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Rachel's Flute

by **Nadezhda Ptushkina**

Translated by Slava I. Yastremski and Michael M. Naydan

Translators' Notes

In our translations we try to find English equivalents for the colloquial Russian of Nadezhda Ptushkina's texts. For translations of theatrical pieces, the lines must sound natural for the actors performing them as well as for the audience. To that end, we asked the amateur and professional actors mentioned in the acknowledgements to do a staged reading of most of the plays in this volume and have incorporated much of what we heard in our translations.

Ptushkina's plays are closely connected with the *realia* of Russian culture during its transition from the Soviet regime to the new, quasi-capitalist environment of today's Russia. This period has seen a tremendous shift in cultural and spiritual values. Under the totalitarian Soviet regime when religion was banned, some Russian and foreign authors were prohibited from being published. Culture was the only means for preserving spiritual values. With most of the population being equally impoverished in the USSR, no one cared much about money. There was not much you could buy, even if you happened to have it. *Perestroika* and the first few years of the new Russia brought a complete reversal in people's attitude toward culture and money. This is prominently present in almost all of Ptushkina's plays. For example, in *I Pay Up Front*, the character Polina complains about the change that had taken place in Russian culture where spiritual and cultural values such as art, literature, reading books, despising money, etc. were replaced by the new corrupt capitalism such as businesswoman Olympiada's interest in nothing but money and the attitude that it can buy anything – from a painting by Picasso (not because she admires its aesthetic values, but because of its monetary value) to buying a married husband for herself. We find a similar clash of the protagonist

Alla's idealistic views on love and life and the mercantile values of Alexandrina in *Somebody Else's Candlelight*. In *Momma's Dying Again*, the lead character Sophia from the older generation has a difficult time understanding how a bookkeeper can acquire money to buy a car along with a summer house in Spain.

In *Momma's Dying Again* we encounter a problem in the cultural translation of things connected with the New Year's celebration. During Soviet times when religion was all but banned in the public sphere, the biggest and the most popular holiday was the secular New Year, which was celebrated exactly like Christmas (which according to the Russian Orthodox Julian calendar is on January 7) – with a decorated fir tree, Santa Claus (called Father Frost in Russian), the giving of presents, a big holiday dinner, etc. Even when religion made a return to favor after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the New Year's holiday has remained the people's favorite. Russian people now celebrate Orthodox Christmas on January 7 according to the Gregorian calendar, but the tree, the presents, the visit from Father Frost, all continue to occur on New Year's Eve. In our translation we have opted to use terms more familiar to a Western readership and call the Russian New Year's fir tree a Christmas tree and Father Frost St. Nick.

One other major issue in translation is that Russians have a penchant for using diminutive forms. Where possible we have retained them in the translation. For example Polina is also known as Polya, Polenka, Polyushka. They are all the same person, of course. Just as Olympiada is also Lipa, Lipusha, Lipochnka, and Lipuchka. In other instances we have opted for using an Anglicized version. For example, instead of Allka as the diminutive of Alla, we use Allie, and Tannie as the diminutive for Tatiana or Tanya.

Finally, in translating *Rachel's Flute*, written in the lofty biblical style of the Old Testament, the book of Genesis and the Song of Songs in particular, we have opted to translate the Russian original directly without any precise quotations from the Bible.

Slava Yastremski and Michael M.Naydan

Introduction: My Plays Are My Erotic Dreams

Since the mid-1990s Nadezhda Ptushkina has been the most popular and widely staged playwright in the Russian theater. When I first met her in 1996, she had eight plays produced in Moscow alone. To this day she has written more than seventy plays, forty of which were produced in many theaters in Russia and abroad, including the Baltic states, China, Japan, Germany, and Scotland. Ptushkina also has written screenplays for nine films, three of which she directed herself. As she said in a recent interview for the *Novye novosti* (The New News), she moved into the media of film in search of what Chekhov once called “new forms,” which the playwright hopes to find at the juncture of the most ancient and the most characteristic dramatic art form for the 20th century and beyond. In recent years Ptushkina also has turned to directing her own plays at several theaters.

Ptushkina has had an extraordinarily diverse and colorful biography before her success as a playwright. Earlier in her life, she experienced years of financial hardship and was forced to work to provide for her family. During Gorbachev’s *perestroika*, when the entire cultural infrastructure of the USSR collapsed, Ptushkina became a businesswoman. she had to navigate through and stand her ground against the mafia, corrupt officials, and competitors (mostly men).

Her first play was staged in Tashkent in 1982 at the Tashkent Theater for Youth, and in 1989-1990 she was invited to the Central Asian city of Dushanbe to write several film scripts. Despite the fact that she wrote a number of scripts, as a result of the hardships experienced by Russian theater at that time, it was difficult for her to stage her plays. She had to postpone her theater career while she continued to support herself through other means. However, Ptushkina continued to write plays that fed on her experience with people from all walks of life.

Ptushkina’s fame as a playwright began in 1994 when St. Petersburg’s “Experiment” state theater produced her play *A Monument to Victims*. The success led to the same theater releasing a production of another of Ptushkina’s plays – *A Mad Woman* the same year. Eventually, Vitaly V. Lansky’s production of her play *Somebody Else’s Candlelight* at the “small stage” of the Stanislavsky Theater in Moscow in 1995 after which she became the most staged playwright in the capital almost overnight. Later that same year true recognition as a playwright came to her after Boris Milgram’s production of *Rachel’s Flute* (The *Little Lamb*, as it was literally called in Russian) at the independent Art-Club XXI theater company. Although initially the play caused a scandal and was attacked by conservative critics, the production enjoyed great artistic success and has remained

extremely popular to this day. Her later play *Momma's Dying Again* (literally "While She Was Dying" in the original Russian) now has a large fan club.

It should be pointed out that Ptushkina's plays are not limited just to erotic themes. She wants to know how people's psychology changes in today's turbulent world. she asks questions such as: What is love? Why do the spiritual and the base, the constructive and the destructive, coexist in every person? What is the relationship between the ideal and reality, truth and deception? Ptushkina's characters are real people who have a wide appeal not only for the Russian theater, but for a western audience as well.

Rachel's Flute is based on the Biblical story of Jacob and Rachel, and Rachel's older sister Leah, who tricks Jacob into marrying her instead of Rachel. The scandalous success of the Moscow staging was the result of the unbridled eroticism of the play. The dramatic and poetic, biblically-based play can be seen somewhat as a literary precursor to *Fifty Shades of Grey* in its unabashed depiction of sexuality.

Somebody Else's Candlelight is a fast-moving play for just two female characters. The play speaks to the need for human contact and understanding, which women may find briefly in each other, but which is very often destroyed by the men in their lives.

Ptushkina's plays are unmistakably written for the theater. The playwright observes that she strives to create parts for actors, which will allow them to respect themselves. Ptushkina's characters are not supermodels from *Cosmopolitan* or a body-builder's magazine, which, in the playwright's opinion, do nothing but traumatize people and serve as a means for developing inferiority complexes among people. Her play *Momma's Dying Again* provides an excellent example of this particular theme. Ptushkina describes the play as a vaudeville; however, it might be more appropriately called a New Year's holiday fantasy.

I Pay Up Front is a typical Ptushkina comedy, which mixes comical, almost farcical scenes with tragic implications of the comic actions in the Russian tradition of "laughter through tears." In any case, money is temptation and represents the battleground between God and the devil. Ptushkina says that for her God and the devil are Siamese twins: one cannot exist without the other.

This theme is continued in Ptushkina's most recent play, included in this collection – *My Goldfish* (2012). It tells the story of SHE, who for thirty years has been in love with HER neighbor, a musician and composer, who lives one floor above

HER. In this play Ptushkina continues to explore the theme of a great, ideal love set against the background of the Christian context of the fish as the symbol of Christ as well as of certain cultural traditions of Russian literature, such as Alexander Pushkin's "Tale of the Goldfish".

The universal themes of love, the need for human closeness, and multifaceted complex female characters make Nadezhda Ptushkina's plays desirable material for any professional theater, and the translators hope that the availability of these translations will make their adaptation to the Anglophone stage easier.

Slava Yastremski

Cast:

Jacob, at the beginning of the play he is 33.

Rachel, at the beginning of the play she is 13.

Leah, we see her for the first time when she is 27.

Act 1

Scene 1

A blistered field. A well. The opening of the well is covered with a huge stone the height of a man. Next to the well are a few feeding-troughs for sheep. To the side of the well a lone spreading sycamore fig tree stands. Everything is flooded by mid-day heat.

Jacob, dusty and dirty, at the end of his strength, staggers carrying a knapsack on a stick across his shoulder. He carefully examines the troughs for the sheep that stretch here from afar, but we see only the last of them on the stage.

JACOB. *(carefully examines a trough, probing it inside with his finger)* Dry.

With all his might he tries to push the stone off the well opening. He strains himself so much that it seems that he will drop dead any minute, but the stone is beyond his strength. Jacob falls moaning, then picks up his staff and knapsack and crawls into the shade of the sycamore fig tree. There he arranges the knapsack under his head and lies down still, so it is hard to say whether he is asleep or dead.

From afar, then closer and closer, one can hear the delicate bleating of sheep, the subtle ringing of bells, the rustle of a small herd, the melody of a flute. Then all sounds gradually die out. Only the noise of the herd going to sleep can be heard.

Prancing like a young goat, Rachel appears carrying a flute and a pitcher. She is very picturesque, thin, long-legged, a little awkward,

but promising to become very graceful, a thirteen-year-old girl. Her fluffy long black hair in small curls lavishly spreads over her shoulders. Her small face slightly resembles that of a ewe.

She is dressed in dark red clothes. She stops by the stone, finishes the water in the pitcher, puts the pitcher on the stone, and goes beneath the sycamore fig tree. She stops near Jacob and without noticing him starts to play her flute.

JACOB. *(with difficulty raises his head and looks at her)* Let me also have a drink from your pitcher. *(Rachel is not afraid but stops playing and silently examines Jacob)* Didn't you understand what I said to you?

RACHEL. The pitcher is empty. I've just had the last of the water. If you would have raised yours earlier, I would have restrained myself and given you the water. Now you'll have to wait. When all the herds arrive, and the shepherds push the stone off the well's opening together, you'll be able to quench your thirst.

