

Times Like These

By John O'Keefe

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Production credits to come

CHARACTERS:

META WOLFF

OSCAR WEISS

SET:

An apartment in Berlin 1930

SOME ADVICE FROM JOHN O'KEEFE:

Do not use a blue light for the black out.

Black outs should be black.

ACT ONE

SCENE 1

OSCAR and META in silhouette facing each other under a red heart gobo. META is holding a bouquet of roses. OSCAR is kneeling before her. OSCAR is applauding.

OSCAR

Did you hear them? They all cried out for you. You were wonderful "Meta! Meta! Bravo! Bravo!" And you eating it up.

META

You were wonderful too.

OSCAR

(Mimicking her) "You were wonderful too." I hate it when you're generous.

META clutches her flowers to her breast and peers down at OSCAR.

META

Oh, get up.

OSCAR

I won't get up until you admit how brilliant you were.

META

Oh, stop it, Oscar. *(She looks down at him. OSCAR remains in place on his knees. Then finally she shouts...)* Yes! Yes! I was brilliant!

They laugh. Lights out.

SCENE 2

OSCAR is pacing and working on his lines from "Woyzeck."

OSCAR

"Yet, if a Wanderer, leaning on the stream of time..."

META (OS)

(Correcting him) "Wanderer," Oscar. What sound in the word gives it its meaning?

OSCAR

"Wan."

META (OS)

"waaaaannn..."

OSCAR

"Waaaaann..."

META (OS)

"Waaaaaann..."

OSCAR

"Waaaaaann..."

META (OS)

It is his longing.

OSCAR

"Waaaaaann..."

META (OS)

And then the sound of his feet, "... derer..."

OSCAR

"... derer..."

META (OS)

Yes, but a light touch of the tongue,

OSCAR

"... derer."

META (OS)

The word is so elegant.

OSCAR

"Yet, if the Waannderer, leaning by the stream of time, in his godly..."

META (OS)

“... gawdly...”

OSCAR

“... gawdly wisdom asketh and answereth himself...”

META (OS)

Snap those words.

OSCAR

“... asketh and answereth himself: What is Man?”

META

“What is man?”

OSCAR

“What is man? Verily I say unto you...”

META (OS)

Think the words through as you say them, they are not complete until the last line.

OSCAR

“On what would the farmer, the barrel maker, the cobbler, the doctor live, if God had not created Man?”

META (OS)

Yes, Oscar, now dig in.

OSCAR

“Yet, if a Wanderer, leaning by the stream of time, in his godly wisdom asketh and answereth himself: What is Man? What is Man? Verily I say unto you, On what would the farmer, the barrel maker, the cobbler, the doctor live, if God had not created Man? From what would the tailor live if Shame was not implanted in Man, from what would the Soldier live if Man did not come equipped with the need to slaughter himself? Therefore, doubt not, yes, yes, it is lovely and fine, yet everything on earth is evil, even money rots. In conclusion, my Beloved Ones, let us now piss on a cross so that a Jew will die.”

META enters, beautiful and radiant. She applauds him as the lights fade.

SCENE 3

META on the telephone. She is in her kimono. She is cradling the phone on her neck while filing her fingernails. She is toying with Hans Johst who is on the other line.

META (OS)

You know perfectly well that I'm too old to play Kate. – You drive me crazy, Hans. You are such a charmer – (OSCAR enters, drying his hair. He is peeved.) Oh, do you? Well, if I play Kate, then I think Oscar should play Petruchio. (OSCAR waves for her to stop.) – Why not? I think he's perfect for the part. – (She laughs.) Yes, yes, he did tame me. – I am tamed, I tell you, I am tamed. – (OSCAR turns his back on her and leaves the room, only to return and glare at her.) No, you aren't the taming kind. – What are you? Hmm, do you really want me to say? (OSCAR begins impatiently pacing.) You're a Bureaucrat. – How have I insulted you? A true German should take that as a compliment. – (OSCAR stands over META.) Listen, Oscar seems to be chomping at the bit, I've got to tend to his needs. It is my wifely duty. – Don't worry about it. – Yes, rehearsal in two weeks. Kate, my God, I hope there is enough makeup. – Oh, stop, you're making me ill. Go to bed; drink a glass of hot milk. Tschüss. (She hangs up. Then to OSCAR...) What's wrong with you?

OSCAR

I don't like that man.

META

There's nothing to dislike about him that is why there is nothing to like.

OSCAR

Yes, he's like a piece of paper, you can write on him anything you want to write and it will be there for everyone to see. Be careful what you say to that guy. In times like these Hans Johst can be a very dangerous man.

META

You're exaggerating, Oscar. He's just a little man with a name in front of his desk. Hans says that things could go much better for theater artists, especially for actors. God knows the union is doing nothing for us. He said that there could be special a chamber for actors where untalented novices couldn't get in.

OSCAR

You mean the Jews?

META

What do the Jews have to do with it?

OSCAR

Jews, intellectuals, foreigners. Who's going to pay for all this? What do we have to do in return? We would have to play Folk art, Folk art, Meta.

META

What do you mean?

OSCAR

Polka Theater!

META

That's not possible, this is Berlin.

OSCAR

Goethe, Schiller, Shakespeare, oh yes, but with changes.

META

What's wrong with Shakespeare? I could do with more Shakespeare, and Goethe and Schiller. There is a lot of self-indulgent crap out there.

OSCAR

Yes, and Hans Johst.

META

Impossible, he's a terrible playwright.

OSCAR

(Pretending to tear his shirt open) Yes, Expressionist sauerkraut!

META

Is it because he was my lover?

OSCAR

No, it's because you could fuck somebody with so little talent!

META

My dear, dearest Oscar, it is you I love, only you. *(She puts her arms around his neck and sings.)*

META (*cont'd.*)

Du, du, liegts mir am hertzen
Du, du, liegts mir am sinn
Du, du, machts mir viel schmerzen
Weiss nicht wie gut ich dir bin.

The lights begin to fade as OSCAR joins her in harmony.

OSCAR and META

Ja, Ja, Ja, Ja
Weiss nicht wie gut ich dir bin.

They kiss as the lights out.

SCENE 4

The lights rise just as META and OSCAR are entering. She is unusually agitated. OSCAR is behind her.

META

I don't understand why they had to postpone the rehearsal. It's unheard of. Casting problems? What does that mean? Well, say something, Oscar. What do you think? You must have some opinion.

OSCAR

I wouldn't worry about it, you're job is secure.

META

Of course, my job is secure, why wouldn't it be? And so is yours, but I think he should have cast you as Petruchio.

OSCAR

I'm perfectly fine with my role.

META

That's your problem. You're afraid of success. You could have done that role; you could have stepped up into that role, yet you hung back. I swear you shrink every time you get up on that stage. You must focus. You must be sharp as a stiletto.

OSCAR

I hate that Johst; I don't want work for him.

META

Some of us don't have the luxury of picking and choosing our directors.

OSCAR

Who says he's a director?

META

The Prussian State Theater! You are in the finest theater in all of Germany, Oscar. This is your chance.

OSCAR

I don't have your talent.

META

You don't have my will!

OSCAR

I wish it were a matter of will. You and Marianne Hoppe and Grudegens, I can't stand near you without being terrified, without shaking, without being fat. And him, that Johst, that smirk.

META

He just wants to see if you can stand on your own two feet.

OSCAR

Are you picking on me?

META

There are always challenges and they're not always pretty, in fact, most of the time they're ugly as sin, ugly as Hans Johst. And they're not always fair, most of the time they're not. There is always some little thing, some loathsome little thing that will get you in the end, that you stave off from moment to moment. From breath to breath you live, now, now, now you live just in the nick of time. That's acting. That's all it is. There is no mystery. *(She crosses to the D.S. window and looks out.)* You must find that thing, that loathsome little thing.

META begins crying. OSCAR crosses to her.

OSCAR

My dear, what's the matter?

META

Will he become King?

OSCAR

Who?

META

That little Austrian?

OSCAR

(Chuckles.) You mean, Hitler? No, he's Chancellor.

META

(Tasting the word) "Chancellor..." If I remember my High School Latin, its "Cancellorius." Isn't that right?

OSCAR

I can't remember my high school Latin.

META

Oh, but you should. You must always remember the roots of your words, their primal meanings, the eggs in them that hatch on your tongue when you speak on stage. "Cancellorius," is the root of Chancellor. It means, "doorkeeper."

