make me come outside, to scold after you!... I knew it!

PRESIDENT

You went sometimes to the witches dance?

ANNELE *now absentmindedly*

I had no more peace, day or night!... He screamed for me! He whinnied above the barn roofs! He has torn apart trees! I was lying so warm under the bedcover!... I, pretty Annele... I was awake... when he sometimes whispered sweet things from outside, as if a breeze were going through a thicket of peonie stalks!... I heard him the whole night! I cried in my pillows!...

PRESIDENT

You have gone with them onto the Fuchsberg!

ANNELE *laughing*

Juchu! Juchu!! We rode through the night... out through the chimney... on the broomstick! Like the wind! Juchu!... Riding over the churchyards... over the woods, over the villages! – – At Old Ferrette, we have danced around the gallows! As fast as the wind! Just like the wind! – – Isn't that a merrymaking, my sweetheart, my betrothed... Haha! Over the woods, over the dells, over the dark villages, all over!... Naked we danced under the pines! The little owls were shrieking for us... The dogs whined... After that, someone died in the village.

PRESIDENT

You confess that on the order of the Evil Spirit you have done harm to the people of the village?!

ANNELE

There he comes, that Doni!... Over there!... I knew that he would come to help me! He is so strong! He knows so much! I knew it, he had to come!... Won't you, even if your folks won't have it, won't you stand by me?

PRESIDENT

Listen to what you're asked! At the home of Peter Lütz, you have done harm to a child?...

ANNELE

It was so pretty in its crib... it laughed...

PRESIDENT

You took it on your arm! After that, it lay for four weeks, grabbling with death!

ANNELE

Poor child! How it grabbled!

PRESIDENT *giving a sign to the clerk*

At Klaus Kampf's, you've walked through the stable?

ANNELE

The stable at the Kampf Klaus's!... So good warm... The trough of cut hay, there!... Through a window, a weeny bit of light... The chains jingling. The beasts were ruminating.

PRESIDENT

After that, three calves died.

ANNELE

These poor calves!...

PRESIDENT

You confess to bewitching the stable?

ANNELE

They were standing there so humbly, and sickly, the calves!

PRESIDENT *pensively*

Write that down!

After a pause, to the Prosecutor.

PROSECUTOR

I accuse before this Court: Anna Balthasar of Willer! -- Said Anna Balthasar confesses the evil deeds for which she appears before us: a pact with the Murderer of Souls, with the Devil accursed in all eternity. She confesses that she poisoned a stable! She has, upon his order, inflicted harm on a small child in a crib. As a result of this, it grabbled between life and death for four weeks. Moreover, she confesses that she has denied God and His Holy Host, and that she took part one night, at Fulleren on the Fuchsberg, in the lewd dance of the witches. I summon the judges, by reason of her having allied herself with the Demon and her having exercised witchcraft, to speak judgement: that Anna Balthasar be punished by being put from life to death through fire!

Pause.

The judges sit, reflecting. They riffle through documents.

ANNELE

The little tombs of my little sisters... they have carnations on them, and geraniums!...

Murmur in the audience:

Her mind is gone!

ANNELE

And they won't give me a tomb! Not a bone will remain of me, not a poor little white bone.

(She looks rapturously in the direction of the window.)

There... Father?!...

(More securely) Father? But you've been crushed by a tree! You were bloody, pale, pitiable... They brought you on a wain...! I can still hear it, bumping... The candles! Father, these two candles next to you on the bench, flickering!... How white the sheet over you... white as snow...

ONE VOICE

Her mind is gone!

PROSECUTOR

It's the Evil Spirit talking out of her, in order to confuse one!

ANNELE

Father! You're standing there!... come and help your child!... Look, how they want to torment me! How they want to hurt me! In the dark tower they have held me; within those dank walls. *(Imploringly)* Father, help this poor child of yours!

ONE VOICE

I'd put my hand in the fire that the maiden is innocent!

ANNELE

Father!... How I cried when you died! For two months, I didn't dare to enter the room in the dark...

ONE VOICE

Don't you see that she has said all this in a fever! She is for sure bewildered!