JACOB. *(gets up with difficulty, goes to the stone and looks into the pitcher, turns it upside down over his face, there is not a drop of water)* Why are you just looking at me? Help!

RACHEL. *(puts her flute into her sash and comes close to the stone)* You and I, traveler, won't be able to manage to move the stone. Only a half dozen of the strongest shepherds will be able to move it.

JACOB. *(leans on the stone)* You talk too much! Better help! Let's do it!

Rachel conscientiously with all her might, together with Jacob, tries to move the stone. Jacob can't withstand the strain and sits down.

RACHEL. *(breathing heavily)* Endure a little longer, traveler. The heat will let up any minute now. *(goes beneath the sycamore fig tree)*

JACOB. It's easy for you to say. You've just had a drink and have hidden in the shadow. I spent the entire sweltering night without a drop of water. I walked without quenching my thirst from morning till noon through the blistered land under the burning sun. The air was hot and still. I did not see a single

tree so as to take respite in its shade. I did not come across any well or spring either. Where can I get water?

RACHEL. Until the shepherds come here, there is no place to get water. But you know now that you'll soon quench your thirst. It is easier to endure when you know your desire will come true. And the time is set when it will come true.

With effort Jacob drags himself beneath the sycamore fig tree. He stops by Rachel and stares intently at her. Rachel smiles at him.

JACOB. *(returns to his former spot)* It is easy for you to rationalize! My mouth is drier than the white sand. My tongue is chapped and hardly is able to move in my mouth. My teeth have become like stones. My eyes are blinded by the heat. My head is aflame and my neck aches. My body seems to be far away from me.

RACHEL. Soon there will be water, and I will fill your pitcher before all the others. I'll run over to you and pour all the cold water onto your head. Then I'll swiftly race to fill the second pitcher and let you quench your thirst. Then I'll quickly fill the third pitcher so you can wash your body, traveler. It will be soon. Meanwhile I'll play my flute for you. If you so desire. The music will make the wait shorter. *(brings the flute to her lips and looks eagerly at Jacob)*

JACOB. You feel good now. Your face is fresh and cool; your lips are moist. You feel moisture in your mouth. Transparent droplets of saliva glisten on your white teeth. It's easy for you to talk me into being patient. You were going to play the flute for me? It'd be better if you were not so courteous, but more generous. You'd save me from my torment. Share the fluid you have in you!

RACHEL. *(laughs)* I would be happy to share it with you, but tell me, traveler, how is that possible? If I had noticed you a little sooner, I would let you have all that was left in the pitcher. Now it's too late to share. The pitcher is empty. It's not in my power to help you. I can only take the edge off your waiting.

JACOB. You begrudge me just a drop of water?

RACHEL. But you yourself saw that the pitcher is empty. Where am I to get that drop you ask me for?

JACOB. I'll take it myself. Come and bend over me! (*Rachel lowers the flute and without fear comes to Jacob and bends over him*) I will collect that drop from your lips, from your tongue, from your white teeth. Don't be greedy! Otherwise I'll not survive until the arrival of the shepherds that you promised.

RACHEL. Are you delirious or joking, traveler?

JACOB. I'm dying. Kneel and lower your face toward mine.

Rachel fearlessly kneels and puts her face to Jacob's face. Jacob presses his lips to her mouth, for a long time as if he really is drinking and cannot quench his thirst. He holds her face in the palms of his hands like a vessel. Rachel is motionless. Jacob moves away from Rachel and looks at her in astonishment.

RACHEL. (*good-naturedly and imperturbably*) Do you feel better, traveler? (*Jacob is silent, he stares straight at Rachel*) Your face is flushed. A shine has returned to your eyes. Now you'll be able to wait for the shepherds. I am happy for you. (*moves away from him, sits on the other side of the sycamore fig tree and plays her flute*)

JACOB. (*crawls to her and stares straight at her for a long time*) You are happy for me? (*Rachel concentrates on the flute. She tenderly holds the end of the flute in her mouth. Her fingers nimbly skip over the holes*) Stop playing! (*snatches the flute away from her*) Why did you walk away from me? (*throws the flute aside*)

RACHEL. I fulfilled your request, traveler. I walked away so as not to disturb your rest.

JACOB. I traced every fold of your lips with my tongue. I touched their corners with my tongue. I pressed my tongue for a long time to that dimple which ends the indentation from your nose to the middle of your upper lip. I licked your every tooth with my tongue from inside and outside – both those that everyone can see and those far back that are visible only when you laugh or cry in sumptuous pleasure. I captured your tongue and caressed it for a long time with mine. I drank your moist breath until I began to suffocate. And you put your pipe in your mouth to caress it with your lips and fingers, and you tell me that you are happy for me!

RACHEL. How is your head feeling, traveler? It looks like it doesn't hurt anymore?

JACOB. It doesn't hurt, but now it is ablaze, and my blood is pounding madly in my temples.

RACHEL. (*with curiosity*) Do you feel your body even now?

JACOB. Blood rushes through my veins like mad mountain streams. My heart pounds so that I fear my chest will not hold it. I fear opening my mouth wider for it might jump out and start to leap across this blistered field.

RACHEL. I am happy for you, traveler. I'll go to look for my flute. (*gets up in order to move away from him*)

JACOB. (*grabs the hem of her skirt*) She is happy for me! Turn your head and look finally at what is happening between my legs!

RACHEL. (*turns her head and calmly looks at him*) I see.

JACOB. (*grabs her hands*) She sees! Stretch your hands and touch it! (*presses her hands to his groin*) Do you feel how tense it is? How large it has become? It has flown up so suddenly that my trousers have torn!

RACHEL. Hurry so that we can finish in time! So that by the time the shepherds arrive you can put them back on.

Jacob jumps up and hurriedly begins to untie all the ropes in order to take off his trousers. Rachel is looking for her flute.

JACOB. (*short of breath*) You agree? Just a child! How old are you?

RACHEL. Thirteen.

JACOB. Thirteen and so compliant! So obliging! So kind to any passing traveler!

RACHEL. (*finds her flute and carefully examines it, checking the sound*) It is not hard for me. Besides, I have nothing else to do. Why shouldn't I help a passing traveler? It will make the time fly faster for me.

JACOB. Thirteen and so sensible! So reasonable! (*takes off his trousers*)

RACHEL. (*turns away from Jacob*) Hurry up, give me your trousers!

JACOB. (*is surprised but gives her his trousers*) What do you need my trousers for? And why did you turn away from me?

RACHEL. You are a grown man, and I am just a girl. You feel yourself quite free with me, but it is not right for me to look like that at any passing traveler. It's indecent. And you think just as I do. (*examines the trousers*) I always carry a

needle and thread with me. I will still have time to play the flute for you before the shepherds come.

JACOB. Thank you. You are very considerate to me. *(takes the flute from Rachel's hands and standing behind her back brings it to the girl's lips. Rachel tries to catch the flute with her lips and laughs. Slowly passes the flute in front of Rachel's face without letting her catch it with her lips. Ingratiatingly)* Right at this moment I need something entirely different from you. *(Rachel manages to catch the flute with her lips. Jacob lets her hold the tip of the flute in her mouth for some time and then little by little begins to take it away. Rachel laughs and tries to keep the flute in her mouth)* You know yourself how you can wish for something very much. You already know what a man can desire so much from a woman that he cannot restrain himself.

RACHEL. Yes, I know. After all I grew up with shepherds. *(takes the flute in her hands and plays it)*

JACOB. *(turns her head to him)* See how it reaches for you? As though ready to burst out of my groin! My thighs are so tense that my skin is about to break. Take the flute away from your lips. Place your hands on it and press your lips to it! It will be good! Or I will die right now! *(lowers her head. Takes away the flute and puts it aside. Sits next to Rachel. Meekly)* I understand you are still very young and you are embarrassed. I won't frighten you any longer. *(a pause)* Do that, lay on your back in this blessed shade and close your eyes. You need to slumber. I'll guard your sleep like the trustiest watchman. *(A pause)* Spread your hands freely with your palms open outwards. Open your mouth a little so as not to constrain your breathing. And move your legs apart slightly. That's it! You'll feel cool and light. *(a pause)* You don't trust me? That hurts me.

RACHEL. I trust you, traveler.

JACOB. Then why don't you do what I told you? Is it so difficult for you to do?

RACHEL. No, it is not difficult, traveler.

JACOB. Then do it! You have taken care of me, now I want to take care of you. *(Rachel lies down as Jacob has asked her)* Do you feel good?

RACHEL. I feel good. Thank you, rare traveler.

JACOB. I began to think that you do not trust me. Sleep! *(carefully lifts up her skirt and uncovers her feet)* I promise you a pleasant dream.

RACHEL. Why did you uncover my feet?

JACOB. It's hot. I want to pamper you a little. Let me do it, and you sleep.

RACHEL. Thank you. I'll sleep. But what will you do?

JACOB. I will guard your sleep.

RACHEL. (*sleepily*) Thank you. I am tired. I always sleep at this time... Traveler!

JACOB. Yes, my girl.

RACHEL. When you hear the huge herds approach from these three directions, when you see clouds of dust everywhere, when you hear bleating and the sound of bells, wake me up.

JACOB. I'll do that. Don't worry about anything. Sleep! (*tensely watches Rachel*)

Rachel sighs, turns her head away from him and lies still. Jacob suddenly throws Rachel's skirt over her head, thrusts his body onto Rachel and lets out a happy, triumphant cry of a hunter who has caught his pray. Rachel suddenly and deftly slips out from beneath him and jumps aside. She stands still ready to run away.

RACHEL. You are a liar! You asked me to lie down. I lay down. You promised to be on guard while I sleep.

Jacob understands that he will be unable to catch Rachel if she runs away. He remains in place.

JACOB. I am no guardian for your sleep. I have not been with a woman for many days. What am I to do with all this?

RACHEL. You should have asked right away! I know what you are to do with all this. After all, I grew up with shepherds. I can help you.

JACOB. Then help me quickly! (*moves carefully to Rachel*) And ask any price! (*puts his hands in a friendly way on Rachel's shoulders*) Help me, kind girl!

