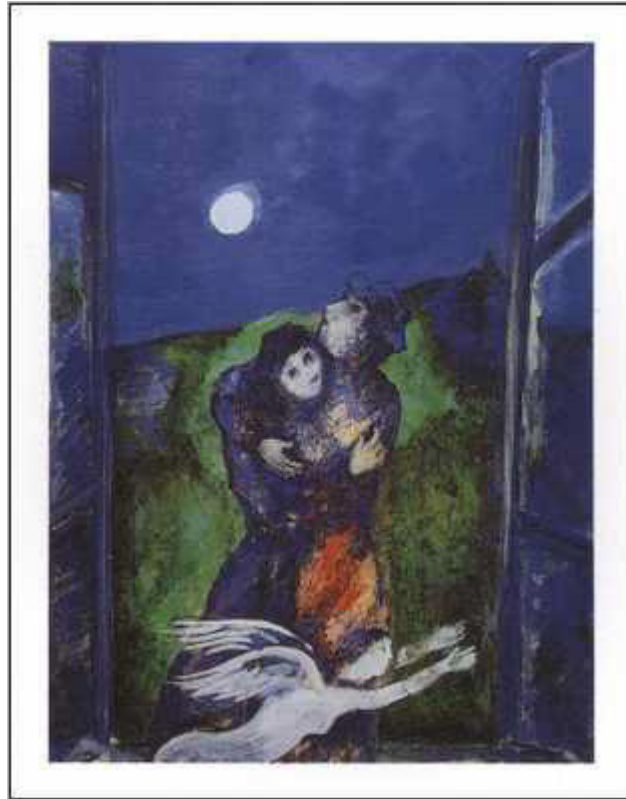


# WILHELMSTRASSE

A PLAY IN TWELVE SCENES



Marc Chagall, "Lovers In Moonlight"

By

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## CHARACTERS

**SAMUEL** 28 & 31, of average height and looks. He wears glasses which with his thinning hair set off his general mordant, condescending nature. He is only as tall as Rica, and much less healthy looking. He corrects Rica's English in short, quick bursts as if not really spoken to anyone.

**RICA** 25 & 28, as beautiful a Teutonic specimen as exists. Her hair is blond, her eyes are blue, she is tall and athletic, full-bodied, but seemingly not a pound overweight. She talks with a noticeable German accent; her command of English varies from scene to scene depending on the time of her stay in New York and the proximity to it. Often she hesitates to translate in her head what has just been said and what she is about to say, frequently nodding with an awkward hesitant delay. When she becomes upset, her command abandons her.

## PRODUCTION NOTES

Essential are the differences in tenor and feel of the scenes in Berlin as opposed to those scenes in New York. In Berlin, SAMUEL is removed, almost to the point of rudeness, or at least tries to be that way, often not succeeding as hoped. The New York scenes have an easy insouciance that would be abjectly inappropriate in the Berlin scenes.

Part of this play's gestalt is the *voyage physique* the characters take. The relative chronology of scenes, the actor's movement and the sights they encounter are fundamental to its fullness. The play should be produced as a multi-medium elucidation. I suggest the use of several slide projectors being employed, simultaneously projecting photographs of the places and the sights flashed against the black, back wall of the theater as the play progresses. Not as an object for interaction for the actors, but merely as the vision of the actors; the seeing of what they see.

Music will be indispensable in establishing the differences in time and place between the scenes. Before each scene where there is a change in time or place, music should be the first clue to the change. Preceding the Berlin scenes, I recommend classic German dirges, Kurt Weill music etc. The New York scenes can be designated by anything from punk rock, the Ramones, to Bob Dylan; that is New York based music (e.g. Subterranean Home Sick Blues, Road to Ruin)

**TIME AND PLACE**

**ACT ONE:**

- Scene 1: Small outdoor café, Greenwich Village, New York City, May 1996
- Scene 2: Bahnhof Zoo Train Station, Berlin, November 1998
- Scene 3: In the café at the Hotel Adlon, Berlin, November 1998
- Scene 4: Washington Square Park, New York City, April 1996  
*(one month prior to Scene 1)*
- Scene 5: On the Ku'daam in Berlin, November 1998
- Scene 6: Rica's apartment, Berlin, November 1998

**ACT TWO:**

- Scene 7: New York and Berlin: Various times between 1996 - 1998
- Scene 8: Unter de Linden and Bebelplatz, Berlin, November 1998
- Scene 9: Small café, Greenwich Village, New York City, October 1995  
*(three months prior to Scene 4)*
- Scene 10: Wilhelmstrasse, Berlin, November 1998
- Scene 11: Rica's apartment, Berlin, November 1998
- Scene 12: Outdoor café, Greenwich Village, New York City, August 1995  
*(three months prior to Scene 9)*

**SCENE 1**

*May 1997. A café in the West Village, NYC. SAMUEL sits at a table reading. RICA rushes in. She carries a large purse and immediately searches through it. As they speak, SAMUEL folds the paper and watches her search.*

RICA

Hi. Sorry.

