

another name

Mahler

MAHLER

1) Song of the Earth

2) Mahler

Same play,
different versions

THE SONG OF THE EARTH

THE SONG OF THE EARTH

A Play In Two Parts

by

Maurice Rowdon

CHARACTERS

GUSTAV MAHLER

ALMA MAHLER

2

SCENE

The scene is divided into areas which can be lighted into existence.

'Left' and 'right' in the directions are from the audience's point of view.

Downstage left there is the personal area, with a table covered with scores, easy chairs and a chaiselongue.

Upstage right a wide staircase leads up to a great Roman arch---this will represent the entrance to public life, the Vienna State Opera house, concerts etc. Lights beyond the arch (where other steps descend out of sight) give it at different times a mellow or a forbidding or a glaringly hostile appearance, according to the requirements of the script.

The space upstage of the personal area is raked and will be used to suggest outdoors.

The action does not always follow a straight chronological development. ALMA particularly is called on to speak from different periods of her life---to be the woman who remembers (in her forties) as well as the woman remembered (in her twenties); and she is seen at her death at the age of 85. GUSTAV is seen between his 44th and 51st year (the year of his death). And at times they are speaking to each other long after their deaths.

GUSTAV MAHLER was born in 1860 and died in 1911.
ALMA MAHLER was born in 1879 and died in 1964.

1.

GUSTAV MAHLER is simultaneously getting into tails and composing. One operation is at the expense of the other: he is tangled in his jacket, one arm in the sleeve and ~~not~~ one not, tranquilly writing, bent over the table from a standing position. He is totally concentrated.

GUSTAV MAHLER, in his middle age, is small, pale and thin, with a rather long face and an unusually steep forehead. His hair is intensely black, his eyes strikingly aware and penetrating behind their spectacles, which give them an extra severe look. He has an irregular way of walking---he tends to stamp his feet, to stop suddenly and then rush forward headlong again: something is always pulling or halting or propelling him, it seems.

ALMA MAHLER appears from the right and stands watching him with awe. She is twenty, taller than he and fair. She already has something of the wonderfully self-assured magnificence of the later years.

ALMA: He's the director of the Vienna State Opera and I'm his wife! I touch him! I kiss him! I feel his breath on my hair! Cabbies recognise him in the street. And he's old enough to be my father, which I don't care about because no man my age could be that successful. It takes a lifetime to build an empire. Look at the funny blind way he does everything (as MAHLER begins strolling round, searching for another phrase in his mind, his tails still hanging on him).

GUSTAV (subsiding into a chair) Yes!

ALMA: I don't mean money. Though I don't despise money. Anyway, he hasn't got much. What I mean by success is-----

I tried to say all of his music, as my reason for marrying him. But of course it didn't mean a thing to her.

MAHLER is nearly at the top of the stairs. He stops in an ~~absent~~ absent way and looks blindly down towards ALMA.

MAHLER: You don't want a ring do you?

ALMA (vehemently) No, my darling, no! Just conduct for me! Think of me with every beat! (He moves on) And look at his trousers...

MAHLER (stopping again) After all it's only a stone.

He goes on and descends the ⁷ steps on the other side, and out of sight. A great burst of ~~applause~~ applause drowns the orchestra.

ALMA: Listen to them! Listen!

The applause becomes deafening as if to represent ALMA's way of hearing it. Then it fades sharply and there is a rap of the baton ^h the conductor's desk, off. on

ALMA: After all, he was only fifty when she said that. He looked so beautiful when he died. Pale, so pale! Like a god! Burning black eyes---so huge! I married twice after that, ⁷ apart from a near-marriage with a painter. That would have made four. I admit it was rather a lot of husbands. A composer, an architect, a novelist, and as I say a painter. And every one of them world famous. Somebody once said that every artist needs a woman behind him. Well, four of them needed me!

All sound has ceased from beyond the arch.

MAHLER appears suddenly from upstage of the staircase in a dressing gown, barefooted.

MAHLER: You surely can't mean that?

ALMA: (startled) You're supposed to be conducting Fidelio!

MAHLER: That was ^{seventy} ~~fifty~~ years ago.

ALMA: What? Gustav! (They stare at each other) It really

is!

MAHLER: Did you mean what you said to me once---we were walking in the woods near Grinzing---you said---

They join each other and stroll along arm in arm in the open area, laughing.

ALMA (a girl again) All I love in a man is what he achieves! Yes! The greater his achievement the more I can love him!

MAHLER (professorial next to her 22 years) But that's a terrible thing to say! Suppose somebody came along who'd achieved more than I?

ALMA: I'd love him more. I'd have to!

MAHLER: Well, I've got nothing to worry about for the time being. I'm only 44. And I don't know anybody else in the world who could do more than I can!

ALMA: I'll go and get your bath ready.

She leaves, left.

MAHLER (watching her go) What a cheap mind she has in many ways. That's what I love. It's like an animal. I feel safer than with all these noble people. I've always loved animals. Thank God Mozart isn't alive. She'd marry him like a shot. But perhaps she wouldn't. He wasn't successful enough. That bitch of a wife he had married somebody else a few weeks after his death. The bitch!

- she

ALMA (off) Gustav! Your bath's ready!

MAHLER (going off left) I'm coming!

The Viennese song ACH DU LIEBER AUGUSTIN! surges over the speakers. ALMA hurries on, a young girl in a sumptuous evening gown. She is carrying a handmaid table cloth and a candelabra. She flings the cloth over the table and sets the candelabra in the middle.

ALMA: Vienna in 1901 (nineteenhundred and one) was soft and easy-going and malicious. Of course I wasn't malicious--- I was just nice and twenty-years-old!

MAHLER
~~GRINZING~~ (off) Sssh!

ALMA (clapping a hand to her mouth) Woops! He's composing!

8

He mustn't see or hear a human being while he's composing. (The table set) There! Well, one day on the Ring, who should bump into me and my mother but the Zuckerkandls! They asked me to come and meet the great Mahler! And I didn't want to! (Laughing) I hated the way he conducted his First Symphony. And I hated his First Symphony! But Mahler cancelled the date anyway. And when they asked me a second time, for another Sunday, I said yes! I accepted! I accepted! Oh Gustav I accepted!

She dances round to the music.
She stops suddenly, afraid for her appearance.

ALMA (touching her hair) My hair! My ~~eyes~~ face! My dress!
My shoulders are knobby! My hands are twitching!
My---!

The music has ceased. She stops spellbound as MAHLER, imposing and remote in evening clothes, with cloak and top hat and cane, enters from the left. He takes his hat and cloak off slowly and throws them on the chaiselongue. He bows to the table perfunctorily and sits down.

ALMA steals to her place at the other end of the table. No chair has been placed there for her and she drags one across with a schoolgirl glance at MAHLER.

He fixes her with his eyes and stays that way, intrigued and captive.

ALMA: I wish he'd take his eyes off me! No I don't!

She talks silently to invisible guests, MAHLER's eyes still on her. She laughs at something said, and she laughs!

MAHLER (laughing involuntarily) Can't we share the joke down at the end there?

She laughs on.

ALMA: His poor neighbour---he didn't get a word out of Mahler all evening. (Nodding and laughing) I had Klimt the well-known painter, and Max Burkhart, the great theatrical director (laughing on).

MAHLER (craning forward to hear a guest) Kubelik? I think

"THE SONG OF THE EARTH"

A Play In Two Parts

by

Maurice Rowdon

CHARACTERS

GUSTAV MAHLER

ALMA MAHLER

SCENE

The scene is divided into areas which can be lighted into existence.

'Left' and 'right' in the directions are from the audience's point of view.

Downstage left there is the personal area, with a table covered with scores, easy chairs and a chaiselongue.

Upstage right a wide staircase leads up to a great Roman arch---this will represent the entrance to public life, the Vienna State Opera house, concerts etc. Lights beyond the arch (where other steps descend out of sight) give it at different times a mellow or a forbidding or a glaringly hostile appearance, according to the requirements of the script.

The space upstage of the personal area is raked and will be used to suggest outdoors.

The action does not always follow a straight chronological development. ALMA particularly is called on to speak from different periods of her life---to be the woman who remembers (in her forties) as well as the woman remembered (in her twenties); and she is seen at her death at the age of 85. GUSTAV is seen between his 44th and 51st year (the year of his death). And at times they are speaking to each other long after their deaths.

GUSTAV MAHLER was born in 1860 and died in 1911.
ALMA MAHLER was born in 1879 and died in 1964.

1.

GUSTAV MAHLER is simultaneously getting into tails and composing. One operation is at the expense of the other: he is tangled in his jacket, one arm in the sleeve and ~~xxx~~ one not, tranquilly writing, bent over the table from a standing position. He is totally concentrated.

GUSTAV MAHLER, in his middle age, is small, pale and thin, with a rather long face and an unusually steep forehead. His hair is intensely black, his eyes strikingly aware and penetrating behind their spectacles, which give them an extra severe look. He has an irregular way of walking---he tends to stamp his feet, to stop suddenly and then rush forward headlong again: something is always pulling or halting or propelling him, it seems.

ALMA MAHLER appears from the right and stands watching him with awe. She is twenty, taller than he and fair. She already has something of the wonderfully self-assured magnificence of the later years.

ALMA: He's the director of the Vienna State Opera and I'm his wife! I touch him! I kiss him! feel his breath on my hair! Cabbies recognise him in the street. And he's old enough to be my father, which I don't care about because no man my age could be that successful. It takes a lifetime to build an empire. Look at the funny blind way he does everything (as MAHLER begins strolling round, searching for another phrase in his mind, his tails still hanging on him).

GUSTAV (subsiding into a chair) Yes!

ALMA: I don't mean money. Though I don't despise money. Anyway, he hasn't got much. What I mean by success

He begins writing and 'ALMA's theme' steals over the speakers---the second subject in the first movement of the Sixth Symphony.

ALMA: Oh Gustav! That's what I mean!

MAHLER (suddenly looking up as the music fades) You don't mind if I don't give you a wedding ring do you?

ALMA (with great disappointment) No!

MAHLER: I think it's bad taste. I mean we're already married---always have been---

ALMA: Spiritually, you mean.

MAHLER: With the whole of us---not just spiritually---with the whole of our destinies!

ALMA: Yes.

MAHLER: And you can't seal that with a ring. I hate the idea. (Suddenly looking at her again) You don't care for rings do you?

ALMA: Oh no!

He concentrates on his music again.

ALMA (to her self) I love rings!

