

Kitchen. RESERL washes blood-soaked bed linen. On the stove, a diet meal is cooking. BURCKHARD appears. (Later joined by KLIMT, the ALMANIAC, and ZEMPLINSKY.)

- BURCKHARD** Reserl, what are you doing there?
- RESERL** I'm working. Can't you see?
- BURCKHARD** You're washing your blood-soaked linen here, in the kitchen? Are you crazy?
- RESERL** It's not my linen I'm washing.
- BURCKHARD** Is it that time of the month, or what?
- RESERL** Please! It's my master's linen. Now leave me in peace!
- BURCKHARD** Your master? Ahh – has he already... hmm?... screwed her...?
- RESERL** Be quiet! You're awful! – It's not what you think.
- BURCKHARD** A fine character, your Direktor Mahler! A real gentleman! So soon before the wedding! Couldn't he have waited?
- KLIMT** *(takes some of the boiling-hot food:)* Max, Max! Come here – Try some of this ! It's delicious!
- BURCKHARD** *(tastes)* Wahhhh...!!! — What the hell is that?! Reserl, what's going on here?
- RESERL** Don't ask me. I'm cooking something so disgusting I wouldn't even dream of tasting it. It's a scandal.
- BURCKHARD** It tastes like Matzeball with laxatives. What is it?
- KLIMT** It's a stew of whole-wheat bread and pommes-reinettes.
- BURCKHARD** Whole-wheat bread and apples? Good gracious! Who could eat a thing like that?! – Oh! I see! Alma's pregnant, isn't she, hm?! Oioioi!
- KLIMT** No! It's the only dish the master of the house will eat.
- BURCKHARD** Gustav Mahler? What's the matter with him? Is he sick?
- RESERL** Would you put it in your mouth if you were healthy?
- KLIMT** He's obsessed with diets, you know? She's not allowed to cook anything that smells of life, of blood! No rare meat, no beef and kidney pies, no steak tartar! Anything that risks making your mouth water is strictly forbidden! Nothing but spongy pommes-reinettes!
- RESERL** It's so frustrating!
- BURCKHARD** But why is that? Why is he so unsensuous?
- RESERL** It's because of his... his »bitter plague«
- BURCKHARD** His what?
- KLIMT** He calls it his «subterranean pains».
- BURCKHARD** «Subterranean pains»? What's that?
- RESERL** I can't utter the word.

BURCKHARD For Christ's sake!?! Reserl! What is it?!

RESERL He's got... He's got ... — No, I can't!

BURCKHARD Say it, Reserl, say it! Come on!

RESERL You'll despise me...

BURCKHARD No, I won't! Come on!! Don't make me angry!

RESERL His Haemor....Haemor... no, I can't! Leave me alone!

BURCKHARD Reserl! Your destiny and God himself have put you in a position where you can enlighten the rest of mankind in regards to the darkest secrets preoccupying the mind and spirit of one of the greatest geniuses of the 20th century! You are in a position to enrich all of humanity with a crucial insight into the psyche of a genius! Tell us, Reserl, what are those "subterranean pains" that make our Court opera director eat only tasteless, steamed apples?

RESERL It's his God forgive me!.... (*whispers*) haemorrhoids.

BURCKHARD (*surprised*) Haemorrhoids?!!

ALMANIAC Well, nebbich! Haemorrhoids... It's common knowledge all over Vienna!

RESERL What do *you* know about it?

ALMANIAC Ha, ha, ha! (*secretly:*) »It's a cold winter's night... The night of February 24th, 1901. Gustav Mahler is directing his 6th Symphony at the concert hall in the morning, and that same evening "The Magic Flute" at the opera... He is suffering... He is suffering terribly! (*he scratches his ass, sings as a parody Mozart's "Magic Flute": »In diesen heil'gen Hallen kennt man die Rache nicht, kann kein Verräter lauern, weil man ihm gleich vergibt!«*) Alma, who hasn't yet met him, is sitting in the auditorium... She is fascinated and deeply impressed by Lucifer's face, those pale cheeks, those burning eyes! No one can endure such a blaze very long! It's not possible to create two miracles in one day, with such intensity, without being destroyed in the process.« (*He dries, produces a small book from his pocket.*) – Wait a moment, wait a moment... just one second, just one... where is it...? Where's the goddamn ending...?

RESERL What's that?

ALMANIAC Her diary!

RESERL You're a monster! (*tries to take the book*) Give it to me, you're the Devil Incarnate!

KLIMT (*interfering:*) God and the truth, better known as The Devil, my dear, dwell in the infamous details, remember this! – Read aloud!

(ZEMPLINSKY) That night Alma's attention is drawn for the first time to the "spiritually" tortured face of Director Gustav Mahler. She believes the fire is in his mind, she has no idea it's in his ass...!!