OSCAR

Bellhop, you mean. Are you okay?

META

I'm a Jew.

The lights fade.

SCENE 5

META is sitting on the couch. OSCAR bursts through the door. He has rushed from rehearsal to see how META is doing.

OSCAR

Meta? Are you all right?

META

(Quietly) Shhhhh, relax. Sit down.

OSCAR

Smarmy, bastard, practically licked my face!

META

(Quietly) Did you get Petruchio?

OSCAR

Yes.

META

Marianne got Kate?

OSCAR

Yes.

META

She's good.

OSCAR

That smile, that sneaky smile, those snake eyes. God, I hate that Johst, that little smiling man. Did he call you?

META

No.

OSCAR

Of course not. Meta, why didn't you tell me?

META

Is it important?

OSCAR

Not to me.

META

My grandfather belonged to a Reform Synagogue that was very liberal, so he didn't protest when my father became a Protestant and I was raised as a Protestant too. I've never thought of myself as a Jew. I've never known anything Jewish. I abhor religion. At best it's a kinky relationship to ones father. And Buddha, a rich boy who gave up his ego because he couldn't take reality. I can't admire that. I'm not a humanist either. I'm not that nosey, nor that interested. I'm not even an atheist. It's a none-issue. I'm am actress. That's all I am. I like to be noticed. I like to be praised. I have a big ego. Anyway, people knowing I'm Jewish wouldn't do me any good.

OSCAR

Didn't you register yourself as Jewish?

META

No, why should I? I'm German.

OSCAR

He can't fire you, that smiling little unctuous man can't fire you. You're the best actress in that theater.

META

That seems to be debatable.

OSCAR

What are we going to do?

META

You've got to take care of us for a while, Oscar, until we can get out of here.

OSCAR

Get out of here?

META

Yes.

OSCAR

Yes, of course.

Lights out.

SCENE 6

In the darkness the Horst Wessel Song in the background. It grows louder. META is just entering as a flickering light comes up D.S. OSCAR enters behind her.

META

A fire. Where?

OSCAR

The Parliament.

As they watch the fire the song grows louder.

META

What is that song? I hear it every day.

OSCAR

It's the Horst Wessel Song. He was a Nazi hero who was shot in the face by a Commie. He wrote it. A martyr for the Nazi cause.

META is frightened.

META

It's big and dumb like a zombie. It feels no pain, has no reflection, cannot be stopped. *(Suddenly she can't stand up.)* Oscar, hold me, I'm falling. I'm falling.

The lights fade as META sinks into his arms and into the darkness as the Horst Wessel Song grows louder. It segues in the dark into a news report coming from the radio.

SCENE 7

In the darkness.

VOICE ON THE RADIO

A few days ago, Germany was astonished by the news of arson in the Parliament.

The lights rise on META sitting on a chair by the radio, expressionless. She is in her kimono. She is listening to the radio.

VOICE ON THE RADIO (*cont'd.*)

The ringleader is a Jew Communist. A bloody uprising was supposed to begin throughout Germany. The burning of the Parliament was to be the signal for the attack.

OSCAR enters. He is wearing his winter coat. The voice on the radio continues through their dialogue.

OSCAR

How are you?

META

Fine.

VOICE ON THE RADIO

The Jews did not succeed in carrying out their treacherous scheme. The National Socialist Minister Göring put a halt to their plans.

OSCAR

What are you listening to?

META

The news.

VOICE ON THE RADIO

But the Jew will find new intrigues and crimes, will not rest until a new attack on Germany is ready. The Jew is guilty...

OSCAR turns the radio off.

OSCAR

Why do you listen to that crap? (*He takes off his coat.*) Bernard has left. So has Sophie. Hector, Otto, Franz, Paula. There are a lot of new faces. Josht, he smiles all the time, says "the air is clear now. We will be a family." I think most of the new ones are embarrassed. Marianne says nothing. She smiles, she keeps to herself. She does her work. And Gustav, he just prances about as usual. He greets the new ones with big fat, hot handshakes. He came up to me, clapped me on the shoulder and said, "Congratulations. See, it's not so bad." He and Johst, they should be husband and

wife. (*Notices a book on the table.*) What's this? "Goebbels on Horst Wessel," Why are you reading this crap?

META

(*Gazing out the window*) All these flags, I've never seen so many flags. It's like a big celebration. What are these flags? Are these the flags of my country? A flag should be like the Holy Host hidden in the Cross under glass that a priest holds above him when he is doing Mass. When there is war the flags will fly out of it, but these, what are they?

OSCAR

What are you talking about? You've never been to a Catholic mass.

META

Yes, I have. I liked it. It was very theatrical. It was like magic, they turned a piece of bread into God. Do you think they did it?

OSCAR

What are you talking about?

META

Destroy the Parliament building?

OSCAR

Who?

META

The Jews?

OSCAR

No.

META

Who then?

OSCAR

The communists.

META

Perhaps.

OSCAR looks at her.

OSCAR

The Nazis? Oh Meta, you can't be serious.

META

No one would believe they'd actually do it. Only a crazy person would believe such a thing.

OSCAR

You haven't dressed.

META begins pacing.

META

There is a catastrophe. A building has been destroyed. People have been killed. Everyone is running around in terror. They don't know where to hide, what will happen next. This guy comes along who wasn't really liked that much before, but now, he's there in the ashes of disaster, in the still smoldering fires, naming the people who did it, promising to punish them. *(She looks at OSCAR.)* You'd rally around that man.

OSCAR

Meta, you haven't left the apartment.

META

I never wanted to think about politics. I took it for granted that civilized people would act in good taste. Now everything I know has been turned around. Nothing is the same. I used to think there were crazy people and sane people, but now I know that we are all crazy. How else would one explain it? That little screaming man is our leader. I'll tell you something else, guys like him, once they're in office they never let go.

META looks out the window. OSCAR takes her into his arms.

OSCAR

I know you're frightened, but this foolishness, it won't last long, it can't.

META

Why not?

OSCAR

Because this is Germany.

META

Oh, yes, of course, yes. *(Smiling wryly)* I didn't think of that.

The lights fade.

SCENE 8

META is on the telephone.

META

Hello? Hello, Marianne? This is Meta. – Yes. – Oh, I'm fine. How are you? I'm not interrupting anything am I? I just wanted to say "hello." – Yes, I'm sure it won't last. – I'm glad it's you. I think you should have played Kate all along. – Oh, please. That's one thing I'm not vain about, my age. – *(Laughs.)* Well, perhaps I am. – Oh, don't please, it's all right. I didn't call for sympathy. How is Oscar doing? – Oh, that's so good to hear. Take care of him will you? What I mean is that he's not terribly confident around you. You understand. – Yes. Yes, he should pipe up more. Perhaps some good will come out of this, a chance for him to stretch. – Plans? Well, everything's happened so quickly, I haven't caught my breath. Yes, I think I will be planning something. – Yes, I heard that and Franz too. – Oh, to Paris. – Hmm, he speaks French does he? – Oh, Paula, to Amsterdam. What is she going to do? – I'm sure she'll find something. Well, I guess I should think about that. Being married is a little complicated... It's probably not good for me to be speaking with you. I mean, has it gotten that bad? I'm sorry, what a stupid way to say it, but I'm very curious about it, like lifting a rock to see what kind of bugs are under it. *(Laughs.)* I'm sorry, it's just so burlesque isn't it all? I mean the flags. It's a miracle the birds can fly with all that cloth in the air. Oh, I'm sorry. Yes, you have to learn lines. I get absolutely incensed when someone interrupts me when I'm learning lines. – Oh, yes, I'll call. I'll tell you what's happening as soon as I find out. Make sure Gustav doesn't flail around him too much, Oscar gets nervous as a cat when people fling their arms about. And how is Johst? – Oh, yes, please, I won't hold you, but he is treating him well? Good, good, that's good to hear, oh, yes, of course...Marianne? Hello?

MARIANNE has hung up. META looks at the dead receiver in her hands.

META *(cont'd.)*

Well, Tschüss.

She whispers into the receiver as the lights fade...

Go to hell, you blond bitch, go to hell, go to hell, go to hell...

SCENE 9

*In the darkness. OSCAR is reciting lines from
"Taming of the Shrew."*

OSCAR (*as Petruchio*)

Come on, I' God's name; once more toward our father's.