He begins dressing for a concert. Ideas constantly interfere with this and he gets tangled up in his sleeve. ALMA watches him with some impatience. Then he is ready to mount the ~~steps~~ stairs to the arch, where a bright light sweeps up accompanied by the exciting sound of an audience and a tuning orchestra. It is larger than life for a moment---as perhaps ALMA hears it. He walks up the stairs in an haphazard way, still thinking over his composition.

ALMA (relaxing into an older woman) An American woman---the Gibson girl she was called---she stank of money---no brains at all but very beautiful, if that's possible---she asked me in her car one day on Fifth Avenue, What made you marry that hideous old man? I admit he wasn't looking very good at that time. It was a year before he died. I sat in the car and talked and talked---

I tried to say all of his music, as my reason for marrying him. But of course it didn't mean a thing to her.

MAHLER is nearly at the top of the stairs. He stops in an ~~absent~~ absent way and looks blindly down towards ALMA.

MAHLER: You don't want a ring do you?

ALMA (vehemently) No, my darling, no! Just conduct for me! Think of me with every beat! (He moves on) And look at his trousers...

MAHLER (stopping again) After all it's only a stone.

He goes on and descends the ^{steps} on the other side, and out of sight. A great burst of ~~applause~~ applause drowns the orchestra.

ALMA: Listen to them! Listen!

The applause becomes deafening as if to represent ALMA's way of hearing it. Then it fades sharply and there is a rap of the baton ^{on} the conductor's desk, off.

ALMA: After all, he was only fifty when she said that. He looked so beautiful when he died. Pale, so pale! Like a god! Burning black eyed---so huge! I married twice after that, ~~apart~~ apart from a near-marriage with a painter. That would have made four. I admit it was rather a lot of husbands. A composer, an architect, a novelist, and as I say a painter. And every one of them world famous. Somebody once said that every artist needs a woman behind him. Well, four of them needed me!

All sound has ceased from beyond the arch.

MAHLER appears suddenly from upstage of the staircase in a dressing gown, barefooted.

MAHLER: You surely can't mean that?

ALMA: (startled) You're supposed to be conducting Fidelio!

MAHLER: That was ~~fifty~~ ^{seventy} years ago.

ALMA: What? Gustav! (They stare at each other) It really

is!

MAHLER: Did you mean what you said to me once---we were walking in the woods near Grinzing---you said---

They join each other and stroll along arm in arm in the open area, laughing.

ALMA (a girl again) All I love in a man is what he achieves!
Yes! The greater his achievement the more I can love him!

MAHLER (professorial next to her 22 years) But that's a terrible thing to say! Suppose somebody came along who'd achieved more than I?

ALMA: I'd love him more. I'd have to!

MAHLER: Well, I've got nothing to worry about for the time being. I'm only 44. And I don't know anybody else in the world who could do more than I can!

ALMA: I'll go and get your bath ready.

She leaves, left.

MAHLER (watching her go) What a cheap mind she has in many ways. That's what I love. It's like an animal. I feel safer than with all these noble people. I've always loved animals. Thank God Mozart isn't alive. She'd marry him like a shot. But perhaps she wouldn't. He wasn't successful enough. That bitch of a wife he had married somebody else a few weeks after his death. The bitch!

ALMA (off) Gustav! Your bath's ready!

MAHLER (going off left) I'm coming!

The Viennese song ACH DU LIEBER AUGUSTIN! surges over the speakers. ALMA hurries on, a young girl in a sumptuous evening gown. She is carrying a handmaid table cloth and a candelabra. She flings the cloth over the table and sets the candelabra in the middle.

ALMA: Vienna in 1901 (nineteenhundred and one) was soft and easy-going and malicious. Of course I wasn't malicious--- I was just nice and twenty-years-old!

MAHLER
~~MAHLER~~ (off) Sssh!

ALMA (clapping a hand to her mouth) Woops! He's composing!

He mustn't see or hear a human being while he's composing. (The table set) There! Well, one day on the Ring, who should bump into me and my mother but the Zuckerkandls! They asked me to come and meet the great Mahler! And I didn't want to! (Laughing) I hated the way he conducted his First Symphony. And I hated his First Symphony! But Mahler cancelled the date anyway. And when they asked me a second time, for another Sunday, I said yes! I accepted! I accepted! Oh Gustav I accepted!

She dances round to the music.
She stops suddenly, afraid for her appearance.

ALMA (touching her hair) My hair! My ~~dress~~ face! My dress!
My shoulders are knobbly! My hands are twitching!
My----!

The music has ceased. She stops spellbound as MAHLER, imposing and remote in evening clothes, with cloak and top hat and cane, enters from the left. He takes his hat and cloak off slowly and throws them on the chaiselongue. He bows to the table perfunctorily and sits down.

ALMA steals to her place at the other end of the table. No chair has been placed there for her and she drags one across with a schoolgirl glance at MAHLER.

He fixes her with his eyes and stays that way, intrigued and captive.

ALMA: I wish he'd take his eyes off me! No I don't!

She talks silently to invisible guests, MAHLER's eyes still on her. She laughs at something said, and she laughs!

MAHLER (laughing involuntarily) Can't we share the joke down at the end there?

She laughs on.

ALMA: His poor neighbour---he didn't get a word out of Mahler all evening. (Nodding and laughing) I had Klimt the well-known painter, and Max Burkhart, the great theatrical director (laughing on).

MAHLER (craning forward to hear a guest) Kubelik? I think

he plays like an angel, yes.

ALMA (abruptly ceasing her laughter, and addressing MAHLER'S end of the table with the utmost seriousness) I don't like soloist's recitals!

MAHLER: Nor do I! Nor do I!

Silence. They are gripped by each other. They gaze into each other's eyes.

MAHLER (unwillingly dragged into conversation by an invisible guest but still gazing at ALMA) Beauty? I think Socrates was probably beautiful. (Rising and wandering off into the open area downstage right) And I suppose you'd call him an ugly old blighter. Well, he was--- also.

ALMA (ALso rising) I think Zemlinsky's beautiful for instance.

MAHLER (swivelling round) No. That's going too far. He's the most atrociously ugly man I've ever set eyes on, even for a musician.

ALMA (approaching him) While we're on the subject of Zemlinsky, ~~Mr~~ Mahler---why haven't you ever done his Hofmannsthal ballet, The Golden Heart? I happen to know that you promised him you would!

MAHLER
~~QUESTA~~ (startled) Because I can't understand it!

ALMA: Would you like me to explain the whole thing to you?

He gazes at her. She becomes increasingly confused.

MAHLER (smiling) Very well.

ALMA: What lovely white teeth he has...

MAHLER: I believe you study music?

ALMA: Yes, under the atrocious Zemlinky.

MAHLER: Ah, that's why you love him! Would you like to bring some of your work along to the Opera one day and show me?

ALMA: When I have something----

MAHLER: Come to my dress rehearsal tomorrow morning---
The Tales of Hoffmann.

ALMA: If I can get my work done first.

MAHLER (ironically) Under Zemlinsky?

She leaves with a flourish, right.
He stands gazing after her.

MAHLER (seeming to address her) I'm so lonely, you see. By the way, this opera doesn't really give the spirit of Hoffmann. Just the corpse. I could hardly get to the end of the second act today. But with you there---tomorrow! I'll do it for you! Read that little story of Hoffmann's---Rath Krespel: you'll see what I mean. And then all these singers I have to manage---they're not a very clever lot. They usually have Antonia dying of consumption but she doesn't die of consumption, she just gives up her personality, her body, which we are all trying to do---it may take a lifetime, and it may take millions of lifetimes. Antonia's an artist you see! She melts away!

ALMA (off) She drifts into the night from which there is no return.

MAHLER: What? Oh how bogus she is! (With a shrug) But then she's a woman. You see, if you really listen to the Hoffmann tomorrow you could find out about music---

(off)
ALMA Oh! Generous of you!

MAHLER: There's no reality you see---all this you see around you, it's just a formula---it disappears when it has served its time---the only real thing is the soul---I apologise for the word but how can you have a word for what can't be described, ~~but~~ only demonstrated. And music demonstrates it, voilà!

ALMA(off) That day you conducted the Meistersinger---I didn't know you then---you looked like Lucifer---eyes burning like coals---your face so white! (Excited) Lucifer! Demon!

MAHLER (smiling) Yes, they always call me that. How else could I have controlled vast operatic productions---hordes of singers, cattle-sheds of musicians? It's the bad ones always hate me---you see, they know that all I have to do is look inside me for the answers and I'm always right! And all their study doesn't get them anywhere near it! All their intrigues, their worms of ambition gnawing their entrails out! Are you there? (Silence) She's dead. She's been

dead a good---oh I don't know. She died over fifty years after me. Imagine that! I formed her, really. Alma! You needed me, didn't you? For your other men! Do you remember a few days before I died, we joked about who you'd marry---and I went through a whole list? and at the end of the list I said no, I'd better stay alive---you don't want any of that lot! But you did get one of them. Old Gropius. Wasn't he something ghastly like an architect? Remember when he sent you a telegram from every station along the Toblach-Vienna line---and I was at the receiving end---and my darkness was back again---the early horrors!---you brought them back!---you broke me! That's why I died!

ALMA (off, with horror) No!

MAHLER (quietly) But it doesn't matter. You were only an instrument. It was time for me to go. We have nothing creative about us. That damn silly word. We find, and we tell what we find. And then when we've told our bit we go. And become somebody else. Like me, now. A poor devil of an actor, from Warsaw. And you, getting into another costume. Are you ready yet?

ALMA (off) Not quite.

MAHLER: Your changing was always a long business, I remember.

ALMA (off) Tell them about your life, Gustav. There was always something so modern about you. The people round you seemed so stagey and heavy and self-important compared with you!

MAHLER (sitting down) Well---I started life as a Jew. That means something rather dark for me, to speak quite honestly. I always had them on my shoulders---brothers, my mother, my sister! Especially my sister---oh my God! Marrying you was like divorcing her. You see, I never really woke up to the kind of life I was living---I just worked from one production to the next---I can't tell my life, Alma! I can't! It's these dreams---it's---!

A pistol shot, off.

MAHLER leaps to his feet, staring upstage, aghast.

MAHLER: Otto! Otto!

ALMA rushes on from the left, dressed rather gorgeously in a dirndl.

ALMA: Gustav!

MAHLER (subsiding) I'm tired. I thought it was my brother. The one that shot himself.