RACHEL. Let's go! (*takes Jacob around a rock and points*) There, see? On the other side of the white sheep and those of many-colored ones is a black sheep. When the shepherds' faces become as sickly as yours is now, they go to that black sheep. She is used to it. She likes when they do this thing to her. The more often they do it to her, the merrier she is. Even rams have brutal

fighters over her. Everyone needs her – shepherds and rams. Go to the black sheep, traveler!

A pause.

JACOB. (*covers himself with his hands and moves away from Rachel*) Have you known men?

RACHEL. No. My time has not come yet for that. (*quickly mends his trousers*) Go to the black sheep, traveler! She's gotten to know many men.

JACOB. (*tempting*) Okay. I'll go to the sheep. (*heads in the direction Rachel pointed him to, but then stops*) You don't know what pleasure you concede to that lustful sheep. Come with me! At least take a look how merrily we'll be playing! At least stay next to us. At least hold the black sheep around her neck like your sister! You'll see how good the three of us will feel.

RACHEL. I know this game. After all I grew up with shepherds. In the spring when all the shepherds have faces like you have right now, and the grass is still thick and tall, I hide in the grass and spy on the shepherds for a long time. Oh, everything that happens to them is all the same. A shepherd comes close to the black sheep, and his face is evil and unsatisfied, just like yours right now. On seeing him the sheep begins stirring in place as if she is ready to run away but doesn't run anywhere. The shepherd firmly grabs her hind legs, raises it up in a jerk from the ground and plunges into its restless backside. His thighs jerks from side to side as though he wants to tear the sheep apart, to hammer her to death, to bury her in the ground. Her front legs give way, and she falls, but he holds her tightly and doesn't let her fall. She bleats sadly louder and louder. He throws her to the ground and drags her from side to side. From my hiding place it seems to me that the sheep had long ago lost consciousness and was dead. Except for its harrowing bleating. The expression on the shepherd's face becomes smug and sated. Screams can be heard from his throat and blend with the bleating. He throws the sheep aside and walks off, and she becomes a formless heap. Only her sides rise. She nevertheless gets up and either crawls or staggers after him on her weak legs. And she keeps bleating! Pitifully but unrelentingly! She asks for more! Go to the black sheep, traveler!

JACOB. Do you envy the black sheep! Don't be afraid! Take this pleasure for yourself! I'll help you!

RACHEL. No, traveler! Go to the black sheep!

JACOB. Tell me, why do you then spy on the shepherds who amuse themselves with the black sheep?

RACHEL. I want to understand if it can really be that men need all this? Your trousers are ready. (*throws his trousers to him*) You can put them on.

JACOB. What else does a man need from a woman? What, my girl? Thank you for the trousers. (*puts the trousers on*) I am still tormented by thirst. One drop of moisture from you is too little for such a man as me. Let's play a nice game so I can forget my thirst. Or are you afraid?

RACHEL. What game do you offer me, traveler?

JACOB. I will teach you to play it.

RACHEL. I agree, traveler.

JACOB. Then rise up!

Rachel gets up.

JACOB. I will stand behind your back. You must stand absolutely still and do not move no matter what I do to you. You cannot turn and look back. You have to guess what I am doing and say it. You also have to say if you feel good about it. If you say that you do not like it, the game is over, and I've lost. The game is easy for you. It is much more difficult for me. Because I have to tell what you are going to do at a given moment. If I do not guess right, I lose.

RACHEL. How can you know, traveler, what I am going to do? No one can know that about another person. Not every person even knows that about himself.

JACOB. All the same I will not make a mistake. I played this game many times and if I don't make a mistake, I win.

RACHEL. Tell me what will you demand from me if you win?

JACOB. You'll have to play this game with me till the arrival of the shepherds.

RACHEL. (*laughs*) And if I win?

JACOB. (*laughs*) I'll do whatever you want.

RACHEL. (*laughs*) Then you'll go to the black sheep!

JACOB. Let's play.

RACHEL. Let's.

JACOB. Let's agree on something. You won't interrupt the game. We'll play to the very end.

RACHEL. I promise. You and I will play until one of us loses.

JACOB. Close your eyes! Begin! (*Rachel stands covering her eyes with her hands, stands behind her back*) Lower your head! In this game the woman shouldn't hold her head so haughtily and so high. (*Rachel lowers her head, touches Rachel's back of the head with his tongue*) What am I doing?

RACHEL. You are touching the back of my head with something hot and sharp as a knife. You are also touching me with tulip petals.

JACOB. You've guessed correctly, my girl. Do you feel good?

RACHEL. I feel good.

JACOB. (*moves close to her, breathes heavily*) And what am I doing now?

RACHEL. You've stood up close to me. I feel the heat of your body with my back.

JACOB. Do you feel good?

RACHEL. Good.

JACOB. (*covers her tiny breasts with both of his hands, in a hoarse voice*) Don't move! You promised not to interrupt the game.

RACHEL. I am not going to. I like your game.

JACOB. Then tell me what am I doing now?

RACHEL. (*laughs*) You put my small breasts into your huge hands, and they filled the palms of your hands just as birds fill a nest.

JACOB. Do you feel good?

RACHEL. I feel good. You have kind, caressing hands, the rare traveler.

JACOB. (*presses his body to hers*) What am I doing now?

RACHEL. (*laughs*) You pressed your body to me as hard as you could, and I feel all of your flesh. But you are a liar! When will it be your turn? When will you guess what I am going to do?

JACOB. It is now moist between your thin, scratched legs. Did I guess right? Why are you silent? Did I guess right?

RACHEL. (*quietly*) No.

JACOB. It is you who is a liar! I will check!

RACHEL. (*hurriedly*) Don't do that! I've told you the truth, traveler. Tell me what I will do now?

JACOB. And now you'll bend and move forward as though you want to run away from me, but instead you'll press your hips to me even stronger.

RACHEL. Yes... (*as if against her will she does what he just said and lets out a short moan*)

JACOB. Have I guessed correctly? Tell me.

RACHEL. Yes, rare traveler. (*gives out another moan*) And what will I do now?

JACOB. And now you will put your hands on your bottom....

RACHEL. (*with a moan*) Yes... (*as if struggling with herself, she moves her hands behind her back and places the palms on her bottom*) And what now, traveler? (*moans again*)

JACOB. And now you impatiently will move your buttocks apart with the palms of your hands. (*Rachel moans and arches her back*) I did not deceive you? Isn't it a fascinating game? Tell me that I have not deceived you.

RACHEL. (*very quietly*) No, you have not deceived me.

JACOB. We will wait a little longer, you and I. How fast your heart is beating! You have made me suffer, but Oh, how impatient you are now, you fox! And how fearful you are! No, I will not force you now! It is so sweet for me to feel how you long for me! I will wait....

RACHEL. (*as an echo*) I will wait....

JACOB. So then, move apart the two firm halves of your apple! Do you want me to tell you what will happen after that?

RACHEL. Tell me.

JACOB. It is so simple! You will begin to arch your back pining and hastening me to enter you! But be prepared, my girl! It will happen not as you expect. I won't enter you, I'll burst into you. I will drive my staff into you too deeply and too forcefully for such small flesh... I will fill all of you! Your legs will give way beneath you and your hands will shake. You'll be gasping for air. Oh, you'll be terrified! You'll be afraid that I will tear you to pieces or slaughter you. But I will very firmly grab you by your legs and will hold you. Your legs will be covered with bruises, and you'll fall to your knees and prop yourself against the ground with your hands. You'll be swaying from side to side and hit your face against the ground and come off the ground! I don't intend to cater to you at all. I will follow just my own desires!

RACHEL. You've talked about yourself, traveler. And what about me? What will I do?

JACOB. You'll squeal and moan and scream in a frenzy and plead for mercy! Oh, it will be very painful for you! Finally, I'll toss you, overflowing with my seed, aside and I will walk away alone! And you will crawl after me. You will be grabbing my feet and lick them and kiss them... And you'll implore me, "more!" Why are you waiting, my little coward? All right. So be it. I will help you. Do you like my game?

RACHEL. (*all of a sudden loudly and gaily*) I do! (*laughs and jumps away from him*) But the game is over! And it is you who has lost! You failed to guess what I will do and will try to force me to follow your desires. I have warned you. A person cannot know what another will do. I have won. Go to the black sheep, traveler!

Jacob sits down, leans against the stone and, clasping his head with his hands, rocks back and forth and screams. Rachel continues to play the flute.

JACOB. (*at the top of his lungs*) Cruel one! Sly one! Hypocrite! Liar! You've known many men! What have you done to me? How did you dare? Oh, how my head is spinning! What an unendurable burning in my groin! How my thighs ache! My hands are all numb! My legs fail me!

RACHEL. What do you need me for? The black sheep – that is what you need! I will run and bring it to you, traveler. (*laughs*) That is all you need! You will feel better right away! (*wants to run to fetch the sheep*)

JACOB. (*grabs her by the foot*) Take pity on me! (*crawls after her along the ground*) I'll go mad! I'll die from desire! I want to possess your frail, thin body! Your black curls! Your long, thin legs!.. I haven't seen a woman more beautiful than you! I haven't desired a single woman more that I desire you! You are kind, joyful, timid, dutiful, clever... I want all of you!

RACHEL. I know this game, traveler. The shepherds many times have wanted to play it with me. They have grabbed me with their hairy, restless hands and have pressed close to me with their bowed and hairy legs. They also have tried to push up close to me with their bodies, covered with long, thick hair like a ram's skin. They have bleated around me like rams, but I have always managed to run away from them.

JACOB. Look at me, touch me! What a smooth body I have! My brother Esau is a shaggy man like your shepherds, but I am smooth. In my land I had many wives and concubines, and countless women. They all desired me and fought over me. Do I look like a ram?

RACHEL. No, you do not. You are handsome and a smooth talker. You are cunning and disarming. But you behave like a ram! (*pushes him aside*) You persist in trying to get just one thing from me as if there were nothing else in me!

JACOB. What else can you have in you? What else besides flesh can a woman have in general? Why do I waste time pleading to you for what I can take myself? (*jumps up abruptly and grabs Rachel in his hands*)

RACHEL. (*tries to tear herself away from him*) Don't do it, traveler! I don't want you!

JACOB. (*firmly holds her and laughs*) What do I care about your wishes? I always just follow my own.

RACHEL. I do, too, traveler! I belong to myself, not to you!

