

your books where you belong. You could leave raisins behind and fulfill your destiny.

SPINOZA. If I have a destiny, I'm fulfilling it no matter what I do. That's why they call it destiny.

BEN ISRAEL. Your destiny is to be a rabbi, Baruch, and a great one. So let us help you. What can we do for you? We'll give you a loan, we'll give you an annuity. What do you want?

SPINOZA. I want nothing.

BEN ISRAEL. Baruch, my father died, too. What father doesn't? This grief will pass.

VALKENBURGH. Yes, Baruch Spinoza is grieving so much for his father, he's applied to be classified as an orphan.

BEN ISRAEL. What?

VALKENBURGH. He's applied to the city for relief from his father's debts. To do this he has to be declared an orphan. He put in an application three weeks ago.

BEN ISRAEL. But why, Baruch? The regulations of the congregation say —

SPINOZA. I know what the regulations say.

BEN ISRAEL. You can't go to the city until you've gone to the community. Your dealings are with Jews, so this is for Jews to solve. If we can't help you, then you go to the city.

SPINOZA. Well, I went to the city.

REBEKAH. *(From the audience.) He should be expelled for this! He should be excommunicated! Put him in kherem!*

VALKENBURGH. Who is this person? *(Rebekah enters from the audience.)*

SPINOZA. Mr. Valkenburgh — my sister Rebekah.

REBEKAH. Half-sister. Not sister. And I'd be ashamed to be half-cousin, half-anything, half-nothing to this noisemaker. This icicle. This prig. And if the regulations say he has to go to the community first, then he's violated the regulations and he should be expelled. And while you're at it, get me the money I should have inherited from my father that's going to him. Or do I have to bypass the Jews and go to the city, like him? Oh, he'll tell you what he needs to say — for *him*. For Baruch Spinoza. The center of the universe. Yes, the business is bad for this cause and that cause, which depends on this other cause. Maybe business is bad because Baruch is running the business. Maybe *Baruch* is the cause. And now he says that he's in *love*? I'm not going to say what he's in love with. One of *them*. A

gentile. A shikse, as our eastern cousins would say. I say Baruch Spinoza does not love anything. Not his family, not his people, not his religion. Ask him about his people. Go on. Ask him about the Jews. Oh, yes, he likes to rub shoulders with the Jews — so he can feel superior to the Jews. *Baruch Spinoza hates the Jews.* The law of Moses? He despises it. The Jews, he'll tell you? A superstitious people born and bred in ignorance. Just ask him. The Jews? They don't know what God is. The Jews? They have the gall to think of themselves as God's chosen people. The Jews, he will tell you, are no different from anybody else. They're no different from Hindus or Chinese or Christians (*Indicating Valkenburgh.*) like this piece of paper. Ask Mr. Know-It-All about the Jews. But what he answers, we won't understand. We Jews are too ignorant for his wisdom. We're too superstitious, we're too stupid, we pay too much attention to the sacred books given to us by God. You know he's got Jews stabbing him in the street now, calling him a heretic? What are you waiting for? The *Messiah* to say he's a heretic? He was a snout when he was a child, and he's still a snout. The arrogance behind all that cheerfulness. The smugness. Ask him. Somebody. Ask what he really thinks about the Jews and you'll see what he is. This loser. This prince. This fox. Ask. Meanwhile, I say *this* to him. (*She spits at Spinoza.*) I demand justice. I demand excommunication.

BEN ISRAEL. Baruch, did you really say all that about the Jews?

REBEKAH. A thousand times in my own hearing. I swear it on my parents' grave.

VALKENBURGH. This woman's testimony isn't exactly objective. She has a monetary grievance.

REBEKAH. I only ask for the money that's due to me. I only ask for justice.

VALKENBURGH. You didn't inherit from your father?

REBEKAH. Somehow I was omitted from the will.

SPINOZA. Gabriel and I inherited. Rebekah became my financial responsibility.

REBEKAH. Yes, I'm the ward of Baruch Spinoza. The pet sister of a swindling atheist.

