

Scene A

(TATEH is combing THE LITTLE GIRL's hair.)

TATEH

If people ask, how old are you?

THE LITTLE GIRL

I don't answer.

TATEH

Your name?

THE LITTLE GIRL

No name.

TATEH

Where your mother is?

THE LITTLE GIRL

Dead.

TATEH

This is my father. He speaks for both of us.

THE LITTLE GIRL

This is my father. He speaks for both of us. Is that other ship going home?

TATEH

No! America is our home now. America is our shtetl.

TATEH AND THE LITTLE GIRL

Amekhaye khlebn.

(A flare goes off, illuminating FATHER and TATEH.)

THE LITTLE GIRL

Look. Someone is waving. Where is he going?

TATEH

He's a fool on a fool's journey.

Scene B

(Outside the theatre. EVELYN enters. She is being hounded by an unrelenting REPORTER.)

REPORTER

Daily Journal Miss Nesbit! Is it true you haven't visited your husband in the asylum since the trial?

EVELYN

I don't know what you're talking about!

REPORTER

And you have nightmares about your lover's shot-off face?

YOUNGER BROTHER

(stepping forward)

Leave the lady alone.

EVELYN

Thank you. You! You're at the theatre every night. You've never missed a performance. You deserve a reward.

(She kisses him.)

Is that what you wanted?

YOUNGER BROTHER

I love you, Miss Nesbit.

EVELYN

Would you repeat that for the press?

YOUNGER BROTHER

No, I really love you.

EVELYN

You love the Girl on the Swing. Well, now you can say she kissed you. But she could never love a man as poor or as thin or as nice as you. I'll blow you a kiss from the stage tomorrow night, if I haven't forgotten all about you.

(She goes, followed by the REPORTER. YOUNGER BROTHER sinks to his knees in despair.)

YOUNGER BROTHER

I was going to change the world for you.

Scene C

EMMA

J.P. Morgan! You should be ashamed of yourself, comrade.

TATEH

Don't make a lecture, Mrs. Goldman. I'm here to work, not make politics.

(HE begins to cut her silhouette.)

EMMA

Work is politics.

TATEH

You are barking up the wrong tree, Mrs. Goldman. I am an artist. I work for no one. Trade unions are fine but they are not for me. Now be nice and don't move. This is a complimentary silhouette because I admire you anyway.

(EMMA starts to say something.)

Sshh! That doesn't mean I have to listen to you. I was in your socialist frying pan over there; I'm not jumping into the same fire over here.

EMMA

What's your name?

TATEH

They gave me a name I can't pronounce so you can call me Tateh like everyone else.

EMMA

What about her mother?

TATEH

Dead. I said I worked for no one. Not true. I work for my child.

(HE hands HER the silhouette.)

With my compliments, Mrs. Goldman.

EMMA

You can call me Emma.

(SHE reacts to the silhouette.)

Mein Gott, what a kisser!

(SHE reaches in her pocket.)

Here.

TATEH

You're insulting me, Mrs. Goldman.

EMMA

It's not for you. It's for the child.

TATEH

Thank you.

Scene D

BRIGIT

Who the hell are you?

FATHER

Who in God's name are you?

BRIGIT

I'm Brigit! All right, that's enough, the back door for you, you brazen peddler.

FATHER

This is my home. I live here.

THE LITTLE BOY

Father! Father!

BRIGIT

Oh Holy Mother, it's the master!

(SHE runs out, embarrassed.)

FATHER

You were in short pants.

THE LITTLE BOY

Short pants are for little boys!

(MOTHER enters. She has pencils in her hair. She carries the baby under one arm and a ledger book under the other.)

MOTHER

Hello. I hope that's you under all that or I am going to kiss a strange man.

(SHE kisses FATHER.)

MOTHER

It's him! Welcome home. We've missed you terribly. Did you get all the way to the North Pole?

FATHER

No, only Admiral Peary and his first officer, Mr. Henson did.

MOTHER

Well, they're professionals.

FATHER

I got to 72 degrees, 46 minutes, a very respectable way.

MOTHER

I should say so!