ALMA: It was a child outside---a balloon---

MAHLER: He was a marvellous composer, you know. I found a couple of symphon~~ies~~ in his drawer. I felt a terrible remorse as if my music stole his life--- and there couldn't be two of us! Then why was he born at all? And Ernst---I loved him so much--- he died of heart trouble---and three of the others died---all children---and now, the rest of the family-- so many debts---

ALMA: I'll settle them all. I'm going to put everything in order.

MAHLER: How much do I owe by the way?

ALMA: Fifty thousand crowns.

MAHLER: It's a big debt to marry.

ALMA: You're the biggest capital I could think of.

MAHLER (looking at her dress with a smile) That's what took all the time.

The Funeral March in the Manner of Callot (the third movement of the First Symphony) steals over.

MAHLER: Do you hear that?

ALMA (disappointed at his scanty attention to her dress)
What?

MAHLER: The Funeral March---I wrote it when I was 33---

ALMA: Sometimes you frighten me! And I'm so young!

MAHLER: Poor Otto! Do you hear! (Catching her) Listen!

ALMA: But I can't hear!

MAHLER: The critics called me sterile and trivial and extravagant, and in general an unholy bloody noise (as the music fades). You know, I thought I'd never be able to love properly---give everything---I often tried to and something always went wrong---but you--- radiant!---you light up my whole life!

ALMA: Why funeral marches then?

MAHLER: Why frightened? Don't you realise all these little terrors are going to save you from the worst part of yourself---the rich man's daughter?

ALMA: It's true what Max Burkhardt said---you're^{going} to put out my flames with yours! You wrote me that terrible letter, forbidding me ever to compose a song again!

MAHLER (sharply) Nobody can forbid you to compose! Composing pours out of the skin, it can't be stopped! Do you think my composing could be stopped? It goes on all the time! All these shrivelled little thoughts---do away with them! (Going to her) I was harsh like taht with my mother. I used to play the piano and if I saw her stealing into the room to listen I used to stop and sit stock-still until she'd gone again. And your little face reminds me of her. Only it's healthier.

ALMA: Is that wrong?

MAHLER: I suppose I like to see the mark of sorrow---

ALMA: It's there---on your face. I've seen it so often---at the opera house, when you're conducting!

MAHLER: I did exactly the same as my father did---I loved her but I didn't show her any feeling! He used to scream at us both! Can you imagine the horrors of that family---the daily horrors? Thank God I became a Christian! Thank God for the light! All that hell of belonging---testicles and breath and shit and everything, all belonging to somebody else, no! I got my freedom! I found the silence of silences inside. (Touching her face) If I love you, my darling sparkling child, it's because of the Christian light in ~~me~~ you, which you know nothing about. My sister said to me once, 'You're flesh of my flesh!' I said, 'Dirt of your dirt, you mean!' Do you remember that morning you came to the Tales of Hoffmann rehearsal?---the second time we saw each other---and you wouldn't look at me?

ALMA: I was feeling malicious.

MAHLER: You little cat! And I called out to you from the desk, 'Miss Schindler, how did you sleep last night?'

ALMA: And I said, 'Perfectly---why shouldn't I?'

MAHLER: And I said, 'I didn't sleep a wink all night'.

They gaze at each other, in perfect stillness.

MAHLER (with a glance behind him) I need you---I ache for you all day---when I'm out of Vienna I feel sick! I hear your name all the time! Do you feel the same?

ALMA: Yes! Yes!

MAHLER: We've got to marry---the fever's got to end--- did you tell your mother?

ALMA: Yes.

MAHLER: I feel everything's for you---all the music---the opera---every time I tap the desk with my stick--- the sound of your dress---it's all bound up together!

ALMA: It's so overwhelming! You've got so much behind you--- and I'm so poor!

MAHLER: Do you know how I'm going to celebrate our engagement? I'm going to give you a dress rehearsal of The Magic Flute! Just you---the only audience! in secret!

ALMA: But Mr Director!

He buttons himself up and walks towards the staircase.

MAHLER (turning) Will you be there?

ALMA: Oh yes, yes!

Dim house lights go up beyond the arch and a tuning orchestra sounds again.

MAHLER (on his way up the stairs) Mr Director, she calls me. Chills me to the bones. How could she do it? (Stopping and gazing down at her) A girl of twenty!---and she could take me down into the jaws of hell, with the tip of her fingers! Thank God she doesn't know it--- Or perhaps she does. That old bastard Karl Moll told her not to marry me. He said I was ugly and poor in health and unpopular at the Opera and badly in debt and anyway my music stank. (Triumph) And still she wants to marry me! Can you beat that? Am I too old then? I don't know what to do with someone so young---look at her!---the way she darts around--- if only she'd had an affair or lost a husband or something! (Shouting up towards the arch) All right, all right, you'll be playing soon enough, don't worry! Set of damned buffaloes! (Looking down at ALMA again) How precious she is. Every day seh seems fuller, since that first dinner party, where I was baptised into life.

(Addressing the arch again) Don't worry, you won't get rid of me for a long time yet---at least five years! I've put Mozart on the map---nobody could sing him until I came along! Is she still there? Miss Schindler!

ALMA (startled) Yes?

MAHLER: Why the devil do you want to marry me?

ALMA: Well---

MAHLER: Do you remember where Faust sings, 'Past understanding are God's works, and fair as at the birth of light'? That's why you're marrying me! Because my music is bright like country air---clean like the day---that's what you want to marry---not me!

ALMA: But I still don't like your Fourth. I like it as little as your First.

MAHLER: Oh, liking has nothing to do with it!

He disappears quickly through the arch. The tuning quickly fades. We hear him tap the conductor's desk sharply with his baton.

ALMA: Marrying him because of something in Faust! What do these men think? And he's got the most horrible friends! There's that Polish gorilla, Siegfried Lipiner, with his beastly bald skull. His eyes are so close together (burlesquing his appearance) that they're like cufflinks threaded through his eyes sideways. Nietzsche thought him great shakes, so did Wagner, so does Gustav Mahler. And Brahms said about him, 'That lying hound of a Pole interests me.' Well, he doesn't interest me! I can see right through him to the seat of his dirty pants! And it isn't as if there's just one of him. There's his first wife, his second wife, his lover who Gustav Mahler is supposed to share! Yes, they moun^d the same whore and think I don't know! The cat! The cow! The lock she gave me that first day in his office---and Mahler nibbling at her hand every time she said something stupid, the poor trussed-up overdressed sallow-faced bitch! Then there's the Pole's first wife's husband, who looks as much of a gorilla as he does. And he thinks I want to marry that lot! And this faded whore comes up swinging her arse and says, 'Do you laike Gustav's music?' Do I like it! The cheek! And he stands there laughing! Well, I know one thing, there won't be any of that crew near him in a month from now! I know how to deal with great artists---

first time. They hug each other and kiss. They look into each other's eyes and laugh. They can't stop laughing. It is a long delighted laugh, a release of their joy which seems to have been pent up until now.

Then with a great sigh ALMA unclips her skirt, and the corset underneath.

ALMA: There! I needn't play the virgin any more!

MAHLER: You played it well.

ALMA: Do you think mummy suspected anything?

MAHLER: Of course. Mummies always do.

ALMA (touching her tummy) He feels happy to be going to St Petersburg.

MAHLER (also touching her tummy) And his mama---what about her?

ALMA: Oh! You tell me! Look in my eyes!

MAHLER: I read a certain---well, I suppose it could be happiness.

They hug and kiss again, they laugh.

ALMA: People outside are looking at us.

MAHLER: And you love it. You're cheeky, you're impossible! I saw you laughing when I fell off the pew this morning.

ALMA: It was funny! Even the priest laughed.

MAHLER (gazing out of the window) Do you think all those people are going to St Petersburg?

ALMA (busy with the hand luggage again) I don't know. All I know is that we three are!

MAHLER: Perhaps they're all going to my concert.

ALMA takes out bread and sausage, a thermos flask full of coffee, lace napkins etc.

MAHLER: I didn't know you brought all that stuff.

ALMA: You talked to me while I was packing it. You poured the coffee yourself.

MAHLER: Good God.

ALMA offers him some food.

MAHLER: I'll just have coffee. You haven't got an apple have you?

ALMA (pouring his coffee) No.

MAHLER (again looking out of the window) We're off.

ALMA (handing him his coffee) Here. Your coffee.

MAHLER: Ah!

ALMA: 'Ah!' Well I'm going to eat.

MAHLER: It's so hot in here.

ALMA eats ravenously.

ALMA: Mm!

MAHLER: They overheat these compartments (loosening his jacket).

ALMA: Oh Gustav! I do hope you don't start a sore throat!

The whistle goes and the train pulls out with a steady nineteenth century boom and clatter.

ALMA: Wouldn't it have been nice if somebody had waved us good bye? Mummy for instance? Or Karl Moll?

MAHLER: To hell with Karl Moll. I see him every day.

ALMA: But not hell with mummy!

MAHLER: I'm sick to death of all people except one. I have them all and every day, remember---orchestras of them, choruses of them. And I'll have them again assoon as I step off that platform at St Petersburg.

ALMA (her mouth full) Yes I suppose so!

A phrase from the Seventh Symphony comes over. His mouth is open, he is gazing before him, conducting slightly with his right hand.

ALMA gazes at him, a piece of bread poised.

ALMA: Are you composing?

He comes to suddenly and the music fades away.

MAHLER: It'll be years before I write anything like that.

ALMA: Anything like what? I didn't hear it.

MAHLER: Ah no, of course not. Funny isn't it---I can imagine it---hear it---but it goes when I've got the paper in front of me. It's in the tragic mood---it's for later---later in life---

ALMA: Tragic? Is the future going to be tragic?

He simply gazes before him. She finishes eating and settles deeper into her seat. She leans her head on his shoulders, then closes her eyes.

Again the phrase from the Seventh steals over, softer now. His right hand comes up almost imperceptibly again, twitching. He shakes his head to the music, beguiled, drugged with it.

It fades again, leaving the clatter of the train.

MAHLER: You like a bit of glitter don't you?

ALMA (blinking awake) What?

MAHLER: Do you know why there are rich people? They have to gild their poverty---inside. God couldn't bear such poverty otherwise. It would sort of crack the world. I mean, you like dinner parties a bit, don't you---and poor devils like the President of the Society of the Friends of Music?

Silence between them. Battle is brewing. She slowly levers herself away from him.

ALMA: That's Siegfried Lipiner's story isn't it?

MAHLER: Why do you hate Lipiner?

ALMA: Hate him? I adore him as a matter of fact!

