

1902. Turkish bath. Steam fills the air. Alcohol vapours waft across the room. Alex Zemlinsky is depressed. His friends try to cheer him up with booze, jokes and a dirty song about a girl who betrayed her boyfriend with an old man whose sexual potency is as poor as his pocket is deep. The atmosphere is frivolous. Every miserable joke provokes waves of hysterical, unbridled laughter. Alma enters.

- ALMA** Teresa! Teresa!!! Where are you?! - Ahhhh! My friends! This is where you're hiding! - I need a drink! Give me a drink! Come on, give me a shot of schnapps! (Alex serves her.) Thank you, Alex. Cheers! Bottoms up! (She empties her schnapps in one gulp.) Ahhh! That was a good starter. Now! Pour me a pint of beer. And another shot of schnapps. I want to drown my brain in alcohol!!! (Alex offers her a pint of beer. He pours schnapps into her beer.) Thank you, Alex. Pour some more. I wanna lose my head. Ahhhh!! What am I doing with my life? Eh? What am I doing?!! Can anyone tell me ? I am throwing away my youth, my «joie de vivre», as if it were a worthless old rag. Why am I doing it?
- KLIMT** Because you are a silly cow!
- ALMA** Am I? Am I?!
- KLIMT** Let me be your bull!
- ZEMLINSKY** Why bother us with your madness? If you want to find out about it, go ask your Gustav.
- ALMA** He keeps telling me he loves me. But what does that mean- »Love«? Hmm? We kissed. He played his pieces for me. My senses remained silent.
- KLIMT** Forget his music. What's he like in bed? How's his foreplay there?
- ALMA** You could say it's lovely and pleasant, but... so heavy, so grim and dreary, so deadly morbid. (She addresses Zemlinsky:) Oh, Alex! Poor Alex! Forget me. You must. I'm not worthy of you! I don't deserve your love. You know everything. You know all that has happened. You can read even my most secret thoughts. For me, the last weeks have been torture. You know how very much I loved you. You fulfilled me completely. The just as suddenly as love came, it vanished cast aside. And appeared to me with renewed power! On my knees I beg your forgiveness for the evil hours I caused you. Some things are beyond our powers. Maybe you have an explanation for it. You—you know me better than I know myself. No! Don't forget me! Please! Remember me for ever! How we were together – innocent – passionate - young lovers!
- KLIMT** Oh, Alex, how enviable ...
- ZEMLINSKY** You'd better leave me alone!
- KLIMT** Don't make that face! You're breaking my heart.
- BURCKHARD** His foreplay is pleasant – but – You said: »But?«...
- ALMA** So much about him irritates me: his smell – his constant humming (*She imitates Mahler's humming the Chassidic variation of »Frère Jacques«:*) »Ya–ba ba ba bam, Ya-ba ba ba bam« – the way he walks, bent forward, with his hands clasped together on his back; The way he jumps from leg to leg; the way he talks – he doesn't talk to me: He talks through me – he's always preaching! Preaching and teaching! Alma's mood changes. All of a

sudden she is the spoilt little girl in need of a father: And then he is like a father to me... A very loving, caring father – very warm, passionate –

ZEMLINSKY *(starts a song:)* ...

ALMA But I never miss him like I miss you, Alex! I miss you every minute, every second... I shall never forget the joyous hours you gave me—and don't you forget them either! Please don't desert me! If you are the man I think you are, you will stay with me, and give me your hand—and your first kiss of friendship. Be a dear fellow, Alex. Our friendship could mean a lot. . We could always stick together , like old comrades. One more time : forgive me—I don't know myself anymore. And when I think of him... – he's a stranger – our tastes are so different – – Just imagine: he doesn't like my music. He thinks it's worthless! He wants me to stop composing –

ZEMLINSKY What?!

KLIMT No!

ALMA Give up my music?! Give it away?! Everything I've lived for until now...?! I can't do that!!! - He said to me: "Alma, make your choice, make up your mind! But for God's sake: be true!" To be true – his music is so foreign to me! He doesn't think much of my art, but he thinks a lot of his. And I don't think much of his art, but I believe very much in mine. That's how it is. And I don't like his hands. What should I do?! Tie up my life with that man? Why?... Oh, my God! Oh, my God! I feel like a cold hand is tearing my heart from my chest. It's so cruel! — Alex, cheer me up! Make me laugh!

ZEMLINSKY Leave me alone.

KLIMT What's the matter with you, Alex? Tickle her!