SAMUEL

*Hey there. I was beginning to worry, it's not like you to be late. Any trouble?*

RICA

No, I just got caught up. There's a lot of shit to do.

*(RICA searches a long moment, then stops, exhaling)*

SAMUEL

Relax, you've got time. Are you gonna want something to eat?

*(she nods)*

Then I think we better order, service usually blows here. Six actors vying to be the most useless wait staff in all of New York.

*(SAMUEL tries and fails to catch the attention of an offstage waitress. They share sad smiles. Pause)*

Your year is up, you're going home....We knew it would....*but still.*

RICA

Yes!

*(SAMUEL reaches out, takes hold of her hand. They hold a long moment. Then, RICA rummages again)*

SAMUEL

Got everything?

RICA

Except for my sunglasses. I can't find them.

SAMUEL

The ones we bought, the black ones?

*(she nods)*

That sucks, they looked great on you.

RICA

Yes they did.

SAMUEL

*Yes?*—Not even a pretense of modesty?

RICA

With you?

SAMUEL

Good point.

RICA

Everything's ready. Car comes at three, I get to the airport by four. I'm good that way.

SAMUEL

Of course you are. Orderly. Precise.

SAMUEL and RICA

*(together)*

German.

RICA

Ja, very German.

*(they smile at each other. RICA pulls things out of her bag. SAMUEL watches with fondness, then begins seriously)*

SAMUEL

And how come we never slept together?

RICA

*Samuel?*

SAMUEL

*Rica?....Well?*

RICA

We have talked about this before.

SAMUEL

Have we?

RICA

Every *single* time we got together.

SAMUEL

Hmph, what are the odds of that?—You gotta admire my persistence.

RICA

Do I?

SAMUEL

*Yes.*—And you can't blame me for trying.

*(RICA smiles seductive and nods. SAMUEL waves for service in vain. She stops searching, grows forlorn)*

I'm very *sistent*. Consistent, persistent. Insistent. Don't knock it, we make the best lovers. Get you there every time.

RICA

I doubt.

SAMUEL

Nope, it was in Cosmo. Women hide all their truths there. They lead with some terrifying headline to keep us away. “8 Ways to Tell Him He’s Awful in Bed. Two that’ll *really* hurt.”—

RICA

*Samuel*....I will miss you.

SAMUEL

*(pause)*

I know. I’m just trying to....Me too. You know, you do?

*(she nods, pause)*

Did you pack the Chagall print carefully?

RICA

I packed it very carefully. I put it in a tube and taped each end of the tube three times. Then I put the whole thing in, uh, the white....

SAMUEL

Gauze.

RICA

*(nods)*

Then I wrapped it in towels and reinforced it with string.

SAMUEL

The way to a man’s heart—anal retention. Promise me you’ll carry it on. I don’t want it checked underneath with the gassy schnauzer.

RICA

You shouldn’t have bought it for me.

SAMUEL

I wanted you to have something to remember me by.

RICA

Are you concerned I could forget about you?

SAMUEL

I'm concerned you could forget *how much*—about me.

*(they stare, then slowly, she leans and presses her lips to his. They hold a long tender moment and stay up close)*

RICA

Put away your fears Samuel.

SAMUEL

I'm Jewish. I do that, what will I have left?

RICA

Just me—and no concerns about me.

*(searching again)*

Do you write letters well?

SAMUEL

I read them pretty well....Especially if they're from someone I've had *sex* with.

RICA

You're impossible.—Fuck it! I can't find these glasses.

SAMUEL

I love when foreigners curse in English. Ask for directions in Europe and they just stare at you with these vacant faces. But stub a toe on a kitchen table and all of a sudden, David Mamet. Fuck! Shit! Motherfucker!

RICA

We don't have a word as good as fuck. It sums up all your anger.

SAMUEL

Yes it does. As in *fucking* waitress.



*(he tries to get the waitress's attention. he turns to RICA.  
They smile fondly at each other)*

RICA

Thank you Samuel.

SAMUEL

For what, lacking any presence whatsoever?

RICA

I didn't know what to expect when I came. I was nervous. Alone.

SAMUEL

You wouldn't've been for long.

RICA

It has been extraordinary getting to know you in my own way.