MAHLER: He doesn't think so.

ALMA: He never thinks. Nietzsche and all sorts of other writers think for him---he gets all his talk out of their books.

MAHLER: It's marvellous talk, though.

ALMA: I agree. That's why I adore him. So why does he spread a lot of horrible stories about me?

MAHLER: He doesn't!

ALMA: He said I flirted with the President of the Society of the Friends of Music after your Fourth Symphony the other day.

MAHLER: But that has nothing to do with what I said---I said you liked the big world---I didn't say you shouldn't---I meant that the President represents that world perfectly---

ALMA: In other words the President's an idiot---and I'm an idiot---and all your friends are geniuses! (Bursting into tears) He's been a friend of my family for years! Years!

MAHLER: Oh for God's sake don't cry! I can't stand the sound of a woman crying!

ALMA: Oh yes! It's always what you can't bear isn't it? I mustn't cry because you can't bear it! It's always you!

MAHLER: Alma, I meant I couldn't bear the suffering behind it---!

ALMA: Oh, suffering! It's natural! You've got to face up to it---you talk just like Dostoevsky!---and you're both egoists! Egoists can never bear the thought of suffering!

She sobs herself to dry eyes.

MAHLER: Well, instruct me then. We murder millions of animals for our food, mothers go through agonies in childbirth, the animals kill each other with frightful cruelty, there are hordes of poor people who can't even clothe their children, and there are the rich who are much less happy than anybody. What do you make of it all? Nothing's settled for a moment. There are quarrels all the time, assassinations, bankruptcies, suicides. We're making love one minute and quarrelling the next.

ALMA: We wouldn't have quarrelled if you hadn't started it.

MAHLER (with a laugh) So you won't tell me what the answer is! (Settling back again and gazing before him, then, with extreme sadness:) Perhaps He will one day.

ALMA: Who?

MAHLER gazes out of the window.

ALMA closes her eyes again. She nestles into him. The train clatters on.

A frightening passage from the Seventh comes crashing through. He does not conduct this time. He stares before him tensely, as it were aghast at these tremendous sounds. ALMA appears to hear nothing.

The music melts into the slowing of the train, with its screech. There are the sudden bright lights of the station, much larger than life. They seem to be the climax of the music. He is terrified. He starts, stares out of the window. The music ceases. He subsides: it is just a railway station.

ALMA sleeps. He unleans her from him gently. He mops his brow. She goes on sleeping. He rises and leaves the compartment.

There are the sounds of a busy railway station.

ALMA is woken by them. She starts when she sees that MAHLER is not at her side. She sees his greatcoat. She jumps up, dashes to the window.

ALMA (calling to him) Gustav! Gustav! Come in! You're mad! Come in at once! Gustav!

There is laughter outside.

GUSTAV stumbles back into the compartment, hatless, his collar open, covered with snow, panting. He simply throws himself into the seat,

unable to speak.

ALMA: Gustav, how could you? It's 30 below outside!
Gustav! Do you want to die?

He is shivering. She covers him with his own greatcoat.

She looks up at the window, where people are staring in and laughing, and she makes a face at them.

ALMA: Oh go away and stop giggling, you silly people!
If all the Russians are like you, the country's a zoo!
(Attending to MAHLER) My darling!

He gradually recovers himself.

The whistle blows outside and the train booms out of the station. He gazes out of the window with weak eyes.

MAHLER: I had such a painful throat. These trains are overheated, terribly overheated.

ALMA: You've got a fever. And you go out in the freezing cold! Gustav, look at me. You're always talking about nature, then why aren't you closer to your own body? You don't seem to know what to do with it!

MAHLER (gazing at her for some time, and then smiling) I do what I feel I ought to do. I needed the air. And I do feel better. No, I don't understand my body.

She dabs the sweat off his upper lip and brow.

They nestle up to each other again and sleep. Sometime passes. Again with a great flash of lights and the screeching of brakes the train pulls in at a station. MAHLER starts awake, stares out of the window. He mops his brow, gasps. And again he quietly unleans ALMA from his shoulder and leaves the compartment hatless and coatless.

ALMA starts awake.

ALMA: He's gone again! Oh well let him! I'm going to eat and sleep---for the little one.

The sound of a tuning orchestra comes up beyond the arch. The conductor's desk is rapped, and there is silence.

ALMA: It's started! Oh dear!

She gathers all the hand luggage frantically, puts his hat on top of hers, throws both her and his overcoat on. She staggers across the stage under the load, towards the arch.

ALMA (stopping to look upstage) Look, the Neva's frozen over! There are tramlines across it! Gustav!

The Liebestod steals over. She stands, grotesque in centre stage, enchanted.

MAHLER appears under the arch in rehearsal clothes.

MAHLER (~~still~~ hoarse) Listen! (We lose his other words)

ALMA: What?

MAHLER (waving the orchestra impatiently to silence) I say old Wagner fits everywhere doesn't he---even raw Russia--- these spaces! Ah Richard! The one and only, the greatest!

ALMA: Oh Gustav! How ever are you going to get through three concerts with a throat like that?

She begins stumbling up the steps, all but enveloped in greatcoats, hats, hand luggage. Her struggling becomes a burlesque as he talks.

MAHLER (still hoarse) Do you realise these Russians look down their noses when you mention Dostoevsky? You see, real work never gets its due, not till long after you're dead. When most people talk about art they mean objets d'art--- something with plenty of body in it! something that shines! Not this kind of thing, not Dostoevsky--- nothing from the other side.

ALMA (slumping down on the top step) What a lot of stairs!

MAHLER: Oh you're young!

ALMA: I'm expecting!

They sit surrounded by hand luggage.

MAHLER: Such a funny old cow that archduchess from Moscow, wasn't she? But they're nicer than our aristocracy, on the whole. Because they aspire harder, I suppose. She asked me to tell her what death was like.

ALMA: Did she find such a lot of it in your music?

MAHLER: I imagine she did. I felt rather complimented.

The light changes to something mellow as they gaze before them, thinking. In the background Ach du Lieber Augustin! drifts over.

MAHLER (his voice normal again) Alma, why did they stare at us when we were driving through the streets of St Petersburg in an open troika?

ALMA: Because it was 30 degrees below zero and open troikas aren't for that sort of weather. And secondly because we look funny. People always stare at us.

MAHLER: Do you remember Crefeld? where I did my Third symphony? You had one of those reform dresses on---for pregnant women---and children called after us in the street---and we had to pour water on their heads from the hotel balcony---

ALMA: What about when you poured water on to a lot of fashionable ladies sitting round a table---

MAHLER: Impossible!

ALMA: That was from a balcony too---in a café---your sister told me---you wanted to wash your hands so you leaned over the balcony and tipped the water jug over your fingers! There were shrieks from below, and do you know what they said when they saw you?---They said, 'Oh, it's only Mahler'. And they moved to another table, to get out of your way. Then you wanted to wash your hands again, but you thought you'd go further along the balcony to do it---you didn't want to inconvenience them again. You tipped the jug over your hands again---right on to the table they'd moved to!

She enjoys this greatly.

Silence.

ALMA: What a lot of travelling we seem to do. Crefeld,

St Petersburg, Vienna! Your second name must be Baedeker.

MAHLER: At least, ~~(unbuttoning his greatcoat)~~ this is home.

ALMA (pointing through the arch) Is that your apartment down there, with the brokendown door?

MAHLER: Yes, we're nearly there. Are you tired, my little treasure?

ALMA: No---just terribly old! I feel twice as old as you! I seem to have been through so many experiences! And those walks you go in for. All over St Petersburg, I swear that's why the streets were so icy hard, we walked on them so much!

MAHLER: It does you good, my darling. (Rising) I'll go ahead and see that everything's all right.

He goes through the arch.

ALMA: Gustav!

MAHLER (returning) Yes?

ALMA: Please take these bags.

MAHLER (taking them) Ah yes.

ALMA: 'Ah yes'.

He goes through the arch with the hand luggage, and disappears.

ALMA (calling him) Gustav!

MAHLER (off) Yes?

ALMA: Why do you look shabby in the most expensive clothes?

MAHLER (off, with a laugh) I'm always in love my darling--- with you---with Mozart---or the Rhine maidens! Yes, that's how I am!

She continues gazing through the arch.

ALMA: How clever your absent-mindedness is. You absent-mindedly get me pregnant a month before we ~~even~~ ~~get~~ engaged, so as to demoralise me, get me nicely under your thumb, stop other men looking at me---and then of course I have to marry you! Don't tell me you haven't eyes in your backside, Mr Director, because I know you have! All artists have! Well (rising),

we'll see if you can get away with it! We'll see
 who gets the upper hand! (Shouting) You're jealous
 of my youth!---my beauty! (stopping) Why do I have
 these thoughts? He's such an angel. Why can't I be
 one?

MAHLER enters the downstage area
 below the staircase, minus his great-
 coat and the hand luggage.

ALMA disappears through the arch.

Simultaneously with MAHLER's entrance
 a gramophone screeches out a Viennese
 waltz. The record is scratched and
 worn.

MAHLER (aghast at the noise) Oh no! I say! (Making towards
 the personal area on the left) I say! Take that
 record off! Take it off!

ALMA dashes in from the right, now
 dressed in a 'reform' dress for
 pregnancy.

ALMA: What the devil's that?

MAHLER (shouting) It's that blasted captain---the one who
 shares the flat! He hates my guts!

ALMA (shrieking) Captain?

MAHLER: He's got a room at the end of the corridor!

ALMA: A what?

MAHLER: A room!

ALMA: A woman?

MAHLER: No, a room, a room!

ALMA: A room? And what's that got to do with this?

MAHLER: What?

ALMA: Why---His---noise?

MAHLER: Because he hates my guts! He knows I'm a composer,
 and I can't stand noise! So he puts it on when I come
 in!

ALMA: Oh he does does he?

She storms across the stage and

exits left. MAHLER gazes after her.

The noise continues.

Then it abruptly ceases.

MAHLER: Good Lord. She's killed him.

ALMA stalls back.

ALMA: He's out.

MAHLER: Out? Who?

ALMA: The Captain. It's his batman puts the record on. He has orders to start it up when you come in.

MAHLER: I know. I told you that myself.

ALMA: No, you didn't. You said the captain put it on. Anyway I guaranteed him a little income for not doing it. He'll just put the record on when the captain happens to come home.

MAHLER: Well, you seem to have established yourself already.

She begins pushing the furniture back to the old positions from the 'railway compartment' positions. MAHLER watches her.

