

*Listening—
To the souls in the fool's night,
Fumbling mutely with their rude hands . . .
And there's heartache without end . . .*

(The lights shift. Melchior's home. Melchior's father, Herr Gabor, addresses Frau Gabor:)

FRAU GABOR (*Mid-conversation*): Hermann, this is our son.

HERR GABOR (*This is hard for him, too*): For fifteen years, my darling, I have followed your lead, we have given the boy room. And now we must eat of the bitter fruit. He has shown himself utterly corrupt.

FRAU GABOR: He has not.

HERR GABOR: Hear me out.

FRAU GABOR: But I have. Melchior wrote an essay—every word of which was true. Are we so afraid of the truth we will join the ranks of cowards and fools? Twisting his naive act into evidence against him?

I will not have Melchior sent to some reformatory, pent up with degenerates and genuine criminals.

(Herr Gabor looks away, pained.)

WENDLA:

*See the father bent in grief,
The mother dressed in mourning.
Sister crumples,
And the neighbors grumble.
The preacher issues warnings . . .*

HERR GABOR: And now I must break your heart. (*Withdrawing a letter from his pocket*) This afternoon, Frau Bergman came to see me. Bearing a letter Melchior wrote to young Wendla, telling her he has no regret for what transpired in our hayloft . . .

FRAU GABOR: Impossible!

HERR GABOR: That he only longs to find again that bit of Paradise—

FRAU GABOR (*Reaching for the letter*): Let me see that.

HERR GABOR: Yes, do have a look.

(Frau Gabor takes it, and is horrified by what she reads.)

WENDLA:

*History . . .
Little Miss didn't do right.
Went and ruined all the true plans—
Such a shame, such a sin.*

*Mystery . . .
Home alone on a school night.
Harvest moon over the blue land;
Summer longing on the wind . . .*

HERR GABOR: The wretched fact is: Melchior knew precisely what he was doing. And as that essay shows, he knew the danger of doing it. And yet, he went ahead. Defiling himself and all but destroying that girl.

So, you tell me, Fanny—what shall we do?

FRAU GABOR: What you will.

A reformatory.

(Herr Gabor confronts Frau Gabor. She gazes into the distance, stricken. The light on them fades.)

WENDLA:

*Had a sweetheart on his knees,
So faithful and adoring.
And he touched me,
And I let him love me.
So, let that be my story . . .*

*Listening . . .
For the hope, for the new life—*