JACOB. You are a woman! (*throws her down and presses her to the ground with his body*) Now we will finish our game.

RACHEL. (*angrily*) I don't feel like playing with you! You are a stupid ram!

JACOB. Don't feel like? Too bad! I'll tell you what will happen to you and what you'll do. You'll be convinced that this time I'll guess everything correctly. You do not desire me, but I'll enter you like a long sharp knife! Oh, how you'll toss about, scream, and writhe! And I will slit, torment, and tear you! The pain will overwhelm your strength, and you'll beg for death in earnest! But I will delight myself in you as much as I want. When I am sated with you, I'll push you aside with revulsion and walk away from you! And you will stay there mutilated and bleeding, your blood mixed with my seed, your body covered with bruises and scratches. At that moment in your trampled body, desire will begin to grow irrepressibly. When the shepherds come, you'll drag yourself to them like the black sheep and you'll bleat near them and let every one of them torment you. You'll no longer care whether they are hairy or not! Your desire will be insatiable! Because you'll be looking for me in every one of them and won't find me! You will desire just me! But you'll plead with everyone you meet to take you. Let's see if I guessed correctly this time! (*lifts Rachel with a jerk from the ground, throws her*

toward the sycamore fig tree, presses her back against the trunk, raises her leg up roughly, pushing it aside, and presses himself close to her)

Far, far off but seemingly from all directions at once, the ringing of bells and the bleating of a great number of sheep are heard.

RACHEL. The shepherds will catch up with you. They'll do the same to you as what you want to do to me. And then they will stone you to death.

JACOB. I don't intend on running away. I'll still be indulging myself with you when they come. Who will believe you? I'll throw you to them and tell them – you should also taste her! She is lustful and skillful! There will be enough of her for every one! Oh, they have been desiring you for a long time! They will fall upon you and start tearing you away from each other. They will think of nothing but you. Each will hurry to satiate himself with you. No one will run after me. No one will leave you to others.

RACHEL. You'll lose again. They will kill you. They'll not dare to touch the daughter of Laban!

JACOB. *(suddenly steps back from her)* Whose daughter are you?

RACHEL. My father is Laban. These are his herds.

JACOB. And do you know who I am?

RACHEL. You are a stupid ram!

JACOB. I was on my way to Laban. I saw a sign this night, and I did not recognize you. Forgive me! I've understood this sign now.

RACHEL. You are a liar! Go away from here!

JACOB. Listen to me!

RACHEL. I don't believe your words!

JACOB. Listen and then judge!

RACHEL. Go away from me!

JACOB. Tell your father Laban about me. Let him punish me! Betray me to the shepherds! Let them tear me in pieces! But just listen to me!

RACHEL. All right. Tell me!

JACOB. I left Beersheeba and went to Haran. I came to a certain place and stopped there for the night because the sun had set. I had a dream, a ladder stood here on the ground and its top touched the sky. I saw the Angels of God ascend and descend that ladder. And the Lord God stood on it saying, "I am the

Lord God of your father and the father of your father, do not be afraid. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. You will have as many descendants as the sands of the earth. You will spread to the sea, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south. And all the tribes of the earth will be blessed in your seed.” Only now I understood the sign. That place is nothing else but the House of God! It is the Gates of Heaven! My mother Rebecca sent me to her brother Laban to marry his daughter and remain here. You’ve been the first whom I have met in this land. I did not recognize you. Forgive me! Tell me your name.

RACHEL. Rachel. Tell me yours.

JACOB. Jacob.

RACHEL. Jacob.

JACOB. Rachel. Will you be my wife?

RACHEL. Why did Rebecca send you to her brother and my father Laban?

JACOB. Once Rebecca called me and said, “I heard how your father was saying to your brother Esau, ‘Bring me wildfowl and prepare a dish. I’ll eat and bless you before God’s face and before my death.’” My mother told me, “Now, my son, obey my words in what I’ll order you to do. Go to the herd and bring me two young goats, and from them I will prepare a dish for your father the way he likes. You will take it to your father, and he will eat it in order to bless you before his death.” I told Rebecca, “My brother Esau is a shaggy man, and I am a smooth man. It may happen that my father will touch me, and I will be a liar in his eyes and will bring a curse upon me, not a blessing.” My mother told me, “Let your curse fall upon me, just obey my words.” I went and brought the young goats to my mother. And my mother made a dish out of them. Rebecca took the clothes of her older son and my brother, Esau, which he had entrusted to her and dressed me, her younger son, Jacob in it. She covered my hands and my smooth neck with the goatskins. I entered my father’s room and said, “My father!” He said, “Here I am. Who are you, my son?” And I, Jacob, told my father, “I am Esau, your first born. I did what you had told me, eat my wildfowl so that my soul can bless you.” And Isaac said to me, “Come closer, I will touch you, my son, whether you are Esau or not.” He touched me and said, “The voice is of Jacob, but the hands are of Esau. Embrace me my son!” And Isaac felt the smell of my clothes and said, “That is the smell of my son Esau as from the

abundant field.” And he also said, “Are you Esau?” I answered, “I am.” And my father Isaac blessed me and said, “God grant you the earthly dew and the abundance of the earth, and much bread and wine. Let nations serve you and peoples bow to you. Be a lord to your brothers and the sons of your mother will bow to you. Those who curse you will be cursed. Those who bless you, blessed.”¹

RACHEL. But what about Esau? Tell me!

JACOB. Esau came later. My father told him, “Jacob came before you, and I blessed him. He will be blessed. Esau gave out a loud and quite a bitter cry and said to my father, “My father, give me your blessing, too!” But my father told him, “Your brother shrewdly came and took your blessing. What can I do for you, my son?” Esau has come to hate me and said, “The days of mourning for my father are approaching. I will kill my brother Jacob.” My father and mother called me and said, “Run away to Mesopotamia to the brother of your mother Laban and take a wife for yourself from among his daughters. And God Almighty will bless you and increase your number, and there will be a multitude of descendants from you, and you will inherit the land of your travels.” I went to Mesopotamia to Laban. And here I am before you. What will you say to me?

RACHEL. Poor Esau.

JACOB. You shed tears for Esau? For the one of whom you’ve known nothing until now? You haven’t seen him before and won’t ever see him again. Why Rachel? Why do you bemoan him? What is he to you?

RACHEL. You took possession of his blessing by deception, and I am telling you, this is bad.

JACOB. For Esau it is bad! For me, Jacob, it is good! I will be great on this earth! A multitude of peoples will come from me and from you, my wife. What do you have to do with Esau? Why must you weep for him?

RACHEL. I am weeping for you as well, Jacob.

JACOB. Tell me, why weep for me? I have the blessing of my father Isaac and Our Lord God on me. You should rejoice and not weep. Be my wife!

RACHEL. You have obtained the fate of your brother Esau by deception. Where is your fate now, Jacob? Did you not lose it?

JACOB. I do not understand you, Rachel. The meaning of your words is obscure for me. I followed my own desire. Now everything is fine. I have met you and I want you to be my only wife, Rachel. Answer me!

RACHEL. My father Laban has another daughter Leah, my older sister. How can you know which one of us you should take for a wife?

JACOB. I have met you, and you have taken a place in my heart. I feel sweetness and pain right here in my chest because of you. I will never need another woman. One can breathe air, eat bread and drink water, and die in his time contented and calm. You are the aroma in the air, you are the salt in the bread, you are the coolness of the water. One who has breathed the aroma, tasted the salt, and experienced the coolness will long for air with the aroma, bread with salt, and water with coolness before his death. I dare not touch you and I kiss the dust at your feet. (*lies down near Rachel's feet*) I love you and will love you forever. You are the only one for me now and will be the only one forever.

RACHEL. Go to my father Laban. You were going to him, so go to him. If he gives his blessing, I will be your wife.

JACOB. But do you yourself want to be my wife?

RACHEL. I am always obedient to the will of my father.

JACOB. What did you do to me, Rachel? I love you more than myself. I love you, I desire you, but I will give you up, if you do not want me. Tell me, Rachel, do not torment me.

RACHEL. I fear you, Jacob. Perhaps, you have made up a new game. I am afraid that I will lose it.

JACOB. Say “no” to me, and I will leave this place forever. If you say “yes” to me, I will fulfill the blessing of my father and my Lord. Answer me, Rachel! I am standing before you on my knees, barely alive in the dust, waiting for your answer.

RACHEL. Do you hear? The herds are very close. They are approaching. The shepherds will be here any minute.

JACOB. What do the herds have to do with me? Or the shepherds? Tell me, Rachel! I will not rise from my knees until you answer me.

RACHEL. I love you, traveler.

JACOB. Who is it coming out of the desert leaning against his beloved? You awakened me beneath the sycamore fig with the sound of your flute. Place

me on your heart like a seal. Like a signet ring on your hand. Because love is as strong as death. What happened to me when I met you? How good my soul felt! You are my beloved. You are my only one. My desire is directed only at you. I will do you no wrong. I will never take another wife besides you. As God is my witness between us. (*Rachel staggers and falls. Catches her*) What is wrong, my love?

RACHEL. My head is spinning. My throat is parched. How hot the sun is! Water, water....

JACOB. I will give you water! (*lowers Rachel to the ground, comes to the stone, exerts himself greatly and somehow manages to move the stone, fills the pitcher from the well and comes to Rachel, raises her head and brings the pitcher to her mouth*) Drink, Rachel, drink, my little ewe.

Scene 2

Seven years have passed.

A tent. Two beds. A hearth.

An elegantly dressed Rachel rubs aromatic oils onto her legs.

Jacob quietly sneaks into the tent.

RACHEL. (*shrieks*) Who is there?

JACOB. Rachel, my lamb! Arise my beloved, arise my beautiful one, come out! The time has come!

RACHEL. How can I come out? Myrrh is dripping from my hands... myrrh is dripping from my breasts onto you... You are impatient!

JACOB. You are reproaching me?! I am impatient?! I have suffered for seven years. I have worked for Laban for you. To take you as a wife. And Laban told me this morning, "When we reap the harvest, you will take Rachel as a wife. I will summon all the people of this place and will make a feast." And I said to him, "No, Laban. Give me Rachel today! Because the time has come for me to go to her." And Laban said, "Good, take Rachel today."

RACHEL. You are impatient!