MAHLER: You said you were tired just now. You don't look tired now.

She subsides into one of the chairs.

ALMA: I think it's lovely.

MAHLER: You do?

ALMA: Yes I do. I don't know why you needed me.

MAHLER (going close to her) You've got little tears in your eyes. Why? (Taking her) Tell me why!

ALMA: I thought it wouldn't be nice. You're famous for your absent-mindedness and I thought it would be a dirty bachelor's den, sort of thing. Then I could have done lots of things to it. You have to be on top all the time!

MAHLER: Don't you see that you're the only thing the apartment lacked? and therefore it had no light until you came in? so of course you call it lovely, because you've brought your own light in, your gaiety and your truth!

Before, there were just a couple of men angry with each other. You've brought the spring in. It was always winter before. And the captain's going to eat out of your hand, like his batman did.

ALMA: And then you'll accuse me of flirting.

MAHLER: Only if you do flirt!

ALMA: When our house on the lake's ready we'll go there, won't we, all the summer, and be alone, and you'll compose, and I'll orchestrate your scores, and we'll work and work, and forget everything else except our baby!

MAHLER: Do you know, my music is only that---what you've just said---being alone---and getting nearer to God---and---

The awful waltz blasts out again.

MAHLER (shouting) I thought you'd---

ALMA: What?

MAHLER: I thought you'd stopped him!

ALMA (at the top of her voice, as she strides out left)
The captain's come back!

MAHLER: What?

ALMA (stopping to stamp her foot with rage) The captain!
The captains come back!

She goes off.

MAHLER makes rather frantic movements as if these will exorcise the dreadful noise.

Then suddenly the record ceases again.

MAHLER: Ah!

He strolls quietly to his chair left, and takes up a score page.

MAHLER (beginning to write) And now she'll find out how charming the captain is.

He sighs.

The music he is composing steals over--

a snatch from the Fifth. It ceases as he ceases to write.

He writes again and a further phrase from the Fifth comes over: it is the Adagio.

He ceases agains and now we hear birds outside. And there are the playing cries of children in the distance. There is the country sound of hammering, echoing voices, a splash as someone dives into the lake. We are at Maiernigg on the ~~U~~urthersee.

MAHLER gazes before him, pleasantly exhausted. He has written himself out. He is hot. He flings off his jacket, rises and stretches.

The third movement of the Sixth comes over and seems to merge and take up the distant cries of children, being in fact a musical representation of two children playing in the sand and stumbling about. MAHLER seems to be criticising it in his mind, though without movements of the face or hands. He is simply concentrated, as he strolls up centre with his hands in his pockets.

The music fades. He stands quite still, seeming to listen. Then the last movement of the Sixth Symphony comes up swiftly and relentlessly.

MAHLER (shouting) Yes! Yes! The three blows of fate---one, two, three! (A sweep of his hand) And the hero falls, there, at the third blow! Zuk!

The music ends. A clock on the lake strikes midday and he walks upstage behind the staircase.

The Sixth comes up again, drowning everything with its three blows of fate.

MAHLER emerges again in a bathing costume of the 1904 period. He strolls haphazardly towards the lake, upstage, still ~~living~~ in the music. He disappears. A great

splash as he plunges into the lake. And then his cry of pleasure. He laughs. The music ceases.

ALMA, in a bright summer dress on the fantastic side, appears upstage of the staircase with a bath towel under her arm. She is no longer pregnant. She gazes upstage across the lake.

We hear MAHLER whistle her from the distance. She smiles and waves.

ALMA: Gustav! Gustav! Not so far out!

We hear the children again, the birds.

MAHLER makes another cry of pleasure from the distance.

MAHLER (off, in the distance) Almschili!

ALMA: That's enough!

She goes to his table, looks at his score. The Adagio from the Fifth sweeps over triumphantly. She is delighted. It dies away quickly as she turns to hurry back to the edge of the lake with his towel.

MAHLER (closer, off) It's so good!

She watches him approach land.

We hear him gasp as he scrambles on to the landing stage.

He comes in, dripping.

MAHLER: Ah!

She covers him round with the towel.

MAHLER (trying to evade it) I'll dry in the sun.

ALMA: No, it can't be good for you, it's at the top of the sky!

MAHLER: How's Putzi?

ALMA: Asking for you!

He sits on the lowest step of the stairs, drawing the towel round him,

drying his hair.

ALMA: Why do you sacrifice yourself like that? swim out so far? You had a haemorrhage last year.

MAHLER: Swimming a sacrifice---who ever heard of that?

ALMA: You give your attention to everything except me. You hardly look at me.

MAHLER: But it's different now! We're together---we're side by side---not looking at each other---we're working side by side---

ALMA: It's different because I'm working in the house all day! and there are two children to look after! and everything has to be on time! If your breakfast isn't there in the hut at seven sharp---

MAHLER: Oh for God's sake don't cry over trivialities!

ALMA: They're NOT trivialities for me, because I DO them! Don't you understand that? I change their nappies--- I order the food---and stand over the maid---and arrange the house---and keep people away from you!

MAHLER (quietly) Don't you remember how I am in the winter, at that blasted Ministry of Music night and day, and aren't I supposed to be for a rest? and you know I never take a rest, aren't I working at my music here---? Alma! Isn't my music attention to you? I thought we were closer than that!

ALMA: Yes, yes! I know!

MAHLER: If I didn't plunge ahead with the work---would there be money?

ALMA: I know!

They sit in silence. He gazes before him.

MAHLER: Explain to me more---what you mean.

ALMA: You give your singers more attention than you do me!

MAHLER (laughing) Well---what sort of operas would we get if I didn't?

ALMA: I'm afraid of losing you every time you go to rehearsal.

MAHLER: And when I'm working here---in the hut---
what are you afraid of then?

ALMA: Gustl, I looked at the Adagio.

MAHLER: Did you like it?

ALMA: Oh Gustl!

MAHLER: Would you like to copy it for me?

ALMA: Yes!

MAHLER: It's only a sketch---you can fill in the gaps---
only you can do that---

They are silent again. There are
the cries of the children. He
gets up.

ALMA: Go to your Putzi.

MAHLER: Do you mean that nicely?

ALMA: Oh yes!

He leaves---upstage of the stair-
case, right.

MAHLER (off, calling back to her) Will you come soon?
Is lunch on the table?

ALMA: Yes! Yes! Lunch is on the table. Everything's
ready. It always is. At the stroke. When you've
been on tour there's a hot bath waiting for you when
you get back, steaming as you come in the door.

MAHLER (off) Isn't that what we've got servants for?

ALMA: Yes, Gustav. (After he is out of earshot) Oh,
Gustav, you've eaten me up---I don't exist---if only
you knew!

MAHLER (off) Do you think I exist?

ALMA (starting at his voice) No! Your music but not you!
And so I'm a slave to that too, now. I have to shush
the children quiet all the time. You love little
Putzi but not me! There's something between the two
of you---something lovely, a silent message that
closes me out! And then you come out of your hut
looking like a god when you've finished your work,
shedding light all round---it falls out of your
hair! Oh Gustav!

The cries of the children, joined by MAHLER's laughter, off.

ALMA raises herself disconsolately and goes towards his work table. She slumps down in his chair and takes one of his scopes. She reads the Adagio of the Fifth again, and it steals over. She gives way to it--- in the sense that it expresses what she feels, all the more poignantly because it was written by the person she has just been complaining to.

She puts the score down again, and abstractedly takes up another. The music fades. The first version of the Fifth comes over: this was over-written for percussion. It crashes over the speakers.

She frowns. This neither moves nor pleases her.

She jumps up. The music cuts off as she throws the score down.

ALMA (calling) Gustl! Gustl! (no reply) Gustl!

He appears like an alarmed child, now in his dressing gown.

ALMA: It's a terrible noise! How could you do it?

MAHLER: How could I do what?

ALMA: You've gone mad with the drums! Mad! You've ruined everything!

MAHLER: Drums? What drums?

ALMA: Here! Here! (tapping the score violently)

MAHLER (suddenly wild with delight) ~~Not~~ yet! Not yet I haven't ruined it! You see, I can cut! Here---- (dashing across the room to the table) look--- (grabbing his pencil and drawing lines across the score)---out with the side-drums, that's for a start--- then half the percussion instruments, out! Now! How's that? (Grabbing her and swinging her round) And now come to lunch! We need light at the lunch table! We need the sun! Oh what a lioness you are!

ALMA: And sometimes a bitch?

MAHLER: I didn't say so.

ALMA: You don't call me nice things in the old way. I remember how you called me the spring once--- when we started living in your Viennese apartment--- you said I brought the spring in.

MAHLER: But the spring doesn't last for ever, Almscherl. I wish you could learn to take things in their rhythm. Don't cling to ideas. You can't be an artist out of the head. You've got to be natural. You've got to start with life. If I had the children all day I'd make music out of them---I'd make it out of dirty nappies! And isn't it all there in my music anyway? Isn't there the dirt and the struggle and then a blaze of redeeming light?

ALMA: And then you make such a fool of me at dinner parties. The last one, with all those rich people yawning their gold teech off---you have to come in half way through and take an apple off the bowl in the middle of the table and keep smelling it, while everybody stares at you. And then you jump up before the last course and go to the other room. And you know everybody's going to follow you! And then they stop and stare at us in the street, everywhere we go---'Look, there's Mahler and his wife!' But he's not with anybody! His wife's just trailing along! I don't know where to put my face sometimes!

MAHLER: What have I got to do---study the way they look at me, the bloated idiots! No, you're happy, Almscherl--- happy to have somebody who doesn't give a damn. Because you don't give a damn either! Do you remember that sketch from the Sixth---the second subject in the first movement? That's you! That's my Almschili music!

The 'ALMA theme' steals over. He beats time and sings very vigorously da, da, dum, di, da, di! It fades.

ALMA: I'm not good enough for it. After I've been working in the house all day I feel just a body---I don't want to Gustl!---

MAHLER: Does it help you to work on my scri¹oes---as if we were one spirit---not one body---one spirit---doing the same thing?

ALMA (after a sad pause) Yes.

~~They begining walking together~~

ALMA notices another score on the table. She picks it up.

ALMA: And what's this? Songs on the death of children?
What children? What death? Oh Gustl!

MAHLER: It's a setting on Rückert!

ALMA: He lost his child---it was the most horrible loss of his life! Gustl! (As the harrowing Kindertotenlieder come bursting over) How could you do it? How could you tempt fate like that?