VALKENBURGH. Does Spinoza give you an allowance of any kind?

REBEKAH. Oh, I live well enough.

VALKENBURGH. How much does he give you? (*Rebekah doesn't answer.*) Well, how much does he give you?

REBEKAH. Twenty-five guilders a month.

Clara Monologue

MORTERA. Why not?

SPINOZA. There's no need. Nature and humanity cannot *not* conform to God's blueprints, or God would not be God and God's laws would not be laws. Immutable and necessary.

MORTERA. You would lock us into unbreakable chains for all eternity.

SPINOZA. But free you with your mind.

CLARA. Bento, isn't something missing from this world of yours? From this philosophy of yours?

SPINOZA. Yes, there is. Yes. And that's the piece I'm missing! That's the capstone in all this where right now there's this gaping hole.

CLARA. You don't see what it is? That missing piece? *(A small pause.)*

SPINOZA. Thank you, Clara. Clara as always is the clue. Clara is the clarification. — *Love.* That's what's missing.

CLARA. God's love for us.

SPINOZA. No. God can't love. Nature cannot love, Clara.

CLARA. Yes, but ... but Bento —

SPINOZA. Our love for God. *Our love for God.* That's what I was missing. It's not just comprehension that we must attain. We must ascend through comprehension, beyond comprehension, to *love*. To loving that God that is indistinguishable from the world and that must be loved as I love Clara — without the hope, without the need, of receiving anything in return. And this is going straight into my book. Thank you. *(He kisses Clara.)*

BEN ISRAEL. Shame on you! Shame, Baruch — in this place!

SPINOZA. Blame the laws of Nature. Blame gravity. Blame God. *(Clara looks horrified.)*

MORTERA. But Baruch, if what you say is true, everything we do or say is predetermined. This entire proceeding is determined.

SPINOZA. Yes, it must mean that.

MORTERA. And the outcome today is preordained.

SPINOZA. Yes, it must mean that, too. Whether you free me or condemn me it's because you have no choice.

VALKENBURGH. If you think that can undo your guilt, think again.

CLARA. If only we could stop our thoughts. If only we could stop them as we stop water in a tap.

MORTERA. Miss van den Enden, I know that Bento has troubled your heart.

CLARA. More than troubled it. He has ravished my heart but

seeded my mind. Implanting so many questions and ideas ... What am I to do with all these thoughts? And I must carry them with me, inside me, whether Bento is here or elsewhere, whether he's with me or no. His ideas are like a child that I as a good believing Christian cannot raise up. God won't let me have these ideas. And when Bento is gone, when you've banished him — *if you banish him ...* What am I to do with all these thoughts? What am I to do with these ideas? Oh, God, God, help me, please. Please. Please.

MORTERA. Some water for her. *(Simon brings her a glass.)* Drink, child.

BEN ISRAEL. Rabbi, how far do we let him speak? This man is an atheist. Isn't that "clear and distinct" already?

SPINOZA. I maintain that God is the highest good and must as such be loved. How can I be an atheist?

BEN ISRAEL. You're poisoning me. And you're poisoning the minds and faith of everyone here. You're not a Jew and you're not worthy to stand in this house. You're not worthy to wear this on your head! *(Rips the skull cap from Spinoza's head.)* Damn you, Baruch! *Damn you!* Baruch Spinoza is not a good citizen. He is not a good Jew. This is our only question here. For my part, I say we should go back to the days of Uriel da Costa. I say this man should be publicly stripped and whipped and forced to lie down in the doorway of this synagogue so that everyone may walk over his body as we leave. Even if it means he goes home and puts a bullet in his brain. God forgive me.

VALKENBURGH. I think you've just lost your case, Mr. Spinoza.

SPINOZA. Not yet. Not until Rabbi Mortera says so.

VALKENBURGH. I give you three minutes to finish.

SPINOZA. Three minutes...!

VALKENBURGH. Or I will dissolve this assembly and bring in the city guard. You will be put in prison and this meeting house will be shut.