ZEMLINSKY Leave me alone! I'm telling you!

BURCKHARD I'll make you laugh. May I try?

ALMA Oh, please do! You always make me feel so frivolous! You and your dirty jokes! Come on, Burckhard! Be as nasty and tasteless as you can!

BURCKHARD He's lost a wench. And what a wench! Alma Schindler. Alma Maria Schindler. Do you know her? She's the most notorious »femme fatale« in Vienna.

ZEMLINSKY Yes, yes, at the age of sixteen she intoxicated the most experienced womanizer in the entire Austro-Hungarian empire: Gustav Klimt! He ran after her to Venice like Hannibal over the Alps, and like Hannibal he - he ended up outside: she never let him in. Only a kiss, that's all she gave him, Alma, the best cheese cake in all Vienna! Or did she let him deflower her?

BURCKHARD Eh, Alex? You're the only one who knows that, aren't you? You're the only one who can tell us the truth: did old Klimtoris deflower her or not? He's not talking,, our good friend. He's depressed. You must have licked a little cream at least, didn't you? Na, come on! Tell us something! Tell us about her!

ZEMLINSKY Leave me alone!

KLIMT Oh, oh, oh, oh! He lost her. He lost her. And to whom? To a young prince? To a handsome man? No! To an irresistible satyr? To a famous Casanova? No, my dear friends! No: He lost her - you won't believe it - just hold your breath - he lost her to a puny little old wrinkled sweaty Jewish gnome: he lost her to Gustav Mahler! Can you believe that?!

BURCKHARD Come on, Alex, cheer up! They say poor Gustav doesn't know what to do with her. He'd be just as happy with a doll. Come on, Alex, let's cheer her up with some good old funny stories. Listen to this one: Old Gustav was

sitting with another aging Methuselah on a park bench, when Alma passed by. "Look at her", says the friend, "you remember how we used to run after those sweet young things?" - "Yes", says Gustav, "I still remember running, but I don't remember what for!"

(Burckhard bursts in a crazy laughter. All laugh hysterically.)

KLIMT On their wedding night, young Alma and old Gustav are lying in their bed. Old Gustav is humming one of his favorite Jewish tunes, as usual: »Ya ba-ba-ba-bim ya ba-ba-ba-bam« etc., and young Alma is lying with her eyes wide open, waiting for him to start performing. Finally she loses her patience. »You know, Gustav, she says, "Alex used to bite my nipples... That was wonderful!« - «All-right, all-right!« - Says old Gustav, »I can do that too! Just get me my teeth out of that glass of water. «

ALMA You call that a joke ? It's pathetic! Pathetic!! I said I wanted to laugh. I want to laugh until my brain explodes and splatters all over the wall! Why can't you make me laugh?! What are men good for, if they can't make you laugh. Alex, it's your turn. Make me laugh! Come on, now ! Make me laugh. Make me cry. Make me feel something! I don't want to be dead before I die!!!

ZEMLINSKY Okay. Alma is having sex with Gustav Mahler. In the middle of his performance he gasps: "Oh, God! I'm dying! I'm dying!" - "I thought you died a long time ago", says Alma. After a while she feels something moving above her in the dark. - "Darling... Darling", she says, "What are you doing up there?" - "I'm making love!" - "Oh, really? To who?" - "To you!" - "No kidding! Are you in?" - "I was." - "When?" - "A minute ago!" - "Oh, I'm so sorry, I didn't notice." - The next day they both get sick: he caught a cold, and she got a stomach ache from rotten eggs.

ALMA Ughhh!... I feel so dirty! So ugly! So... - What I have to tell you today is terribly sad. I went to see Gustav—this afternoon we were alone in his room. He entrusted me with his body - I let him touch me with his hand. - His manhood stood Stiff and upright . He carried me to the sofa, laid me gently down and swung himself over me. Then—just as I felt him penetrate, he lost all strength. He laid his head on my breast, shattered—and almost wept for shame. Distraught as I was, I comforted him. We drove home, dismayed and dejected. He grew a little more cheerful. Then I broke down, weeping, weeping on his breast. What if he were to lose—that! My poor, poor husband! I can scarcely express how aggravating it all was. First his intimate caresses, so close—and then no satisfaction. Words cannot express what I today have undeservedly suffered. And then to observe his torment—his unbelievable torment! My beloved

(Alma leaves the place with Reserl as nurse to go to spa Tobelbad to meet Gropius.)