MAHLER: But listen to it! Listen! (Grabbing her) Now! Listen to that!

ALMA: Oh Gustl!

She shrugs, throwing the score down. The music fades.

He takes her arm. They begin walking upstage together.

MAHLER: You know, they just don't understand my music===the Viennese, the Germans, nobody---not unless I'm there on the spot drilling it into them. Their cheering doesn't kid me. And when you come to think of it what could they of all these new worlds in my work, one new world after another erupting and then crashing down again---what can they say to these primeval sounds---the sea, foaming and raging---the stars dancing in the sky---the breakers in the distance---can you see them---how they flash and sparkle before they cascade down again?

ALMA: I feel better! Go on talking to me---just to me!

MAHLER walks on in thought. Then he turns to her gravely.

MAHLER: Darling, I thought to mention this to you before. There's the most tremendous stink of rotten glue in my bedroom---what can we do about it?

She stands staring at him for some time and then bursts into the most helpless laughter. It infects him. They laugh together---the same force of joy as in the train. They go off upstage of the staircase, arm in arm.

We hear their laughter, off. ~~III~~

It dies away.

There is silence. We hear the children again in the distance.

Very faintly the Kindertotenlieder steal over again, hardly more than a suggestion.

11.

The scene comes up under a strange brilliance of light, ominous and unreal.

Simultaneously Lehar's waltz from THE MERRY WIDOW bursts over the speakers.

Dressed in evening clothes MAHLER and ALMA whirl into view at the top of the steps, under the arch, dancing a waltz that is almost a ballet. They descend the steps with deft leaps, light as neither of them has been until now, and correspondingly unreal. It is almost inconceivable how they reach the lower steps in their leaps, simultaneously.

Once at centre stage they whirl round and round and then draw upstage and out of sight beyond the staircase while the music plunges on.

They reappear from the right, downstage of the staircase. Now the professional deftness has disappeared. Their steps are not so light. They are beaming at each other but simply dancing the correct steps together. He whirls her---but not fantastically now---towards one of the chairs on the left, and she subsides into it, out of breath. He stands gazing at her, panting.

ALMA: If only we'd danced like that when we were alive.

MAHLER: We'd have been different people---that sort of thing has to be choreographed down to the last step. I never tried to express myself in the body. I wanted that 'eternal blessedness'---you remember Goethe in Faust?

ALMA: Did you find it? (As he shrugs) I just went from day to day. I had no time to live.

MAHLER: Your body needed many more journeys, didn't it?---many more men?

ALMA: Yes.

MAHLER: Did you get a hint of the bliss in the end?

ALMA: Not like you. The way you used to come out of your room with joy all over your face.

MAHLER: I think we got that bit wrong.

ALMA: Which bit?

MAHLER: That da-da-di-da-tum-ti-da-da---there was something wrong.

ALMA: Look it up.

MAHLER: What? You don't imagine I've got any Franz Lehar in the house, do you?

ALMA: But you did enjoy it, Gustl?

MAHLER: Every minute. I don't care how it was done. I loved every singer---every cardboard tree---

ALMA: So did I. Our one night out, in five years! It ought to be chronicled somewhere, for the historians. And The Merry Widow, not Lohengrin or the Parsifal.

MAHLER: I tell you what, we can go to Schott's tomorrow and I'll ask about the sales of my music, and while I'm doing that you can thumb through The Merry Widow and see where we went wrong, then we can dance it again tomorrow night.

ALMA: I had the impression we floated---you held me---!

A child's cry---disturbed sleep---
in the distance.

MAHLER turns and stares at her.

Silence.

MAHLER: Almschili---what's that?

ALMA: Gustav! Don't look like that! Gustav!

MAHLER: Who is it, for God's sake, who is it?

ALMA: It's Anna. The English nurse scalded her fingers this morning.

MAHLER: It's more than fingers! Go and see!

She gets up, under the influence of his wild eyes.

A savage phrase from the Kindertotenlieder comes bursting over. He seems to stare into the music itself. ALMA rushes off, right.

The music dies. He continues to stand there.

ALMA reappears from where she went, quiet.

MAHLER (stating it, without looking at her) It's a fever.

ALMA: Yes.

MAHLER: The doctor's coming?

ALMA: Yes. Mummy's looking after her.

MAHLER: And Putzerl?

ALMA: She's asleep.

MAHLER: Calm?

ALMA: Yes.

MAHLER: Not flushed?

ALMA: No.

MAHLER: Come and sit down.

She returns to her chair, while he remains there, immobile.

MAHLER: The Lord Chamberlain called me into his office today.

ALMA: Yes?

MAHLER: Somebody stole my appointments book and took it to him.

It said, 'After Easter, three concerts in Rome'. He said I wasn't allowed to do concerts in the Opera House's time. He told me box office receipts always fell off when I'm away. I told him this wasn't true. They want me out. It has nothing to do with Rome. They've finished with me! The Germans are finished with me too! They've had enough of my standards! When you're as demanding as I am you tread on too many toes and in the end they surround you---they need a lower level, you see, a sort of Weingartner level, it makes them feel more at home. I've been there ten years near enough. It's time to go.

ALMA: It's because you stood by Roller. You stand by him whatever he does.

MAHLER: Because he's the finest designer in Europe.

ALMA: Yes, but making the Rhine Maidens sing from hanging baskets---

MAHLER (with a shrug) It's only because they're so fat--- they're afraid the ropes'll break---

They are about to laugh when the child's cry interrupts again.

MAHLER: There! The second blow! I said there were three! The first my dismissal---no money---nowhere to go--- And then (staring off, to the right)---the second---

ALMA: Don't make it happen! You should never have written those songs on children!

MAHLER: The three blows of fate that lay the hero low!

The last movement of the Sixth Symphony is heard briefly in the distance. 'The three blows' are suggested.

Silence.

A bell rings from inside the house, right.

MAHLER: What's that for God's sake?

ALMA: Gustav! (Getting up) It's only the doctor. I told mummy to ring the bell when he came.

She hurries out right.

He goes and slumps into a chair.

MAHLER (calling after her suddenly) I've never heard that bell before!

Silence.

ALMA (off) Gustav! You're making it happen! Gustav!

Silence.

MAHLER: I've never been able to talk to You. Is this Your only way?

ALMA has reappeared.

ALMA: He says Putzerl has a fever too.

MAHLER: It's diptheria.

ALMA: Yes.

MAHLER: And there must be a tracheotomy. No!! No!! Why do You talk to me like that? Why show it to me before? I could have stood dismissal from the Opera House--- that was right---You must take me away from the centres of power, yes! I agree with that!---but my child!--- the centre of my delight! You aren't just! If only I understood. I thought I had it once---and then I got swept up in life again, in the Opera House---yes, it was right to take me away from there---

The bell sounds again.

MAHLER: Don't go!

ALMA: It's my child---!

She hurries out right again.

MAHLER (talking to her in her absence) I willed it, yes. I suppose I must have done. I must need it. Little Putzerl must need it. She never belonged here. She and I belonged to each other. But the earth wasn't for her, you see. And she decides to go before me. She doesn't need to stay, to go through all this. Her will works that way. Quick---where's my Schopenhauer? (Fixing his spectacles properly, hunting blindly about)

ALMA screams, off.

MAHLER dashes off, left, stumbling, his spectacles falling.

Silence.

There is the sound of a gay Italian barrel organ in the distance.

ALMA enters from the right, upstage of the staircase. She is dressed smartly in black, a touch of the American in her styles. She looks round quickly, then hurries over to the personal area.

ALMA (in a hushed voice) Mummy! For God's sake call the hall porter and ask him to stop that hurdy-gurdy! He's composing.

She glances anxiously upstage, right.

The barrel organ continues. She sits on one of the lower steps of the staircase, enjoying the sound.

It suddenly cuts to a stop.

ALMA (disappointed) Oh!

Silence.

She buries her head in her hands.

ALMA: Thank you mummy.

There are the sounds of traffic in the distance---automobiles. She strains to listen. There is a snatch of 'classical' jazz---Buddy Bolden or Jelly-Roll Morton or Bunk Johnson---being played on someone's radio or phonograph. She strains after it, but that too goes.

MAHLER comes in very slowly from the right, upstage of the staircase. He is looking for her. He is in a dressing gown and his steps are deliberately slow.

MAHLER: What a lovely sound.

ALMA: What?

MAHLER: That barrel organ. It reminded me of my childhood. And then he suddenly stops. (Going towards the chaiselongue, left) The moment I lean back to remember--- which means to forget---he stops.

He lies down on the chaiselongue carefully, sighing.

MAHLER (gazing across at her) Why do you sit outside the door all day?

ALMA: To hear New York, down below.

MAHLER: You could ^{take} a lift downstairs, sit in the foyer.

ALMA: My duty's with you.

Silence.

MAHLER: These Met designers are bloody awful. We need a Roller here.

ALMA: He's having trouble, you said---he wrote from Vienna---the savages are collecting round him---?

MAHLER: Yes. They'll send him packing soon. But the whole heap won't last long---the royal opera house, royalty itself---none of it.

The traffic sounds---1907 klaxons--- drift up again.

MAHLER: You like those noises?

ALMA: Yes.

MAHLER: You like this city, don't you?

ALMA: It's divine.

MAHLER (chuckling) They built it against the divine. That was the whole idea. They ran away from divine right--- of kings, aristocracies. So how is New York divine?

ALMA: The bigness. The free way they have of talking. Nothing scratching and nibbling at me like in Vienna. I feel unknown---everything feels positive---

MAHLER: With everybody knowing that the Mahlers live on the eleventh floor of the Majestic---you feel unknown?

ALMA: We're respected.

MAHLER: More than in Vienna?

ALMA: We were worshipped there. And it doesn't make you feel good. The slave can turn. The Viennese didn't come to your last concert.

MAHLER: You look a woman.

ALMA: What?

MAHLER: A woman. Dazzling, attractive in the way awful men---(he stops with a smile)

ALMA: Life's simpler. Only one child now. No Ministry of Music at the back of everything.

MAHLER: You're even happy.

ALMA: You must change for the Met.

MAHLER (sitting up carefully) What made me ask that damned doctor in Maiernigg to examine me? Do you remember I laughed when I asked him? And he gives me a sentence of death.

The steps of a slow procession from the street below.

ALMA: Listen.

MAHLER: A procession. Nothing supernatural happens here. It's a rally or something.

She goes to the window, upstage, and looks down.

ALMA: It's a funeral. There's a huge crowd.