JACOB. I have not been with a woman for seven years. And I have not gone to the little black lamb. Before I had forty wives and forty concubines, and maidens without number. And in one night I have known up to ten women at

a time. Now my beloved belongs to me. And I belong just to her alone. You are beautiful, my beloved, and there is no stain upon you. Why do you tarry? Why do you torment me? I have stolen my way to you to ask why you do not come to me? Have you forgotten me?

RACHEL. Just wait a bit more! It is for you that I am rubbing fragrances onto my arms and legs.

JACOB. You do not need fragrances! Your scent is better than any aromas! I will possess your scent. And I will smell of you. And you of me.

RACHEL. Look then, how elegantly I am dressed!

JACOB. I love you the same in your old dress, the one you wear when you tend the sheep!

RACHEL. Examine me right away! And put out the lights in your tent!

JACOB. And why do you order me to put out the lights next to our bed? I want to look at my beloved! My beloved is too greedy! She has shown herself to me little by little these past seven years! First she bared her deeply tanned arm to her shoulder! Then she bared her scratched up tiny round knee! Then she placed her breast into the palm of my hand like a cluster of grapes! My greedy love, I want to see all of you today!

RACHEL. Jacob, I ask you to put out the lights next to our bed!

JACOB. Have it your way, my little lamb! We have countless nights before us. And I will have time to fill my eyes with you. And never, never will I be able to gaze my fill of you. (*He traces his fingers along her face, and with her lips she catches his fingers*) But I ask of you, do not take the flute with you! I am jealous of it. I will give you another flute for your lips. And this evening you will play such melodies on it, the kind that you would never extract from your flute. And you will say, "Jacob, your flute is sweeter than mine!"

RACHEL. Go to your chamber and wait for me, impatient one! Leah will come here and will begin laughing at us.

JACOB. What is Leah to me? And what am I to her? Come with me right now, my beloved!

RACHEL. And everyone will say, "Here is Jacob leading Rachel to his bed!"

JACOB. What are people to you, my beloved?

RACHEL. I will wait till dark and I will steal my way to you so no one will see me. Go Jacob!

JACOB. Oh, you are beautiful, my beloved, you are beautiful! I grow faint from love. Let me carry away on my lips just one kiss from you! Or else I will be unable to wait for you and will die.

RACHEL. Just one! We have countless kisses before us. (*Jacob kisses Rachel*) Go, impatient one.

JACOB. Why are you sending me off, my beloved? Why do you begrudge me kisses? I will never be sated with you! How can I go away from you? How can I leave you? Let us go together!

RACHEL. Go alone. And I will follow. Just let it get a bit darker.

JACOB. You have captivated my heart, my sister, my little lamb! You have captured my heart with a single glance of your eyes, with your spirit! You have captivated my heart beneath that sycamore fig with the flute on your lips. Oh, how dear are your caresses, my beloved! Oh, how your caresses are better than cool water! And your scent is better than any aroma. Let me touch your hands with my lips! And I will carry away their sweetness. And it will be easier for me to wait till you come.

RACHEL. Impatient one! Here are my hands for you! (*Jacob kisses her hands and in languor caresses them with his face*) Go now!

JACOB. How can I leave you? Don't chase me away! A padlocked garden, my sister, a locked well, a sealed spring. Undo your belt! Allow my head to rub beneath your blouse! Let me touch your breasts with my lips! Two unripen bits of grapes. And let them ripen between my lips! You belong to me, and my desire is directed at you!

RACHEL. (*unhooks her belt*) Impatient one! Leah will come and laugh at me and shame you. (*Jacob pushes his head beneath Rachel's blouse*) Enough Jacob! And then you will tell me, "I have known you!" And what will I do with you all night? (*She pushes away his head from beneath the blouse and hooks the belt*) Go, Jacob! I'll come soon.

JACOB. My little lamb! I still have not kissed your tiny feet! How can I leave without kissing them?!

RACHEL. (*laughing*) Impatient one! (*she lifts her skirt*) Kiss them quickly and go to your tent!

JACOB. (*takes and kisses her feet, caresses them with his face, and lifts Rachel's skirt higher*) Do you love me, Rachel?

RACHEL. You know that I do.

JACOB. Then why do you allow me to leave you? Why do you tarry? No, you do not love me and do not desire me! (*turns away from Rachel*)

RACHEL. What should I do so that you'll believe that I love you, Jacob?

JACOB. Do what I ask of you. Promise me!

RACHEL. I'll do everything you ask. Just tell me!

JACOB. Be still! And do not clutch my hands! And do not clamp your supple legs together, spread them apart.

RACHEL. I'm afraid.

JACOB. My beloved is afraid of me! No, my beloved trickster! She does not love me!

RACHEL. Fine. I'll do it for you. (*covers her face with her hands*)

JACOB. My beloved, my lamb! (*puts his head between her legs*) Your womb is a stack of wheat surrounded by lilies.

Rachel bends over and moans. With her hands she caresses his head, feeble, she drops her arms, presses her mouth to muffle the screams tearing out of her. She grabs the flute, caresses it with her lips, and extracts discordant sounds from it. She shudders with her entire body and lets out a scream.

JACOB. Oh, how sweet it is to sit in your shadow! And your fruits are sweet to my throat! For the last time in seven years my seed has poured out barren. It is only your womb that I will fill with my seed.

RACHEL. (*tosses away the flute*) My flute will stay here on my virginal bed. For the last time I have caressed it with my mouth. Be not jealous of it, my beloved! From this day on I will take only your flute to my lips! I will go with you, Jacob!

JACOB. Will you forgive me, my lamb?

RACHEL. Why should I forgive you, my beloved? If you feel guilty before me, I forgive you. And I do not want to know what guilt that might be.

JACOB. Will you forgive me for our first night?

RACHEL. Tell me, why do you ask forgiveness?

JACOB. You are so beautiful and pure, my beloved. As soon as you enter my tent, I will pounce upon you as though you are the lowest harlot. For it has been seven years that I have burned with desire. But I have not lain with a

woman. Only at daybreak will you become what you are for me – my beautiful beloved. Forgive me, my lamb, for being rough and impatient with you.

RACHEL. There is nothing to forgive you for, my beloved! I myself am weak from desire. For seven years I ran away from you, because I wanted to tell you just one thing, take me right here on the ground beneath the sky and do with me what you want. I will cross your threshold and tear the clothing off me. And I will not be able to reach your bed. And you will know me at your threshold. (*the voice of Leah outside the tent, "Rachel! Rachel!"*) It is Leah. Run! I will come to you right away!

JACOB. I will wait for you, my lamb! I am weak with desire! (*slips out of the tent*)

LEAH. (*enters*) Who was it that slipped out of our tent like a thief?

JACOB. I did not see anyone.

LEAH. Some man was with you. I will tell our father Laban!

RACHEL. No need to say anything to father, Leah! It was my beloved Jacob.

LEAH. He entered the tent and knew you here?

RACHEL. He entered the tent and pressed me to come sooner to him. And become his wife. Leah, are there still many people near our tent?

LEAH. Many people have gathered to watch as you go to Jacob.

RACHEL. It is dark. And people will not notice me.

LEAH. They are holding torches so the darkness does not impede seeing you. Wait a bit more. They will disperse at some point.

RACHEL. Jacob has waited for seven years. And I do not want to force him to wait longer. I will go to him right now, Leah! Give me your blessing, too, my older sister, Leah, instead of my departed mother.

LEAH. I will say my blessing to you. Just be patient a bit. Take off your head wrap made of spun wool and give it to me! (*Rachel gives her the head wrap*) Take off your finely embroidered belt made of light blue, purple and red wool and give it to me. (*Rachel takes off her belt and gives it to Leah*) Take off your woven attire made of spun wool and give it to me. (*Rachel takes off her attire and gives it to Leah*) Take off your flaxen undergarment and give it to me.

Rachel takes off the undergarment and gives it to Leah.

RACHEL. And here I stand naked before you, Leah. Tell me, why have you taken my clothes?

LEAH. (*undresses*) Be patient a bit more. And I will tell you.

RACHEL. And here, Leah, we both stand naked before each other. Why, tell me? (*Leah flings her clothing into the hearth*) Why did you fling your clothing into the hearth, Leah?

LEAH. Are these here the oils you used to rub into your body?

RACHEL. Yes, those are the rest of what I could not rub into my body. (*Leah pours all the rest on herself*) Why have you poured oils onto yourself, Leah?

LEAH. How impatient you are. Wait a bit. I will tell you all when the time comes. (*she puts on Rachel's clothing*)

RACHEL. Why are you putting on my wedding dress, my sister?

LEAH. I will tell you. Our father Laban has said, "In our land it is not acceptable to give the younger daughter before the elder." And I, Laban's eldest daughter, will go today to Jacob instead of you. And instead of you I will lie on his bed. And he will know me as his wife. And Jacob will be my husband. And you must obey Laban, your father, just as I am obedient to him.

RACHEL. Are you joking Leah, my sister?

LEAH. Go to Laban and ask him!

RACHEL. Return my clothing that you have taken from me by deception. Am I to go naked before the people?

LEAH. I will not give you your clothes. I will wear them to Jacob.

RACHEL. (*takes the cover from the bed*) Then I will wrap myself in the bedding and will go to our father Laban in it. (*wraps herself in the bedding and goes out of the tent*)

LEAH. (*commandingly*) Stop, Rachel! Only whores walk around at night wrapped only in bedding. You will walk past the people just like a whore. The people will not let you pass, they will not recognize you. They will begin to mock you. Be obedient to our father Laban's will.

RACHEL. But what is our father's will to Jacob?! He will chase you from his tent with shame and curses! And in anger Jacob will say to Laban, "What are you doing to me?! Have I not served you to win Rachel? Why are you deceiving me? I have been with for you seven years! Your sheep and she-goats have not miscarried! I have not eaten the rams of your flock. I have not brought to you the body of any animal torn apart by wild beasts. I bore the loss myself.

You deducted from my pay whatever was stolen during the day or night. I grew weary during the day from the heat, and at night from the cold. And sleep deserted me. Such have been my seven years in your home. I have served you to win your daughter Rachel, and you want to alter my reward!”²

LEAH. I do not have time to listen to you Rachel! Jacob has grown weak in seven years without a woman. I cannot force him to wait any more. Bless me, my younger sister Rachel. And I will go to my husband Jacob. Such is the will of our father Laban. And you, as well as I, will obey his will!

