

START

IN YIDDISH:

MADJE: OH!! (*Reads a little further*)

ASCH: Oh???

MADJE: Ohhh . . .

ASCH: Ohhh as in it's awful??? Oh as in how do I tell him? Oh as in whom did I marry?

(Madje reads. End of play.

Madje puts the manuscript down on her breasts. She closes her eyes. She opens her eyes. She inhales. She weeps.)

MADJE: Ohhh!

ASCH: Are you crying?

MADJE: I can't breathe.

Oh as in it's wonderful. It's so sad. I love it.

ASCH: Really?

MADJE: Really.

ASCH: What did you love?

MADJE: My God, Sholem. It's all in there. The roots of all evil: the money, the subjugation of women, the false piety . . . the terrifying violence of that father . . . and then, oh Sholem, the two girls in the rain scene! My God, the poetry in it—what is it about your writing that makes me hold my breath? You make me feel the desire between these two women is the purest, most chaste, most spiritual—

ASCH: —It is! . . . are you angry? That I stole your words for the virgin daughter?

MADJE: If Papa had come downstairs and discovered his virgin daughter in flagrante! . . .

ASCH: I would never have made it to the huppah alive.

MADJE: It's interesting to hear your words the night you seduced me . . . in the mouth of a prostitute.

— INDECENT —

ASCH: I feel like a prostitute every time I have to pander to Mr. Peretz to get a reading in his salon.

MADJE: This play will cause a sensation tomorrow night! All the writers will be green with envy.

ASCH: Don't bring down the evil eye! Mr. Peretz could hate it.

MADJE: Oh, Mr. Peretz is a lovely man . . . but he's so nineteenth century.

Acchh! Warsaw is a provincial little town! This play will be done all over the world: Moscow, Berlin, Paris—wait, wait!—I know who would be perfect for the father! Rudolph Schildkraut!

ASCH: Who?

MADJE: Rudolph Schildkraut is a sensation in Berlin right now with his *Merchant of Venice*. I'll ask Papa for money to send you. We must get this play to him!

ASCH: It's my first play!

MADJE: Our play will catch fire in Berlin! All the German intelligentsia can talk about right now is Dr. Freud! It's the twentieth century! We are all attracted to both sexes. I promise I'll understand if you get attracted to a man—

ASCH: —Huh.

MADJE: But I'll kill you if it's another woman.

ASCH: I promise you I'll understand if you get attracted to a woman—as long as I can watch.

MADJE: My God, I am now married to a *playwright*! You're my warrior! My suffragette!

ASCH (*Hopefully*): Your lesbian?

MADJE: "Teach me. Take me. I want to taste you."

END

(*Madje dives beneath the covers.*)