BURCKHARD Shall we say that she fell in love with the suppressed or sublimated side effects of his haemorrhoids?

RESERL I hate you, I hate you, I hate you all... You are disgusting!! She fell in love with his spirit!

ALMANIAC His spirit – my ass!! Hahaha! – Could you fall in love with me, Reserl?

RESERL Me, fall in love with you?!

ALMANIAC Look at me, Reserl! (*He “composes” on kitchen equipment*) I am Gustav Mahler. I mean, I am as madly in love with you as he was that night with Alma. What would you say if I proposed to you?

RESERL Mr. Mahler – marry me?! He would never do that!

ALMANIAC Suppose he did! – Suppose you were Alma.

RESERL Me - Alma?!...

BURCKHARD Just imagine!

RESERL I can't be Alma.

ALMANIAC Of course you can. Any girl in the world can be Alma. All she has to do is meet her Gustav.

RESERL “All she has to do is meet her Gustav”?

ALMANIAC Yes, my love.

RESERL Did you say “my love”?!

ALMANIAC Read, read!!! – (*gives her a sheet of paper:*) I wrote this for you. Through all the nights when I lay alone in my room and ...

RESERL You? But you said you were incapable of writing ...?!

ALMANIAC (*impishly, to Zemlinsky*) The Professor taught me ...

RESERL (*reads:*) »Das kam so über Nacht!
Hätt' ich's doch nicht gedacht,
Daß Contrapunkt und Formenlehre
mir noch einmal das Herz beschwere!
So über eine Nacht – Gewann es Übermacht!
Und alle Stimmen führen nur
mehr homophon zu einer Spur...«

How charming! How wonderful!!

(ZEMLINSKY) Go on, go on!

RESERL »Das kam so über Nacht
ich habe sie durchwacht –
Daß ich, wenn's klopft, im Augenblick
die Augen nach der Türe schick'!«

How beautiful! It's a dream...!

ALMANIAC It *is* a dream! It *is* a dream! *You* are a dream. Oh don't wake me up –I'll throw away ten dream-Almas for one real Reserl!

(ZEMLINSKY) (*secretly*) Where did you get that?!

ALMANIAC (*secretly*) He gave it to her – the day after they first met. !

RESERL How touching! How wonderful! It was love at first sight!

(ZEMLINSKY) *(whispers):* Alma! Ask me whatever you want ! I will engage you as conductor of the opera orchestra!

RESERL Oh...! You will engage me...? How moving! How beautiful!!!

ALMANIAC The whole thing is a sin! Such a beautiful creature, and of pure Aryan descent! She shouldn't spoil it all by marrying that arthritic degenerate Jew.

BURCKHARD Terminally ill, debt-ridden and impotent? Eats nothing but wholegrain bread and fruit, and that's exactly how he composes, too!

RESERL That's not true! His Lieder are very beautiful-

ALL His Lieder! What do you know about them ?!

RESERL *(points to the house telephone:)* I listened when he played them for her...

ALMANIAC You eavesdrop on your master and his mistress?!

RESERL So what? You do the same often enough!

BURCKHARD Really?

(ZEMLINSKY) You listen to his diet music?! With the irresistible charm of apple pie?! It never fails to work – as a laxative! Spare us!

RESERL Play me his music.

ALMANIAC *conducts the suitors like an imaginary orchestra, performing the funeral march from Mahler's 1st Symphony, the »Frère Jacques«-motive. They use all kinds of kitchen equipment and make a horrendous noise. Subsequently they move stealthily out of the room, leaving Reserl with Zemlinsky.*

RESERL She listens to his music, but her senses don't respond. I am afraid that Alma feels that she belongs, that she will always belong – to someone else

ZEMLINSKY You mean... to me?!!

RESERL Yes. Why torture yourself? I told you – *you* can give meaning to her life. You are far superior to all the other men who come to this house. I know it. – She's in a terrible dilemma. There's always somebody between Gustav Mahler and her. She mutters "my love", and immediately she adds... your name. "Alex". How will she be able to love my master as much as he deserves? And will she ever understand his music? - You played her your music. You have listened to hers. You should know...! You kissed her... - Now if you are her good friend, I dare you: tell him that he should take his hands off Alma Schindler, because she needs to be free, you hear me? She needs to be free, and not be chained to him. Tell him this, if you really are her friend! - He doesn't think much of her art, but he thinks a lot of his own. And she doesn't think much of his art, but she believes very much in hers. That's how it is.

Reserl is interrupted by Alma (the beginning of "Pantalone Jokes":)

ALMA Reserl! Reserl!!! I need a drink!! Give me a drink!!!!

RESERL Yes, madam! I'm coming!!