

THREE SUITCASES

by

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CHARACTERS

BURROUGHS

The writer William Burroughs (Ages: 67 and 25)

TOLLER

German writer, politician and activist Ernst Toller. (Age 45)

ILSE

Ilse Herzfeld Klapper Burroughs. Polyglot, cosmopolitan, and refugee. Married William Burroughs in 1937. She is a woman of Weimar, with a sharp tongue and a stylish look -- including a monocle. (Age: 38)

SETTING

A large room in the Mayflower Hotel in New York City, 1939. The room has a view out into Central Park. There are three doors: One door out of the room into a hallway; One door to a bathroom; A third door to a sleeping space. (The latter door is never used.)

The room has a radio, an armchair, and two tables (with a single chair each) that serve as desks. There is a coat rack by the door. Other furnishings and the present state of the room are as described in each scene of the play.

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES

* The three characters in this play certainly met. But almost nothing is known about what they actually said to each other in January and May of 1939.

* The first and last scenes of this play make use of the fold-in and cut-up techniques pioneered by William Burroughs and Brion Gysin. They do not, however, fold in or cut up any works by William Burroughs.

* When Toller and Ilse are alone together, they speak German -- rendered in this play as perfectly fluent and idiomatic English. When they are with Burroughs, they both speak an English that reflects their skills in the language. Ilse is always fluent, but speaks with the occasional identifiable tics of a non-native speaker. Toller speaks in a slightly more labored English, but his fluency improves greatly when he feels passionate about a particular subject.

* The references made to Mayan culture in the play do not reflect the latest scholarship on the subject, but rather knowledge about the Maya available to William Burroughs in the late 1930s.

SCENE ONE

(BURROUGHS appears. A world-famous writer in late blossom of his fame. The familiar voice beamed out to millions of televisions across America, as it was on *Saturday Night Live* in 1981.)

(He wears a trench coat, fedora, and glasses. He sits at a small desk, or stands at a lectern, and reads from papers in front of him.)

BURROUGHS

Dateline. Everywhere and anywhere. An immense conflagration.

(The sound of a raging fire begins softly under BURROUGHS. It grows very slowly but gradually as he speaks.)

BURROUGHS (cont'd)

The era has come to an end. Writers, philosophers and scientists thrown into the flames.

This revolution was burned works. Those who represent the best sense of the word, the expression, and the will. Theatres, publishing houses, bookstores!

Here stand the intellectuals, the best professors! Silent shame. Humiliations. Your libraries. Your studios. Scholarship isolated itself from real life, torturing those whom you confined in your prisons.

The movement you wish to destroy has become the state. And that spirit has achieved groundless hatred, revolutionary energy, and social justice. These people are true.

Revolutions that are genuine stop at no boundaries. The voice of truth, they will not bow before might. You are doing the right thing.

Many of us will now have to prove that we are deserving of the past. Not making any promises. We shall never cease. A spirit that we carry forth.

Rescuing culture, yet you destroy.

(MORE)

BURROUGHS (CONT'D)

Justified, as you are blinding their eyes, their spirits, their feelings. Exclaim shameful phrases, stupid nationalism, race hatred.

Barriers that separated us are torn down. Reunited in chains of social and spiritual slavery.

You have already completed the process. The old past lies in flames, persecuting the most insignificant.

Wherever we stand together, wherever we march together, an abasement of ideas. We have fought for the highest values. Carried them so often to the nightly sky. I cannot hold it against you.

(BURROUGHS shuffles his papers. The sound of flames fades into Benny Goodman's version of "Bei Mir Bist Du Schoen.")

BURROUGHS (cont'd)

Dateline. Manhattan. The Mayflower Hotel. January twenty-fourth. Nineteen thirty-nine. A man listens to Benny Goodman on the radio.

(Black.)

SCENE TWO

(Lights up on TOLLER's room at the Mayflower Hotel. January 24, 1939. The end of Benny Goodman's version of "Bei Mir Bist Du Schoen" plays on the radio.)

(A table that serves as TOLLER's desk overflows with papers, magazines, and photographs. The appearance is that of creative disorder.)

(TOLLER sits in an armchair and listens to the radio. He looks at his watch. He takes a pack of cigarettes from his jacket, retrieves one, and lights it.)

(TOLLER smokes throughout this scene. He often punctuates his speech by stubbing out a cigarette, or initiates a new conversational tack by striking a match and lighting a new cigarette.)

(The song ends.)

FEMALE ANNOUNCER

It's 9:56 a.m. on a chilly January morning in New York City. Time for Press-Radio News, followed by our two regular serials: *Aunt Jemima's Cabin at the Crossroads* and *Margot of Castlewood*.

(A brief blast of trumpets underscored by the clatter of news tickers.)

MALE ANNOUNCER

Press-Radio News. Dateline: Spain. Rebel troops under the command of General Francisco Franco have captured the airport at Barcelona. Franco's forces already bombard Catalonia's capital by air. Rebel artillery are now within range of the besieged city. The tottering Loyalist government insists it will fight on, but most observers say Franco will win the war if he takes Barcelona.

(TOLLER rises to switch off the radio.)

MALE ANNOUNCER (cont'd)

(A beat.) Press-Radio News. Dateline: Washington. Representative J. Parnell Thomas of New Jersey has demanded the impeachment of Labor Secretary Frances Perkins...

(The radio falls silent. TOLLER sits at the table where he works. He looks again at his watch.)

(Noise at the front door. TOLLER looks up as ILSE enters. Her coat is thin, and not quite warm enough for January. She carries a small cactus and a bag. A few letters are tucked between the fingers of her left hand.)

ILSE

Guten Morgen, Herr Toller.

TOLLER

Barcelona ist verloren.

ILSE

Where did you hear this?

(ILSE goes to the other table, which has a typewriter. She puts the cactus next to it.)

TOLLER

A radio bulletin. Just now.

ILSE

I have brought your mail.

(ILSE hands the mail to TOLLER.)

ILSE (cont'd)

A letter from Pablo Picasso, I see.

(TOLLER sets the letters aside. ILSE removes her coat and puts it on the rack.)

TOLLER

I'll read them later.

(ILSE sits.)

ILSE

What shall we accomplish together today?

TOLLER

Frau Klap... (Catches himself.) Boor-owfs?

(ILSE shakes her head.)

ILSE

Burroughs. As a badger or a hedgehog digs into the earth to make a home.

(TOLLER rises and approaches ILSE.)

TOLLER

Frau... Burroughs.

ILSE

You have called me Ilse for many years. You may do so in America as well.

TOLLER

In candor...

ILSE

(Over.) I expect nothing else.

TOLLER

I want to take you on as secretary. I do.

(ILSE offers her hand.)

ILSE

I gladly accept your offer.

(TOLLER does not take it. ILSE withdraws her hand.)

TOLLER

As I suggested yesterday...

ILSE

(Over.) I am desperate for work.

TOLLER

(Through.) A position at Random House will suit you better.

ILSE

I typed your letter to them.

TOLLER

(Over.) Random House has a list of prominent writers from around the world. Your skill in languages will be invaluable to them.

ILSE

I am grateful. Of course. My problem is...

TOLLER

(Over.) My problem is I see you settling in.

(TOLLER points to the cactus.)

TOLLER (cont'd)

That, for instance.

ILSE

I thought you might like it.

TOLLER

It reminds me of the desert.

ILSE

That's a good thing, I hope.

TOLLER

Hollywood frayed my nerves. So I went to Mexico. The desert. I sought stillness. Solitude.

ILSE

Did you find it?

TOLLER

I did. (A sliver of a beat.) It was terrible. The emptiness, the quiet, was startling. It was so still and silent that the cacophony of my spirit began to overwhelm me. Better to be busy at anything, I discovered, than lost in nothing.

ILSE

(A beat.) I was about to tell you about Random House.

TOLLER

Yes?

(ILSE retrieves a letter from her bag.)

ILSE

They sent a reply. Directly.

(She hands it to TOLLER. He skims it and hands it back to her.)

TOLLER

I will think of something else.

ILSE

May I make my case?

TOLLER

I am not a magistrate.

ILSE

These piles of paper. You're drowning. I can help.

TOLLER

(Over.) I cannot pay you.

ILSE

Here is my reasoning..

TOLLER

I welcome any application of reason to my finances...

ILSE

You have raised vast sums of money.

TOLLER

(Over.) For Spain.

ILSE

(Through.) You can afford me. (More quickly.) Temporarily. At a meagre salary. The pittance I need to find my feet here in America.

TOLLER

Out of the question.

ILSE

It is customary to provide efficient administration of the sums you have raised, Herr Toller. Governments, philanthropists: They expect this.

TOLLER

I wish you had come sooner.

ILSE

I came as soon as the American government allowed it.

TOLLER

(Over.) Had you arrived in October! I employed three secretaries to keep up. But my money has vanished. I let them all go at the new year.

ILSE

Your commitments have not vanished.

TOLLER

They vanish as we speak. Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco cancel them.

ILSE

The Spanish Republic hasn't fallen yet.

TOLLER

A matter of days now. A catastrophe. Spain cannot be saved. My project is in ruins. And what of the money and food pledged to its people? Donated at my request? President Roosevelt authorized three million bushels of wheat personally. Because Ernst Toller asked him. Do we load it onto ships and send it to Franco and the fascists?

(TOLLER reaches for a photograph in a pile on his table.)

TOLLER (cont'd)

The sight of this girl is burned into me.

(TOLLER hands it to ILSE.)

TOLLER (cont'd)

A child of Spain. One of so many I saw last summer. If they escape the bombs, and the bullets, they are condemned to starve. (A beat.) Shocking, yes? I clutched this girl to my breast in July. Is she still alive? (A long beat.) I have stopped knowing where Spain ends and I begin. (A half beat.) But this is obvious to you.

ILSE

I remember when you did not know where Munich ended and you began.

TOLLER

A lifetime ago.

ILSE

Twenty years. (A beat.) November. February. April. Masses of people in Munich's streets. Marching. Singing. And you in the vanguard. Always. (A beat.) That image is burned into my mind.

TOLLER

How quickly it vanished. Faster than the Paris Commune.

ILSE

It happened. It cannot be erased.

TOLLER

I had years to think about it in a prison cell (A beat.) You smuggled pamphlets to me.

ILSE

And tobacco.

TOLLER

More important, perhaps. Simple human kindnesses grow larger in confinement.

ILSE

It was nothing. The pamphlets slid into my stockings.

TOLLER

(Slips into memory.) Those pamphlets were read in the cells. Passed from comrade to comrade, until they disintegrated. (Suddenly.) Never say it was nothing, Ilse. Stadelheim Prison is no place for a girl.

ILSE

On the Night of the Long Knives, it was no place for the Brownshirts, either.

TOLLER

(A painful grin.) Revolutions devour their children. Always. (Half-beat.) But if we savor this irony, we lose the thread. Yes, Ernst Röhm and his Brownshirts are gone. But Hitler and National Socialism march on. (A beat.) And now you are here. Two days already. What do you make of New York?

(ILSE gets up and walks a bit in the room.)

ILSE

Overwhelming.