RACHEL. Why are you forcing me to be ashamed of my own sister before my husband Jacob? Why do you draw shame onto this day, when for the first time I should be knowing my husband Jacob? Why do you want my husband Jacob to call you a deceiver and chase you away with shame?!

LEAH. Many nights I have made my way into the field to Jacob. And I have said to him, “Sleep with me, be with me!” And he did not heed me. He did not want to sleep with me and be with me. And he said to me, “How can I do this great evil and sin before God? God is witness between me and Rachel.” And I said to him, “You will be pure from sin. I will take and carry your sin.” And he said to me, “I do not desire anyone else. Just Rachel alone. Because she will be my wife. And all my desires are directed at her.” And I seized him by his clothing and said, “Lie with me. I am weak with desire.” But he left his clothing in my hands. And ran away from me. And here I will go to him today. And he will be helpless before me. And he will not want to run away from me. And he will not find the strength in him to chase me away. He will be weak from desire. And now he can exchange his beloved for a whore. And he will take any woman into his bed.

RACHEL. He will ask when you enter, “Is it you, my beloved, Rachel?”

LEAH. And I will answer, “It is I, Rachel! Take me quickly, right at your threshold. I am weak from desire.”

RACHEL. But he will not embrace you....

LEAH. (*continues*) ...and will recognize your clothing.

RACHEL. He will kiss you and....

LEAH. (*continues*) ...and will smell the aroma of your oil.

RACHEL. And he will say, “Are you Rachel or not?”

LEAH. And I will answer, “It is I, Rachel.”

RACHEL. And he will say, “The clothing and scent are Rachel’s, but the voice, the voice is Leah’s.”

LEAH. He has not known a woman for seven years! He will throw himself at me like a wild beast. And you come at dawn to the tent of my husband Jacob, and take your flute with you. And sweeten our awakening with music. And in the morning all women will call me blessed!

RACHEL. Leah, Leah, you will be punished because you want to sin against your sister!

LEAH. God will hear that I am the wife of Jacob, whom he, the Lord, has blessed, and He will not judge me, but will even bless me as the wife of Jacob. And I will give birth to Jacob’s son. And the clan of Jacob will multiply through me. And Jacob will become devoted to me and will forget you.

Leah leaves the tent.

Rachel, wrapped in the bedding, remains in the tent alone.

Act 2

Scene 3

A night has passed.

A blistered field.

*A fig tree, but no longer green
as in the first scene, but dried up.*

A stone on the opening of the well.

*Rachel, wrapped in the bedding, is sitting on a trough
playing the flute.*

Jacob approaches.

Rachel does not notice him.

For a long time Jacob gazes at Rachel.

JACOB. (*quietly*) Rachel! My lamb!

RACHEL. (*puts down the flute, rises, but does not approach Jacob*) My beloved has knocked at my gates! I have unlocked them for my beloved. But my beloved has turned away and left. My soul has ceased to be in me. I searched for him but did not find him. I called him, and he did not respond to me. In my bed at night I searched for the one whom my soul loves. I searched for him and did not find him. I awakened and went off through the fields and pastures. Where is he walking, skipping through the fields, prancing about the hills? The entire night I searched for the one whom my soul loves. Shepherds who were tending their flocks met me. Have you not seen the one whom my soul loves? And I left them and did not find the one whom my soul loves. And I did not clutch him and lead him to my tent. Why did I let him go?

JACOB. Rachel, my lamb. You have wasted away and grown pale overnight. And your feet are worn out. And your arms all scratched. And your lips inflamed. And your eyes swollen with tears.

RACHEL. Love is as strong as death. Jealousy is as fierce as the nether world. Its arrows are fiery. It is a powerful flame. Tell me, have you traded me for Leah, my sister?

JACOB. You are the most beautiful of all, my beloved!

RACHEL. Tell me that you belong to me, and I – to you.

JACOB. You are beautiful, my love, you are beautiful.

RACHEL. Tell me that I belong to you and your desire is directed at me alone?

JACOB. You are so beautiful, my beloved!

RACHEL. Tell me if you allowed Leah into your tent?!

JACOB. No! I did not allow her into my tent. She entered herself!

RACHEL. Tell me, did you allow Leah onto your bed?

JACOB. No! I did not allow Leah onto my bed! She herself lay down.

RACHEL. Did you know Leah?

JACOB. Leah came in your clothing and smelled of you.

RACHEL. Tell me, did you come to know my sister Leah?

JACOB. Before I realized that it was Leah and not Rachel, I knew her. (*Rachel gives out a loud scream of despair*) I lay with her, I was with her, but I thought that I was taking possession of my beloved, my lamb, my Rachel.

RACHEL. Was it not you who swore that you will not do harm to me? And that you will not take a wife above me? And God was our witness!

JACOB. Leah came and made my bed impure with her deception! I told Leah that we will lie down head to toe. I – with my head to the west, you – with your head to the east. Thus we lay down. And I will go to your father Laban to say, “Leah is not my wife. Only Rachel will be my wife. And I do not need another wife.” I kiss the dust next to your feet. I do not dare approach you. I am impure before you. But God will remove my shame. And I will lead you into my tent. And will love you more than Leah.

RACHEL. (*quietly*) You have known Leah. You have loved Leah. I am jealous of my sister. (*loudly*) I curse my sister! I am dying!

JACOB. Am I really guilty that Leah first came into my tent? Am I really guilty that Leah was in your clothing? Am I really guilty that you ordered me to put out the fire next to my bed? And where were you when I took Leah for Rachel? When I had her? And my heart feels awful now! And my body is impure! For seven years I have desired you! And I did not know that Leah,

and not you, had entered my tent! Tell me, where is my guilt? What am I guilty of before you? And for what do you reproach me?!

RACHEL. Do you now love Leah, Jacob?

JACOB. You are my only love! I have had countless of those like Leah! I have already forgotten her!

RACHEL. Do you desire Leah now?

JACOB. I desire you alone, my poor lamb!

RACHEL. And you will never touch Leah anymore?

JACOB. Never! I curse Leah!

RACHEL. And you will tell our father Laban?

JACOB. I will tell Laban, "I have worked seven years for Rachel, and you with your deception have changed my recompense! Take away your eldest daughter Leah and give me back my Rachel!"

RACHEL. And you will not renounce me?

JACOB. Could I renounce my beloved? Can I desire another woman? Forgive me, Rachel! Love me, Rachel! I am going to your father. (*he wants to go*)

RACHEL. Jacob!

JACOB. (*takes a step toward her*) What else, my lamb?

RACHEL. You are leaving without having kissed me?! Do you begrudge me a kiss? (*she approaches Jacob*)

JACOB. Forgive me, my lamb! (*with a light kiss he touches her lips*)

RACHEL. How cold your lips are, Jacob! I did not recognize them.

JACOB. I am in a hurry to see your father Laban. (*he wants to leave*)

RACHEL. You are leaving without having kissed my hands? (*Jacob kisses her hands*) Oh, how hasty you are today, Jacob!

JACOB. I am in a hurry to see your father Laban! (*again he wants to leave*)

RACHEL. (*chases after him, falls to the ground, seizes him by his legs*) Here I am opening up my shawl! With your lips touch my nipples, not yet ripe, like two tiny bits of grapes. (*Jacob kisses her breasts, kneeling down before her, he stands up and lifts Rachel from the ground*) No, they have not had time to ripen between your lips! No, you no longer desire me. You do not love me!

JACOB. What am I to do so you believe that I love you and desire you even more strongly than before?

RACHEL. Then will you do what I ask of you?

JACOB. Say it! And I will do anything for you.

RACHEL. My womb is a stack of wheat, surrounded by lilies. And it was sweet for you to sit in my shadow. And my fruits were sweet for your throat. I am dying from jealousy. I am dying from love. I am dying from desire. I will lie down here in the dust before you, and you lie down with me. And be with me. And pour out your seed into my womb.

JACOB. Oh, Rachel, my lamb!

Rachel unfolds her shawl and stands before Jacob naked. She throws the shawl onto the ground and lies down on it.

*Jacob slowly lowers himself next to Rachel.
Unnoticed, Leah approaches and halts above them.*

LEAH. Do you really want to possess my husband, Rachel?

*Jacob looks over Leah and rises up slowly and unsurely.
Rachel jumps up and covers herself in her shawl.*

JACOB. Go away from here, Leah! You are not my wife. You came to my bed by deceiving me! And I will go to your father Laban. And I will tell him that you deceived me!

LEAH. I did not deceive you, Jacob! I entered your tent and did not disguise my voice. Rachel has nipples like two unripen bits of grapes, but mine are like two towers. Rachel is small and thin, and I am tall and full-figured. How could you take me for Rachel? You told me, “The clothing and scent of Rachel, but the voice, the voice of Leah.” Why did you not light a fire to take a look at who was on your bed? And you possessed me. And could not be sated. And I am filled with your seed. And the Lord will hear me and will send me a son.

JACOB. You are a liar, Leah! Did I not tell you, “We will lie head to toe?”

LEAH. Your words are true, Jacob. We did lie head to toe. But you touched my feet with your feet. And you slowly moved toward me. And my feet ended up by your groin. And I began to caress you in the groin with my feet. And you poured out your seed on my feet. And you were weary. And I was weary. And you moved even closer to me. And my knees ended up by your groin.