*The lights rise on OSCAR with his foot propped
theatrically on a chair. His delivery is rather wooden,
Charlton Heston comes to mind. They are holding
scripts. META is sitting across from him still in
her kimono.*

OSCAR (*as Petruchio*) (*cont'd.*)

Good Lord, how bright and goodly shines the moon!

META watches him stone-faced.

OSCAR

It's your line, dear.

META

Let me play him and you play her.

OSCAR

Come on, darling, not now.

META

Get on your knees, sweet heart.

OSCAR

On my knees?

META

Yes, dear.

OSCAR reluctantly kneels.

META (*cont'd.*)

Not Petruchio, Nazi Petruchio.

Suddenly META screams in homicidal fury...

META (*as Petruchio*)

Come on, I' God's name; once more toward our father's!!
Good Lord, how bright and goodly shines the moon.

OSCAR (*as Katharina*)

(In a feinged soprano) The moon! the sun: it is not moonlight now.

META (*as Petruchio*)

I say it is the moon that shines so bright.

OSCAR (*as Katharina*)

I know it is the sun...

(She grabs OSCAR by the back of the hair. OSCAR is a bit surprised. The soprano is gone.)

... that shines so bright.

META (*as Petruchio*)

(Savagely) Now, by my mother's son, and that's myself,
It shall be moon, or star, or what I list,
Or ere I journey to your father's house.

(She kicks him in the ass. He goes to the floor and she steps on his back.)

Go on, and fetch our horses back again.
Evermore cross'd and cross'd; nothing but cross'd!

OSCAR (*as Katharina*)

Forward, I pray, since we have come so far,
And be it moon, or sun, or what you please:
An if you please to call it a rush-candle,
Henceforth I vow it shall be so for me.

She begins hitting him with her rolled up script.

META (*as Petruchio*)

I say it is the moon.

OSCAR (*as Katharina*)

(Screaming) I know it is the moon!

META (*as Petruchio*)

Nay, then you lie: it is the blessed sun.

OSCAR (*as Katharina*)

Then, God be bless'd, it is the blessed sun:
But sun it is not, when you say it is not.

META (*as herself*)

The best place for the woman to serve her people is in the home, in the marriage, in motherhood. This is her highest mission. This is what Kate must understand. This is what Petruchio understands. He must set the example of German manhood, for the less German men are willing to act as men in public life, the more women succumb to the temptation to fill the role of the man. So he must tame her and once tamed, she will naturally understand what her task is as a woman.

OSCAR

That's a pile of shit!

META

Oh, is it?

META crawls to OSCAR, mewling with desire and adoration.

META (*as Katharina*)

"Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper,
Thy head, thy sovereign; one that cares for thee,
And for thy maintenance commits his body
To painful labour both by sea and land.

OSCAR

That's completely skewed.

META

You have to think like they think. An actor obeys the director.

OSCAR

I can't stand that Josht.

META

Get up. (*She pulls OSCAR to his feet.*) Stand up straight! You are an Aryan. The world embraces you and abhors me. Think of it. What is the logic, the sequence of particulars, the sense information of each subsequent step in the chain of experiences that lead you to believe that you are superior to me? Where is that ugly maggot in the dark of your brain? You must find the fault to find the power. Only then can you believe it and let it speak through you beyond morality. When the maggot in the dark

has walked out of your head and stands naked on stage for all to see then they will cry, "He is magic!" If you keep thinking you're a "good boy" then you are not worthy of being an actor. Think of it, all you have to do is get rid of me. Oh, what a relief it would be. It's only going to get harder. I'm the unwanted dog in your house, the one that shits on the rug, that howls in the night and keeps the neighbors awake. Think of it. Doesn't it tempt you to throw me out on the street for the dog catcher?

OSCAR

No, Meta, no!

META

Then start thinking of it! You must be that ruthless to be that Aryan Petruccio Goebbels' wants you to be.

OSCAR

I don't know what Johst wants. He's the director, not Goebbels.

META

Josht wants what Goebbels wants, he just doesn't have the balls nor the talent to know what it is. Your job is to show it to him so he can take credit for it. That's what every director does. Now, my dear, let's begin again, but with magic.

Lights out.

SCENE 10

In the darkness, META on the telephone. She is still wearing her kimono.

META

Edgar, I must get out of here. Can you help me?

The lights rise.

META (*cont'd.*)

No, Oscar doesn't know. I don't want to tell him. It would destroy his focus and he needs his focus. He needs a lot of work, but I think he can do it if he applies himself. I'm going to be his crutch until opening night, but then after that I must go. Oh, please, can you help me? I'm so terrified. – Palestine? I don't think I'd like the weather. – Constantinople? – South Africa? – America? Yes, that would be nice, but it's awfully far from Oscar. – Of course, of course, I can't be picky. But couldn't you find some place closer, like Paris? – Yes, once I'm out of here I can go other places. At

least, I used to be able... until I became a... *(She breaks down in tears.)* I don't want to leave my city. I'm from Berlin. I was born in Berlin. – I'm sorry, please, please forgive me. – *(She recovers.)* Switzerland? Do you really think there might be a possibility? – Yes, I know several theater directors there. God, I can't believe I'm even considering this. Things have happened so quickly, without transition, they keep hitting you and before you can recover, they hit you again. I can't go to the theater any more, I can't even attend my own husband's performances. Can't they make an exception in my case? I won't tell anybody I'm a Jew. – I'm sorry, I'm sorry, Edgar. Please don't hang up. I know what a risk you're taking by helping me. – Yes, I have talked too long on the phone. – Yes, I'll watch my phone use. – *(The lights begin to fade.)* I won't call you, but you'll call me soon, won't you? Yes, yes, I will, yes, anywhere, yes, anywhere, I'll go there, *(The lights have faded to black. META continues in darkness.)* I'll go there, I will, I'll go...

SCENE 11

OSCAR is pacing. META is in the bathroom.

META (OS)

How long will it take to get this identity card?

OSCAR

It might take a little while. I'll be with you, but we really must get going.

META enters. She is in an elegant coat, hat and scarf.

META

Do I look all right?

OSCAR

You look beautiful. But take the scarf off and change your hat.

META

Why?

OSCAR

You're a little overdressed.

META

Do I look like a Jew?

OSCAR

No, you look like a diva. Everyone is dressing down right now. Everyone is trying to be invisible.

META exits into the bedroom.

META (OS)

I'll have a pedigree. I'm a complete Jew.

OSCAR

Hurry, Meta, please.

META enters. She has transformed. Gone is the elegance. She is dressed in an old coat, a little old lady's hat is perched on her head. She looks dispossessed.

META

Do I look like a Jew?

OSCAR

I don't know what a Jew looks like.

META

Of course, you do. Big nose, big ears, big lips, shifty eyes.

OSCAR

Well, maybe the ears.

META

Really, do you think so?

OSCAR

Don't be silly. Come on, let's get this over with.

META starts for the door, then crumbles to the floor.

META

I can't, I can't go. I haven't gone out on the streets for days and now I have to go to the police. What will they do to me?

OSCAR helps her to a chair.

OSCAR

They won't do anything. I'll be with you.

META

Because you'll stop them? Because you're an Aryan? Hell, you can't even act!

OSCAR turns away from her.

META

I'm sorry, I didn't mean that. I'm just terrified. Will they hurt me? Will they scream at me? Will they spit at me? Please forgive me, I need you.

She reaches out to him but falls to her knees.

OSCAR

No, I'm not a good actor! I know it! What do you think it's like? You've never needed me. You're always the boss. You can't stand it that I can help you. Don't start believing that shit. I'll kill anyone who touches you. You are with me. For once I'm useful. Let me be useful, Meta. Stand on your feet. You can't show any weakness. They're animals. If they sense a weakness they'll attack. Stand up for Christ's sake. Think about it, you've stood on the stage for thousands to see, the most sophisticated people in all of Europe. These are beerhall idiots. They are dogs. They will cower if you stand straight and tall. You are magic, Meta. You can make yourself invisible with a thought. You're always yelling at me to concentrate, well, it's your turn now. Concentrate. Stand up, goddamn it. *(He kneels to and takes her in his arms and kisses her.)* You've got to last this out. It can't last forever, it's too insane. Things have to change, my darling. They will. You'll see, it won't be so bad. Breathe. Breathe. Breathe. *(He pulls her to her feet.)* Yes, that's it. Now, let's go.