TOLLER

Yes.

ILSE

Does the city overwhelm me? Or the change in my circumstance?

TOLLER

Both, perhaps?

ILSE

I thought my ordeal was finished when I married Burroughs. But it had just begun. Sixteen months to get my visa.

TOLLER

But you did.

ILSE

I lived in constant terror. Carried my papers with me everywhere. Marriage certificate. Visa applications. The trip to the embassy was worst part of all. Alone.

(MORE)

ILSE (CONT'D)

On a train to Zagreb. Would I be arrested at the final hurdle? Sent back to Germany? I booked my passage with my last dinars.

TOLLER

Every escape is narrow. Especially now.

ILSE

My sister Franze and her husband are still looking for their way out. They are in France now. And I am here. Free. But I walk in these streets and feel as if I cannot breathe. All this... energy. Like carnival in Munich. Does one ever get one's breath back in New York?

TOLLER

Do you like it?

ILSE

I don't know yet. You must like it. This beautiful view into the park.

TOLLER

(A half beat.) Central Park is a prison yard.

ILSE

(A hesitation beat.) Should I argue with Ernst Toller about prison yards?

TOLLER

(Over.) Central Park has lovely trees. Pleasant paths. Your fellow prisoners walk beside you. They seem happy and free. But look up to the sky... And I'm always looking up. I can't help it. It's my nature always to look up. (A sliver of a beat.) And when I do look up, I see we are hemmed in. Tall buildings, built with human sweat, ambition, money, and blood, tower over you on every side. We prisoners take our exercise in their shadows. (Half beat.) Yes, Central Park is wonderful... If you never look up.

(ILSE fusses with the cactus.)

ILSE

You'll forgive me being happier on this side of the Atlantic.

TOLLER

Of course...

ILSE

(Over.) I won't apologize for putting an ocean between myself and Hitler.

TOLLER

No.

ILSE

Right now, I don't even feel German. Silly, I know. I am. But my sense of belonging to a place called Germany has vanished. I left it behind when the ship docked.

TOLLER

You will feel yourself to be German again. At the oddest moments, I find.

ILSE

In English, you called your memoir: *I Was a German*.

TOLLER

The publisher insisted. (Mulls the deeper point.) I feel most German in moments of solitude. Loneliness. The mind drifts back to what is most familiar. A nursery rhyme. A poem of Hölderlin's. Just this morning, I looked out to the bare trees outside, and it came back to me...

(TOLLER rises and recites with feeling.)

TOLLER (cont'd)

Pear fruit hangs from trees
and wild roses cluster
where the land
meets the lake.
Swans, lovely and drunk
with kisses, dip their heads
into austere and holy water.

My grief to ask where
I will seek flowers
When winter comes,
Or find again sunshine,
The shadows of the earth?
Walls stand without words and cold,
And in wind, the flags clatter.

ILSE

Were you feeling particularly German this morning? Or simply cold?

TOLLER

They were words I reached for in the moment. German words.

ILSE

I must find a better coat. My coat is meant for spring. In Yugoslavia.

TOLLER

Try Macy's department store.

ILSE

You're right. We cast out minds back to childhood now. In this moment, I feel more that I am a Jew than a German. One identity defines me. The other may kill me. The fact that (A sliver of a beat.) Our boat, the Vulcania, was full of people fleeing for our lives. Yet we never spoke of it. We exchanged polite words at meals. Made complaints about the weather. (A beat.) But at night, when the dark sea rocked the ship, and the spray hissed against black windows, I felt the danger so intensely. And my mind scurried back to childhood. That warm safe world. The odor of it. Holy words. Things allowed. Things forbidden. Brightness lurking under tarnished objects. My sense of being German receded, like the coast of Dalmatia did as we sailed away. And my sense of myself as a Jew loomed larger and larger, as skyscrapers do when a ship approaches shore. (A longish beat.) It's stupid, I know. I don't even believe in a God.

TOLLER

I long for God. But God is absent. God found so many men in muddy trenches. In prison. But God never found me. And I did not seek God out when I left those places. (A beat.) The Americans say my speeches about Hitler will be greeted more enthusiastically if I call upon God. But must I do so? The evils of Hitlerism are plain enough. Must God validate them also? Is simple human reason not enough to apprehend this evil?

ILSE

We'll all meet God eventually. Or not. I'm in no rush. My only haste was to be finished with Germany before it finished me.

TOLLER

We must save what's best in Germany. The spirit of Goethe and Schiller...

ILSE

The Nazis read Goethe and Schiller. Hölderlin, too. They quote them as they throw your books on their bonfires.

TOLLER

Not every German is a Nazi, Ilse.

ILSE

You're right. Half of Germany can't believe the horrors they see. The other half can't see the horrors they believe.

TOLLER

(A beat. Maybe two.) America's National Socialists will meet here in New York. At Madison Square Garden. (A half beat.) Yes. Next month. The so-called "German-American Bund." They have youth camps on Long Island. Create disturbances when I lecture. You'll find them also in the lobby of this hotel, accompanied by men from the German consulate. (A beat.) So perhaps you have not put an ocean between yourself and these horrors after all.

(TOLLER goes to his armchair, sinks into it,
and closes his eyes.)

TOLLER (cont'd)

Spain on its knees. Informers in the lobby. My wife fled from me... I am a man who yells at the bottom of the mountain, and brings the avalanche down upon himself.

ILSE

Where is Frau Toller?

TOLLER

Christiane remained in California. (A half beat.) She still believes in Hollywood.

(TOLLER opens his eyes and sits up.)

TOLLER (cont'd)

Can I help your new husband somehow? I should like to make his acquaintance.

ILSE

Burroughs is an acquired taste. (A beat.) He telephoned me last night to say he has papers for me to sign. I told him he might find me here.

TOLLER

Here?

ILSE

I hope that is not a problem. (A half beat.) You just said you'd like to meet him.

TOLLER

I did.

ILSE

He is young. Very young.

TOLLER

So we both married a child.

ILSE

I heard that you were happy.

TOLLER

It is the story of *Pygmalion*. Did you see the film, starring Mister Leslie Howard?

ILSE

I did not. I know the play...

TOLLER

(Over.) Precisely! George Bernard Shaw must be positively enraged by this film.

ILSE

Why?

TOLLER

It does a mischief. At the very end of the play, Eliza escapes from Higgins to her new life with Freddie.

ILSE

That is my recollection.

TOLLER

But in the movie she returns! To Higgins! In the last line of the film, he commands Eliza to fetch his slippers.

ILSE

That is quite a liberty to take with a writer's work.

TOLLER

Money buys such liberties, Ilse. Especially in the movies.

(TOLLER gets up and shuffles through papers.)

TOLLER (cont'd)

I can show you the screenplay I wrote for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. About Lola Montez.

ILSE

The first Ludwig's courtesan?

TOLLER

She was a dancer, too. Do you remember the dance of Lola Montez?

ILSE

(Thinks.) A spider?

TOLLER

Yes! The tarantella! First class marks! King Ludwig lost his crown for love of her.

ILSE

She bared her bosom to him, yes?

TOLLER

(Interrupts.) When he asked if her breasts were real! A story for our times, yes? A king renounces his throne for love.

ILSE

I saw them, you know. Wallis Simpson and the former king of England. They moored their yacht in Dubrovnik on their famous cruise.

TOLLER

What were they like? True love birds?

ILSE

They sat together on the terrace of a restaurant in candlelight. Talking quietly to each other and no one else. Quite alone in the flashbulbs of photographers and the hubbub around them.

TOLLER

Lola Montez and King Ludwig must have dined that way. Lost in each other as a mob gathers outside the palace. (A beat.) The gentlemen from MGM were interested in my script. But they said they had a problem.

ILSE

Politics?

TOLLER

No, no. They said they wanted a happy ending. Could Lola and King Ludwig ride off into the sunset, perhaps? So enraptured by their mutual love that he casts off worldly power - and happily -- for the sake of her dark eyes.

ILSE

You're making this up...

TOLLER

(Over.) The script is here somewhere. We proposed Joan Crawford for the role.

(TOLLER stops searching.)

TOLLER (cont'd)

Do you know the true story of Lola Montez? (A beat.) She was so despised and feared in Munich that the people rose up to drive her from the city -- and in the melee pushed King Ludwig from his throne. Lola fled to Switzerland. She begged Ludwig to join her. For a happy ending. But her spell was broken. He abandoned her. So Lola went back to her spider dance. She traveled the world, performing for increasingly paltry sums. Married three men in quick succession. When her body failed her, she gave lectures on the power of love. She dropped dead at thirty-nine. Right here in New York. They buried her in Brooklyn. At the Green-Wood Cemetery. (A beat.) She died of syphilis. As did Ludwig. (A half beat.) And that was the happy ending of Lola Montez.

(TOLLER sits in the armchair again, and closes his eyes.)

TOLLER (cont'd)

How did we come to speak of Lola Montez?

(TOLLER opens his eyes after a moment.)

TOLLER (cont'd)

My Christiane, of course. And I am Shaw's Higgins. Not Hollywood's. I shaped her. Helped her find a voice. But she will not return to fetch my slippers. Only in Hollywood does the story end this way.

ILSE

I am sorry.

TOLLER

Who can blame her? It is a terrible thing to be old, yet be connected to a younger soul. I am forty-five. She is twenty-one. I imagine you feel this.

ILSE

Burroughs is the oldest young man I have ever met.

TOLLER

I should like to do something for him.

ILSE

I doubt he'd accept.

TOLLER

What is his profession?

ILSE

(A hesitation beat.) He has none. (A half beat.) Burroughs comes from money.

TOLLER

Ah.

ILSE

The famous adding machine.

TOLLER

(Ponders.) Ah, yes. His family name is in every bank in the world. (Chuckles.) My agent has an adding machine.

ILSE

So he feels no need to work. (Another beat or two.) Burroughs seeks, but doesn't know yet what he's looking for. He is intelligent. Has strength -- and inclination -- to row against the tide. Our marriage is one example of this quality. But at present he flits, as hummingbirds do, from new interest to new interest. (An exasperated sigh.) We have been married for seventeen months, and in that time, alone, he has told me of his enrollment in three different programs of advanced study in four different disciplines in three different cities. Lately, takes up writing. Comic sketches of some sort.

TOLLER

He needs what any man needs: a great cause.

ILSE

Burroughs is suspicious of causes. Especially great ones.

(ILSE looks again at the picture of the child.)

TOLLER

I want to help him. Because he has helped you. I often wonder, if the situation was reversed, how many Germans would marry an Englishwoman, or an American?

ILSE

(Suddenly.) I have a thought. About Spain.

TOLLER

Yes?

ILSE

(A hesitation beat.) There are so many refugees. In France. In Portugal. More will come now. Can you deliver relief to them directly in those places? Not let it slip to Franco?

(TOLLER rises from his chair with
astonished optimism.)

TOLLER

Yes. Yes! Thousands of them must already be in Perpignan. Carcassonne.

(TOLLER goes to ILSE, pulls her up from
her chair, and wraps her in an embrace.)

TOLLER (cont'd)

You are a practical genius, Ilse! We shall make this happen. For Spain.