ANNELE

Oh, on the Fuchsberg!... Hu! How they are dancing there, under the pines!... The little owls are hooting!... it's unholy!... someone will die!... In the moon... witches!... the Evil Spirit... he's dressed all in red!... Naked they are dancing there... How white their bodies, between the black trees!... How their hair is waving!... Like silk! Just like silk!

(She laughs)

No! I've taken hallowed salt; I won't dance anymore!

PRESIDENT

You took hallowed salt?

ANNELE

Hallowed salt and wax...

PRESIDENT

And then the Evil Spirit did not return?

ANNELE

He did! Turning around the house!...

PRESIDENT *getting up*

Speak, then!

ANNELE

Sometimes, he came prowling... I could hear him at night... I was lying in bed... I pulled the bedcover over my head... he was like a storm wind in the night!... He cried, outside! He pulled on the roofs of the sheds, in his anger!... He threw open and shut the shutters! – – I have pulled the bedcover over my head... He had no might over me any longer... How happily I slept there in the chamber!... I, poor, pretty Annele!

PRESIDENT

And since, he's never come back to seduce you?

ANNELE

Never!

DEFENDER

If she was able to chase the Evil Spirit with hallowed salt, then she is no longer punishable!

ANNELE *again looking to the window in rapture.*

Father, you're still here?!... Come, take your child in your lap again!... Father, the gillyflowers are a-bloom in our garden!... We have sown two acres of rye this year!... The Good Lord walks through our orchards, Father! Sometimes one can hear him, as he passes: not a branch moves in the trees... How still the gardens are!... Here and there, a twig is cracking... The kitchen steps and the little stable window are alive and look out to the fields... Oh, you're wearing

your black Sunday clothes, those you wore to go to church!... Why are you wearing them today?... It's a workday!...

ENTERS DONI, suddenly, struggling past the Lansquenets into the hall. Seeing Annele, he pauses in despair, then runs up in deepest torment to her.

DONI

Must I find you in such a state, my child?

ANNELE *looks at him fixedly:*

Are you Doni?!... Look, it's so dreadful here...

DONI *screaming in despair*

That's the state they have put you in, poor creature!!... Look at the state she's in... Merciful God!!

Annele laughs absentmindedly. She seizes Doni's hands and caresses them like a child. She snuggles up to him. She lightly passes her hand over his hair.

ANNELE

I won't have to die, won't I, sweetheart?... Because I would like to live for a while... to live with you for a little while... You are helping everybody, otherwise... So, help me, too!...

PRESIDENT

(loudly, to the lansquenets)

Bring in order, here!!

ANNELE *holding Doni's hands*

But you'll stay with me now, won't you!... You are not going to let me alone again, now!... Oh, for sure, huh?!... Never alone again... I am so afraid when I am alone... You have a heart for me, don't you?

She seizes him convulsively. The lansquenets try to tear Doni away. Doni defends himself.

DONI *in highest passion*

(to Annele) No, nobody will bring me away from you!!

(To the Judges) You want to bring a poor child to her grave! If only one of you could be standing here, with a heart as innocent as hers!

(To Annele) I am now with you, my heart!!

ANNELE *(as in a fever)*

Look how I have suffered... Why must I be made to suffer like that?... Tell me, sweetheart!... Stay with me now... I'm feeling good again, if only you can be with me!...

A troop of lansquenets surrounds Doni. He gets himself loose again.

DONI facing up to the Judges' table

Why don't you send in all your henchmen's helpers!! Why not send more of them! You can master a man without defences!... What a laugh, this justice of yours!...

(Pointing at Annele) Why don't you look at her? Do look at her! Your laws, which you follow, which are written in your dusty books... where everything is foreseen... made by poor, miserable humans... Yet no pity nowhere, and no heart!!... No pity!! That's it!! That's your justice, people!! ... So why don't you come!! Kill me too! With her! You have the power and the might to do it! You are already killing one here, who's better than I am!... Have a look at her, at what you did to her!! Look at her standing there! Doesn't at least one of you have pity in his soul?...

The lansquenets wrestle down Doni and carry him away.

DONI, turning around once more:

Have you gone so far, people, in forgetting your God?...