The tap of a drum hushes the crowd. We hear a man addressing them. We cannot make his words out.

MAHLER: What does he say?

ALMA: I think it's that fireman who died heroically. It was in the papers.

MAHLER joins her at the window.

Another tap of the drum.

MAHLER (on his way out, right) I must use that drum-tap one day. (Stopping) A great change came over you in Paris. When Ossip Gabrilovitch fell in love with you. The dear man. It brought you back to life.

She does not move.

He leaves.

ALMA: Gustav. I can see Putzi.

She wanders towards the left, upstage, peering closely.

ALMA: I could swear!

She goes towards the staircase but stops at the first step to turn round again.

ALMA: It is! Come on then, quickly---you're daddy's rehearsing! Putzi, Putzi!

The sound of a tuning orchestra sweeps up with great violence. She gasps, turns towards the archway.

ALMA: Gustl! It was---couldn't you come just a----?

The conductor's desk is rapped with a jarring sharpness.

MAHLER (off) Isolde, from your entrance please---and could we keep the backstage noises down---!

She runs up to the arch and disappears through it.

The tuning has ceased. No music.

Instead of music there is the sound of a tremendous blizzard.

It rises to a threatening climax.

MAHLER (off, left) Alma! Alma!

The blizzard continues. She does not appear.

MAHLER staggers in from the left. He is dressed with unusual elegance---top hat, cloak and white gloves. He is covered with snow. He gasps,

stumbles forward.

The blizzard cuts off.

He walks carefully to the table. He peels off his white gloves slowly, and then pulls out his watch. He takes his pulse. He grunts---he is only moderately satisfied with the result.

He then remembers he has his hat and cloak on. He begins taking them off.

ALMA appears from the right in a nightdress. He throws his hat and cloak on to a chair.

ALMA: Gustl! It's past two o'clock!

MAHLER (lowering himself on to the chaiselongue) Mm.

ALMA: Were you that man stumbling about?---clutching the railings---falling in a heap---I was watching from the bedroom window.

MAHLER (putting his head back with a sigh) Yes. I was that man.

ALMA: You see, dangers everywhere. On us all the time!

MAHLER: I was warned about these New York blizzards. Go to bed, darling. The doctor said you mustn't leave your bed.

She approaches him instead.

ALMA: I saw her again. In the corridor. I peeped outside!

MAHLER: I hear her voice.

ALMA (touching him) Your poor hands!

MAHLER: I left Karl Bitter's just after midnight. They all got drunk. I was disgusted. Why do people have to do that? I got a cab. Alma---it blew over! Can you imagine it? And I crawled from underneath. And the cabby was drunk too---

ALMA (beginning to laugh) No!

MAHLER: I lost my glasses. We were fishing around in the snow for them. The snow stings you like wasps here.

I had to cling to the railings.

They laugh together.

Silence.

ALMA: Conried died then.

MAHLER: Yes. They offered me the Metropolitan. I turned it down. They're giving it to Toscanini---he's a good man. But do you know what---he wants to conduct my Tristan and Isolde. After a production like that! It was the finest I've ever seen---ever heard about! All those cuts I made. And ghastly sets. But still it was the best ever---miles ahead of any Tristan I did in Vienna.

ALMA: You take things so much easier now. You'd never have agreed to cuts in Vienna. And I remember how you were if anybody came in late.

MAHLER: Our little girl taught me such a lot. Nothing's so important any more---on this side, I mean---

ALMA: We should sell Maiernigg. Mummy and I found a lovely old farmhouse at Toblach when we were last over.

MAHLER: I liked what Max Burkhard said the other day---'Death exists if you believe in it, and I don't.'

ALMA: He's dying.

MAHLER (with a sudden laugh) That old trout---what was her name?---the wife of the shipping magnate---she said is it true that Wagner was ungrateful to Listz? 'What's ~~that~~?' I said. 'Wagner had a bad reputation? And what does Tristan mean to you?'

ALMA: Yes, we all heard you. A woman asked me, 'Does he always make a scene at dinner?'

MAHLER: You see, I made the scene. Not her, with her lies about how Tristan keeps her awake at night. Not the lie but the truth makes a scene. That's how their minds work---from the Balkans to Philadelphia.

ALMA: People are so light here. They take you to their hearts. I see you never miss a dinner party nowadays. And you dress so beautifully.

MAHLER: We must give up the flat in Vienna.

ALMA: Yes.

MAHLER: And live in Toblach. A nice farmhouse you say?

ALMA: Yes.

MAHLER: Does Anna miss her sister?

ALMA: It must be dawn, look.

MAHLER: I feel I'm sinking further and further into this divan. And you look fresh for the voyage---bursting---young!

ALMA: Bodansky came to me with tears in his eyes. He said 'I shall never love a woman like I love Mahler'.

MAHLER (laughing suddenly again) That night I arrived for my First Symphony and found that the good ladies had massed the brass all round my feet and the strings in a circle all round the back, to get a pretty effect! Still, it didn't matter. The audience didn't get a thing anyway.

ALMA: You took them to a night club afterwards, and came back at three in the morning, radiant.

MAHLER: They felt like my children. And their critics are so nice. Unlike the Viennese ones. And the French. Remember the time Debussy walked out of my Second Symphony with all his friends? Said it was all too Schubertian for them, too Viennese, too foreign, too Slav! What nonsense people do talk! Trying to make it seem there's a right way of doing things---this side---on this side!

ALMA: Still, they enjoyed your conducting of Fidelio.

MAHLER: Oh, conducting---that's nothing. Music's little enough. It's what we are that remains. You see, Tristan and Faust and Fidelio, they're only the discarded husk of our lives---they're like the body---they're what a man leaves behind. But they fade. What doesn't fade is what a man is. The music tries to get that. That's why we go through storms. Almschili, you must always try to exert that inner force of yours---spread yourself---never stint your beauty---always try and bring out the light inside---- (He yawns) I'd better get up. I'll have a dip.

ALMA: You shouldn't!

MAHLER: A little one.

ALMA: But no underwater swimming.

MAHLER: I promise.

MAHLER raises himself slowly. He goes upstage of the staircase and out of sight.

We hear birds, echoing voices across the lake. Hammering. A dog barks.

ALMA goes to the left and takes up his hat and cloak.

ALMA (calling left) Anna! Anna darling! It's time to wake up!

ALMA goes out left.

MAHLER reappears in his swimming trunk's. He is about to walk towards the lake but then stops. He looks round for ALMA. Silence.

MAHLER: Alma! Alma! (With increasing alarm) Alma!

ALMA appears from the left. She is now dressed in a bright dierndl. She stands looking at him.

MAHLER: I---thought you had gone.

ALMA: Gone?

He slumps into a sitting position on the lowest step.

MAHLER (looking across the lake) I need you to be here. In case I need the boat.

ALMA: Yes.

MAHLER (glancing at her) You were in the house?

ALMA: Yes, with Anna.

Silence.

MAHLER: Help me please. (As she comes to him) My Almschiltzili! I have this terrific longing for you---I just think of you and feel this terrific joy--- it's when I'm travelling, when I'm here a few feet from you---my concerts, everybody I see, it all goes back to you!

She helps raise him to his feet.

ALMA: Gustl---I can't bear this tense life any more!

MAHLER (putting his arm yound her) There---it won't last much longer---the tense part---

ALMA: Why not?

MAHLER (walking out) Oh, I mean the Tenth. It'll be finished soon. And then we'll be free, take a holiday---

He passes out of view. We hear him plunge into the water. No cries of pleasure.

ALMA goes nearer to the edge of the lake, gazing out.

ALMA: Not too far!

MAHLER (off) I promise!

She stands looking out. Then she seems to remember something. She turns slowly, looking off, left.

ALMA: Anna!

She goes off, left.

Silence.

The sound of MAHLER laboriously approaching the shore. A splash as he emerges from the water.

ALMA's laughter, off, as she plays with her child.

ALMA (off) Annalinchien! Annalinchien!

Silence.

MAHLER appears upstage left, dripping with water. He peers round, fixing his spectacles. He finds no towel and shakes the water out of his eyes. His spectacles are blurred.

MAHLER: Alma!

Suddenly the bell rings, loud and startling, from the right. He

starts. He gazes with horror off, right. He stands quite still. He then goes slowly towards the right, as if obeying someone's sign. He goes out of sight, upstage of the staircase, like a hypnotised man.

MAHLER (off) Thank you.

He returns breaking open a letter in a feverish way. He reads it with trembling hands.

MAHLER: Alma! Alma!

ALMA comes running in from the left with a bath towel over her arm.

ALMA: I went to get your towel.

MAHLER: It's this damned architect, look---(holding the letter out)!

ALMA (throwing the towel over his shoulders) The architect?

MAHLER: The one who fell in love with you at the Tobelbad sanatorium. When you were ill. I said at the time you were hiding something---look, he's addressed it to me! He wants my wife! What can I say? He wants to come here and talk it over! (As she takes the letter) Is that the kind of impression he gets of your closeness to me, your need for me---your loyalty---kindness---the children we've had---and the poor dead---

ALMA: I was tired and broken down and he sympathised! He sympathised! Yes!

MAHLER: Sympathised with the fact that you're married to me---instead of to a popinjay who designs brick walls! (Drilling it into her at close quarters) I told you didn't I, it won't take much longer---it's almost finished---and then you'll be free!

ALMA: Why only me?

MAHLER: Both of us, yes---both of us free!

He stalks off.

ALMA: And don't walk so fast---the doctor said not to!

MAHLER (off) To hell with doctors, and architects too, and all the dead professions!

ALMA: Do you remember how you said spring couldn't last for ever? So you pushed me into winter! You didn't even look at me! It was the Fifth and the Sixth and the Seventh and the Eighth---the Song of the Earth---the Song of Children---dead children---before it happened---never a song about me! Always music---not me! not even your own life! Do you wonder I needed a bit of warming sunlight? And he was there! He looked at me! He showed me who I was, with his eyes!

She looks at the letter, then carefully folds it, shaking off the water that MAHLER has dripped on to it. She whirls round, holding it, in a brief recollection of the waltz she danced with MAHLER. She goes off, left. Again we hear her laughter as she plays with her child.

ALMA (off) Annalinchien!

A great threatening burst of applause comes over from beyond the arch. But the archway is dark, plunged in gloom.

The applause, with frequent Bis!, begins to die. The gloom increases.

Silence.