The lights fade.

SCENE 12

META is wearing a plain bathrobe. She is tying OSCAR's tie.

META

Many actors clown around in the dressing room: they poke and mimic each other. They quack like ducks and bark like dogs. On the surface it all looks quite harmless, as if they're simply doing it to relieve tension and oil the joints, but don't let it fool you. When actors pretend that out of humility they should make light of their work they are really saying, "Don't excel' be one of the gang, be like us." Don't do it.

Be respectful; treat them with dignity. Watch out for Gustav. He'll test you every moment. No one will notice it but you. He'll delay his lines, pounce on yours, smile at you unexpectedly. He'll try to wear you out – stand your ground. Watch him. See him. Soul to soul – meet him without decoration and he will come to you like a cat chasing a string; he won't be able to stop himself. He is too curious and he's just too good. You look very nice, my love.

OSCAR

I'm terrified.

META

Good. Your terror is your stallion. Ride it well.

OSCAR

Oh, Meta, I wish you would come with me, at least to the theater.

META

I'm sure you do. *(She makes the German expression of "good luck," a rapid spitting gesture.)*
 "Teu, teu, teu." *(She directs him to the door.)* I'll be here, waiting for you.

OSCAR

Meta...

META

Shhh, go; do.

She pushes him out of the door. When OSCAR is gone she takes her bathrobe off. She is fully dressed beneath it. She brushes her hair. Straightens her clothes, then exits into the bedroom and re-enters with a suitcase. She puts it by the dining room table so that OSCAR doesn't see it right away when he comes back. She crosses to the couch and sits by the phone. She lies back and dozes. She turns, still asleep and as she does the lights shift. The phone rings. META snaps it up.

META

Hello? – Yes. – Yes. Oh, my god, yes, thank you. – Midnight? *(She looks at her watch.)*
 It's almost midnight. I've got to wait for Oscar. I'll be there. – Yes, I understand.

She hangs up. She crosses to the dining room table and sits. After a little time the door opens and OSCAR enters. He stands there, crestfallen.

META

What?

OSCAR looks at her, then a smile creeps into the corners of her mouth.

META

They loved you?

She flings her arms around him. He cries out.

OSCAR

A standing ovation! It wasn't just for Marianne, it was for me. They called out for me but they didn't know my name, I swear it.

He takes her in his arms and whirls her off her feet.

META

I knew it, I knew it would happen. You've worked so hard you deserve it.

OSCAR

I've never known such a feeling. I know I shouldn't indulge in it.

META

Yes, indulge it, indulge it. If the audience wants to give you love let them give it.

OSCAR

Oh, my Meta, I couldn't have done it without you. You should have seen Johst, he was drooling. I wanted to slug him, that grinning little gargoyle. I wanted to pummel him! Do you know what he said just before I went on? "We're counting on you. Goebbels is in the audience." And the great Gustav Gründgens. He knelt to me and kissed my hand.

META

Yes, next he'll be trying to get you in his bed.

OSCAR

And then, backstage (*He enacts Goebbels with his small stature and his limp.*) that hideous little man, Goebbels shook my hand and clapped me on the back and said, "Congratulations, I'll be keeping an eye on you." Can you believe that? I didn't know whether to be glad or shit my pants. (*He sees META's suitcase.*) What's going on?

META

I've found passage to Switzerland. Isn't it incredible, Switzerland? I won't be far from you.

OSCAR

Why didn't you tell me?

META

Does it matter? You're on your feet. It will be just for a little while. Like you said, it won't last forever.

OSCAR

Yes, of course, when do you have to go?

META

Immediately. I only have a few minutes. Now kiss me, Oscar, and let me go.

META kisses him.

OSCAR

Where do I write you?

META

Basel, at the Theater Swiss in care of the director, Kurt Jörger. Now I must go.

OSCAR

What am I going to do without you? You should have told me. You should have warned me.

META

I couldn't have done it if I had told you.

OSCAR

Please!

META

Oscar, I must go. This is my last chance!

OSCAR

Yes, yes, I understand.

META

Do you? Oh, please understand?

OSCAR

You could have told me. My god, what am I going to do? I'm sorry, I understand, I do. Go, Meta, go, hurry!

She pauses and looks at him. He pushes her toward the door.

OSCAR

(Screaming) Get out! Get out of here!

He shoves her out of the room and closes the door and breaks down in tears. There is a moment when OSCAR is by himself, then, META flings open the door and flies into his arms.

META

I can't. I can't.

The lights fade.

SCENE 13

There is a flickering light D.S. META is standing is looking out. The radio is on and a voice is speaking over it. The action and lines continue while the announcer speaks.

VOICE ON THE RADIO

The Jew, Herschel Grynszpan brutally murdered Third Secretary Ernst Von Rath in Paris. Throughout Germany there has been a spontaneous outburst of indignation.

OSCAR bursts into the room.

OSCAR

Oh, my god, you're safe. They stopped the rehearsal.

OSCAR crosses to META and stands behind her. The lights dim as the voice on the radio continues.

VOICE ON THE RADIO

Seventy-six synagogues demolished. And seventy-five hundred stores ruined in the Reich. According to reports, one hundred and fifty Jews were arrested by yesterday

afternoon. So much glass fills the streets that the German People have named this night Crystal Night. All together there are one hundred and one synagogues destroyed by fire. (*While the names of the German cities are spoken the Horst Wessel song is heard.*) Synagogues were destroyed in Berlin, Leipzig, Dresden, Linz, Munich, Baden, Nuremberg, Hanover, Bremen, Hamburg, (*The lights fade to darkness.*) Munster, Essen, Düsseldorf, Brunswick, Bonn, Mannheim, Saarbrücken...

SCENE 14

In the darkness there is the sound of the room being torn up.

SCENE 15

The lights rise. The living room is in shambles. OSCAR enters. META is not in the living room.

OSCAR

Meta?

He goes into the bedroom.

OSCAR (OS)

Meta?

He comes out of the bedroom. He is frantic.

OSCAR

Meta?

He sees a card on the table. He grabs the phone and dials the number.

OSCAR

(On the telephone) Security police, please. Security police? Yes, this is Oscar Weiss.

Lights out.

SCENE 16

META's voice in the darkness.

META

"Do you have any weapons?"

*The lites rise META standing in the center of the room
and OSCAR putting the furniture in place.*

META

They made me look for weapons. Do you have any weapons?

OSCAR

No.

META

Yes, you do, you have a stage sword.

OSCAR

My epee? It's ancient. It has bandage on the tip.

META

He said, "What's this?" I said it was a stage sword. "A what sword?" I said, a stage sword. "What's a stage sword?" I told him that it was to practice fighting Scenes, but it wasn't dangerous. Every actor has one. "Is this yours?" "No, it's my husband's." How stupid, I should have said it was mine. "So your husband is an actor? You have scripts, you're an actor, so where is yours?" "My what?" "Your sword!" I told him that I didn't know. I didn't do sword-play anymore. I must have just, what the hell did I do with it anyway? "I lost it," I told him. They searched the house for hours. I asked the big one to be careful, please. He started throwing things around. "Cheap Jew garbage!" The animal had mustard on his chest. They tore everything up. They took my scripts, all of the plays that I have done with all the notes in them. I asked them what possible importance do they have? There was this littler one, but not small because he was too muscular; he was the more dangerous of the two and they were dangerous. My god, I had never imagined any two people so dangerous, so violent, so free to do anything. This littler one said, "Up until now you looked okay, but this hostile attitude; it makes you wonder what does she have to hide?" I said that they weren't important, they were just personal. Then the big one screamed at me. "You ugly Jew sow, do you think I'd want anything personal from you." And then he said, "Take her to the station. They've got guillotines there, electrical ones that chop off heads electrically". They took me there. They walked on either side of me so that all the neighbors could see. When we got to the police station I had to sit...

for hours, Oscar. Then an old man with a Party Badge came and got me. He said, and he said it almost in a whisper, "Don't worry, honey, they do this to everybody." He led me down a hallway and to an office with a tidy little man, and this man was actually little, but perfectly proportioned. He said, "Hello, I'm Dietrick Dieter. Meta Wolff, god, I know you! You are fantastic! How could you be a Jew? Well, this is very unfortunate. Don't worry about it." He looked at my file. It was very big. How can they know so much about me? Why would they even be interested? He said, "Ah, your husband is an Aryan. Oscar Weiss? I don't know him. It says here he's an actor." "Taming of the Shrew," I said. "Ah," he said, "I didn't see that one." He stamped my papers. He said, "This inconvenience should never happen again. My god, Miss Wolf, it is an honor to have met you." I loved it, Oscar, now that I am through it. I am through it, aren't I? (*She notices that the radio is gone. She suddenly screams.*) They took my radio!