(TOLLER releases ILSE.)

ILSE

So I am hired?

TOLLER

Yes.

ILSE

(An un-ILSE-like squeal.) I am happy. My cactus is happy.

TOLLER

You must help me with the newspapers.

ILSE

(In a Thirties gangster moll voice.) It's your dollar, mister,

TOLLER

(Smirks.) You speak like an American already. From a gangster film.

ILSE

Burroughs speaks in such voices to amuse me. It has "rubbed off."

(ILSE finds a pencil and a pad in her purse
to take notes.)

TOLLER

We will request telegrams from important men, addressed to me, urging that the Spanish Relief Project funds must go directly to the refugees.

ILSE

Yes.

TOLLER

Then we will draft a statement for the newspapers.

(TOLLER hunts through papers.)

TOLLER (cont'd)

Buried here somewhere with Lola Montez is my address book. (A beat.) Call journalists and read the statement. I shall sit here as you do. Tell them Ernst Toller will supply an exclusive quote if they hold the line. Wait a few seconds, then hand the receiver to me.

ILSE

Shall I type behind you as you speak?

TOLLER

Why not? It will enhance the presentation. A call from Ernst Toller must be dramatic.

(The telephone in the room rings.)

ILSE

Perhaps the press is telepathic?

(It rings again. TOLLER doesn't move. ILSE goes to the phone and answers.)

ILSE (cont'd)

Hallo! Ernst Toller's secretary on the line. (A beat.) Send him up, please.

(ILSE hangs up.)

ILSE (cont'd)

It's Burroughs. (Quickly.) I'll sign his paper and send him on his way.

TOLLER

Is it important?

ILSE

His parents insist I sign a document. (A half beat.) That I will not rely upon Burroughs for money. (Quickly.) He believes this gesture will mollify them. (An exasperated half beat.) As if our marriage was an imposition upon them.

TOLLER

Why does he not stand up and object -- as a man -- to his parents' request?

ILSE

Please don't blame Burroughs.

TOLLER

The family is wealthy, you say...

ILSE

His parents give him a generous allowance each month. They threaten to end it. He endured many interviews to obtain my visa. The bureaucrats questioned him endlessly. One of them asked why he had married his mother.

TOLLER

What did he say?

ILSE

He told them religious fanatics in America marry off their children to grown men every day. With no objection from the government.

(There is a knock at the door. ILSE goes to the door and opens it. When she does we see BURROUGHS -- not yet twenty-five, clean-shaven and dapper, in a winter coat with a thin coat of snow on his hat and shoulders.)

BURROUGHS

(With exaggerated Midwestern affectation.) Hello, Elsie.

ILSE

Stop that nonsense, Burroughs. Do come in.

(ILSE takes BURROUGHS by the arm.)

ILSE (cont'd)

Allow me to introduce you to Ernst Toller.

(TOLLER greets BURROUGHS warmly.)

TOLLER

I am delighted to make your acquaintance, Mister.... (Pronounces it slowly.) Bore-ohs.

BURROUGHS

(A bit uncertain.) Likewise.

TOLLER

It is a wonderful thing you do. A wonderful thing for our Ilse.

BURROUGHS

Assume a virtue if you have it not. That was Shakespeare's advice.

TOLLER

Ilse tells me you write.

BURROUGHS

I wouldn't advance myself as a writer at present.

TOLLER

(Through.) I would gladly introduce you to some notable writers. I meet with Mister Wystan Hugh Auden today, He will again make English music from my German verses. He has arrived in New York with Mister Christopher Isherwood.

BURROUGHS

I don't rightly...

TOLLER

(Through again.) There is something in common you have with Mister Auden, you know. (A beat. Two.) He took up the brave task also to marry a woman who must leave Germany. (A half beat.) Erika Mann.

ILSE

The daughter of Thomas Mann, Burroughs.

TOLLER

So you keep already company with great writers.

BURROUGHS

I'm no poet, Mister Toller. I write skits with a friend of mine. Fare you might find in a vau-deh-ville show.

TOLLER

You write for the cabaret? You should meet Erika Mann. She had a cabaret called The Pepper Mill. We tried to introduce it here in New York City, but it had little success.

BURROUGHS

I have published nothing yet. Sent a slapstick piece to *Esquire* magazine. About a shipwreck.

TOLLER

Is a shipwreck amusing?

BURROUGHS

The editors also found it tedious. They sent us a curt note of rejection.

ILSE

Send it elsewhere.

BURROUGHS

Elsie's theory is a stopped watch tells correct time twice a day.

ILSE

So send your work so it arrives punctually at that hour.

TOLLER

Even a well-known writer must bend to the public. A few days ago, I gave a reading of my new play. *Pastor Hall* is the name. Hall is a German cleric who preaches Christian love against the National Socialists. This brings him to great danger, of course. Hitler's men put Hall into a camp. When he is released, the pastor must choose: silence or the truth.

ILSE

What is Hall's choice?

TOLLER

The essential question. My audience said -- quite loudly -- that I made a mistake. In my first draft, the pastor suffers a heart attack and dies, before he makes his choice. The audience was correct. The work has a new ending now. Pastor Hall must preach the truth.

ILSE

The right choice.

TOLLER

A successful writer must listen to the audience. It is not enough to tell the truth in our time. One must tell it so all men can hear it.

BURROUGHS

I'll keep that in mind, should I pursue the writing game.

TOLLER

What are your other pursuits?

(BURROUGHS takes off his jacket and
puts it on ILSE's chair.)

BURROUGHS

I wish to travel in many realms. I am infected, you see, with a disease of wandering. I have a peripatetic nature.

TOLLER

(To ILSE.) Peripatetiker? Wie der Aristoteles?

ILSE

(To TOLLER.) Wanderlustig.

BURROUGHS

(Over ILSE.) You have correctly placed the origin of the term in Aristotle's method.

TOLLER

(More to ILSE.) Ah. (To BURROUGHS.) The restless youth.

BURROUGHS

Not for wandering's sake alone. My aim is to discover the hidden currents of human life. What is beneath the surfaces -- be they glittering or mundane. My own life was laid out for me in straight lines and familiar destinations. I seek paths beyond the maps now.

TOLLER

Where has the quest taken you?

BURROUGHS

As you know, I met Ilse in Europe.

TOLLER

Europe is on many maps.

BURROUGHS

Algiers. And Malta.

ILSE

Burroughs had a close look at Nazism, Herr Toller. In Austria.

TOLLER

Why wander there?

BURROUGHS

To study medicine.

TOLLER

Dann Sie Deutsch sprechen...

BURROUGHS

(Slightly embarrassed.) Ein bisschen.

ILSE

All your travels, Burroughs, and you cannot speak another language fluently.

BURROUGHS

(To ILSE.) You pick up languages like kids pick up stray pennies on the sidewalk.

ILSE

You have intelligence enough to learn.

BURROUGHS

(Over.) I can be more useful to unlearn something.

ILSE

That's just your fancy way to say "forget."

TOLLER

Forgetting comes easily to some. There is a mercy in it. But I have the curse to remember.
(A beat.) Tell me, can one study medicine in Vienna with ein bisschen Deutsch?

BURROUGHS

The ancient and venerable medical school in Vienna still conducts its anatomy lectures in Latin.

ILSE

Master a living language, Burroughs.

BURROUGHS

So my study of the Mayan race and its hieroglyphs is a waste of time?

ILSE

(To TOLLER.) You see? (To BURROUGHS.) Another dead language.

BURROUGHS

Dead languages are dead because they're murdered. I fancy myself a detective on this case. A private dick of history, you might say.

ILSE

We'll be dead soon enough. We must speak to the living.

TOLLER

The notion of dead language as a murder intrigues me.

ILSE

Please don't encourage him.

TOLLER

When Hitler and the National Socialists took power, such a... language murder, as you say... was the first thing they did. Silence my voice. Burn my books...

ILSE

(Over. To BURROUGHS.) His books were the first ones on the fire.

TOLLER

(Through.) ..Remove them from libraries. My name was no longer spoken on the radio, except to abuse or to condemn me. My plays were taken from the stage. I lost the power to speak to my fellow Germans in our language. Which is a death. (A half beat.) Now I fight to make myself heard, in the languages I cannot master. English. French.

BURROUGHS

The books of the Mayans were also burned. (To TOLLER.) Only fragments survived. (A half beat.) Most conquistadores in the Americas were satisfied if they could enslave the natives, snatch away their land, their gold, and sprinkle the damnable enterprise with holy water. But there was one monk, Diego de Landa, whose Inquisition in the New World surpassed the malice of any seen in the Old. He employed all familiar measures: water, weight, and blade. But his enthusiasm knew no bounds. Landa gathered all the writings of the Mayan priests -- not just their holy books and images, but treatises on agriculture, astronomy, and history -- and burned them all in a grand *auto-da-fé* in the city of Maní. Every scientific innovation of the Mayans was put to the flame. Calendars tracking movements of the sun, and moon, and stars, calculated with extraordinary precision. Vanished in a single afternoon. (A pause for breath.) And the irony of this crime? Most of what we do know of the Mayans survives because of Landa -- the monk who burned it all.

TOLLER

I do not follow you.

ILSE

Nor do I.

BURROUGHS

Even the Catholic Church was shocked by Landa's conflagration. He was clapped in chains and shipped back to Spain. The friar's defense was that the natives he encountered were practitioners of human sacrifice. What he burned was the instruction manuals for a cult of demonology. In prison, Landa wrote down everything he could remember of what he burned. He called it *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán*. These writings saved his skin. More than that, even. A few years later, the Church sent him back to the Yucatan. As the bishop. (A half beat.) What Landa left behind is a puzzle lacking all the pieces. A mystery in a dead language.

ILSE

The mysteries of our moment are more urgent. Why I did I have to leave my life behind and marry you?

TOLLER

(Ponders.) What would history say of my plays, if the only account of them came from the pen of Joseph Goebbels?

BURROUGHS

Precisely! How might our world appear to those of a future time? What would they make of Times Square, or Piccadilly as desolate ruins, overrun by vegetation. (A half beat.) There is a hotel in St. Louis. The Chase Park Plaza. To my eyes, it resembles a temple of the Mayans. What would it look like as a ruin? Each of its rooms has a phone book and a Gideon Bible. Which one would professors of the future translate first?

ILSE

Perhaps they would translate the room service menu. If they were hungry.

BURROUGHS

My point is that history seems to me to be a thin sheet of tin. Men can pound it into any shape they want.

TOLLER

(Mulls this.) Too easy. Some history remains always behind. Those Mayan temples. Or the Pyramids. Things so great that the earth cannot swallow them. (Thinks.) No, my young friend, I believe it is the memory of mankind that is tin. It is... (To ILSE.) Wie sagt man auf Englisch veränderbar?

ILSE

Malleable.

TOLLER

Malleable, yes. The fascists try to hammer the horrors of humanity's most brutal war out of the memory in a generation. To prepare the new war. And they succeed. Soon young men will march again.

BURROUGHS

But do they march forwards? Backwards? Or maybe in circles. Circles so large we never recognize them as circles?