ANNELE in despair

Don't leave me, sweetheart, you are leaving me!... Can't you see how I have been violated and tormented?

DEFENDER

This maiden is innocent!

PROSECUTOR

All witches are innocent!

DEFENDER

With this crime on our souls, we shall appear one day before the Eternal Tribunal!

PROSECUTOR

For twenty years I have now been sitting at court. Every witch is innocent when she stands before us. They all whine and make up things! God wants justice!

A JUDGE

I think, we would be doing best, in this case, not to pass judgement, and to ask their knowledgeable lordships in Strasbourg for advice.

PRESIDENT *gets up; after a pause*

Judges of the Tribunal of Malefices, you have sworn before God Almighty, I now require from you to speak judgement over Annele Balthasar of Willer.

The JUDGES RECEDE. Murmur in the hall.

ANNELE

Oh, to die... now!... They are piling up the wood already!... They are bringing the fire!... The cords are cutting my hands!... Now they are lighting it!... Not even a little piece of bone will be left of me, not a miserable little bone!... Will nobody help me?!... Now...

She falls in a faint. Murmurs in the audience.

VOICES

Look, she is dying!!... And she is innocent!... Innocent, I say!

The JUDGES RETURN. The President reads the verdict.

PRESIDENT

“By the Judges of Malefices through rightful judgement be it declared that Anna Balthasar of Willer is said free of the accusation!”

Murmur on the benches.

VOICES

Free! Innocent!

The President moves up and sees Annele in a faint.

VOICES

Look, she is dying!

PRESIDENT

Bring her to the hospital!... Does she have relatives outside?!... Someone get them!

A COURT USHER EXITS.

OTHER COURT USHERS

Her mother lies faint in the hallway below.

The judges stand around Annele. Attempts are made to revive her. – the public in tense expectation – the COURT USHER COMES BACK, followed by DONI.

DONI *in highest agitation and tenderness running up to Annele*
Annele!...

He tries to make her stand up. She lies unconscious in his arms.

DONI

(to the Judges, in tones of deep distress)

That you could hurt a poor, innocent child! Have you a heart in your body?!...

(in highest tenderness and despair to Annele)

My child, what is the matter with you?! Show me! Child, don't you recognize me?! ... Show me, wake up!... You see, who's here!... Can't you see?!... Love! Wake up, come on, wake up...

Annele opens her eyes and looks bewildered around her.

ANNELE *in a feverish delirium*

Who are you?!... but who are you?

DONI

You no longer recognize me?!... I am Doni!... Your Doni!!

ANNELE

You?!...

DONI

Look at me! Don't you recognize me?!... It's me, me!...

ANNELE

That Doni... you! ...no!

She closes her eyes and sinks back into a faint.

DONI
Annele!!

ONE OF THE BYSTANDERS
She's dying!

DONI *looks fixedly at Annele.*

She is dying!...

(Collapsing over her, in despair) No, don't die!... No!... Can she die, when I love her so much?!... God cannot allow this... Never! Never!... When I love her so, beyond anything in the world!...

While people busy themselves around Annele, the curtain falls.

ACT IV.

The stage is as in Act I.

ANNELE'S CORPSE is stretched out, covered with a white sheet. – Red roses are spread over it.

Half-darkness. – A thunderstorm outside. In the window, far-away lightning. From time to time a muffled sound of thunder.

GIRLS, PEASANT MEN AND WOMEN are holding wake. In this act, all, except for Doni, are speaking with hushed voices.

DONI, his hair shaggy, his face haggard, let's out a strident scream.

PEASANT WOMAN

He's out of his mind for good!

DONI

They are burning her! Help, quickly!... They are piling the faggots!... They don't know what they are doing!... They want to burn my poor betrothed!

LÜWISLE

Please be quiet, Doni!

A PEASANT WOMAN

What's that Vreni up to?

LÜWISLE

She is still lying in a fever. I don't have much hope for her.

DONI

They've gone crazy, all!... Look at them, how they drool! With their frightful, cruel eyes!... They are wearing their Sunday best!... Isn't there any other issue?!...

LÜWISLE

Look, Doni, be quiet a little bit.

DONI

Can't you hear, how they are heckling?... They want her blood! They won't be content otherwise!... They are like wild beasts!...