OSCAR

I'll get it back

She attacks him. He restrains her.

META

Because you're superior! You look just like them!

OSCAR

I don't look like anybody. Meta, it's Oscar. It's just me.

Lights fade on META and OSCAR struggling.

SCENE 17

There is music on the radio. It is a kind of jumpy tune sung by Zahar Leander. META is in a housecoat. She's performing to the music a kind of show tune dance. OSCAR enters after rehearsal, his hat and briefcase. She turns and performs for him. She does a pretty good job at dancing but there is a strange quality to her energy. OSCAR notices it. At the close of the song OSCAR enters with a bag of groceries. He puts them on the table.

OSCAR

Meta?

META dances to him.

OSCAR

Meta?

She dances on the couch.

META

I have new teeth.

OSCAR

New teeth?

META

(As she dances) Yes, you remember that Aryan dentist you couldn't get for me and my teeth were so sore they were falling out. I had maggots in my mouth. I went to a Jewish dentist. He was able to put in a new set. He got them from the cemetery. See, look a fine set.

META shows her teeth. OSCAR looks at her teeth.

OSCAR

Meta, these are your teeth. He didn't put any teeth into your mouth. *(OSCAR grabs META and holds her in his arms. META doesn't respond to him, and although he has her in his arms she doesn't touch him.)* My darling. My darling.

The lights fade. There is the sound of rain

SCENE 18

The rain continues. A melancholy vocal of the period is on the radio (Zarah Leander – Ice steh'im regen.").
META is alone, sitting by the window, careful not to be seen. She is wearing a house coat.

META

People are missing from the streets. They've gone away or have disappeared. And it's so strange. No one says anything about it, but I know they notice it too. *(She crosses behind the couch.)* And in the Jewish cemetery there are so many fresh plots. I can't walk in the park, only in the Jewish cemetery. *(She smooths the pillows, then lays her head on them.)* I look at the grass there, at those fresh graves and I have this longing to rest, to get it over with. But then I see these Jews strolling among the gravestones

and I begin to hate them for their resignation to it all. *(She rises.)* I've never really known hate until now. And I can understand how civilized people would be resigned to death rather than be filled with so much hate. It is crushing, this hate. One has to constantly be reminded to hate, but it keeps me alive.

The lights shift.

SCENE 19

Music on the radio. OSCAR lights a match and touches it to a candle on the dining table. META is sitting at the table, subdued, observant. OSCAR pours wine into her glass. He is trying desperately to make contact with her.

OSCAR

Things are changing, my darling. Come on, drink. Gustav has taken over the theater. He knows about you and the problems we have had. He said he would do everything to help us. He is a horrible man in some ways but you must admit he is talented. He admires you. He had me into his office. He asked me about you. He said, *(OSCAR does an impersonation of Gründgens.)* "My dear poor Meta, I'll do anything for her. She's a genius. She must be protected." He's gotten us food. Look, French wine. He said, "She must not lose hope. I am disgusted, revolted by what is happening, but what can we do, what can any of us do but survive this madness? It can't last forever. All we can do is take care of our own." *(He kneels beside her.)* Meta, please snap out of this. You're killing me. *(He spreads her hair from her face.)* Listen, my darling, I'm going to play Hamlet!

META slowly raises her eyes to his. She looks at him for awhile, then...

META

You're what?

OSCAR

I'm going to play Hamlet.

She gazes at him. Slowly a laugh issues from her.

OSCAR

Yes, isn't it hilarious?

META begins to laugh in earnest, she laughs and laughs. OSCAR joins her in her laughter.

OSCAR

Isn't it funny? (*META laughs.*) Well, it's not that funny. Don't you see, I need help. You've got to help me. (*He shouts.*) Help! Help! Help! Oh, my darling. My darling, don't you see, we've got work to do.

META continues laughing

META

Who's playing Ophelia?

OSCAR

Marianne.

META

She's perfect; high cheekbones, blond hair, a little on the severe side, good hips for birthing and totally harmless. She will simply "go mad."

OSCAR

And I suppose that you feel that way about me?

META

What way?

OSCAR

Like I'm some Hessian ox?

META looks at him and laughs.

META

Yes, yes, you are, aren't you?

OSCAR laughs.

OSCAR

Yes, I am, didn't you know? I'm a member of the master race, the Hessian ox race.

He picks up META's glass of wine and brings it to her lips.

OSCAR (*cont'd.*)

Meta please, drink. It's good. Gustav can get us more. Gustav wants you to help me.

META

You? You're beyond help.

OSCAR

I know, I know.

*META rises. A great and sneaky idea begins to dawn.
She walks.*

META

Is Pamela Wedekind still in the company?

OSCAR

Yes.

META

Marianne is a superb actress but a better choice, a more delineated one would be Pamela Wedekind, that black hair, that pale white skin, those ice-blue eyes. And she's mad. She has that shrill upper register like some terrible addendum, something she can simply unpack and throw on a bed. And she is relentless as a tick. She's a stalker. Once Hamlet gets her attention he's a goner. She'll lurk and skulk about, appear out of nowhere.

OSCAR

And what about me?

She looks at him mysteriously.

META

If I could run that company and make that play for this place, in these times, for these people, I would make a Hamlet that would pull the devil right out of its bottle, expose the maggot on a dark stage under a bright white light and make the Germans eat it whole. "Elsinore," with its race of old aristocrats, a castle full of zombies, venom pumped by their rotting hearts; utterly beautiful dead Ophelia floating through dark halls. God, it makes you want to vomit blood. Oh, Oscar, think about it. Wouldn't it be fun. Right from this room we could give them a show and it might just be possible.

OSCAR

What do you mean?

META

If I know Gustav he'll try to get away with anything he can. He's a different kind of sneak from "The Smiler", Mr. Josht. The Smiler cheats everybody but his masters. Gustav is a ubiquitous cheat and he's creative. His only problem is which devil to serve.

OSCAR

What do you mean?

META

Goebbels or Göring? Goebbels never liked me very much. He didn't like my edge but Göring loved me as he loves Gustav. Goebbels is a sneaky little puritan, Göring is Bacchus. Haven't you seen them snap at each others ankels? Goebbels is the Minister of Culture, by rights he should be in charge of the Prussian State Theater, but it is Göring's plaything and Hitler doesn't want to get involved. Gustav has to decide whether he will serve Goebbels or Göring. When he cast Marianne as Ophilia he was thinking Goebbels, but if he recasts her with Pamela Wedekind he will be thinking Göring. And Göring is ever so much more fun. Listen, my darling, with a little ingenuity, like Goya we can paint the Nazi family royal.

OSCAR

This is a very dangerous game.

META

Dangerous? *(She crosses to the candle on the dining room table.)* Have you looked outside lately? Listen, darling, it's a German thing . Nobody takes us seriously unless we have a war.

She blows the candle out and the lights go out with it.

ACT TWOSCENE 20

The lights rise on OSCAR asleep in the easy chair. There is a rose in a vase on the table. META enters silently. She has disguised herself as a man. She has one of OSCAR's overcoats and is wearing one of his fedoras. She bends over OSCAR and looks at him. OSCAR snaps awake with a start.

OSCAR

Meta, where have you been? It's past the curfew.

She struts her male drag stuff to the dining room table. She sits back on a chair with her feet propped up on the table, her hat still tipped smartly over her forehead.

META

I went to my first "Jewish thing." It was a reading by Hans Heinz Ewers, a banned writer. It's funny, he's banned for Germans but he isn't banned for Jews. He's an old man now living with a half Jew architect. He's a homosexual. He has a face like a skull. He wrote a book about Horst Wessel.

OSCAR

My darling, darling Meta, I never want you to do this again. I waited up for three hours. You could have been shot.

She tosses her hat to OSCAR.

META

I've got the model for Hamlet. Horst Wessel.

OSCAR

Who? The Nazi hero?