ILSE

Enough of Spengler, Burroughs. (To TOLLER.) He lugged both volumes of *Decline of the West* to Athens when we married.

BURROUGHS

(Over.) Is the march of human beings progress? Or endless ascents and declines? I want to inquire of the Mayans about it. Facts are uncomfortable things, but they are better than illusions.

TOLLER

Herr Spengler has many critics. I number myself among them. We all agree on his poor grasp of the facts. (A half beat.) Herr Spengler suffers from a special German disease, you know. You did not study it in Vienna: The patient creates a great theory to explain everything. But they cannot explain the theory itself.

ILSE

It's a disease that spreads rapidly with glasses of Pilsner beer.

TOLLER

(Over.) But history will remember him. Herr Spengler is the man who made a gift of the word "socialism" to the National Socialists. After our republic fell.

ILSE

Herr Toller speaks of the Worker's Republic, Burroughs.

TOLLER

A revolution written on tin. (To BURROUGHS.) But after we who made it were killed or imprisoned, Herr Spengler published a book. To explain it. He wrote that socialism was a Prussian phenomenon.

ILSE

Which is nonsense.

TOLLER

And socialism was not socialism, he said. It was nationalism.

ILSE

Hitler swallowed this nonsense eagerly.

TOLLER

No one knows the true story of the Munich Revolution. The Communists lie. The National Socialists lie.

BURROUGHS

Make the story simpler, maybe. Write it up like a boxing match.

TOLLER

(Tries to take this in.) Our revolution as a... boxing match?

ILSE

(Over.) I warned you of his fanciful notions.

TOLLER

Like Max Schmeling versus Joe Louis? Would such a story actually move the people?

(TOLLER takes off his jacket, and loosens
his necktie.)

TOLLER (cont'd)

(To ILSE.) Perhaps *Die Weltbühne* should have been a magazine for the sport.

ILSE

It would have sold more copies.

(TOLLER assumes the pose of a boxer, and
begins to punch at the air.)

TOLLER

I was head of state for a week. Over as quickly as that famous boxing match in the Yankee Stadium.

(TOLLER closes in on BURROUGHS.)

TOLLER (cont'd)

(To ILSE.) What is that phrase? When you want someone to fight?

ILSE

Put up your dukes, Burroughs!

TOLLER

Yes! Put up the dukes!

(BURROUGHS steps back warily.)

BURROUGHS

Not much of a pugilist myself.

(TOLLER advances on BURROUGHS.
BURROUGHS throws up his open palms,
and TOLLER punches into them, lightly at
first.)

TOLLER

Pow! A true worker's government in Bavaria. Bam! The forces of reaction attack. Pow!
They are subdued! Bam! But I must resign. Pow! The Communists seize power.

(TOLLER launches three harder punches in
succession into BURROUGHS' palms as he
speaks. The force pushes BURROUGHS
back and stings his palms.)

TOLLER (cont'd)

The Freikorps advance! Munich fights to the end! Collapse and catastrophe!

(The last punch lands with enough force that
BURROUGHS trips and falls backward as
he counters it. ILSE goes to him.)

ILSE

Are you alright?

BURROUGHS

Lost my balance is all.

TOLLER

(Over ILSE and TOLLER.) A knock out! Munich on the mat! But it will rise again! No one will count Munich out! Ever!

(BURROUGHS gets up.)

ILSE

You left out the most important part.

TOLLER

Did I?

ILSE

(Over.) Dachau.

BURROUGHS

What's Dachau?

ILSE

(Over BURROUGHS.) A town north of Munich.

TOLLER

(Over ILSE.) Not the most important....

ILSE

(Over TOLLER.) This is why it is wrong to tell the story as a boxing match. (To BURROUGHS.) Herr Toller defeated the troops who invaded Munich at Dachau.

TOLLER

We stopped them for a few days only.

ILSE

Even after the Communists deposed you, you kept faith with the people. (To BURROUGHS.) Herr Toller took soldiers north to meet the invaders. They will never forget how a poet bloodied their nose.

TOLLER

At Dachau, the people won the victory.

ILSE

Dachau is why they want you dead. You fought them and beat them.

TOLLER

And what of Dachau now? (To BURROUGHS.) The National Socialists chose this place for their first detention camp. A coincidence? Or do they think memory is tin also? (A half beat.) The National Socialists know the camp is shameful. When the Freikorps came to Munich in nineteen-nineteen, they did not try to hide their crimes. When they captured me, they showed me the place where they shot Eugen Leviné. There was a stain there. On the wall of the prison yard. His blood.

ILSE

Leviné wanted to die. It was a romance for him. (To BURROUGHS.) He told his captors: "All Communists are dead men on leave."

TOLLER

He was brave. Despite his errors.

BURROUGHS

So you didn't want to be a martyr?

ILSE

What sort of question is that?

TOLLER

A young man's question. So I give the young man's answer. The new government declared me dead. It was six days before they knew the mistake. I hid from the police for a month. (A sliver of a beat.) Every day, in my hiding place, I made the preparation for my death. But I was not tired of life. For me, the life was begun. I was glad to keep it -- even in the prison.

ILSE

Martyrdom is useless.

TOLLER

If the martyrs are forgotten, yes. And Hitler makes new martyrs so quickly that one cannot keep track of them. But we must speak their names. Always. I think of Erich Mühsam.

BURROUGHS

Who's Mühsam?

ILSE

A leader in the Worker's Republic.

TOLLER

(Over.) A man like me. But an anarchist. Mühsam also did not want to die. We were imprisoned together in nineteen-nineteen. He also continued the fight. The National Socialists came for both of us on the night of the Reichstag fire. (A beat.) By some good fortune, I was in Switzerland. (A silver of a beat.) But Mühsam slept at home. With a ticket to Prague in his pocket. He was never a free man again. (A half beat.) But Mühsam never lost his spirit. The prison guards demanded that he end his own life. They gave him rope. But Mühsam refused. So they killed him and hung him up in the toilet. To deceive the world.

ILSE

It is terrible to think of.

TOLLER

A man who was with Mühsam in the camp told me this story: A monkey escaped the circus and came to the camp. The monkeys are clever, you know. Mühsam made a friend of the creature. (A half beat.) Nature always seeks out those who suffer, yes? (A sliver of a beat.) When the guards discovered the monkey, they tried to catch it. They looked for days. As I say, the monkeys are clever. But finally they trapped it. They made Mühsam watch as they put out its eyes. Mühsam screamed. The monkey screamed. Then they shot the monkey in the head to end its misery. And the screams of the monkey and the man stayed in the air for a long time. Even after the gun shot.

BURROUGHS

(Two longish beats.) That is a loathsome tale of unmitigated evil. As foul as Vulcan's stithy...

TOLLER

But what is to be done, William? Can we stop it happening in America?

BURROUGHS

It already happens here. You might have read about the Ku Klux Klan.

TOLLER

They are not the government.

BURROUGHS

Governments are worse. The space a man needs to be himself are vanishing here in America. Take marrying Elsie here.

(MORE)

BURROUGHS (CONT'D)

When I did that, the government put its nose right up into my private business. Where it has no business. I felt freer in my squalid Vienna hotel than I do here in America.

ILSE

You may return to Vienna whenever you like, Burroughs. We cannot accompany you.

BURROUGHS

I didn't mean it like that.

TOLLER

America is the best hope to save us.

BURROUGHS

(Snorts.) America's a flim flam man. Fake cures. Useless tonics. That's what America peddles. It will sell you something for your cough that gives you hemorrhoids -- or worse. Take it from me: Don't rely on America for anything.

TOLLER

Most Americans I meet are... patriots.

ILSE

(To TOLLER.) I warned you.

BURROUGHS

I won't pledge allegiance to anything. Because allegiance in America's a matter of convenience. (A beat.) I was born in St. Louis, you know. On Berlin Avenue. But when war fever hit in 1917, they stripped "Berlin" right off the street signs. It's Pershing Avenue now. After General Black Jack Pershing. And Pershing Avenue it will remain, at least until the next war. Maybe they'll go back to calling it "Berlin" again.

TOLLER

We cannot awaken Americans to the danger?

BURROUGHS

The loudest siren won't wake more than a fraction of them. But I don't blame you for thinking so. You're Europeans. You've had thousands of years of order, structure, hierarchy. You're used to being ruled. But your American, see. He's a different breed. Conquistadores and colonialists didn't know their place in Europe. They refused to accept it. And why? They were grifters, criminals, religious zealots. Their success was stealing land, and getting rich on slave labor. That's the American dream. A cruel and intoxicated illusion. A nightmare for any and all its victims. Expect nothing from us.

ILSE

Where is this paper I must sign, Burroughs?

BURROUGHS

In my jacket.

ILSE

Give it to me, then.

(BURROUGHS retrieves the paper. ILSE takes it from him.)

TOLLER

You baffle me, Mister Burroughs.

BURROUGHS

My sincere apologies. I've been known to elicit that response.

TOLLER

Not your words, my young friend. Your deeds.

BURROUGHS

What precisely have I done?

(ILSE searches for a pen.)

TOLLER

(To ILSE.) Wait a moment, Ilse. (To BURROUGHS.) You have done a wonderful thing. A selfless thing. To marry our Ilse.

BURROUGHS

You said that.

(TOLLER goes to ILSE and takes the paper. He looks at it, and then to BURROUGHS.)

TOLLER

But what if you took the next step? Tell your parents this paper is a nonsense, and you cannot ask Ilse to sign it? (A half beat.) I could tear up this paper. Could you stop me? That is nothing. You can just... make another paper.

ILSE

Please.

TOLLER

But what if you tore it up, William? (A half beat.) You have opinions. Every young man does. But I speak of the spirit. Your honor. As a man. You married Ilse. A brave choice. Are you brave the second time?

(TOLLER hands BURROUGHS the paper.)

BURROUGHS

I don't think you grasp my situation.

TOLLER

Ilse told me. You are from the family who make the machines to count vast sums.

BURROUGHS

This paper touches on my present livelihood.

TOLLER

There are many ways to make money.

ILSE

Give the paper to me, Burroughs.

TOLLER

A man who seeks his path beyond the maps would tear it up. On the principle.

ILSE

(To TOLLER.) It is my decision.

TOLLER

(To ILSE.) But William despises the false morality. (To BURROUGHS.) Prove it.

ILSE

Burroughs.

(BURROUGHS slowly tears the paper in half. He puts the two torn pieces of paper in his jacket. TOLLER applauds.)

He extends his hand to BURROUGHS, who
flinches as they shake.)

TOLLER

The happy thing is I knew. This is the only correct decision.

(TOLLER looks at his watch.)

TOLLER (cont'd)

I must go now to meet with Mister Auden.

(TOLLER retrieves his coat.)

TOLLER (cont'd)

(To BURROUGHS.) If you change your mind about an introduction to writers, please
inform me. I should like to help you. (To ILSE.) Ich komme um zwei Uhr zurück.

ILSE

Ich überprüfe Ihre Korrespondenz, und ich bereite Antworten.

TOLLER

Danke. (To BURROUGHS.) Good day.