LÜWISLE

Don't make yourself sick, Doni! Nobody will do harm to her any longer.

DONI *gets up and goes to the window*

Can't you seem him outside?!...

LÜWISLE

Whom?

DONI

You see him, don't you?!

LÜWISLE

But whom?

DONI

There, on the mountain... in his white robe!... There...! He is speaking to the people!... He can be felt in every heart... (*rapturously*) Oh!... he's talking... such simple words... "Be good to each other! Don't plague each other! Help each other, for God's sake!" Now he goes off over the mountains... The people are still standing! There's a shine on their faces!... Don't you see him?... (*ecstatic, painfully*) Oh, come walk again, only for a day, through our poor, miserable times!!...

He sits down on a bench and buries his face in his hands.

DONI *calling*

Lüwisle!

LÜWISLE

What?

DONI

Look, they want to burn my girl!

A PEASANT WOMAN

Children, how sad!

DONI

I don't know what's going on... It seems to me, there's a light before me!... These women in black clothes... The four men walking, mourning... They are carrying a casket on a sheet... on a white sheet... White as as a knife, cutting into one's heart... like the lilies in the churchyard are white!... Standing white around the old rotten crosses, inside which worms are chomping!... Listen: can you hear the thunder, outside? Doesn't it sound like the hour-chime of eternity?...

(After a while) Everything moves past... everything decays and rots... and we are but poor little humans and know no better than to torment each other during these few handfuls of days, that we are on earth, and we can't even do anything against everything dying and decomposing! Are'nt we bound all of us to the Big One, whom we cannot escape: to death!... to leaving!

A GIRL *(forcing Doni to sit down)*

Please be quiet!.. Sit up a little!... don't you remember at all, what happened yesterday?

DONI

Yesterday?...

LÜWISLE

Did nothing happen yesterday?

DONI

But why do you have lights, here inside?

LÜWISLE

Didn't you go to a maiden yesterday?

DONI

To a maiden?... I don't know... Everything is so grey inside, today... To Annele?... Isn't the mother here?... But surely, tell me, we'll get together, the two of us... I love her!... And I will work for her!... I would like to have her!... And to have our little house! Here!... A chamber with a bed inside, a den where at night in winter there would be a good heat!... And all this would meet one with a laugh, when one came home...

A PEASANT

Can he have hung onto her so much?

Enter the Mayor and the Mayor's Wife.

MAYORESS *walks up to Doni*

Poor child, you must not think that your parents don't have a heart for you, when such a misfortune has hit you. If only you knew what I have been through, yesterday and today...

DONI

Mother, why are you crying?

MAYORESS

You mustn't think that we, your parents, are against you. I can't tell you how much it hurt me, when I saw how much you suffered for her sake.

DONI

You understand how much I was attached to her, don't you, Mother!... As much as any man can be attached to anything!

MAYOR

Look, I've done for her whatever I could!... I've been to Altkirch... I have spoken up for her...

DONI

Yeah, you've gone to Altkirch...

MAYORESS

If you knew, how much it hurt, when I heard that she had died. If a knife had been stuck into my heart, I couldn't have hurt more!

Doni, pausing, reflecting.

DONI *despairingly*

But then it's true: she's dead!!...

MAYORESS

My poor child!

DONI

So it's possible after all...?!

MAYORESS

You must think that she is in peace now... Our good beloved God wanted it this way, that she should leave us...

DONI

She is dead!... And the flowers are still before the window, which she liked so much... And she would water them!... She planted them as seedlings!... They gave her so much pleasure... and she had to leave so young!

LÜWISLE *sadly*

Poor girl!

DONI brings the Mayor's Wife by the arm and brings her near the bier

Look, here she is lying!... You see!... They have hurt her! They have done dreadful harm to her!...

(Screaming) They've taken her from me and murdered her! Isn't this horrible?! Must not a shudder go through their hearts when they take their children in their laps? Can even one of them enjoy a quiet minute, after such a crime? Can they have an hour of peace to die in?! – – And I could not help her!... There were too many of them!... How they were standing there, waiting to see her suffer... Me alone against all of them... Against thousands of them... against the whole land!...