META

Hero? Do you know what he really was? Hans Ewers told me the real story of Horst Wessel. *(Playing with a German accent)* "I thought he might have been a Bavarian boy making a song to Germany when they bring the cows down from the mountains, wreathed with flowers: lung soup and beer, girls in dirndls with edelweiss in their hair, fathers in leather shorts bringing down the cheese for the May Fest." Do you know who Horst Wessel really was? *(She rises and slips suggestively out of her coat crosses clothes tree by the door.)* He was a pimp and his wife was a prostitute and he was killed

in a jealous rage by a gangster named "Ali". Isn't it perfect, for our play, that is, for that castle in Elsinore?

OSCAR

What are you talking about?

META

Hamlet is Horst Wessel. Ophelia is Erna Jaenicke.

She slinks against the wall like a prostitute waiting for a "John."

OSCAR

Who?

META

Erna Jaenicke, Horst Wessel's "woman," the prostitute. Pamela Wedekind has to play Ophelia.

OSCAR crosses to the rose and plucks it from the vase.

OSCAR

I have a little flower.

META

Yes?

OSCAR

Her name is Pamela Wedekind.

META

Gustav went for it! How did Marianne take it?

OSCAR

As well as can be expected, she's a trooper.

META

(Smiles ironically.) Yes, she is. Did you begin working with Pamela?

OSCAR

Immediately. Gustav did it with such speed that it seemed Pamela had always been in the role.

META

What did you think of her?

OSCAR

Of Pamela? She was terrifying! Honestly, you were absolutely right. I could tell some of the cast was a little taken aback but they didn't say anything.

META

Of course, they're good Germans. What did Gustav think?

OSCAR

Gustav ran to the lobby where there were roses, picked one out and gave it to me. He said, "It's for your dear wife." Then he winked at me, Meta. He winked. "I think your suggestion was a stroke of genius. Let me know if you have any more suggestions. Keep them between you and me, alright? I'm really interested to see what you and Hamlet come up with."

META kisses the rose. Lights out.

SCENE 21

OSCAR is standing in his underwear. They are the 30's kind and he looks a bit ridiculous in them. He's irritated.

OSCAR

I don't like this.

META enters with an SA uniform. She lays it on the couch and begins circling OSCAR, watching him with a certain sexual curiosity.

META

I do. Youve got to dress for the role.

OSCAR

Can't I put my costume on at the theatre?

META

Put on the shirt. *(She hands it to him.)*

OSCAR

You're impossible.

META

Perhaps. Oscar, you must stop feeling like the good guy.

OSCAR

I don't feel like a good guy, God damn it.

META

Yes you do!

OSCAR

No, I don't.

META

Yes you do. I can see it in your eyes. They're full of apologies, like some sneaky little puppy. *(META reacts to OSCAR's look.)* That's better.

OSCAR

What? Is the sneaky little puppy gone?

META

A bit. Now the pants. *(She hands them to him and then kneels in front of him, watching him closely.)* This is good.

OSCAR

(Buttoning his pants) Are you sure you want me to button these?

META

I want you to look this part. I want you to feel this part. I want you to feel what it is like to wear this uniform on the streets of the Third Reich.

OSCAR continues to put on his SA uniform.

META

Now the boots.

OSCAR

Is this a game?

META

This is no game. *(She hands him the hat.)* I want to see him.

OSCAR
Who?

META
Horst Wessel

OSCAR
Horst Wessel is dead

META
No, he's not. He's not dead.

META, finished dressing him, slips the swastika armband on him. OSCAR looks embarrassed. She points at him and begins laughing. She then starts crying, crosses away and as OSCAR reaches for her the lights fade to black.

SCENE 22

OSCAR is pacing in his S.A. uniform. META is on the couch watching him.

OSCAR
I can't seem to concentrate. I'm watching myself doing the role like a puppet. It's as if I were separated from my body, that my body is working independently of me. I'm not saying my lines, "It's" saying them. I look at the actors. I can see them mouthing their words. the saliva on their tongues. It seems so silly that I'm standing there. I realize that I could ruin everything in a single moment. I could just walk off stage and leave them standing there, or worse, I could do something crazy, like licking Ophelia's face; or I could slap her, or strangle her. Perhaps a murderer feels that way, not out of control but being "taken over". Then I come to my senses; I'm suddenly in my body again and I don't know where I am, don't know my lines. Oh God, Meta it happened tonight in rehearsal. I was just looking at them and I didn't know what I was doing. I felt so small, like a stupid drooling child.

META
You're afraid of your potential.

OSCAR
What potential.

META

He's sitting in the back of your head watching me, Horst Wessel, can you see him?
Can you feel him?

OSCAR

Horst Wessel?

META

Is he looking at me? Is he looking at me?

*OSCAR's face begins to change. As he gazes at META
his face hardens and at the same time becomes aroused.*

OSCAR

Yes.

META

What is he seeing?

OSCAR

He doesn't know, you're just an object.

META

What does he want to do?

OSCAR

I don't know.

META

Come on, what does he really want to do?

OSCAR

He wants to break your neck.

*META approaches OSCAR seductively. She exposes
her throat.*

META

Come on, do it, break my neck. Say your lines and break my neck.

OSCAR is Horst Wessel, tender in his hunger to kill, sweet in his ruthless need, efficient in brutal act, cunning in his seduction. As OSCAR speaks at he first places his hands on her head as if to simply snap her neck, then slides his fingers over the soft warm skin of her throat and begins strangling her. META begins to sink to the floor. As she chokes OSCAR flicks his tongue against hers. She goes to the floor.

OSCAR (*as Hamlet*)

Get thee to a nunnery: why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? I am myself indifferent honest; but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me: I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offences at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in. What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven? We are arrant knaves, all; believe none of us. Go thy ways to a nunnery.

META throws her legs around him and kisses him passionately.

Lights out

SCENE 23

META is in shadow. OSCAR is by the window. He is dressed in his S.A. uniform. He is on one knee in a heroic pose surveying the Scene below his window. There is a flickering of torches and the sound of marching feet.

META

Tell me what you know.

OSCAR

(With growing intensity)

First the election without a mandate:
 then the catastrophe:
 the enemy, then the scapegoat.
 Indignation follows emergency.
 Fear turns to anger, anger to revenge.
 The objective is to create a state of continuous emergency.
 When the state of emergency is over we can afford to question. It is never over.
 In the terror of confusion we must seek solidarity, find our basic values.
 We clean up our streets,
 enlist our neighbors as informers.
 "This shall not happen again. We will strike back."
 Fortinbras has taken Poland and now he's taking Denmark.
 He clears the castle in Elsinore of vermin.
 The charlatan is vanquished.
 His slut mother drinks poison like honey.
 The hot head is easily slain.
 The dottering councilor is run through.
 The virgin whore goes mad with heat and cools her lust by drowning.
 The would-be king meets his justice at his nephew's blade.
 The good and loyal friend remains,
 but Fortinbras will have none of it:
 at his signal, he too is killed.
 All are slaughtered.
 The blood is washed from the walls and floors;
 the Danish court disinfected:
 Hitler is marching on Czechoslovakia. It has begun.

*OSCAR makes the Hitler salute. META steps
 downstage.*

META

Are you ready?

OSCAR rises.

OSCAR

Yes.

META

Let's open our play.

SCENE 24/25

META is pacing.

VOICE ON THE RADIO

The goddess of history looked down to earth. German troops entered Bohemia and Moravia, and with breathless excitement the German people and the whole world saw the Führer take up residence in the castle of Prague...

OSCAR is heard unlocking the door. META runs and turns the radio off. OSCAR enters. He is still in the S.A. uniform. He gazes at her, she at him. He crosses to her. He takes her into his arms and kisses her.

Lights crossfade to another look.

META, sitting. OSCAR is in the process of performing for her as the lights rise. He quotes from Fortinbras in Hitler's reverent mode.

OSCAR (*as Fortinbras*)

"Speak loudly for him.
Take up the bodies: such a sight as this
Becomes the field, but here shows much amiss.
Go, bid the soldiers shoot."

OSCAR breaks character and enthusiastically relates the events.

OSCAR (*cont'd.*)

And then the soldiers shoot Horatio and all the court. It's a blood-bath. Everyone is writhing on the ground. The cannons blast and the curtain falls and then... silence. (*He pauses and waits, then...*) The curtain rises for the curtain call and... (*He pauses and waits, then...*) silence. Meta, you've never heard such a silence. I looked out at them; their faces were all agog. They were in shock. It was as if they had ingested some huge esculent pig that had fairly rifled through them. I tell you, I've never seen so many satisfied Germans in my life. Then miracle of miracles; spontaneously, in unison, they began to sing the Horst Wessel song, tears streaming from their eyes.