(TOLLER exits. ILSE sits at her desk and
takes up the mail without looking up.)

ILSE

Are you staying?

BURROUGHS

What's your racket with Toller?

(ILSE looks up at BURROUGHS.)

ILSE

Are you trying to get me the sack? (A sliver of a beat.) Or, perhaps, after your bold
gesture, you can support both of us on your two hundred dollars a month.

BURROUGHS

I... now... listen...

ILSE

You will take a proper job when father and mother cut you off. I insist. It's first class all the way for me.

BURROUGHS

Elsie...

ILSE

Don't Elsie me, Burroughs. (A beat.) Your manners with wealthy scum in Vienna and Budapest are perfect. And I say it with no malice. These scum are my friends. Yet in the room of a great man, as a guest, you behave like a hooligan. Explain yourself, please.

BURROUGHS

I got carried away.

ILSE

It is not like you to state the obvious.

BURROUGHS

Ernst Toller rubs me the wrong way.

ILSE

You measure yourself against him -- and find yourself wanting.

BURROUGHS

That's not it...

ILSE

(Over.) There is nothing wrong with that. But it should guide you to do great things. Not be petulant.

BURROUGHS

Ernst Toller stinks of presumption. A man's not a man unless he does what Ernst Toller thinks he should do.

ILSE

He tries to help you. Marrying me is the sort of grand gesture he admires. You should take some useful advantage. But you squander it instead, Mister Peripatetic.

BURROUGHS

His delusions about America are foolish...

ILSE

Well, you did set him right.

(BURROUGHS sits in TOLLER's armchair and slouches. ILSE comes to him and places her hand on his shoulder.)

ILSE (cont'd)

I know I can be a terrible bitch...

BURROUGHS

You can be, Elsie.

ILSE

You would rather be back in Greece. On Mount Athos, maybe.

BURROUGHS

Let the men and the women bunk separately. That's the winning ticket.

ILSE

Mount Athos is a monastery, Burroughs. And you are not religious.

BURROUGHS

(Over.) I'd permit a festival. Once a year. Tied to the lunar cycle. For assurance of continued propagation of the species. But that's the limit. And any male brats go straight to the monastery once they're weaned.

ILSE

Am I that bad? (A beat.) I never stick the needle in for any reason other than your improvement, yes? (A beat.) Where is that clever young man who tells me interesting stories? Sings funny little songs?

BURROUGHS

You want a song? (Falls easily into the patter of a skit.) Ladies and gentlemen, that dapper son of old St. Louis, Thomas Stearns Eliot, will now perform his scintillating blend of ragtime music and English lit-er-at-oor, first given to the world as part of his erudite but overripe poem "The Waste Land," and now refashioned for your delectation tonight...

(BURROUGHS cracks his knuckles, stretches a bit, and takes to a knee.

He begins his best imitation of a music hall
singer of the era.)

BURROUGHS (cont'd)

O O O O

That Shakespearean Rag
A rag so swell-egant
So intelli-gent
It drove the groundlings mad

(BURROUGHS rises, with a bit of soft
shoe.)

BURROUGHS (cont'd)

Ol' Ben and Kit
Can't hold a candle to it
Just keep your *Tamburlaine*
Your *Sejanus* famed

BURROUGHS/ILSE

Ham-let's the palpable hit!

(They laugh.)

ILSE

Now this is William.

BURROUGHS

We had a time.

ILSE

Remember the town?

(BURROUGHS and ILSE close their eyes.)

BURROUGHS

White. Blinding white. Streets baked white in sunlight.

ILSE

And the café?

BURROUGHS

Which one?

ILSE

You know the one.

BURROUGHS

Cut into the hillside.

ILSE

We watched the boys dive from the cliffs. They would plunge into the sea, climb out, and sun themselves on the rocks below us.

BURROUGHS

A pleasurable afternoon, as I recall.

(They open their eyes.)

ILSE

You didn't join them.

BURROUGHS

I was comfortable where I was.

ILSE

You wanted to.

BURROUGHS

So you know what I wanted.

ILSE

I know what you prefer. And that you will make do. When you must. (A beat.) A wife always knows. (A beat. Maybe two.) You must be braver, Burroughs. Remember the day we met? You stood outside my hotel for an hour with your letter of introduction from Graham Eyres-Monsell.

BURROUGHS

(Interrupts.) Ol' Ears Monsell. I wonder what he's up to now?

ILSE

(Through.) He sent me a telegram in advance of your arrival. But you clutched that letter in your hand, and walked back and forth in front of the hotel. I watched you from my window.

BURROUGHS

I was trying to think of what to say.

ILSE

A letter from the son of the First Lord of the Admiralty speaks for anyone.

BURROUGHS

“Let the candied tongue lick absurd pomp...” You’re a sucker for nobility.

ILSE

That is where the money is. First class all the way for me. (A half beat.) And when we were introduced, you could not look me in the eye.

BURROUGHS

You terrified me.

ILSE

Am I terrifying? Truly?

BURROUGHS

(Over.) In your way.

ILSE

(Through.) I showed you Dubrovnik. And I did not bite you once.

BURROUGHS

Was that when your cunning machinations began? To snare a young American?

ILSE

It had to be the right American. (A beat.) You made me believe that if Americans were like you, the place might not be so bad after all.

BURROUGHS

Sadly for you, I’m a unique case.

ILSE

Singular, perhaps. (A beat.) You must be more respectful with Toller. I work for him.

BURROUGHS

But you hate phonies. And bullies.

ILSE

You see a public face. Earlier today, you might have had pity for him. (A half beat.) I will help him if I can. And if I help myself...

BURROUGHS

I see your angle.

ILSE

Not everything is seen best from an angle, Burroughs.

BURROUGHS

It's hard for me to see things any other way.

ILSE

I have known Ernst Toller for a long time.

BURROUGHS

You didn't mention that.

ILSE

I keep some memories close. So not to lose them. (A half beat.) The last time I saw him was in Dubrovnik. In nineteen thirty-three. You were at university, yes?

BURROUGHS

I was.

ILSE

Did the world seem dark to you at Harvard University. In nineteen thirty-three?

BURROUGHS

How so?

ILSE

Did you follow world events?

BURROUGHS

I didn't care what happened at Harvard. Luckily, that place has plenty of books. You can lose yourself in books. And find yourself there too. My resolution was to know Shakespeare by heart.

ILSE

So they weren't burning books at Harvard in nineteen thirty-three?

BURROUGHS

The New England custom is to burn witches.

ILSE

(Ignores this.) They were burning books in Germany in nineteen thirty-three. And the fight to save them started in Dubrovnik.

BURROUGHS

Hardly seems a battlefield.

ILSE

World writers met in Dubrovnik that year. The PEN Congress. And as you read Shakespeare, the writers of our age did battle in the city theatre. As I say, the world was dark that spring. The smoke of burnt books in Germany hung over everything. Joseph Goebbels expelled his nation's best writers before the Congress, and sent nitwits and nonentities to Dubrovnik. To show his contempt.

BURROUGHS

For literature?

ILSE

For everything. (A beat.) A meeting of writers is a Babel Tower, you know. French. English. German. I volunteered my services. So I had a seat in the front row. The Americans introduced a strong motion against Germany. But some delegates wanted to "save the situation." I was locked in a room with them, translating their arguments about a compromise. Eventually, they agreed to condemn the burning of books and the arrest of writers. But the motion would not name those responsible. And there would be no debate. A simple vote to minimize embarrassment.

BURROUGHS

What's this got to do with Toller?

ILSE

I'm coming to it. Toller did not arrive for the opening session. Rumors began. He would not come. He was afraid to come. Toller's name was on every tongue. But when we left the room with that shabby "compromise," we heard a commotion outside. It was Toller. A crowd had followed him from the harbor to the theatre.

BURROUGHS

In the nick of time.

ILSE

Just. They took the compromise to H.G. Wells, the president of PEN. He agreed to a vote. But not without debate. He said PEN was founded on free expression. There must be debate. And he turned to Toller and asked him to speak. Toller demurred until after the vote. H.G. Wells was angry. He knew any vote at all would be a Nazi victory. So he told Toller: Speak now, or never. (A long beat.) Toller spoke. There was a pandemonium. And above it all, the sound of Toller's voice as the Germans walked out of the congress. He read aloud the names of every writer whose works were burned. He told the story of his own escape. (She imitates TOLLER a bit.) "Madness rules the time. Cruelty the people. The air around us becomes thinner and thinner." In the thin air, Toller spoke and gave artists a voice. (A sliver of a beat.) You know me to lack sentiment. I do not cry. But I cried that day. I blubbered, as you say.

(ILSE wipes a tear away. BURROUGHS
puts a hand on her shoulder.)

ILSE (cont'd)

Don't be ridiculous.

(ILSE pushes his hand away.)

ILSE (cont'd)

(A bit angry.) You may not like Toller. He bullied you a bit.

BURROUGHS

I bring that out in people, I'm afraid.

ILSE

But he has punched at evil in the world. And left a bruise on it. (With softness now.) You must respect this, you hooligan.

(BURROUGHS gets up, takes his coat from
ILSE's chair, and puts it on.)

BURROUGHS

Let me take you for a blow-out lunch. Celebrate.

(ILSE looks at the pile of papers.)

ILSE

You are trying to get me the sack. See this mess? I must prove my usefulness with
immediate effect.

(ILSE gets to work.)

BURROUGHS

Well, then. As they say in the gin joints: A-bys-sin-i-a.

ILSE

You can buy me a steak tonight, Mister Money Bags. Meet me in the lobby at six. Don't
be late.

BURROUGHS

(With a bow.) Missus Burroughs.

ILSE

And not any old grease joint, mister. This is the Big Apple. First class all the way for me.

BURROUGHS

You do think I'm a sap.

ILSE

(Without looking up.) I know it.

(BURROUGHS lingers. ILSE looks up.)

ILSE (cont'd)

Go on. Make tracks.

(ILSE back at her work. BURROUGHS
opens the door and leaves, closing it gently.)

END OF SCENE

SCENE THREE

(May 22, 1939. TOLLER's room in the Mayflower Hotel.)

(The room is tidier. The piles of papers are gone. The table used by TOLLER has a book, a magazine, and an ashtray.)

(ILSE's table has its small typewriter and a few papers. Her cactus is also still there, slightly but perceptibly larger.)

(Three once-stylish suitcases stand by the door to the hallway. This luggage has been everywhere and has seen better days.)

(ILSE types as TOLLER speaks on the telephone. ILSE no longer sports a monocle. She wears nondescript glasses. She is also dressed less stylishly.)

(As in Scene Two, TOLLER smokes, but with less frequency. He savors each cigarette and no longer punctuates his conversation with lighting them or stubbing them out.)

TOLLER

I do not presume too much. My books sell many copies. Thousands. (A beat.) It is a simple matter. An additional one half of one percent. (A few beats.) As my agent, I request you to ask again. Yes? (Longer pause.) Yes. I was told Mister Spender's translation is unsuitable for the stage. I have found a new translator. (A few beats.) Yes, yes, *Pastor Hall* will be more... A moment, please...