(to the corpse, in despair) Child, I couldn't help you! I couldn't!

(He pauses, brooding) Is it possible?... That she must lie in the dark grave... in the dankness... When she loved spring so much!... And outside, the blackbirds are singing...

The thunderstorm outside has become stronger. The den is darker. One can see behind the windows from time to time a pale glimmer of lightning. The geranium on the windowsill in strange contrast with it. The light from the lightning every time makes the sheet glow up, white. Otherwise, the den remains in the half dark. For a while there reigns a heavy silence.

Finnele and her little sister Marikele open cautiously the door. They remain shyly standing.

MARIKELE

I don't dare to...

FINNELE

It's so dark in here...

Lüwisle walks up to the children.

LÜWISLE

Do enter, children! She won't hurt you, the poor Annele. She has always been so good to you!

She takes the children by the hand and leads them to the bier. The children are standing, silently crying. Pale glimmer of lightning. All are overwhelmed by the silence reigning in the room, by the majesty of Death. Strong thunderclap.

LÜWISLE

Children! What a weather!

DONI

(to all) In the wet, cold earth they want to lay you, girl...? That one should have the gall to come close to you... lying here, so pure!

It's you, who have murdered her! You! I accuse you all before our dear Lord God... All of you!... You have no pity in your hearts!... You have invented wicked things: witchcraft! Being possessed by the evil spirit!... You are possessed, all of you, by an evil, evil spirit... that the sun should wish to go dark!... It's you, who have invented wicked words: Right!... Justice before God!... through all the churchyards runs a wail about your justice!... You're inventing a thousand and then again a thousand clever things, and yet you don't know quite what you want, in every enemy of your delusions, you see an enemy of God!... and you don't know that you've lost God! The more you've looked for him, the more you've wagged your tongues about him, the more you drove him out your hearts!... Wasn't it God, in me, when I was in love with her so much!... Was it not God, inside her, when she clung onto me, when she rejoiced over every flower on the windowsill, over every hour that the sun shone?... God, who lives heavily in all which surrounds us: in every bush that shoots, in every cloud passing, in every wind blowing over the fields!... Is it not God in us, who calls for everything great and beautiful?... Oh, when one listens to the air waving at night through the trees, behind the shed, in the orchards... When the storm howls in the forest like a beast... When lightning flings itself onto the mountains... Isn't that beautiful? Doesn't that make one good? ... But you have lost him: God!... You drive your plough through the field and you don't hear the voice talking all around you and inside you, and you hang onto riches and on everything that sparkles, children! And you plague and torment each other!... Sometimes I've thought: a faith!... For all men: to be good to each other. To help each other... That's what I always thought!... That's what my heart was after! How I have hoped for a time when we would be human, only human!!... Oh, to see us all fall down on our face before something that is great and beautiful, and become better, and more compassionate!... How I believed in

that!... And what did I find: wretchedness... The whole world sinking into wretchedness! In a sea of vengeance and envy and hatred unto eternity! And without any hope, that it should become otherwise!...

(after a pause, quietly, visionary) You are mine, now, girl...! Now nobody has any right over you any longer! Nobody! No miserable human paper law! Above all the baseness of the world, you're mine!

(He remains lost in thought for a while.) You're eager to see me, poor heart!... For I am yours!... All yours!... Because I have belonged to you always, from all times... Because I will be yours into eternity... We've belonged together always, each had to come on earth for the other! So that we should have helped each other to carry all the sorrow and all the joys. So that neither of us should have had to while in this cold world and wither away without love and light... So entirely do we belong to each other! And a thousand times I hear your voice... Through all the walls... through all the woods... This is how you are calling for me... in a being-alive beyond misery... and death... that's what I have always pined for: to be together with you!... To be here with you in that great life, which swells in all the worlds... which trembles at the tip of every leaf of grass... To be here... with you... in all eternity... Where no man can tear us apart, and no law, nothing!... and to be free!... Like this... in all eternity!...

(He opens the window. Lightning falls.)

How the lightnings pour!... What frightening beauty!...

(as if in a trance, quietly, gazing at the flames of lightning)

Child, this is where we're at home!

CURTAIN