He begins singing the Horst Wessel song. The phone rings. META and OSCAR start. They watch the phone in dread as it continues to ring. OSCAR looks at META then crosses and answers it.

OSCAR

Hello? (*He looks at META.*) Yes, Gustav? – Oh, yes. – Oh, thank you so much. – Is that so? – You think so? – He is? And that is good? – Good. When? – You'll let me know, won't you? – Thank you. Goodbye.

OSCAR hangs the phone up. He looks at META in apprehension.

META

Yes?

OSCAR

Gustav congratulated me. He wanted to extend his compliments to my (*Indicating META.*) "Hamlet". He said Doctor Limp was not so happy. He said that Mr. Diamond was not in attendance but he was sure to come when the word got out. That he would let me know when he came.

META

Doctor Limp?

OSCAR

Goebbels.

META

Goebbels was not happy.

OSCAR

Mr. Diamond...

META

Göring? Wasn't there?

He takes her in his arms.

OSCAR

He's coming. You wanted war, my darling. We have one.

SCENE 26

META is asleep on the easy chair. She snaps awake, disoriented. She crosses to the side of the window and cautiously looks out. She looks at her watch. She paces. The phone rings. She watches it in apprehension. She waits for it to stop ringing but it does not. Slowly she crosses to it, waiting for it to stop ringing. Then, impulsively she snatches up the receiver.

META

Hello? *(No answer.)* Hello? *(She waits.)* Is someone there? *(No answer. She hangs up.)* My god, what have I done?

She looks at the receiver in dread as if something was hiding in it, then slowly places it in its cradle. She sits then falls asleep.

The door opens. OSCAR enters. His clothes are in disarray. His face is bruised.

OSCAR

Meta?

META

My god, Oscar, where have you been?

OSCAR

Are you okay? I'm sorry, I've got to hurry. It's almost curtain time.

OSCAR exits into the bathroom.

META

What's happened to you?

OSCAR *(OS)*

The bruises look good! It was even better, Meta. It was incredible. You should have seen it. They had to close the curtain on the applause. They just wouldn't stop. It thought the theater would explode.

META

Never mind that, you were gone all night and day.

OSCAR (OS)

I no sooner left the stage than two men grabbed me by the arms and pulled me out of the theater to Gestapo headquarters. Oh my god, I had the scariest night of my life. The Gestapo boys roughed me up; called me faggot, Jew-fucker, bolshevist, traitor; they ran out of names. They were really pissed. I thought they were gonna kill me. Then some bigwig in a leather suit came in, I swear, Meta, it was leather. He took one of them aside and whispered frantically at him. They untied me, but before they did one of them slugged me in the face. The guy said, "This is from Herr Goebbels so that you'll look good for Prime Minister Göring." (*OSCAR enters from the bathroom.*) I'm so inspired." Goebbels was trying to stop the show but Göring intervened. It is a miracle, it is magic. They're fighting each other, Meta. And we little actors, no you, Meta, you're doing it. I've got to go. Prime Minister Göring is coming tonight. Wish me well.

OSCAR starts for the door.

META

Oscar.

OSCAR

(Impatient, looking at his watch) Yes?

META

I answered the phone.

OSCAR takes on that Horst Wessel look again. He becomes cold, pins her with an icy glarae.

OSCAR

You what?

META

I answered the phone.

OSCAR

How could you be so stupid!

META

I didn't know where you were. You were out all night.

OSCAR

Did anyone answer?

META

No.

OSCAR

Of course not. If the phone rings again, don't answer it no matter what happens. Do you understand me. Now wait here. I'm going to kill tonight. I'm going to burn the house down with my performance!

He exits. META gazes at the door in amazement.

SCENE 27

Off stage in the dark OSCAR is heard loudly singing the Horst Wessel song. He is drunk. The lights rise as META approaches the door cautiously. He knocks on the door. META steps back. He knocks again. Silence. OSCAR unlocks the door and springs in. META gives a startled shout. He's wearing his S.A. uniform. He has a rose and an open bottle of wine from which he's been drinking.

OSCAR

My darling! *(He drops to one knee and thrusts the rose to her with his head bowed.)* From the Prime Minister of Prussia, Founder of the German Airforce, Creator of the Gestapo, Reichmarshal, President of the Reichstag, Chairman of the Council for Defense of the Reich.

She stands back and looks at him irritated by his carelessness.

META

You're drunk.

OSCAR remains kneeling with the rose extended.

OSCAR

Is that what I am? Yes, that's what I am, a victorious drunk! *(Realizing that she's not going to take the rose, he stands and throws the rose on the table)* Aren't you happy to see me? Don't you want to know how it went?

META

You met Göring?

OSCAR

None other.

META

You told him about me?

OSCAR

I didn't have to, he knew who you were.

META

He knew I was your wife?

OSCAR

He knew from Dietrich Dieter.

META

Dietrich Dieter?

OSCAR

The little man at Gestapo headquarters. He was there too. He wanted to get close to Göring. He clicked his heels and introduced himself. "Herr Prime Minister, your Hamlet is none other than the husband of the famous Meta Wolff. She was in my office only a few months ago."

META

Oh, god, then Göring knows I'm a Jew.

OSCAR

Don't worry, my darling. Everything is going to be all right. Göring is going to take care of us. He loves us. He loved my Hamlet. He loved everything about it. He grabbed me by the hand and almost broke it with enthusiasm. He's huge, Meta, enormous.

OSCAR laughs. META laughs mockingly.

META

Yes, fat with Jewish corpses.

OSCAR

Don't be a spoil-sport. We are victorious! *(He drinks from the wine bottle.)* Czech wine. From the Front.

META

"The Front." What are you doing, Oscar?

OSCAR

I'm celebrating, if you let me. Come on, drink with me, drink with me, my love. Gustav took us into his office, Göring and me. Can you believe it? He had a sky-blue uniform with huge lapels and ten pounds of medals. He had this French aftershave. There were four SS men with him everywhere he went. He loves Gustav. He put his arm around him. Every time he looked at me he laughed. He sat and looked at me and laughed and slapped his knee. He wasn't a bad guy, you know, for a killer. Gustav told me he has four castles. He has a pet lion that he takes with him everywhere and that he calms himself by immersing his hands in a fish bowl full of diamonds. Can you believe that?

META

Diamonds stolen from Jews.

OSCAR

(Laughing) Where else would he get them? Listen, my darling. I don't approve of the guy but if you're going to have somebody on your side he's the next best thing to Hitler.

META laughs incredulously.

META

I can't believe you're saying these things?

OSCAR

(Roaring) Why not, you're the one who did it!

META

Quiet down.

OSCAR approaches her. She avoids him. He laughs and feigns surprise. He goes one way, she goes another. This goes on for a bit, then he grabs her and tries to sit her on his lap.

OSCAR

Come on, my darling, come and sit with me. Drink to our success.

She resists. He throws her on to the couch.

OSCAR

Fucking Jew bitch! I do everything for you. I go out on stage and I do everything you say. I go to Gustav and risk telling him how to direct the play. *(He drops to his knees next to her. She covers her face with her hands.)* I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I'm acting like them, aren't I? *(He puts his face in his hands and cries.)* It's been so hard, so frightening. I'm sorry I called you a Jew.

OSCAR cries. META watches him. Finally, OSCAR's tears subside. He sits there in silence.

OSCAR

I never mentioned you, Meta, I swear it. I wouldn't be that careless. Göring knew you. He loves you. *(He goes to the rose and then crawls to META on his hands and knees.)* When Göring left he plucked a rose from a vase in Gustav's office and gave it to me. *(He holds the rose out to her.)* He told me that you were the finest actress in all of Germany, in all of Germany, Meta. Göring said that.

META takes the rose. She smiles.

META

(With a certain surrender) And that is my death sentence.

OSCAR

No, no, it's not. When he left, he drew Gustav aside and spoke with him. Gustav was excited. He told me that Göring told Goebbels to keep his hands off of the production or else he would tell the Führer about a certain mistress Goebbels is keeping. Gustav said that while the stand off lasts we must get you to Switzerland, Switzerland, my darling.

META

(Quietly) While the "stand off lasts." Yes, my dear, while it lasts. I'm going to the performance tomorrow night.