(TOLLER pulls the receiver away and calls over to ILSE, who does not look up.)

TOLLER (cont'd)

“Umgangssprachlich?”

ILSE

“Colloquial.”

TOLLER

Ja genau.

(TOLLER resumes the call.)

TOLLER (cont'd)

Colloquial. More colloquial. (Noise down the phone.) Yes, and please: That extra half of one percent. I count upon you. (A beat or two.) Yes, yes. Goodbye.

(TOLLER hangs up the receiver.)

TOLLER (cont'd)

Entschuldigen Sie...

ILSE

So sagen die Amerikaner: “Take it easy, bub.”

TOLLER

I can tell when you have spent time with Burroughs.

ILSE

He may drop by. As the Americans say, “Fair warning.” I must return twenty dollars he lent to me. (Changing tack.) It always surprises me when you call out for a word.

TOLLER

It is this insomnia. When I cannot sleep, the right words slip away.

ILSE

Perhaps your passage to England will be pleasant. It is May, after all.

TOLLER

London has always valued me. *Pastor Hall* must be produced there. The world must know of the detention camps.

ILSE

Thank you for paying the last bit of my salary.

TOLLER

I wish only it was more. And that you could accompany me.

ILSE

You know my situation.

TOLLER

Of course. (A beat.) Many times these past four months, you rescued me.

ILSE

Let us not speak of it.

TOLLER

I cannot express my gratitude sufficiently. (A beat or two.) I keep a fantastical notion in my head: By the time I get to London, Italy and Germany will be at war. (A half beat.) It's nonsense. I know. But I cling to any branch of hope. Perhaps Hitler and Mussolini see each other as competitors. Like mobsters in Chicago...

ILSE

(Finishes it.) They will rub each other out?

TOLLER

(Smiles.) I shall miss your quirky turns of phrase.

ILSE

(Through.) The conflict will come between Hitler and Roosevelt. You said he would be strong against Hitler.

TOLLER

When I shook his hand, I could feel that strength. But he does not want another war.

(ILSE resumes typing.)

TOLLER (cont'd)

I don't recall giving you any new work.

ILSE

I must find a new position.

TOLLER

Please take the typewriter when you leave today.

ILSE

You mentioned it on Friday.

TOLLER

Did I?

ILSE

Yes.

TOLLER

It was a dreadfully busy weekend. I was with Marcuse and his wife .

ILSE

Yes?

TOLLER

Sascha helped me pack the cases. Marcuse smoked and watched.

ILSE

That was kind of her.

TOLLER

She also helped tidy the room. Marcuse watched. And smoked. (A half beat.) I had a long conversation with Marcuse last night. About suicide.

ILSE

(A beat. And another.) What did he say?

TOLLER

Marcuse is a philosopher. He approaches such a question with academic rigor. (A half beat.) He said my thinking was sloppy. He insists there are logical reasons to end one's own life.

ILSE

I see.

TOLLER

He listed them in detail. Unbearable pain. Undying shame. To avoid a brutal execution. (A beat.) I told him life is precious, even when there is pain or shame in it. But, sometimes, pain or shame overcome any logic.

ILSE

Did you come to a conclusion?

TOLLER

He is a Socrates. And just as annoying. He meant to demonstrate that I have not met the classic philosophical conditions to end my own life.

ILSE

A useful conversation, then. Philosophers are wise.

TOLLER

(Over.) And, as always, I could not sleep last night. An hour or two, maybe. I lay awake and thought of my leaving. How much I will miss your help. I recalled the day you first came to work with me. How William observed that I did not want to be a martyr.

ILSE

He apologized.

TOLLER

He put his fingers directly in the wound.

ILSE

Burroughs has a skill in this.

TOLLER

He was right. I was not a martyr for the workers. I escaped. I hid. I lived. (A half beat.) When I traveled to Moscow in nineteen twenty-six, many "comrades" told me I should have given myself up to be murdered in Munich -- as Eugen Leviné did.

ILSE

Nonsense.

TOLLER

It was published in *Pravda*. One may regard it as an official statement.

ILSE

It was monstrous behavior. You were an invited guest of the Soviet Union.

TOLLER

(Goes on.) The people's way forward would have been illuminated by my death. My reply was that if I had dies in nineteen-nineteen, I would not be alive to visit Moscow.

(MORE)

TOLLER (CONT'D)

(A beat.) But Stalin is consistent. He compels many comrades to illuminate the progress of world communism.

ILSE

Things have not come to that here. Or in England.

TOLLER

We vowed to make a better world when we climbed out of the trenches. Fresh air in our lungs, not poison gas. Make a better world. With the best words. With love. (A sliver of a beat.) You cannot make a true revolution with fear. Or hate. (A half beat.) Words and love should be enough to make a revolution.

ILSE

We know better. Now.

TOLLER

Perhaps I still don't. Perhaps I never will. I refuse any revolution not made with words and love. Only that revolution is worth a martyrdom.

ILSE

Can we stop this talk of martyrs? Do you care what *Pravda* said? Or Burroughs? I care about Burroughs because he saved my life. (A half beat.) You are under no obligation to take him seriously.

TOLLER

When I meet a young man like William, I know he is the one I must convince. And I fail. If I could convince William, and then a hundred, and then a thousand Williams, we might prevent a new hell on earth.

ILSE

A million Williams won't prevent the hell to come.

TOLLER

Your cheerful disposition is something I will also miss.

ILSE

(Over.) They will be asked to vanquish hell. Again.

TOLLER

No wonder they hate us.

ILSE

You can show them how to do it. (Pointedly now.) You must do so. When the time comes.

TOLLER

You have a will to live, Ilse. You set your eyes on William and made sure of it.

ILSE

My conscience is clear. Burroughs came to Dubrovnik, and then went back to Vienna. I did not write to him. Then his appendix burst. He had an operation. He wrote to me: May I come to Dubrovnik again? I knew at that moment he would solve my dilemma. And I made sure of it. With no shame and no remorse.

TOLLER

It is like those folk tales of vampires. You must invite them in.

ILSE

I suppose it is.

TOLLER

And what happened to Heinrich?

ILSE

(Cool.) I try not to think about Klapper. (A half beat.) Often, I fail. (A few beats.) If I loved my life in that Germany, he loved it even more. The dirty throb of Berlin.

TOLLER

Some loved it more than others.

ILSE

I believed that Klapper would not live without it. Every artists needed his medicine. For nerves.

TOLLER

Or pleasure.

ILSE

And the whores! Fat, thin, pregnant, old. Demi-Castors. Grasshoppers. Chontes. Table Ladies.

TOLLER

That world has vanished.

ILSE

Even Half Silks in the game part time required examination. Gratis, of course. "It is a matter of public hygiene," Klapper would say.

TOLLER

He was a strange man. I mean no offense by it.

ILSE

None taken. That world vanished in a night. But Klapper could not accept it. He would not leave. We almost missed the open door before it shut. It is strange to think it was a blessing that the brown shirts smashed his clinic. Only then did he see the danger.

TOLLER

Many did not.

ILSE

(Over.) He was older. It was hard to start again. The sun was warm in Dubrovnik. The town was beautiful. But Klapper could not settle. (A half beat.) When I suggested a divorce, he was happy. I was a burden. (A beat.) Then the awful new decree. Yugoslavia would not renew our visas. We must return to Germany. I could not do it. And at the moment I needed him, Burroughs entered. You know the rest.

TOLLER

I think of Heinrich.

ILSE

He moved to a tiny village outside Dubrovnik. It was like the Middle Ages there. No electricity. No running water. He made a joke when I came to say goodbye: If you find a young American for me to marry, send a postcard. (A half beat.) He told me friends would hide him. He was a doctor, after all. They are always useful. (A half beat.) I walked back to Dubrovnik as the day faded. The walls are most white just before the darkness falls. I knew I would never see Klapper again.

TOLLER

(Near sobbing.) The things we have lost cannot be numbered.

ILSE

So many things. I feel I have lost everything but my names. I have so many now. Herzfeld at birth. Klapper. Now, Burroughs.

(MORE)

ILSE (cont'd)

When I write it "Burroughs" on a form, the name looks like a key to unlock a door. (A half beat.) "Elsie" Burroughs is a name to hide in. (A beat.) I am lucky to have it. No one wants a Herzfeld here. Or a Klapper. We are a problem now. And thousands just behind us. (A half beat.) Am I still a human being? Not here. I am a long string of names. (A sliver of a beat.) I know should be grateful. Burroughs is a name that saved my life. But I live in this name now, and I wonder: "What for?"

TOLLER

I know this feeling. Precisely.

ILSE

(Quickly.) I did not mean it this way.

(The telephone rings. It rings again. ILSE moves to the phone as it rings a third time and picks up the receiver.)

ILSE (cont'd)

Ernst Toller. His secretary on the line. (A beat.) I will relay the message. (Hangs up.) The hotel manager.

TOLLER

Again?

ILSE

He insists.

TOLLER

I have not informed them of my departure.

ILSE

Perhaps the maid...

TOLLER

(Finishes.) Is an informer?

ILSE

You have cleaned the room. There are suitcases in plain view.

TOLLER

The Mayflower Hotel was happy to have me when I was some sort of... advertisement for them.

(TOLLER looks for something on his desk.
He finds it and holds it up.)

TOLLER (cont'd)

I will show them this.

ILSE

Will they care about your invitation to the White House last week?

TOLLER

It is beautifully engraved, is it not? Not that lazy method of scribbling in a name. "First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt requests the presence of Mister Ernst Toller." All of it is engraved. (A sliver of a beat.) The entire PEN delegation at the World's Fair received one. It will impress them.

ILSE

Would it not be easier to pay them? You leave tomorrow.

TOLLER

Never settle a hotel bill before leaving.

(A knock at the door. TOLLER is startled.)

TOLLER (cont'd)

Will they not even permit me to come to the lobby?

(ILSE goes to the door and opens it. It is BURROUGHS. Four months has hardened him perceptibly. There is a hint of shadow and sourness. He wears a suit, and plays with something in his right jacket pocket.)

ILSE

Burroughs! (To TOLLER.) It's only Burroughs. (To BURROUGHS.) You usually call first.

BURROUGHS

(To TOLLER.) They sent me straight up with this note. From Mister Mar-koos. Urgent.

(BURROUGHS hands TOLLER the letter.)

TOLLER

Thank you.

(TOLLER opens it, scans it, and puts it in his pocket. He exits. BURROUGHS saunters over to the window to look out on Central Park.)

BURROUGHS

(Recites.) Love, whose month is ever May,
Spied a blossom passing fair
Playing in the wanton air.

(BURROUGHS looks back to ILSE.)

BURROUGHS (cont'd)

So grim and grey out. Even Shakespeare couldn't sell the groundlings on May today.

ILSE

I need your help, Burroughs. As a friend.

BURROUGHS

To drink up eisel? Eat a crocodile?

(ILSE impassive.)

BURROUGHS (cont'd)

Apologies for the whimsy.

ILSE

I need you to stay here with Toller. (A beat.) For an hour.

(BURROUGHS looks at his wristwatch.)

BURROUGHS

I'm a busy man.

