

WENDLA: I dreamed I was a clumsy little girl, who spilt my father's coffee. And when he saw what I had done, he yanked out his belt and whipped me.

MELCHIOR: Wendla, that kind of thing doesn't happen anymore. Only in stories.

WENDLA: Martha Bessell is beaten almost every evening—the next day, you can see the welts. It's terrible.

Really, it makes you boiling hot to hear her tell it. Lately, I can't think about anything else.

MELCHIOR: Someone should file a complaint.

WENDLA: You know . . . I've never been beaten. Not once.

I can't even imagine it. It must be just awful.

MELCHIOR: I don't believe anyone is ever better for it.

WENDLA: I've tried hitting myself—to find out how it feels, really, *inside*.

*(Wendla sees a switch on the ground and picks it up.)*

With this switch, for example? It's tough. And thin.

*(She offers Melchior the switch. He takes it. Tries it, through the air.)*

MELCHIOR: It'd draw blood.

WENDLA: You mean, if you beat me with it? . . .

MELCHIOR: Beat you?

WENDLA: Me.

MELCHIOR: Wendla, what are you thinking?!

WENDLA: Nothing.

MELCHIOR: I could never beat you.

WENDLA: But if I let you?

MELCHIOR: Never.

WENDLA: But if I asked you to?

MELCHIOR: Have you lost your mind?

WENDLA: Martha Bessell, she told me—

MELCHIOR: Wendla! You can't envy someone being beaten.

WENDLA: But I've never been beaten—my entire life. I've never . . . felt . . .

MELCHIOR: What?

WENDLA: *Anything.*

*(No response.)*

Please. Melchior . . .

*(She offers him her backside. He considers, then strikes her lightly.)*

I don't feel it!

MELCHIOR: Maybe not, with your dress on.

*(Wendla hikes her skirt, offering Melchior the prospect of her somewhat more exposed backside.)*

WENDLA: On my legs, then.

MELCHIOR: Wendla!

WENDLA: Come on. *Please.*

MELCHIOR: I'll teach you to say: "Please" . . .

*(He firmly takes her by the arm, and strikes her with the switch.)*

WENDLA *(Winces from the pain, but . . .)*: You're barely stroking me.

*(He strikes her again.)*

MELCHIOR: How's that then?

WENDLA: Martha's father, he uses his belt. He draws blood, Melchi.

*(Melchior strikes her again.)*

MELCHIOR: How's that?

WENDLA *(A lie)*: Nothing.

MELCHIOR: And that?

WENDLA: *Nothing.*

MELCHIOR: You bitch. I'll beat the hell out of you.