SPINOZA. So you're *ordering* the parnassim to condemn me? You with your respect for the law?

VALKENBURGH. You've pushed me long and far enough, young man. Don't push me a hair farther.

MORTERA. Give him time.

VALKENBURGH. I give him three minutes.

SPINOZA. By what right are you here in the first place?

VALKENBURGH. The purpose of the state, Mr. Spinoza, is to keep the peace.

SPINOZA. But you only pay two.

SIMON. All right, two is the true price.

SPINOZA. Only because it's marked down from four. You see why this is a Jewish story.

SIMON. All right. The true price is the average. Two-point-three or whatever.

SPINOZA. Master Simon, you will never be a mathematician.

SIMON. All right, so what's the true price of cod?

SPINOZA. Maybe it's what Shlomb paid for it.

SIMON. Bento, what is the true price of cod?

SPINOZA. Don't *think*, Simon.

SIMON. I know it's a trick question.

SPINOZA. Philosophy doesn't mean *think*. It means *love wisdom*. So philosophize! *Fisbosophize!* (*Clara enters.*)

CLARA. Bento ...

SPINOZA. And behold, the angel Clara appeared unto them.

CLARA. Hello, Simon.

SPINOZA. And behold, the angel was breathless from running. This is a treat. I thought you had a singing student.

CLARA. A message came for you at the house. The man said it was important. (*Clara gives the note to Spinoza.*)

SIMON. I'm going to get another. Clara? Coffee?

CLARA. No, thank you.

SIMON. Bento?

SPINOZA. I'm fine. (*Simon exits.*)

CLARA. Why did Simon run away like that?

SPINOZA. Charming the barmaid, as usual. (*He opens and reads the note.*)

CLARA. What is it?

SPINOZA. It's from Rabbi Mortera. "Baruch. Come to our meeting house. Mortera." A cryptic dispatch. Not his usual polished and periodical style. "My son, if you could find it in your heart to indulge an old man ... " Et cetera ...

CLARA. You look so troubled.

SPINOZA. I've been cutting classes, you might say. Rabbi classes. He probably just wants to urge me again to fill his yarmulke someday.

CLARA. You revere him, Bento. Why not just speak to him? Open your heart.

SPINOZA. And put a crack in his? I'll just do the old Spinoza side-step. And if he calls me, I must go. (*Puts note away.*) Mademoiselle

— paradise, as always, to see you, no matter how briefly. — Simon!

CLARA. No, wait. Don't go.

SPINOZA. What's the matter?

CLARA. Nothing. I don't know. I just have a bad feeling about this. Stay a minute.

SPINOZA. Did you do your geometry today? No, you went to church instead.

CLARA. Don't be angry.

SPINOZA. I don't mind you inhaling your daily sermon. I mind you omitting your daily Euclid.

CLARA. You should come with me sometime. If you met Jesus Christ personally ...

SPINOZA. That would be hard, he being dead all these years.

CLARA. Jesus Christ is not dead. Jesus Christ is God, Bento.

SPINOZA. I'm sorry, remind me. How can a man be God?

CLARA. By God taking on human nature.

SPINOZA. You might as well say a circle took on the nature of a square. Circle. Square. Man. God. Different in *essence*, Clara.

CLARA. I know that Jesus Christ is God.

SPINOZA. You know this how?

CLARA. From all the people leading back to those who knew him.

SPINOZA. In other words, by hearsay. The same way you know that Lazarus strolled out of his grave one day, or that your communion bread is the body of a small-town carpenter. Those are entertaining stories, Clara. But water can't turn into wine, the dead can't be raised, and bread can only become toast. What is the rule?

CLARA. Nature cannot depart from its own —

SPINOZA. No, no. Nature, *which is to say God*, cannot depart from its own laws.

CLARA. Well, yes, logically.

SPINOZA. You say *logically* as if there's some alternative to logic. Logic is just what we all have to agree upon. *Logically*, Jesus is not available today.

CLARA. Bento, you don't know how it hurts me. These are things I believe with all my heart.