And with my knees I caressed your loins. And you arched your back and moaned and licked my feet. And you poured out your seed on my knees. And you flung yourself at me! But I adeptly turned onto my stomach. And you spread apart my buttocks! Oh, how I screamed from pain! Oh, how I pleaded for you to have mercy on me! Oh, how I moaned from erotic rapture! And you poured out your seed. And I stood in your seed up to my waist. And I pushed myself away from you. And I asked, “Do you desire Rachel now? If you desire Rachel I will go, and no one will know that it was I who was with you.” And you said, “Do not move away from me now! I desire you!” (*Rachel lets out a loud scream*)

And then I turned onto my back. And you lay on my chest with your groin. And I caressed you with my breasts, as large as towers, in your groin. And you poured out your seed onto my breasts and began to ask me to play the flute. I laughed and said, “I do not know how to play the flute. That is Rachel, my sister, who plays the flute.” And you laughed and gave me your flute and taught me to play on it. Oh, how I played! Rachel will never be able to evoke such melodies from her flute! Oh, how you screamed from delight! And all the people of our encampment heard your scream and said, “Jacob has not known a woman for seven years, and here in his tent is his wife, and he feels good.” And many times you poured out your seed into my lips. And I stood up to my throat in your seed. For the second time I pushed myself away from you and asked, “Do you love Rachel now?” And should I not leave while it is still dark, and no one will see whether it was Leah or Rachel in your tent? And for the second time you answered me, “Leah, Leah, do not push yourself away from me! I love you!” (*Rachel screams and tears at her hair*)

And you entered me many times. And could not sate yourself with me and could not satisfy your desire. And we heard a flute at dawn. And for the third time I asked, “Do you remember Rachel? And should I not leave you after you have been sated by a woman?” And what did you answer the third time? “Leah, my lamb, do not move away from me! I no longer remember anyone.”

Rachel screams and beats her head against a stone.

JACOB. (*hitting Leah*) Be silent! All your words are lies! Rachel, my beloved, go away from here and await me in my tent.

LEAH. All my words are true, Jacob! And tell me, Rachel! How did I deceive you? I dressed in your wedding dress in front of you! I poured your myrrh onto myself right in front of you! And I told you, “It is I, Leah, and I am going to Jacob to his bed. And I will be his wife!” I told you and went from you to Jacob. And you remained. And you did not run off, wrapped in your shawl to enter into Jacob’s tent before me. And you, naked, did not throw yourself at me, and did not tear my hair, and did not scratch or beat me. You let me go to Jacob, who for seven years had not known a woman and who became defenseless before his desire. Why are you screaming now beside my husband? Why are you tearing your hair out before my husband?! Why do you beat your head against a stone before my eyes and my husband Jacob? What do you want now, Rachel? I am a wife to Jacob. But what are you to him? What are your screams to him? So go away now! What is my husband to you? And what are you to him? He loves and desires only me! Go away, Rachel, and do not try to possess my husband!

JACOB. (*covers her face with her hands*) Go away, Rachel, go away, my lamb!

RACHEL. In one night you have rejected me three times! And when I heard this, my soul died.

JACOB. Rachel, Rachel. You have believed Leah?! What is Leah to me? Here she stands before me. And here you stand before me. And I say, “I love only you, Rachel! I am going to Laban!”

LEAH. (*approaches Jacob and presses next to him*) You are a liar, my husband Jacob! Moisture flows from my womb down my legs because I see that you desire me right now and remember me on your bed.

JACOB. (*pushes Leah so hard that she falls onto the ground*) Be gone from me, Leah! Go away, Rachel, go away, my lamb!

LEAH. (*grabs Jacob’s legs with her hands and presses with all her body to his legs, and kisses them, and caresses them*) Your words are directed at Rachel, but your desire is directed at me! And you do not want to go to Laban. But want to possess me right here and now!

JACOB. Rachel, my beloved, run, run quickly from here! I am going right now to your father Laban! (*pushes away Leah with his legs, tears her off himself and flings her away*)

LEAH. (*screams*) You are chasing her away, Jacob, because you desire me! (*bends down before Jacob on all fours and moans and arches her back*) Jacob, my husband! Pierce me through with your stake that is longer and sharper than the stakes that hold your tent! Beat me with your hammer that is stronger and heavier than the hammer that you use to slaughter livestock! And give your flute to my lips! For my lips will dry up without it! (*Jacob comes closer to Leah as though he were hypnotized*) And let me be a litter beneath your loins! And let me be the dirt beneath your feet! And let me be the vessel for your seed! (*Jacob grabs Leah by the legs, and Leah falls to the ground face first, she screams*) Torture me, my husband! Trample me! My agonies are sweet from you! Oh, be with me for the last time! And let Rachel possess you!

JACOB. (*he presses close to Leah*) Run, Rachel, run! Run, my beloved, run!

LEAH. Stop, Rachel! The soul of Jacob is beside you. But the flesh, the flesh of Jacob is in me! Bone of my bone! Flesh of my flesh! Take possession of his flesh if you can! But I do not need Jacob's soul! What would I do with his soul?!

And Leah screams from lust, "Oh, Jacob, my husband!"

And Jacob screams from lust, "I hate you, Leah!"

And Rachel screams frightfully.

And their screams merge.

And Rachel breaks her flute on a rock.

Scene 4

A year has passed.

A tent. In the middle is a massive bed, covered with a beautiful bed cover.

A large trunk. A hearth. An expensive wash basin. Skins with water. A basket in which children are carried.

Leah sits on the carpet and breast feeds her child. She is elegantly dressed, beautiful and peaceful.

Rachel enters. She looks like an old woman. Her black curls have straightened, with a noticeable gray streak in them.

She is dressed in rags, and her feet are bare. Rachel quietly sits at the threshold and looks at Leah.

LEAH. *(notices Rachel and screams in horror)* Rachel!!! *(she jumps up, rushes about, searches for somewhere to cover her child from Rachel)* Have I sent for you? Have I called you? Why have you come to me? Why have you appeared in our tent, whore? Our father Laban has said, "I no longer have a younger daughter Rachel." And my husband Jacob, if he sees you, will not recognize my younger sister Rachel! He will chase you away from our tent. You no longer are a sister to me! Go away from here!

RACHEL. Here I, Rachel, stand before you. Tell me, Leah, what have I done to you? What kind of ill-will have I brought to you? What kind of harm have I caused you? Tell me, why do you chase me away? Let me look at Jacob's son!

LEAH. You will cast an evil eye on my son!

RACHEL. I have eyes like a dove. But your eyes, Leah, are like a hawk's. And I cannot cast an evil eye on the son of Jacob and the grandson of our father Laban.

LEAH. Good. Take a look and go away as soon as possible. *(uncovers the child in front of Rachel)*

RACHEL. *(looks at the child and laughs tenderly, the way she used to laugh many years ago as a little girl)* How much your son looks like Jacob! And he is smiling at me. I envy you, Leah, my sister!

LEAH. *(self-satisfied)* God has judged me and heard my voice! The Lord has been charitable in my calamity and has given me a son. Now my husband loves me. God gave me a wonderful gift. And now my husband will always love

just me! So go now! Soon Jacob will come. He will not like that his wife is speaking with a loose woman.

RACHEL. I have been looking for my flute beneath the sycamore fig tree by the well. There I met Jacob. And he came to me. And he looked at me sadly and without anger. And he said, “Go, Rachel, to my tent and wait for me. And do not leave the tent. I will return and say to you what I must say to you.”

LEAH. Are you raving, Rachel? What does Jacob have to do at the dried up sycamore fig tree? What does Jacob have to look for by a dead well? Are you raving or joking, Rachel? Go away from here!

RACHEL. No, Leah. Jacob, my beloved, just now told me, “Wait for me, Rachel.” I will not leave the tent, Leah. I will wait till Jacob, my beloved, comes. Do not chase me away, Leah, from the tent! The wrath of Jacob, my beloved, will fall on you!

LEAH. What are you saying, Rachel? Jacob is my husband. He poured out his seed into my womb. And I carried his child in my womb. And I gave birth to a son! And here I am holding my son in my arms before you! And you have come and have said to me three times, “Jacob is my beloved.”

RACHEL. I say what love has put onto my lips.

LEAH. We have come together on a narrow path between rows of grapes. Where from one side there is a wall, and from the other a wall. And one of the two of us must turn back. Must I really turn back? Jacob is my husband. And the Lord blessed us with a son. And you are my sister! Why should you be my rival?

RACHEL. I was looking for my flute beneath the sycamore fig by the well and could not find it. And I met Jacob, my beloved. And he said, “Wait for me, Rachel!” So I came here and am waiting for him.

LEAH. I will make you a flute of silver! Take it and go away with it from my husband Jacob! (*places the child in the basket and rocks it*)

RACHEL. My beloved said to me, “Wait!” And it is only from Jacob that I will take the flute.

LEAH. I know what Jacob will say. He will say, “Leah! Wash the body of Rachel. Adorn her in a clean dress. And allow her to leave us forever! (*from the skins she fills a pitcher with water*) Here I am pouring some water into a pitcher to wash your body. Undress and throw your rags into the hearth.

RACHEL. Thank you, Leah. (*undresses, throws her rags into the hearth and stands by the wash basin*)

LEAH. (*approaches her with a pitcher of water*) Here you stand naked before me. And your body is limp, unclean, and covered with wounds. Bend over the wash basin. I will pour water onto your body. (*pours water over Rachel*)

RACHEL. (*washes*) And here again I am naked before you. And you are pouring water over me so that I should be clean when I meet my beloved Jacob. I have waited for Jacob seven years. And they have passed like seven days. For his desire was directed at me. And I waited for Jacob for a year. And that year has dragged on like an eternity because his desire was not directed at me.

LEAH. I will give you clothing. And you will dress. I will give you bread and meat. Take them and go from our tent. (*places the pitcher next to the wash basin, gives Rachel a towel, she opens a trunk and goes through the things looking for clothing for Rachel*)

Rachel wipes herself with a towel.

The child begins to cry in the basket.

Rachel darts up to the child.

But Leah pushes Rachel away and rushes to take the child into her hands herself.

Leah rocks and calms the child.

Rachel approaches the trunk, goes through the things, finds her wedding attire.

Leah puts the child into the basket, approaches the wash basin and takes the pitcher to put it back in its place.

She sees Rachel in the wedding attire and freezes with the pitcher in her arms.

LEAH. Rachel?! Why have you put on my wedding attire? Take it off! I will give you other clothing!

RACHEL. Jacob said to me, “I am going to your father Laban and will tell him, ‘You know how I have served you and how your livestock have multiplied in my care. For you had few before I came, and now they have become many. The Lord has blessed you with my arrival! For seven years I have worked to

obtain Rachel, but you have deceived me and changed my reward. Give me Rachel. Let her be a second wife for me.”

LEAH. (*drops the pitcher*) Jacob would want to take a whore into his tent?! And keep her next to his son?! Laban will never give his blessing! Here are your bread and meat! Go away, Rachel!