FATHER

My left heel kept freezing.

MOTHER

We'll get you into a nice hot tub then. I look a fright. You weren't expected. You're just in time to help with the six-months audit. Business is wonderful. I adore going down there. I think you should pay me a salary.

FATHER

What are you holding?

MOTHER

Sarah's child.

THE LITTLE BOY

We found him in the garden.

FATHER

Who's Sarah? What is that music?

THE LITTLE BOY

Coalhouse. He's courting Sarah. That's their baby. He comes every Sunday.

MOTHER

He's hoping Sarah will eventually take pity and come down to him.

FATHER

How long has this been going on?

MOTHER

I don't remember.

THE LITTLE BOY

Five months. I've been counting. Coalhouse is teaching me to play the piano.

MOTHER

I think what we are witnessing is, in fact, a courtship of the most stubborn Christian kind.

FATHER

Yes, if you can call a courtship what has already produced a bastard child.

MOTHER

I find that an unkind remark.

FATHER

I find your welcoming of such a situation unfathomable.

MOTHER

There was suffering and now there is penitence. It's very grand and I'm sorry for you that you don't see it. I did not expect you to come home a different man but I had hoped to find you a kinder one. I'll see about your tub.

Scene E

(SARAH nods a happy, tearful assent. The music changes into the vamp for "WHEELS OF A DREAM" as we find ourselves on an idyllic hillside in the country. COALHOUSE has been polishing his car. SARAH, amused at his fastidiousness, holds their son.)

SARAH

You've been polishing that car so hard there ain't gonna be anything left for us to ride home in!

COALHOUSE

You laugh but you wait, you'll see. This is no ordinary car, Sarah. This car is going to take us to a better day and a better time.

SARAH

Who have you been talking to, Coalhouse?

COALHOUSE

No one, but I've been reading the words of Mr. Booker T. Washington. He's a great man, Sarah.

SARAH

I think you're a great man, Coalhouse.

COALHOUSE

Not like that, Sarah, not like that. Harvard University awarded him a degree. Imagine that. Imagine what this child's life can be.

Scene F

FATHER

We are suffering a tragedy that should not have been ours. What in God's name possessed you? You took that woman in without sufficient thought. And she brought Coalhouse into our lives. You have victimized us all with your foolish female sentimentality.

YOUNGER BROTHER

Are you going out to find him and shoot him?

FATHER

I'm protecting my home. If Mr. Walker makes the mistake of coming to my door I will deal with him.

(The baby begins to cry. SARAH'S FRIEND enters.)

YOUNGER BROTHER

Why should he come here? We did not desecrate his car.

FATHER

I went to the police. I told them this murdering madman was a guest in my home. I told them we are keeping his bastard child. I told them everything I knew. They were very grateful.

YOUNGER BROTHER

Did you tell them he's the Negro maniac whose car they destroyed? The same black man who went to them for justice but whose every legal complaint they ignored? The same crazed Negro killer who followed the coffin of a woman they murdered? Were they grateful for the truth?

FATHER

I hope I misunderstand you. Would you defend this savage? Does he have anyone but himself to blame for Sarah's death? Anything but his damnable nigger pride? Nothing under heaven can excuse the killing of men and the destruction of property in this manner.

YOUNGER BROTHER

I did not hear such a eulogy at Sarah's funeral. I did not hear you say then that death and the destruction of property were inexcusable.

FATHER

Must I endure this?

YOUNGER BROTHER

You are a complacent man with no thought of history. You have traveled everywhere and learned nothing. I despise you.

Scene G

TATEH

So, the young woman, forced into a marriage she does not want, decides to elope with the butcher she loves. Nonsense! People don't spend good money to see young women elope with butchers.

(THE LITTLE GIRL and THE LITTLE BOY enter down on the beach.)

MOTHER

Good morning, Baron. I see our children are playing again. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt.

TATEH

Please. I need interruption. Always working, always working. It's a curse.

(A RAGTIME BAND playing a rag crosses the boardwalk. THE LITTLE GIRL runs off followed by THE LITTLE BOY.)