ILSE

Burroughs...

BURROUGHS

(Through.) No time to be bullied by Ernie today. Can't do it...

ILSE

I must meet some people. Urgently.

BURROUGHS

What's the angle?

ILSE

I will be a secretary to an Austrian actor. And his socialite wife. They are wealthy and debauched. It will be a welcome change.

BURROUGHS

Can't it wait?

ILSE

They decide today.

BURROUGHS

Smells fishy.

ILSE

(Stern.) Toller will attempt suicide. If he is left alone.

BURROUGHS

Balderdash.

ILSE

It's not.

(BURROUGHS goes to the window.)

BURROUGHS

More pity that great folk should have countenance in this world to drown or hang themselves, more than their even-Christen.

ILSE

(Over.) You have nonsense for every occasion.

BURROUGHS

Hardly nonsensical. It's Shakespeare. (A sliver of a beat.) Toller lunches at the White House with the Roosevelts. That might make me want to kill myself.

ILSE

(Over.) He also carries a length of rope with him. Every where. It's in one of these suitcases. (A half beat.) An hour. Burroughs. Other friends will come when I leave today. Tomorrow, we take him by a taxi to the ship. (Levels her sternest gaze.) If I get Toller on that boat, there is hope.

BURROUGHS

You want him on that ship to square your conscience.

ILSE

You're like a scalpel rinsed in ice. (A beat.) Will you do this? For me? As a friend?

BURROUGHS

What am I supposed to do?

ILSE

Divert him with your wit, my darling. (A beat.) It is a terrible game with him, Burroughs. Twice now, I returned from lunch to find him at it. Once with a knife. Another time with the rope.

(ILSE goes to the suitcases.)

BURROUGHS

You didn't say that.

ILSE

Watch the door, please.

BURROUGHS

Looking for a souvenir?

(ILSE opens a suitcase. Looks through it.)

ILSE

The rope, Burroughs.

(ILSE shuts the first suitcase, and opens another. She finds the rope.)

BURROUGHS

You weren't fooling.

(ILSE shuts the suitcase. She puts the rope in her bag. ILSE looks at BURROUGHS. She finally notices his hand in his pocket at last.)

ILSE

What have you got there?

BURROUGHS

Nothing important.

ILSE

Burroughs.

BURROUGHS

What?

(BURROUGHS reluctantly pulls a Colt Detective Revolver out of his pocket. A small, snub-nosed gun. Easy to conceal.)

BURROUGHS (cont'd)

A recent purchase. For protection.

ILSE

From what? Let me see.

(ILSE advances on him.)

ILSE (cont'd)

(Gun moll voice, with sarcasm.) Planning to knock over a bank?

(ILSE snatches the gun away.)

BURROUGHS

Hey!

ILSE

I need a baby sitter for Toller and you bring a gun with you?

(ILSE takes the gun to her desk. She expertly unloads it, letting the bullets fall into her palm. She drops them into her purse, then snaps the revolver shut.)

ILSE (cont'd)

Here is your stupid toy.

(ILSE hands the gun back to BURROUGHS, who puts it back into his pocket.)

BURROUGHS

How didya learn that trick...?

ILSE

Klapper bought a gun. For protection from the brown shirts in Berlin. Or to dispatch ourselves efficiently, if worse came to worst.

BURROUGHS

Let me have those back.

ILSE

Not until I return.

BURROUGHS

It's my gun, Ilse.

ILSE

Carry it empty for now. (Looks at her watch.) I am late already.

(ILSE picks up her bag.)

BURROUGHS

I haven't agreed to this scheme.

ILSE

Don't try my patience, Burroughs.

BURROUGHS

I have nothing to say to Toller.

ILSE

I do complain of him...

BURROUGHS

(Over.) You do.

ILSE

(Through.) As any worker talks down her boss. I need a mere hour. An hour you will spend otherwise in idleness.

BURROUGHS

No reason to insult me.

ILSE

In German, Toller called his memoir: *Eine Jugend in Deutschland*. There is a youth in him. A child. If that child dies, it will be a true murder.

(ILSE goes to the door.)

ILSE (cont'd)

I count on you, Burroughs.

(ILSE closes the door.)

(BURROUGHS hesitates for a second, then goes to the door and opens it. ILSE is gone. He shuts the door, and looks around the room, already afflicted with buyer's remorse. He looks out the window again.)

(BURROUGHS goes to the radio and turns it on.)

After a few seconds to warm up, we hear Bing Crosby's version of "Deep Purple," beginning with the lines -- "Through the mist of a memory" -- and continuing through a few bars of Matty Malneck's violin solo. He quickly switches the radio off again.)

(As the music stops, BURROUGHS goes to the front door again. He puts his hand on the door handle. He does not open the door.)

(BURROUGHS looks around the room, spies TOLLER's desk and sits down. He imagines himself in TOLLER's shoes. He picks up a pen, shuffles the papers, gesticulates to an unseen listener.)

(BURROUGHS is lost in this reverie, tipping the chair back a tiny bit. TOLLER enters suddenly, still holding the invitation.)

(BURROUGHS nearly loses his balance, catching himself before the chair falls backwards. He recovers himself and stands up. The men regard each other warily for a few moments.)

TOLLER

Where is Ilse?

BURROUGHS

(Stammering a bit.) Elsie's gone.

TOLLER

So you have lost your wife?

BURROUGHS

I'd hardly say...

TOLLER

I lost a wife also. They are easy to lose. (A half beat.) We are the two men who lost our wives.

BURROUGHS

Sounds like a tale by the Brothers Grimm.

(A few uneasy beats.)

TOLLER

Go look for her, perhaps?

BURROUGHS

(Stammers again.) She asked me to stay.

TOLLER

Here?

BURROUGHS

Wait for her here. Yes.

TOLLER

For how long?

BURROUGHS

An hour. (Half beat.) She said.

TOLLER

Can you wait elsewhere for her? Outside?

(BURROUGHS points to the window.)

BURROUGHS

Hardly the day for it.

TOLLER

The hotel lobby? (A half beat.) I confide in you, William. (A half beat.) I have not slept for weeks now. (A half beat.) If only I could sleep!

BURROUGHS

I might be able to help you. Procure a remedy efficacious to the cause of sleep.

TOLLER

I have tried everything.

BURROUGHS

Doubt you've tried this.

TOLLER

What is it?

BURROUGHS

Something that the doctors won't give you. Fully guaranteed to do the trick. No customer leaves unsatisfied. A man in Greenwich Village keeps a supply. (A half beat.) I can get it when Elsie's back.

TOLLER

I see.

BURROUGHS

Worth the wait. You have my word.

(TOLLER points to ILSE's chair.)

TOLLER

Can you sit quietly there? If you must.

BURROUGHS

Whatever you prefer.

(TOLLER sits in the armchair and closes his eyes. BURROUGHS examines the cactus on ILSE's desk.)

(Suddenly, TOLLER speaks with his eyes closed.)

TOLLER

Do you sleep, William?

(BURROUGHS puts the cactus down.)

TOLLER (cont'd)

Does sleep come easily to you?

BURROUGHS

Most nights, yes. Sometimes, a nervous disposition gets in the way.

TOLLER

Yes.

BURROUGHS

The brain won't stop ticking.

TOLLER

You understand me.

BURROUGHS

In the matter of sleep, yes. I do.

TOLLER

My mind never stops. Speak to this group. Find money for that group. Help this man and his wife who came to America with nothing in their pockets. Fifty francs for this refugee. A job for a man who speaks no English. And not just any job. A job that will preserve his dignity...

(TOLLER opens his eyes and looks at
BURROUGHS.)

TOLLER (cont'd)

I imagine you cannot imagine.

BURROUGHS

I cannot. (Sliver of a beat.) Imagine.

TOLLER

If one cannot sleep, one cannot dream. And if one cannot dream, what is life? (A beat.)
What keeps you awake at night, William?

BURROUGHS

As a child, I was afraid of the dark.

TOLLER

Are you still?

BURROUGHS

Alone at night, I feel a war rage under my skin. (Recites.) Those ignorant armies clash by night.

TOLLER

You are a queer young man, William.

(BURROUGHS fidgets with the gun in his pocket.)

BURROUGHS

I blame my nanny. And Harvard University.

TOLLER

How old are you again?

BURROUGHS

Twenty-five.

TOLLER

I was a prime minister and a prisoner before I was twenty-four.

(BURROUGHS fidgets with the gun in his pocket.)

BURROUGHS

I am doomed to be defeated comprehensively in any competition with you.

(TOLLER sits up and sees BURROUGHS fidgeting.)

TOLLER

Is something wrong?

BURROUGHS

Course not.

TOLLER

What's in your pocket?

BURROUGHS

Nothing.

TOLLER

As you wish.

BURROUGHS

(Hesitates, then.) As a former military man, you might appreciate this...

(BURROUGHS pulls out the revolver.)

BURROUGHS (cont'd)

I enjoy the feel of a firearm. Finger curled around the trigger. The handle resting gently in your palm. The shudder of recoil when you fire. Every bit of it pure pleasure.

TOLLER

You have not had a gun forced into your hand. (A half beat.) Too simple. When war broke out, we were all lovesick for guns. I enlisted as soon as I could.

BURROUGHS

I hope to avoid such a circumstance.

TOLLER

You are only twenty-five. There is time for you yet.

(TOLLER points to the gun.)

TOLLER (cont'd)

May I see it?

BURROUGHS

(A beat.) Why not?

(BURROUGHS goes to TOLLER and hands him the revolver. TOLLER examines it carefully.)

TOLLER

Seems light.

(TOLLER opens it.)

TOLLER (cont'd)

No bullets?

BURROUGHS

No.

TOLLER

You want to give someone a fright?

(TOLLER ponders the gun.)

TOLLER (cont'd)

So small. But a smaller pistol caused a world catastrophe. I stood on the very spot in Sarajevo where Princip shot the Archduke. A simple gun. Fired on a street corner.

BURROUGHS

“Let’s carve him as a dish fit for the gods...”

TOLLER

Franz Ferdinand was no Caesar. And Princip needed luck. The first attempt failed, you remember. But on the way back out of the city, the Archduke's driver made a wrong turn. Drove the car directly to Princip. All too fast to think. He raised the gun. He shot. The best way to accomplish such a task. Do not think too much.

(TOLLER hands the gun back.)

TOLLER (cont'd)

Some friends say I should have a gun. For protection.

BURROUGHS

Protection from whom?

TOLLER

The followers of Hitler here.

BURROUGHS

American Nazis? They’re appalling goons, but harmless.

TOLLER

They filled the Madison Square Garden.

BURROUGHS

They're on the run.

TOLLER

To trample us down, perhaps.

BURROUGHS

They're finished. Or soon will be.

TOLLER

I do not share your confidence.

BURROUGHS

Those gentleman made a fundamental error by abusing Roosevelt directly.

TOLLER

A truly great man, your Roosevelt. All the cares of a nation, and he took the time to shake my hand. The hand of a writer.

BURROUGHS

(Over.) The man is a bully.

TOLLER

I cannot agree.