RACHEL. And Jacob will say to Laban, “Give me Rachel! I will labor another seven years for her!” And the seven years will fly by, like seven days. Because I belong to my beloved and he will not act badly toward me. And God is our witness. And after seven years I will enter his tent and will become his wife. And my soul will become alive. It is easier to wait when you know that the expectation will come true. And when the term is set, it will come true.

LEAH. For seven years to labor for Laban?! For you? For a whore? When will he have time to labor for his own home? And what would Jacob have to do with you?! Who are you to Jacob?! Why would he need you? And what do you have to do with Jacob?

RACHEL. I opened the door to my beloved. But my beloved turned away and left. My soul has ceased to be in me. I have looked for but could not find him. I have called him, and he has not responded. Shepherds met me tending their flocks. They took off my shawl. And they beat me. And wounded me. And inflicted violence on me. I pleaded with them, “If you meet my beloved, what will you tell him? That I am dying from love.” – “How is your beloved better than us that you curse us?” – “My beloved is better than anyone else. Here is who my beloved is! I belong to my beloved, and he to me.”

LEAH. For seven years! The Lord knows that I am unloved and will allow me to beget a second son. And in seven years I will give birth to another six children. And I will praise the Lord, and my husband will cling to me and will love me. I will bring my female servants to him. And he will know them on my knees. And my servants will give birth to many sons for him. And these will all be my sons. My gift to Jacob! What can you give to Jacob more than my gifts? And what are you to him above my many sons?!

RACHEL. I belong to Jacob. And his intentions are directed at me. And he is now speaking about me with my father Laban. And I am speaking about him with you right now.

LEAH. You are an old hag, Rachel, an old hag! And your eyes have grown dim. And your hair has gone half gray. You are emaciated and small, and I cannot even see your breasts. Your legs are not strong, and your arms thin, and your stomach sunken. No one will desire you on his bed. And for seven years I will delight Jacob and will oblige him on our bed. When I conceived our son, and he was growing in my womb, and my flesh became heavy... And I could no longer be as artful and deft, and agile in bed as Jacob likes... He began to desire other women... Then every night I took a year-old virgin ewe from the flock and put it on our bed, over my knees. And I caressed Jacob as he likes to be caressed. And he took the ewe between my legs. And he was all in a sweat. And he screamed in the voice of a beast. And his face was twisted. And sweat poured all over his face. And he will wail, "I love you, Leah!" And the lamb wheezed pitifully. And its blood streamed along my legs. And I did not allow a single ewe to remain alive. Then Jacob noticed that my slave Zilpah had a beautiful face and an appealing figure, and he desired her. He no longer wanted to lie with me. I led her into our tent and placed her naked on our bed. I lit many lamps so that Jacob can easily see her beauty. I beat her with a whip all over her naked body, and she moaned and writhed as her body became covered in bruises and wounds. Jacob watched and desired her even more. He took her in front of me. And he did not want to have anything to do with me! Then I began to beat him with a whip. When he was lying with her and was with her. And I stroke him quietly, as if I were playing with him. And I was able to see that he enjoyed this. And then I beat him hard with the whip, as though he were not my master, but my slave. And he screamed to me, "I love you, Leah!" And every time that he lay with Zilpah, I beat him with the whip. And he did not lie with Zilpah without me. Jacob also desired my servant Bilhah. And I tied her arms and legs and spread her out on the bed for him. And he grew angry that she was not artful in love, and began to call me, "My beloved Leah, come and caress me!" And he lied with Bilhah, and I caressed him. And he was not be able to lie with Bilhah without me caressing him. I took many concubines for Jacob and always was the third one on his bed.

RACHEL. This is abominable, Leah! All these abominations are done by people of this earth and defile the earth! And the earth will spew you out when you defile it, the way it spewed out peoples before you. For if you do all these

vile things, then your souls will be cut off from people. You behave with abominable habits, with which people have behaved before us. And you defile yourself with them and you defile Jacob.³

LEAH. After seven years Jacob will not want you. And he will say, “Why have I worked for seven years to obtain her? What can I do with her on my bed?” And you will beg me, and will promise everything that I desire, for just one night with Jacob. And I will take my price from you! I will sell you one night with my husband Jacob – for your life. I will lead you to Jacob’s bed and will be the third person on that bed. And Jacob will divide his caresses between me and you. Possessing you, he will caress me and welcome my caresses. And taking possession of me, he will forget that you are beside him. And that night for you will not be a night of delights but rather a night of torments. And in the morning I will lead you to the mountain. And I will take a shepherd’s knife and a bundle of firewood. And I will lay out a sacrificial altar. And I will sacrifice you to the Lord for Jacob, my beloved husband.

RACHEL. You fear me, Leah!

LEAH. Why should I fear you, Rachel?

RACHEL. You have stolen my fate, and it has turned out to be beyond your capacities. And you cannot give Jacob anything other than lust!

LEAH. And what does a man need more than lust? What, Rachel?

RACHEL. A soul! Your dwelling is strong, Leah, but your dwelling is situated on a cliff.

LEAH. Rachel, my sister! I will give you a dozen oxen and a half-dozen covered carts. I will fill the carts with bunches of grapes and pomegranates, figs and melons, onions and cucumbers, olives and garlic; and with honey, and wheat flour, and all manner of fowl, and vessels filled with wine. I will load the carts with cedar wood, and flax, and dark red wool, and with copper and iron vessels. And I will put silver dishware and silver goblets into the carts. And a lamp embossed in gold, stamped from its stem to flowers atop it. And I will give you my blessing! I will take all your sins upon me. I, your older sister Leah, who takes the place of a mother for you. Go away from us to another land! Go as far away as you can! Go away from us! You are different from us! And there is no room for you among the people of this land!

RACHEL. And if you were to give me all the riches of your house for my beloved,
I would reject everything with contempt.

LEAH. You are a poisonous snake! You are not a sister to me, but a rival! I will kill
you! (*she grabs the lamp and rushes at Rachel*)

*Rachel shields herself from her with her arms.
Jacob enters and sees everything.*

JACOB. (*threateningly and in anger*) Leah, stop! (*Leah freezes with the raised
lamp*) Here before you is Rachel. My wife. I have the blessing of your father
Laban. He told me, “Take Rachel as your wife today and labor for her
another seven years.” And why are there broken pieces of pottery in my
tent? (*points to the broken pitcher to Leah*) Take this away, Leah! (*Leah
collects the broken pieces of pottery*) Prepare the bed, Leah, for me and for
Rachel! (*angrily*) What is wrong with you, Leah? Don’t you hear what I am
ordering you to do?

LEAH. (*prepares her bed*) I will do everything that my husband Jacob’s heart
desires. And I will light many lamps. And I will bring Zilpah and Bilhah.
And many other slaves, beautiful of face and body. And from the herd I will
take two year-old virgin ewes. And I will set out much wine and meat for
everyone next to the bed. And I will caress you the way you like. And Jacob,
you will not be able to satisfy all your desires till dawn.

JACOB. Take our son, Leah, and go from here. And remain in your tent until I
come to you.

LEAH. But Rachel is not artful in love and does not know your desires. And you,
possessing her, will not reach that delight which I have taught you. Rachel
alone on your bed will not be enough.

JACOB. I am satisfied with just Rachel on my bed! You have corrupted my heart!
And now it is not as devoted to God as the heart of my father Isaac and my
ancestors. Take our son, Leah, and go away from here. Rachel has waited for
me for seven years. And she has waited for another year. I cannot force her
to wait longer. Do you hear me, Leah? (*Leah takes away the basket with the
child and leaves*) And here, Rachel, you are my wife. And you stand before
me in my tent. And I, Jacob, your husband, stand before you. And no one
can ever separate us. Why are you silent, Rachel? (*pause*) I do not recognize

my Rachel in you. And I am emptied before you. And I have no desire to lie with you and to be with you. And I do not understand myself. What are you to me now, Rachel? And why can I not live without you?! Who is this rising out of the desert, leaning on his beloved? Beneath the sycamore fig you awakened me with your flute. Love is as strong as death. Great waters cannot extinguish love. And rivers cannot flood it. (*pause*) Why are you crying? And why are you not eating and drinking? And why does your heart grieve, Rachel? Tell me what your tears are about now?

RACHEL. My tears are for Esau, your brother.

JACOB. For seven more years I will labor for your father Laban to obtain you. And for six years beyond that I will labor for Laban for my house, and for my family. And I will go on my path, leaning on you, my beloved. I will send messengers before me to my brother Esau. And I will order them, say it thusly to my master Esau, this is what your slave Jacob says, “I have lived with Laban and I have oxen, and asses, and small livestock, and camels, and slaves. Take half of everything I have as a gift to you and accept me, your brother!” And Esau will run to greet me. He will embrace me and will fall on my chest. He will kiss me and we both will weep. Esau will look upon you, Rachel, and will say, “Who is this by you?” And you will bow down to greet Esau my brother. And I will say to him, “This is Rachel, the daughter of Laban, my wife. She has cried for you, Esau!” And Esau will see your face, as though someone who has seen the face of God. The Lord said to me, “I will bless you abundantly and greatly multiply your descendants until they are as numerous as the grains of sand on the seashore.”⁴ And it is not in my abilities to carry my fate and the fate of my brother Esau. And let my descendants and the descendants of my brother Esau together fulfill the blessing of our father and our Lord.

RACHEL. I love you, Jacob. I am proud of you, Jacob, and my soul belongs to you.

JACOB. My soul belongs to you, Rachel, forever. Rachel, take this gift of mine! I have made a silver flute for you. (*Extends the flute to Rachel*)

RACHEL. (*accepts the flute, examines it, raises it to her lips*) I have not played the flute in so long.

JACOB. Sit beside me, Rachel, my wife, my beloved. Put your head on my left shoulder. I will embrace you with my right hand.

*Rachel sits down beside Jacob on the carpet.
She lowers her head onto Jacob's shoulder.
Jacob firmly embraces her.*

JACOB. Now play your flute for me, Rachel! Play for me now always, my lamb!
(Rachel sits in Jacob's embrace and plays her flute)

THE END

Notes

1. See Genesis 27-28.
2. See Genesis 31:36-42.
3. See Leviticus 18:26-29.
4. A nearly exact paraphrase of Genesis 22:17.