SPINOZA. We can't want the world to be what it's not —

CLARA. But my *heart*, Bento. I'm saying I believe this is *in my heart*. Do you know what that means? Not to think something but to know something, to feel it and believe it in your heart?

SPINOZA. I don't know what you're talking about today.

CLARA. Most people believe the world is something very different from what you do.

SPINOZA. It's not my job to believe, it's my job to think.

CLARA. I don't think. I *know*. I know God exists. He's in my heart, and he loves me. Bento, I have been stopped in the street and irradiated by the presence of God. And my God is *warm*.

SPINOZA. Unlike mine, you mean.

CLARA. Religion isn't just theology.

SPINOZA. You're my theology.

CLARA. How I tremble at night when I think of what must happen to your soul in the next world.

SPINOZA. Here's a solution. I'll do without a next world.

CLARA. You frighten me. You frighten me.

SPINOZA. How can a *lufimensch* like me scare a strong Dutch girl like you?

CLARA. You once accepted Jewish dogma.

SPINOZA. There is no Jewish dogma, only bickering.

CLARA. You must believe something.

SPINOZA. I love you. That's what I believe.

CLARA. And what does that mean to you? What is love?

SPINOZA. Love is the understanding of an entity's perfections.

CLARA. I am not an *entity*, Bento.

SPINOZA. You are perfect. And utterly good.

CLARA. No, no, no. I'm not perfect. I'm not good.

SPINOZA. You stink to high heaven of sin, is that what you're going to tell me?

CLARA. You have no idea what I am. You're not even in love with *me*. You're in love with the idea of me. If you were to take me in your arms I don't know what I'd do. What am I supposed to do with this ghostly love of yours? Would you marry me and have children by me?

SPINOZA. I can't.

CLARA. So it's very easy for you to love me. Or say you love me.

SPINOZA. Maybe you should fall in love with the idea of Simon. Maybe you have already.

CLARA. What if I did? Would you care? Would you fight for me?

SPINOZA. If you fall in love, you fall in love. Simon's my friend. Mazel tov.

CLARA. So it would just be *logical*. It would be *necessary*.

SPINOZA. Can't I just love you? Can't you just love me? Without return?

CLARA. No! People don't work like that.

SPINOZA. I'm not like other people.

CLARA. It's too late for me to say change your ways.

SPINOZA. How can I change when everything I do is done according to my essence? *Sub specie aeternitatis* ...

CLARA. Please, don't, Bento. Not eternity. Not today.

SPINOZA. I can't help it.

CLARA. In the light of eternity nothing matters. Not you or me or anything. Not even love.

SPINOZA. Don't be angry.

CLARA. I'm not angry. I'm just sad, Bento. I'm just so sad for you.
(Clara exits, as Simon enters.)

SIMON. What's all that?

SPINOZA. Love. God. Eternity. The usual.

SIMON. So is it a walk on the beach today?

SPINOZA. No, it's a walk to the synagogue. I've been summoned.
(Valkenburg enters, unremarked by the two, and paces the stage.)

SIMON. Oh. Then I think I'll paint after all.

SPINOZA. No, no, no. Come walk with me.

SIMON. I have million better things to do than go to —

SPINOZA. No, you don't. Come tour Amsterdam's Portuguese synagogue. The atmosphere! The ethnic color! The old-world Sephardic charm! You'll love it.

SIMON. All right. But wait a minute. First, what is the true price of cod? Four pennies or two?

SPINOZA. The true price is nothing. You can't put a price on a creature, Simon. Not all the pearls of India are worth the ugliest catfish basking on the bottom of the Aye.

SIMON. I knew it was a trick question.

SPINOZA. Wait a minute. The light is changing. One more look before it goes away. *(He stares into the distance a moment.)* All right. Now. *(Spinoza and Simon exit. The set changes.)*

carries a portfolio and does not acknowledge the men, nor they him. His eyes are on the far horizon.) My presence is not necessary. I don't care what Baruch has written or what he's said or even what he thinks. If it contradicts what Baruch *knows* in his heart of hearts, if it contradicts our faith and the Law of Moses, if it contradicts what I myself have taught him, we need only remind him. He will not disgrace himself, or his people. I promise you, excommunication will not be necessary. You will have your silence.