BURROUGHS

I understand your confusion on this point. It's easy to be duped by his patrician exterior. But behind the pinched grin, the cigarette holder clenched tight between his expensive teeth, there lurks an uncommon brute. Roosevelt is positive he knows what's best for every man. (A half beat.) And Roosevelt the bully is why the American Nazis are finished. Ka-putt, as you might say. Our president's not a man to trifle with. Ask Father Coughlin. Ask the Republican Party. Cold steel undergirds his sophisticated surface.

TOLLER

I believe you are lucky to have him.

BURROUGHS

(Over.) Here in America, they say that any boy can grow up to be president.

TOLLER

And that is a good thing?

BURROUGHS

You were a president.

TOLLER

For six days and two putsches, William. (A beat.) I was given power when I could not use it. I was not ready to use it. The chance will not come again. (Closes his eyes.) We saw the trenches and the barbed wire. And now we drag the world back to that place again. (Opens his eyes.) You once observed I did not want to be a martyr.

BURROUGHS

I tendered my apologies by post. And, now, again.

TOLLER

(Over. Slow. Exhausted.) You were right. Maybe the world would be better, had I found a bullet meant for me in Munich. Or if Hitler had died of mustard gas, and not been blinded only.

BURROUGHS

A spell with Morpheus is what you need. When Elsie's back, I'll get that medicine.

(TOLLER sits in his armchair.
BURROUGHS pulls the chair from
TOLLER's desk and sits closer.)

TOLLER

Take....Take no trouble for me.

BURROUGHS

No problem at all. Beneath the lights of the city, wonders of the age exist in the shadows. I have a fondness in seeking them out.

TOLLER

Ah. The restless youth. (A beat.) Perhaps I envy you.

BURROUGHS

Nothing to envy here.

TOLLER

You have... opportunity. To be restless. Money. Family. I had none of this.

BURROUGHS

My name's dead weight. Maybe worse.

TOLLER

But your father...

BURROUGHS

Grandfather invented the adding machine. He was, by most accounts, a genial man. Many men had thought to mechanize the counting process. The Gilded Age demanded it. What my namesake did was puzzle out the guts of it. The innards. How to make it work with perfect accuracy. He died twenty years before I was born, but we're still spending his money. (A sliver of a beat.) All the smiling villains are on the other side of my bloodline. My father married into the Lees. You likely heard of my late uncle, Ivy Ledbetter Lee. The king of the new science of our age: Public Relations.

TOLLER

He worked for the National Socialists. Here in America.

BURROUGHS

And knew better than say it openly. That's why he dreamed up "The German Dye Trust" to do that mischief. Ivy Lee knew a change in coloration is essential in such matters. The Congress looking into it is what killed him dead.

TOLLER

I cannot mourn such a man.

BURROUGHS

Nor can I. (A half beat.) He offered me a job. You're a Harvard boy now, he said. I can always use a Harvard boy. I told him "no" in terms that were ungentlemanly.

TOLLER

The correct thing.

BURROUGHS

I don't require your approbation. The real problem with Ivy Lee was not that he worked for the Nazis. It's that he worked for anybody who walked in the door. All comers. Played every side of the grift. The Nazis and the Bolsheviks. The Rockefellers and the Red Cross. Heads and tails. Win no matter what side the coin lands on.

TOLLER

I see why you don't advertise this fact.

BURROUGHS

Ivy Lee wrote a book, you know. *Publicity -- Some of the Things It Is and Is Not*. But for him, it was everything. (A half beat.) You can't escape family, can you? Sure, I pocket their money. But I take considerable pains to never actually earn it, or to be grateful for it. (A long beat.) I wish I could smash it all up. Ivy Lee. The adding machines.

TOLLER

I wrote a play about the men who broke machines. The Luddites. Are you a Luddite?

BURROUGHS

They had the right idea. Smash it up. Start again. And don't get caught. Even Lord Byron saw their angle.

TOLLER

They failed. We failed. The world will need thousands of adding machines to find the sum of all the damage. The human misery of the future.

BURROUGHS

"All our yesterdays have lighted fools the way to dusty death." (A half beat.) Shakespeare put those words into Macbeth's mouth.

TOLLER

(Exhausted, but with a desire to say this.) You have a way with words, William. Not always your words. Someday you must find words of your own.

BURROUGHS

All words belong to every man.

TOLLER

How many men swallow them? Their words. And never speak them? How many use them as weapons? To wound the world?

BURROUGHS

(Over.) Words are effective in that.

TOLLER

(Through.) And how many use words to heal? (A half beat.) Words are nothing without deeds to walk with them. (A sliver of a beat.) You studied medicine. Something in you wants to be a healer, William.

BURROUGHS

My interest in medicine is confined to its mechanics. (Quotes, pointedly.) “Whilst this machine is to him...” Even Hamlet knew the body’s a contraption. Three hundred years ago. (A sliver of a beat.) Anyway, I don’t study medicine anymore.

(TOLLER sinks back in his chair.)

TOLLER

This jousting is pointless.

BURROUGHS

It passes the time.

(TOLLER sits up.)

TOLLER

It wastes it. (A half beat.) I despair of it. I cannot think of the name. That old philosophy. Light and the dark in an eternal war.

BURROUGHS

The Manichean heresy.

TOLLER

You have me exactly. Is life used up in a battle that solves nothing? And we, on the side of the light...

BURROUGHS

(Interrupts.) Seems presumptuous. How do we know we’re on the side of the light? Adolf Hitler must think himself a man of light.

TOLLER

(Desperately.) Put me always on the side of the light. (A half beat.) And light must defeat the darkness.

BURROUGHS

Maybe shadows are the best place to survive. Stay out of the battle. Squeeze into the cracks. Survive this world and make a new one. Our own world. Damn the rest.

TOLLER

Exhausting. (A beat.) We change the world or it conquers us.

BURROUGHS

I'll try to remember that.

TOLLER

(Intensely.) No. (Softer.) No. (Thinks. Hard. Then points to BURROUGHS' pocket.) Remember this. When you find your bullets. (A half beat.) Shoot only to kill. Kill so that the living being you shoot suffers for a single moment only.

(TOLLER looks at his watch. Then, he rises and goes to BURROUGHS.)

TOLLER (cont'd)

I ask you to leave me now.

(TOLLER waits. BURROUGHS, finally, stands. TOLLER puts his hand on BURROUGHS' back and guides him firmly to the door. There is something unexpectedly urgent and brusque in TOLLER's manner. The sense of a dismissal from class.)

BURROUGHS

I can stay 'til Elsie's back, you know. (A half beat.) I should.

(TOLLER opens the door.)

BURROUGHS (cont'd)

You'll put me in Dutch with her.

(TOLLER looks at his watch.)

TOLLER

I will listen to the newscast now. Then try to sleep.

BURROUGHS

What about that medicine?

TOLLER

Bring it to me when you can.

BURROUGHS

I shouldn't.

(TOLLER points to the suitcases.)

TOLLER

I have a long journey, William. "Alles kommt darauf an, daß man bereit sey."

(BURROUGHS stares blankly.)

TOLLER (cont'd)

Shakespeare, William. To be ready. It is everything. Goodbye.

(TOLLER opens the door. A test of wills at the threshold. BURROUGHS loses. They shake hands. A moment. TOLLER releases BURROUGHS and firmly shuts the door. He locks it. TOLLER looks at his watch again. He gets a cigarette, lights it, and then crosses to the radio. He switches the radio on.)

FEMALE ANNOUNCER

You've just heard the Reverend Harold Paul Sloan, speaking on the subject of "Free People in the Family of Nations." Next, the latest news bulletin, market update, and weather forecast, followed by a program of instrumental music.

(A brief blast of trumpets underscored by the clatter of news tickers.)

MALE ANNOUNCER

Press Radio News. Dateline: Berlin. In a ceremony this afternoon in the new Reich Chancellery, the foreign ministers of Italy and Germany agreed a pact pledging mutual support for future defensive and offensive military maneuvers.

(TOLLER sits. Agitated.)

MALE ANNOUNCER (cont'd)

German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop hailed the so-called "Pact of Steel." He said that the two nations were "ready to offer the hand of friendship to anyone, but determined to smash any enemy by their united power."

(TOLLER shuts off the radio. He looks at the three suitcases as he smokes. He gazes at the last bit of the cigarette before he stubs it out in the ashtray.)

(TOLLER rises and goes to one of the suitcases. He opens it. He sees the rope is gone. He shuts and closes the latches of the suitcase. He looks to the door of the bathroom and sees his bathrobe. He goes to the door, and removes the belt of the robe. He tests the strength of the belt. He looks at his watch.)

(TOLLER takes the chair from his desk, and with the belt of the bathrobe in his hand, he goes the door of his bathroom. He takes a last look at the room, and the window to the park beyond. He enters the bathroom.)

(After a few moments, we hear TOLLER hang himself. The bang of the chair as it is kicked away and hits the tile. Three kicks against the door, each decreasing in impact, and then, a dull final thump.)

(A silence, after, with some light rain outside against the window.)

(A few beats later, we hear ILSE , at the door. She tries the knob and finds it locked. We hear her rummage for the key, and unlock it.)

(ILSE enters. She places a wet umbrella by the door.)

(She looks around. No BURROUGHS, but no TOLLER. She sees the three suitcases. Slight relaxation.)

(ILSE goes to the desk with her wet coat still on. She sits, arranges a few things, puts a piece of paper into the typewriter and begins to type. She types a few lines. Something is not sitting right with her. She looks around, and sees, first, the vanished chair, and, then, the closed bathroom door.)

(ILSE slowly rises. Just the slightest unsteadiness. She puts her palm on the top of her cactus, letting that bit of pain bring her to a sense of steadiness and calm.)

(ILSE walks to the bathroom door.)

ILSE

Herr Toller?

(ILSE knocks, three times hard and quick. No answer. She attempts to open the door. It barely budes. She pushes harder. It gives way only a tiny bit against her weight.)

(Black.)

SCENE FOUR

(Lights up on BURROUGHS, as the aged and famous writer. He speaks without notes, conversationally, wearing a hat and glasses and raincoat.)

BURROUGHS

O for the child,
The enemies flying in,
Too injured to arrange
Our loves,
Rejoice!

No towns said: "Shadowless."
Existing is their shadows
Lightly, unwittingly,
Chased by long ago,
Neutral, no voice.

Friends at last understand
The bright horrid
Sickness we wish for.
They had already
Been outside,
Been away from death.
Refuge, which took
Something big to get.

Sad believing swallows
The egotistical young.
Forgive how a man dies.
Shining example --
Of one, the other,
Who are the brave --
To the earth of the living.

Dear Ernst,
Judge Europe, America,

(MORE)

BURROUGHS (CONT'D)

By powers we pretend,
Unwittingly, to direct.

Ernst, hide
Like the friendly bullet
Among the lived.
Occupy the longings.
Or tell our hand.

No need to see
Your shadow.
Summer grieving
What they'd done.

Tomorrow,
In that other Munich,
Something that was won
Hangs over the suffering.

People do not write.
They occupy.
We know well where we are:

In your head.
In the cell.
The enemy,
Our friends.

END OF PLAY