

Alma's room. Alma meets U.S. Alma, who is playing Anna Schindler-Moll, Alma's mother.

ALMA Mama!!! Mama!!

U.S. ALMA Alma!

ALMA Mama!

U.S. ALMA My poor child!

ALMA My heart has stopped. I am... I... feel like a cold hand is tearing my heart from my chest. Give up my music? Give away all I have lived for till now...

U.S. ALMA Calm down, my little one. Calm down.

ALMA Gustav wants me to give up my music.

U.S. ALMA I heard everything he said to you.

ALMA To give up all I've been living for! I can't do it.

U.S. ALMA Of course you can't. It's absurd!

ALMA I couldn't survive.

U.S. ALMA No. You can't. It's sheer madness. It's a crime.

ALMA I'll say »No« to him. No, no, no!

U.S. ALMA Of course! And the sooner the better.

Alma starts crying. She cries throughout the next bit:

ALMA To hell with him! To hell with all these men! I hate them all! They're such goddamn egotists, the whole bunch of them!

U.S. ALMA Cry, cry my child. Let your fury out.

ALMA Who does he think he is, telling me to sacrifice my music for him! He thinks he's God Almighty! He's only a lousy conductor.

U.S. ALMA He's an ugly dwarf. A hysterical, Bohemian apple-chewer!

ALMA »My music should be your music!« Ha! If he only knew what I think of his music! It's all artificial, from beginning to end.

U.S. ALMA He's a dull and mediocre scribbler of music!

ALMA And his Lieder! Ugh! They're contrived simplicity. They're so pedestrian!

U.S. ALMA No one here in Vienna thinks much of him as a composer.

ALMA As a composer he is nothing ! It's all pretence, all fake and false!

U.S. ALMA If he were younger, at least, and handsome... But look at him! He's an appalling old ape. He has no charm, no grace. With a butt like a baboon! I bet he has haemorrhoids!

ALMA Have you seen the way he walks? Like a billy goat gone wild! With a twitch in his leg! Unsightly, puny, ugly, a fidgety old bundle of nerves!

U.S. ALMA He could be your father, Alma! Believe me, my poor child, Gustav isn't the kind of a man who can make a woman happy. I was shocked when I saw that you were giving in to his entreatments. I couldn't imagine a young beauty like you with a wrinkled old ape like him. I watched him once

bending his head over you, and his cheeks were dangling loose like empty pockets, ugh! I could throw up!

ALMA You're right! Never in my life have I met anyone as alien as he. So alien - and yet so close! I can't figure it out. that's one of the things that attracts me to him. I love him!! I love him so!!!

U.S. ALMA Alma! Are you crazy?! What are you saying?!

ALMA I know, he shouldn't have done what he has done to me. It is a wound that will never heal. But I must love him completely for him to be happy! I feel quite truly and strangely that I really love him, mama! Deeply and truly!

U.S. ALMA That can't be true!

ALMA I must banish the other me, the one who has prevailed until now - down with her! - I must do everything to become a person, and tolerate all that is done to me. Won't I make him and myself unhappy, if I lie? And am I lying? This deep feeling of bliss when he looks at me so happily - is this a lie? No, no, no! - But he should let me be as I am. Already I see I'm aware of changes in myself, due to him. He's taking so much away from me and giving me so much in return. If this goes on, he'll make a new person of me. A better person? I don't know. I don't know at all. - I long for him unutterably. Burckhard is right: we go together like fire and water. Both on the outside and on the inside! Yes! But must I then be the one to succumb? Could the two different perspectives not become one, beautiful and magnificent? Yet I feel as if I stand on a far lower level and he could pull me upwards! - Maybe I would have given up my music anyway one day. But why couldn't he let time do its work? That was horrible, it was inhuman! It was not wise of him either. We are both going to pay for it, oh yes! I promise!

U.S. ALMA Alma, Alma, Alma! Calm down now! Will you? My dear child, believe me: Gustav is no man for you. You are so young, you are so beautiful, you are not yet twenty-two. You are just starting to open up to the world. Just try to imagine what your life will look like as time passes. . Gustav is twenty years older than you. Twenty years! He is not a strong man. He's a weakling. He hasn't exactly got what the French call »Un beaux physique«. He's so fragile-looking, so unmanly. People say he is terminally ill. - Excuse my question, but have you seen him naked yet?

ALMA Mama...!

U.S. ALMA So you haven't. I guess you haven't slept with him either?

ALMA Mama! How dare you...

U.S. ALMA Well, well, I know. I know this is not very pleasant to hear , but believe me: at the end of the day these things do matter.. Frankly, to me he looks very uninviting, as a man. That unhealthy skin colour, the neurasthenic walk. He looks like he couldn't weigh more than 60 kilos.

ALMA Mother! I'm not buying a calf at the market!

U.S. ALMA My dear, you can't go to bed with his reputation. That, you'll have to do with his body. And in that department sixty kilos doesn't add up to much.

ALMA He will be my baby.

U.S. ALMA What?!

ALMA I'll spoil him like a little child. He's like a sick, magnificent child!

U.S. ALMA Alma! You're losing your mind. .

ALMA I shall restrain my longing and my passion—I want to cure him—let him recuperate through my strength and youthfulness. My beloved Master... I will not be the cause of his downfall. – He touches me so deeply. It's so charming the way he can't pronounce the letter »R« properly. And oddly enough, he insists on calling me by my second name, »Marie«! He's in love with the powerful »R« right in the middle of »Marrrrrie«. I'm so afraid that he may catch a disease, and become sick. Every time I close my eyes, I see him lying in his own blood... I'll marry him.

U.S. ALMA Alma, you frighten me. You are heartless.

ALMA Heartless? Why?

U.S. ALMA Well, maybe it's not such a bad idea. It's obvious he's not going to last very long. It wouldn't be such a bad thing to be Gustav Mahler's widow.

ALMA Mother! How can you have such monstrous thoughts!

U.S. ALMA It's not me who's having them, it's you, my dear. How long can he last, a man in his pitiful condition? Another six or seven years, at most. You will be twenty-nine, still very young, in the prime of your life; you'll occupy a privileged position among the crème-de-la-crème of Vienna; you will enjoy a Royal pension for life as widow of the Director of the Royal Opera, and who knows: in these mad times with God's will, maybe his music will become popular, and you'll get fat royalties for the rest of your life, so why hesitate? Go marry him quickly, before some other clever wench snatches this juicy bone from under your nose and leaves you with your mouth watering!

ALMA You're awful, mama. I hate you.