SPINOZA. Fantastic ...

VALKENBURGH. Let us pray. Dear God, you sent the flood at Leiden to drown the Spanish as you sent the wind to shake the Midianites. Help us now in our distress. Though you must shake our city, sweep it clean.

MORTERA. All Highest, if Baruch has strayed, show him the way back to his people, and to you. Amen.

BEN ISRAEL. Amen.

VALKENBURGH. Amen. Gentlemen, until tomorrow morning. *(The three exit, leaving Spinoza.)*

SPINOZA. Unbelievable...! *(The scene changes to ...)*

Scene 2

The garden of The Spinning Wheel tavern. Morning.

SPINOZA. *(Calls offstage.)* Simon! Come out here and look at this! — Unbelievable ... *(Simon enters.)*

SIMON. I'm so glad you introduced me to this place. That barmaid is a miracle.

SPINOZA. *(Pointing toward the horizon.)* So is *that*. How would you do it, Simon? That light on the canal and the way those rooftops sparkle.

SIMON. Old man Rembrandt would know.

SPINOZA. Let's drop in and ask him. His candle was still burning.

SIMON. He'd do the water with three squiggles of red ink. The rooftops with another ten strokes. You'd have the whole scene, just like that. Damn him.

SPINOZA. I wouldn't have even *seen* this if you hadn't stuck a drawing pencil in my hand. I'm going to try it. (*Spinoza sits down and takes pencil and paper from his portfolio.*)

SIMON. Bento, isn't there a boat full of raisins coming in?

SPINOZA. Gabriel will be there pacing the dock when it does. We can't spend our lives waiting for boats, Simon. The raisins could come today, the raisins could come next week.

SIMON. At least Gabriel worries about your raisins.

SPINOZA. It's in my brother's nature to worry about raisins. It's my nature to worry about reasons.

SIMON. Your essence.

SPINOZA. My *essence*. Thank you. I'm glad something is seeping in.

SIMON. You'll never make your first million guilders sitting here drawing.

SPINOZA. It's out of my hands. Bento and Gabriel Spinoza, Merchants in Sugar, Ginger, and Raisins, will succeed or it will fail, "thanks be to God."

SIMON. Thanks be to Gabriel.

SPINOZA. I'm making a glorious hash of this drawing.

SIMON. Release your death grip on the pencil. You have to hold it as you would a bird. Not so tightly that you smother it, not so lightly that it flies away. (*Simon demonstrates. Spinoza tries again.*)

SPINOZA. Oh, yes. Much better. I thought you were going to paint.

SIMON. (*Shrugs, pacing.*) Restless today.

SPINOZA. Don't sit here with me. Three months in Amsterdam and you still haven't seen the sights. Go down to the city jail. For a penny they'll show you the drowning cell. Look at this, it's ingenious. A hermetically sealed cell with only a pump inside. If a prisoner refuses to work, he's locked into the chamber. Gates are lifted. Water pours in. The cell starts to flood. The only way the prisoner can save himself from drowning is to pump — and pump and pump. Not only saving his life but forcing him to the virtuous exertion he refused. True Dutch Reform reform at work. And a perfect image of, what, life in Amsterdam? Life on earth? The life of the intellect?

SIMON. Your jacket is torn, Herr Intellect.

SPINOZA. (*Studying a tear in his sleeve.*) Oh yeah, that. A man tried to stab me.

SIMON. *What? When? **

SPINOZA. Clara and I were walking out of a very dull comedy. Outside the theater a Jew ran up and took a swipe at me with a knife.

SIMON. Why would he do that?

SPINOZA. Maybe he mistook me for the playwright. He was shouting "*apikorus, apikorus!*" — heretic, heretic! — so I don't think he was a drama critic. Though in Amsterdam, who knows?