TATEH

I know what this is. It's called rag. I like this music. It makes me want to turn a cart-wheel. But I won't. Not today. What's wrong?

MOTHER

I am thinking of someone I miss very badly. No, two men. My brother and a Negro man who played that kind of music on our piano in New Rochelle. We never know when our feelings will creep up on us and go "boo!" and startle us, do we?

TATEH

(looking right at her)

No. Never.

MOTHER

Well.

TATEH

No rest for the wicked! I leave you with this question, madam: Would a woman leave her husband for a butcher?

MOTHER

If he were a kind butcher, a thoughtful man who wondered what she thought about, yes, she would.

TATEH

That's the title I've been searching for. "The Thoughtful Butcher." I am forever in your debt.

Scene H

MOTHER

You missed the storm. It was thrilling! I thought the wind was going to pick us up and carry us away. What's wrong?

FATHER

I've been called to New York City. It seems that Mr. Walker and his followers have taken over the Morgan Library and are threatening to blow it and themselves up.

MOTHER

What does that have to do with you?

FATHER

Because I know him, they think I might be helpful as a negotiator or hostage.

MOTHER

Then you must go.

FATHER

Of course I must. I've reserved a place on this afternoon's Cannonball.

MOTHER

Are you afraid?

FATHER

A little.

MOTHER

Would you like me to come with you?

FATHER

There's no need. Mr. Walker has gone too far this time. They'll put an end to it now. He'll get what he deserves.

MOTHER

And what is that?

FATHER

(flaring)

I'm sure I don't know anymore! And must you always be holding that damn child of his? Every time I look at you! It's become an appendage.

(MOTHER gives the baby to SARAH'S FRIEND.)

MOTHER

I'll be right along.

FATHER

Goodbye.

(THE LITTLE BOY and SARAH'S FRIEND exit with the baby.)

I'm sorry. It's not you I'm angry with, Mother. When I return and this affair is forgotten, we will find a suitable place for the child and everything will be like it was.

MOTHER

Things will never be the same.

FATHER

I meant the same as before, when we were happy.

MOTHER

I will not give up the child to anyone except Mr. Walker.

(FATHER kisses her.)

Scene I

WHITMAN

You are surrounded by militia. They are cutting off your water even as I speak.

J.P. MORGAN

Four Shakespeare folios! A Gutenberg Bible on vellum. The treasures of civilization are at stake! You've got to do something.

WILLIE CONKLIN

White people should be grateful for what I done!

EMMA GOLDMAN

I deplore the taking of human life, but I applaud Mr. Walker's capture of the Morgan Library. His actions speak for all oppressed people. It is the cry of revolution.

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON

With guns and dynamite, you are destroying everything I have fought for, sir.

COALHOUSE

Despite the respect I have for you Mr. Washington, you have come in vain.

WASHINGTON

Had you been ignorant of the tragic struggle of our people, I could have pitied you this adventure. But you are a trained musician, an educated man.

COALHOUSE

It is true, sir. But I hope this might suggest to you the solemn calculation of my mind. We are both men of color who insist on the truth of our manhood, and the respect it demands!

(Lights come up outside the library.)

WASHINGTON

Your situation is hopeless. You will be responsible for the deaths of these young men.

Is this the legacy you would bestow on him? Are these the shoulders you would have him stand upon? Let him be the son of a man who had the courage to tell the truth in a court of law. Make your case, and if the verdict is death, go to it proudly knowing you have been heard. The truth is all. If you do this, you will have the thanks and respect of every decent man of color and all those children of our race whose way is hard and whose journey is long.

THINK OF YOUR SON.

COALHOUSE

I would need a hostage and safe passage for my men.

WASHINGTON

It is done.

YOUNGER BROTHER

You can't change your demands. You are betraying us. You said we would all go free or we would all die!

COALHOUSE

And the promise of a fair trial.

YOUNGER BROTHER

No!

WASHINGTON

You have my word. I am their mediator, sir, not their fool.

COALHOUSE

Then they will see me come out with my hands raised, and no further harm will come to any man from Coalhouse Walker, Jr.

WASHINGTON

God bless you sir.