MAHLER appears under the arch, in tails. He is haggard, bent. He gazes down the staircase. He begins walking, almost stumbling down. His feet fall heavily and loudly. He reaches centre stage. He continues across to the table. He holds his throat. He is sweating.

MAHLER: Doctor!

Silence. He looks all round.

MAHLER: Alma! Alma!

He begins weeping. He sinks to the floor.

ALMA (off, right) Gustav!

He makes no reply, lying quite still.

ALMA (off) Gustav!

ALMA enters upstage of the staircase, right. She is in travelling clothes. She stands gazing at him. She walks to him and bends down.

ALMA: Gustl---not like this. You're so hot!

MAHLER (stirring for the first time) It's this damned fever. And my throat burns.

ALMA: Why do you always let yourself fall?

MAHLER: It's better nearer the earth.

She undoes his waistcoat, loosens his tie.

MAHLER: You decided to come.

ALMA: Yes.

MAHLER: If you'd left me I should have died. I'm dead if you don't love me! It took you a long time deciding. I went everywhere we used to go---along the Rhine--- I remembered every spot---we were so happy---it was like being with you again---

ALMA: Shall I wake the doctor?

MAHLER: He's on the other side of Munich. You're the only one---the only doctor---you see, the sweating's stopped. Those damned cars outside---they keep me awake---

ALMA: I don't hear anything. You alarm yourself so much---

MAHLER: Only because I believe in it---I'm not going to control it, I want the fever to rise---I believe in it---loving you---I want to give way to it---until it takes me to God!

ALMA: But why? I'm here!

MAHLER: It's the same when I go to my hut and you're fifty yards away. I ache to get a visit from you. It's because you're never really with me any more. Sometimes you don't come for hours. If you're not there in the front row I ache all over. And I get a fever, and my throat gets coated. And I adore the pain! I know what Tristan means---how can Tristan die while he loves Isolde?

ALMA: Why so much darkness always, and dying---?

MAHLER: Not always. Only now, because you no longer respond. What a terrible pain that is. Will you do something for me?

ALMA: Yes?

MAHLER: Will you lie there, and sleep? You caught a late train.

ALMA: Yes.

She lies on the chaiselongue after taking off her travelling coat. He places the coat over her carefully.

ALMA: It worries me so much.

She closes her eyes. She begins to breathe evenly. He raises himself with effort and stands looking down at her.

The drum tap comes---the same as that heard for the funeral procession in New York. And then once again.

Silence.

ALMA: (waking suddenly) Gust! You're so white! Don't stand there!

MAHLER: I don't want to miss you breathing---I just want to drink you in---!

ALMA (with a sigh) It tires me so much!

She falls asleep again. MAHLER continues to watch over her. She wakes again.

ALMA: I could never leave you---I couldn't imagine living with anybody else---

MAHLER: Ah! You've raised me up again! you've given me a bit more life!

He sits down, still gazing at her. She sleeps again.

MAHLER: How desperately she loves him. A damned architect.

Silence.

MAHLER: Alma.

ALMA: Yes?

MAHLER: Shall we walk?

ALMA: If you like.

MAHLER: The air's so good.

She gets up and then helps him to his feet. He puts her cloak round her shoulders and they walk arm in arm very slowly upstage.

MAHLER: The doctor said my throat's full of streptococci.

ALMA: What?

MAHLER: Like a marsh full of frogs, he said! I said is that how love expresses itself---in streptococci? He gave me such a funny look.

ALMA: It's that English nurse! She had a throat infection and didn't say anything about it! I knew you'd catch it some time.

MAHLER (showing her his hand) You see, I still have your ring. I kiss it every day---in the middle of the night---

ALMA: You stole it from me.

MAHLER: I looked at your songs too. Between rehearsals. They're marvellous.

ALMA: I've carried them about with me for ten years, my little coffin of unwanted songs!

MAHLER: We'll have them performed.

ALMA (gazing at him) You seem to mean it.

MAHLER: Take me to the hut---

ALMA: You're weak, weak!

She takes him to the chaiselongue and he lies down. She covers him with her cloak. Silence.

ALMA: You look so beautiful, like Alexander the Great. That black hair---your lips are so red---

MAHLER: When I get better you can go on looking after me,

I like it so much.

ALMA: You thought I hadn't suffered enough once. Well, now I have.

MAHLER (nodding) Sorrow's put its mark on your face. That's what makes beauty.

ALMA: When you get well we'll be happy. We'll take a rest, go somewhere like Egypt.

MAHLER: Yes. Royalties are beginning to trickle in from my music. America was a great help there. So there'll be money.

ALMA: All the way from Paris to Vienna there were reporters waiting for the train to stop, asking how you were, like for a king.

MAHLER: And the flowers from my Philharmonic, that was something, eh?

ALMA: You look so elegant always. You never used to.

MAHLER: I believe in shining, nowadays. Like I said to you once, 'spread yourself', never let a single faculty get squeezed small. When I remember my early days, when people tried to squeeze me small, the rascals, they stole my life! But I must have wished it. All my life has been paper, Almschili.

ALMA: Only because you see it like that just at this moment.

MAHLER: It makes me tremendously happy to have got ill for you---

ALMA: I'd rather have you well! Gustl!

MAHLER: ---and love you less?

ALMA: No!

MAHLER: Who are you going to marry if I die? Hans Pfizner, Ossip, Charpentier---they've all been in love with you at some time or other! But what an intolerable lot to live with. There's not one of them wouldn't drive you mad in a day! Aren't I the safest bet in the end?

ALMA: Yes!

MAHLER: I'd better stay with you, then, and not die. Do you mind if I sleep?

ALMA: Your eyes are so big!

He sleeps.

She sits looking at him. She settles the cloak round him better. Then she too nods asleep.

MAHLER wakes and sits up.

MAHLER:(quietly) I've got it right.

ALMA (starting awake) What?

MAHLER: I'll show it to you. Look.

He gets up, without a trace of difficulty, and pulls her to her feet. He begins dancing with her, the Merry Widow waltz.

ALMA (stopping) Gustav---Gustav---you've got a fever!

MAHLER: I'm all right! I told you, it comes and goes. It's nothing physical. Just look at me and see!

ALMA (giving him wild kisses) You're astonishing---an astonishing astonishing husband!

They laugh. They dance again--- the same light, deft and unreal steps as before. Only this time they do not dance on the stairs. And there is no music---only MAHLER humming.

MAHLER: Like this! Da-dum! There!

They laugh together in the old way. Their dancing becomes extravagant, nearly grotesque. There is no sign at all of a sick man in MAHLER.

They whirl to a close.

MAHLER: Now I think I'll sleep.

ALMA: I'll sit with you for a little bit more.

He lies down again. He is panting with pleasure, smiling at her. She sits gazing at him.

He closes his eyes. She nods asleep too.

His hands flicker as if conducting.

The fever mounts again. He seems to struggle for breath. Then he subsides again. ALMA continues sleeping peacefully.

Again his hands twitch, conducting.

MAHLER (in a whisper) Mozart! Mozart!

He smiles. He sleeps again.

A drum tap wakes her with a start. She looks across at MAHLER slowly.

ALMA: Gustav. (No reply) Gustl. (She jumps up) Gustav, no! Gustav, not yet! Gustav!

She shakes him. He is dead.

ALMA (rushing out, left) Mummy! Mummy!

Stillness.

ALMA (off) He won't speak to me any more, mummy!

Stillness.

The flicker of candles upstage of the staircase, right, as ALMA, dressed in black now, carries in a candelabra.

She sets it down on the table.

She sits down. Silence.

Some time passes.

MAHLER stirs and stretches. ALMA makes no responding movement to this--- she is slumped half asleep. MAHLER takes off his spectacles.

MAHLER (with a yawn) Well, that's the end of Mahler. I'll grab a coffee. Just one little scene. (Gets up) Pull all the stops out.

ALMA: I'll try.

He walks out, left, upstage, no longer playing MAHLER.

ALMA: I tried all those years---to pull^{out} all the stops.

Never succeeded. Then he wanted me to! And it was too late! I remember when we married---oh and for years afterwards---I was paralysed with shyness whenever he came in the room. And yet I did open out at the end---for other men. Two more husbands--- a heavy responsibility. Gustav did perform a song of mine, in New York. Wrong time, wrong place. I suppose I gave the other two---three if you count the one I didn't marry---what he taught me. He talked and talked! Goethe, Plato, everything! That's where he died (nodding towards the chaiselonge) I won't go near it. They're all dead now, except old Kokoshka, the one I didn't marry. He'll last for ever. (Shouting) Anna! Stop that child of yours playing with a dirty rag doll! (She peers round the stage) Where is she? And that English nurse---the brave, unflinching bitch who gave my husband his throat infection. Didn't tell me she had it, because she didn't want to bother me! (Fiercely) Throw that dirty filthy doll away Marina! I know why your mother never let you speak German--- oh don't worry, I've got little eyes in my arse!--- she said 'I don't want my child hearing all the awful things Alma says about people!' Well, I'll just put my feet up. (Lowering herself on to the chaiselongue) Tipped my handbag out into her hands--- thousands of dollars. Mahler royalties. Yes! Ah! That's good. But don't think I'm going to die. (Closing her eyes and lying quite still)

Suddenly she tries to struggle into the sitting position but can't.

ALMA: Anna! Gucki! (Panic-stricken glances round) No! It's the English nurse! Oh! She's come to get me--- no!---I don't want to die!---don't let me die! Oh!

Her scream dies away, and she lies there panting. Stillness. She closes her eyes. She is quite still.

ALMA (waking again) No! No!

MAHLER appears at the top of the staircase, under the arch, in tails, remote, frail.

MAHLER (softly) Alma. (No reply) Alma.

ALMA (peering up the stairs) Who the devil's that? Franz! Franz! Walter! It's Walter--- It's Gustav! Gustav!

MAHLER: Come up.

ALMA raises herself from the chaiselongue and slowly goes up the steps to him.

The phrase from the Tenth Symphony where the drum tap is used steals over.

She stands before MAHLER. He takes her hand. The music dies away.

MAHLER: It's over now. You see, it didn't hurt did it?

ALMA: No.

MAHLER: I'll take you down to the world again, shall I?

They walk lightly and remotely down the steps, holding hands.

ALMA (stopping in a soft way) What about the other two?

MAHLER: The husbands? They're looking at us now.

ALMA: Where?

MAHLER: (pointing down to the audience) There.

They continue down the steps to the bottom. At centre stage they turn towards the auditorium, still hand in hand, and advance to take their curtain.