SIMON. You didn't go to the constabulary?

SPINOZA. They would have booked me as a heretic and used my shirt for proof. I like to wear it as a souvenir of my sweet hometown. Isn't it nice to live among men with strong opinions?

SIMON. Yes, but they also carry *knives*, Bento.

SPINOZA. I mock this city, Simon, but I do love it. Yesterday on a street corner I passed a preacher spouting some tripe about the end of the world. On the next corner I passed a Jewish fruit peddler with a sign. It said, "Fresh Figs. Fine Tits. Same Thing." How can you resist a place with pockets of poetry like that? I went back later to buy some of those figs and he said, "Gone, sir. Just like the morning." The city should give him a medal. "Gone, sir. Just like the morning ... " I wish my father were here to see this one.

SIMON. Maybe that preacher's right. Maybe the end of the world is coming.

SPINOZA. The world can't end, Simon. Yes, the earth may fall into the sun. All human life may end. The *world* will still be here.

SIMON. You mean the universe.

SPINOZA. The universe *is* the world. You have to look at things from the point of view of eternity.

SIMON. (*Overlapping.*) ... from the point of view of eternity. *Sub specie aeternitatis.* (*Spinoza is overtaken by a harsh cough.*) I heard you coughing all night.

SPINOZA. *Sub specie mortalitatis*, I'm destined for an early grave. So doodle ye landscapes while ye may.

SIMON. Don't joke about that, Bento.

SPINOZA. I'm not joking.

SIMON. It's meant so much to me, your friendship since I got here. Your wisdom.

SPINOZA. Yes, I am wise, aren't I.

SIMON. I wish I were half as wise.

SPINOZA. Be born a Jew. And learn mathematics.

SIMON. I'd rather concentrate on Saskia the sloe-eyed barmaid.

SPINOZA. The world is made of numbers, Simon. Saskia being part of the world, Saskia is made of numbers, too. Know your numbers, you know your barmaid. Not in the Biblical sense.

SIMON. Human beings are more than numbers.

SPINOZA. That pearly haze is a cloud. It's also a mathematically distributed cluster of water droplets. You can paint the cloud or you can plot the drops on a graph. The same is true of people. Human actions have causes, clouds have theirs. Anger and jealousy and love are exactly like lines and planes and solids. They're just not as complicated.

SIMON. You don't know the first thing about people, Bento!

SPINOZA. Maybe not. I do know a few things about God that nobody else does.

SIMON. You've got to stop saying things like that out loud. If you don't believe me, believe the slash in your jacket.

SPINOZA. The more lines I add the worse it gets. Maybe the truest representation of something is nothing. A paradox that I must investigate ... *(A bout of coughing overcomes him.)* before death overtakes me. *(Starts to crumple the drawing.)*

SIMON. Wait. Can I have that? As a memento?

SPINOZA. Of what?

SIMON. Today. This morning.

SPINOZA. You're gazing at me like a maiden of sixteen. You're not going to kiss me, are you?

SIMON. If you believed in an afterlife, would you feel differently, Bento? About "the world"?

SPINOZA. Is there anything more depressing than the prospect of an afterlife? Immortality's only appealing on a morning like this. Amidst the ephemeral. This is what we get, Simon. It's all we get. The poetry of a Jewish fruit peddler and a heap of vanishing figs.

SIMON. Come on, let's get lost. If you're not going to work, let's take a walk on the beach.

SPINOZA. One pipe first. *(He fills a clay pipe.)* And today's philosophical riddle. No, listen to this. Just past my local fig peddler, I passed my local fishmonger.

SIMON. Jewish fishmonger?

SPINOZA. Of course Jewish. All good stories start with a Jew. So Shlomo is out there shouting, "ALL FISH HALF OFF! TODAY ONLY! ALL FISH HALF OFF!" So herring isn't six pennies a pound it's three, cod isn't four it's two, and so on. Here's the question: If everything is half off, what is the true price of cod? Four pennies, or two?

SIMON. Well, four is the *true* price.