OSCAR

You can't do that.

META

I must do that.

OSCAR

But if people see you. Goebbels has spies everywhere.

META

It doesn't matter anymore, Oscar.

OSCAR

Don't think that way. It's just the beginning. We'll get you to Switzerland.

META

Yes, of course.

The lights fade.

SCENE 28

*OSCAR is in his S.A. uniform. He his nervously
pacing.*

META (OS)

I want to go by myself. I want to take a taxi. I'm going to get out a few blocks from the theater and look at the shops.

OSCAR

I don't want you to do this. It is against the law.

META (OS)

Whose law?

OSCAR

You know very well whose law it is.

META (OS)

Don't nag, I know what I'm doing. You're going to be late. That's not only careless, but it's discourteous to the stage manager. Who is the stage manager?

OSCAR

Georg.

META (OS)

Georg, he's held on? Well, he's a bear when he's crossed. Get along.

OSCAR

I can't stand this, Meta, really, I don't think you should do this.

META (OS)

Where is the ticket?

OSCAR

On the dresser. So is the money. You shouldn't be going alone.

META (OS)

I want to taste things. I want to feel the street as a human being. I want to climb out of my hole and see the lights of the city at night. I might get some pastry at Koppels. Then I'm going to sit at a sidewalk café and drink a glass of Riesling. I want to see the fashions. I only look at them from my window. I want to see the women parading down the street on a spring night. I want to hear their shoes clacking on the sidewalk. I want to smell the trees blooming. I want to see gentlemen open doors for ladies. Perhaps one will open a door for me. I haven't been out past nine for ever so long. I want to be a part of Germany's new prosperity. I'm going to watch my husband's triumph. I'm going to meet everyone backstage. Now get along, you'll be late.

OSCAR

Meta...

META

Go, go. I'll be fine. I'll meet you backstage.

OSCAR exits. META sings as the lights fade.

SCENE 29

OSCAR enters and opens the door for META. META sweeps into the room in all her diva glory. She is wearing a blond wig with braids encircling her head. She is ecstatic.

META

I can't believe it! It was even more than I expected. Those jowly servants of the Reich, weeping and grinning, winking at each other and the stage winking back at them like one great eye, the curtain slamming down and then up again midst tears of rage—the Horst Wessel song and you standing there with your "Hitler Salute." Franz Weber covered with blood, taking a bow. I almost choked. I thought he would break into laughter right there in the *curtain call*: all of them, they were practically airborne. (She runs to OSCAR and embraces him.) Oh, Oscar even if I never see another night I will have this one fixed in my eyes for all eternity. Thank you, my dear! At first they didn't recognize me. They thought some grand duchess was paying them tribute.

Kitty Stengel came up to me and she gazed at me as if I were a mummy under glass and then she recognized me. I never heard anyone shout in a whisper before and all of them, they suddenly recognized me. And they crowded around me. "Oh Meta, Meta," and then "shhh, shhh." They kissed me in all of their powder and makeup and stage blood.

She begins crying. OSCAR goes to her and strokes her hair.

OSCAR

It was good, wasn't it?

META

They were so happy to see me. Marianne slipped her hand in mine and she whispered in my ear, "Oh, my brave darling, be careful, please." Only Pamela Wedekind stood apart. She watched me. Her eyes were endless. It made my hair stand on end. She said, "Heil Hitler, honey." (*META laughs. She turns to OSCAR.*) And you, you, my love, I'm so proud of you. You were practically howling on that stage.

OSCAR

You will be on the stage again in Switzerland.

META

I can't even dream of it. God, do you think...? Oscar, I want to be on stage again. It's been so long. I know so much more. Wait. (*She runs into the other room.*) (OS) I kept them. (*She enters with a bouquet of dried roses.*) Remember? It was the last time I was on stage.

The phone rings.

OSCAR picks up the receiver. META begins murmuring.

META

No. No. No...

OSCAR turns and smiles at META.

OSCAR

Yes, Gustav? (*As he listens the smile slowly vanishes from his face.*) Are you serious? – (*OSCAR listens for a long while, then cries out...*) Why did you do that? (*OSCAR turns from META.*) I can't understand you. – That's absurd. I won't do that. – Go to hell, you bastard! Don't hang up.

OSCAR stands with the dead receiver to his ear then slowly, he hangs it up.

OSCAR

(Quietly) The play is cancelled.

META sinks to the chair, her roses still in her arms.

META

Goebbels and Göring... they've made up?

OSCAR

Gustav said that Göring thought the show was too exciting.

META

What else? What else?

OSCAR

Göring practically fired him, then and there.

META

He turned me in.

OSCAR

Gustav told him that it wasn't his idea.

META

That it was mine.

OSCAR

He said he was "sorry". He said we should leave immediately. He began sobbing and hung up.

META

Where can we go?

OSCAR

I don't know. We'll just go.

He starts for the bedroom.

META

Stop, Oscar. What else did he say?

OSCAR

It doesn't matter.

META

Yes, it does. Tell me.

OSCAR

I can still stay in the company.

META

If you let me go.

OSCAR takes META in his arms. META holds the dried roses as she embraces him.

OSCAR

I won't let you go. Where ever you go, I go. We're in this together. The Gestapo could come at any moment. We've got to hurry.

OSCAR exits into the bedroom

META

There's no where to run. Fortinbras is on the move and the nation is moving with him. The play was in the audience long before it was on the stage. Oh, Germany, my Germany, you go to meet your Destiny.

OSCAR (OS)

We'll take one suitcase. We'll take the tram west to the final stop. We'll go on foot...

META

There's no where to go, my darling.

OSCAR (OS)

I won't let them take you to a concentration camp.

META

I won't let them either.

OSCAR (OS)

What are we going to do?

META

"I" ...

OSCAR (OS)

No, "we."

META

I don't want to be here any more.

OSCAR enters.

OSCAR

What do you want to do?

META

I want to be in this moment forever with you.

OSCAR

That's what I want too. Do you think I want to go on without you; in this place; in these times? I watched them, Meta, these important actors of the Prussian State Theater. They looked at you with such sympathy and hunger. They envied you, poor slaves. They live in silent immigration. I don't have poison. I don't have a gun. But we have gas. *(They gaze at each other.)* Yes, Meta, yes.

META gives the dried roses to OSCAR then removes the blond wig.

The lights fade.

SCENE 30

In the darkness there is the sound of hissing gas. The lights rise on OSCAR and META lining the door and the window with sheets.

OSCAR

Get me another sheet. Hurry.

META exits into the bedroom and then enters with a sheet and a pillow. She throws the sheet over OSCAR and then begins hitting him with the pillow. OSCAR, looking like a ghost, grabs her and pulls her to the floor. He kisses her through the sheet. She struggles free and runs.

META

I'm out of breath.

OSCAR stands in his sheet, then pulls it off.

OSCAR

We can stop this, Meta.

META

No, we can't, not unless you want the Gestapo to chop our heads off with electric guillotines. *(She laughs.)* That's German efficiency for you. I feel faint. Do you?

OSCAR checks himself.

OSCAR

I don't know.

They look at each other and laugh. META sinks to the floor. OSCAR goes to her and sits.

OSCAR

Are you all right?

META

(Laughs.) No, am I supposed to be? Oh, god, I'm frightened. *(She grabs him.)* I don't want you to die.

He kisses her.

OSCAR

By god, I am faint.

META

Oh, Oscar...

OSCAR wraps the sheet around her and cradles her in his arms.

META

Are we who we are? Who are we? Are we our actions? Do we have a choice, or are we driven to do what we do? What I do each moment is undetermined and yet when I do it it is there forever. The world is full of magic. It is so much around us, so much in us; the light that falls through the window, the moisture on your lips, my hunger for you. It is so close that we cannot see it. We are making our marriage bed.

OSCAR

I love you, my darling. In all the evil, the ugliness, I don't know where that love came from. I feel so lucky to have met you. Now we will know no separation. They can do nothing more to us. Now they have only themselves.

META is still. OSCAR cries out.

OSCAR

Oh, Meta, my Meta! My Meta, my Meta...

He lays his head on her breast and murmurs her name into silence. Then suddenly there is a loud pounding on the door: bam-bam-bam! bam-bam-bam! bam-bam-bam! The lights bump to darkness. bam-bam-bam! bam-bam-bam! Then silence.

The End