SAMUEL

Please don't....We don't want to start blubbering all over again, do we?

*(she nods stoically, then puts things back in her bag)*

Besides, this isn't an end my dear Rica. You're not getting away that easily. Running off back to the *Führerland*. You're gonna have to run a lot *führer* than that to be rid of me.

RICA

Very cute.

SAMUEL

*Danke*.—Nope, this's just a temporary respite in a life-long love affair.—Or pathological stalking.

*(she smiles. he waves offstage, responds to the failure)*

Besides it will take a while to get my Mother off the ledge. Not just a Shiksa, oh no, I'm going *all* the way. A genu-wine *Deutsches fräulein*.

RICA

*(warmly)*

My little Jewish boy.

SAMUEL

My little Nazi girl....And since you're leaving me pining and woebegone, you can buy.

RICA

I always do.

SAMUEL

I'll pretend I didn't hear that.

RICA

*Bitte.* I got notice today. There's a month before school starts. The firm wants me to be acclimated so I can work the year.

SAMUEL

Acclimated. Lucky you, gainful employment. Bona fide ambulance chaser.

RICA

Stop.

SAMUEL

*What?* The year's been worth it. A job when you graduate, huge firm in Frankfurt. Getting to know *me*, the best part of course.

RICA

What is happening with that foundation?

SAMUEL

They're still thinking. I may not be *Yewish* enough for them. Imagine that?

RICA

I can imagine.

SAMUEL

Oh no, you'd be surprised, I got it in me. Drop a couple Torah references, garble some Yiddish *vords*, and talk about the pastrami at Katz's.

*(with a heavy NY Jewish accent)*

*"Oh, it's just so juicy and tasty. Oooyeeee!"*

*(laughing, she hits him playfully)*

RICA

That's terrible, what you say.

SAMUEL

Yes it is. But I use it when it works for me, when it's to my benefit.

RICA

You should be ashamed.

SAMUEL

I should be many things. Ashamed, employed.—*Ordering!* Christ!

*(SAMUEL stands, waves excessively offstage. He gives a big, open-arm shrug and turns to RICA who laughs at him)*

What?!

*(RICA laughs further. He waves her off, then smiles at her)*

Sure, go ahead, laugh.... You wait and see.—You're gonna miss *die Scheisse* out of me.

**SCENE 2**

*November 1998, three years after Scene 1. RICA meanders a Bahnhof Zoo train platform. A speaker announces a train from Linz, Austria. SAMUEL enters wan, holding a valise. She doesn't see him as he views her uneasily. She turns and runs excitedly to him, stopping short before touching.*

RICA

There you are!

SAMUEL

Yes, here I am.

*(she envelops him in a big hug. It is long, slow, happy)*

RICA

I'm so happy to see you! I can't believe you are here!

SAMUEL

I am. I'm here.

RICA

Yes, but I can't believe it! After almost three years, I can't!

SAMUEL

I promise I am....Here, let me see you.

*(they disengage and look at each other)*

RICA

You look good! You look the same!

SAMUEL

I look the same, I suppose that's good. Just balder. Three years older, six years balder.

RICA

You stop, you look good. It's wonderful, *mein gott*, so wonderful your being here. It's—  
oh!

*(she hugs him again harder)*

SAMUEL

I forgot what a great hugger you are. You hold on like it's the last time you'll ever hug  
again.—Come, let me look at you.

*(they let go again)*

RICA

What?—It's me too, ja? You still remember?

SAMUEL

I remember....You look beautiful Rica. You're still—you're absolutely breathtaking.

RICA

No I don't. Not now, there's no sun. You don't see me, you see what you want.

SAMUEL

I see you—my beautiful little Nazi girl.

RICA

*Ja, ha ha, ja!* My little Jewish boy.

SAMUEL

Your hair, your eyes. *Your body*.—Still the Aryan poster child.

RICA

You embarrass me.

*(he backs away to look at her)*

SAMUEL

It's true, look at you! Strong and firm. Perfectly built, perfectly proportioned.

RICA

You will stop.—

SAMUEL

The *embodiment* of that eugenic vision. An ideal.—

RICA

Samuel?—

SAMUEL

Unwavering, uncompromising—

RICA

Why are you saying this?!

*(he turns away from her and moves about, pause)*

SAMUEL

Did you know Hitler forbid his soldiers to marry *just* German women. Did you know that? I didn't. But he did. I've been reading up for this Foundation trip. They needed to be Aryan, have blonde hair, be blue eyed, truly Saxon in nature. Not tainted by any *foreign* influence. Though he wasn't, which is the world's greatest irony.

RICA

Samuel what is the matter? Why are you saying these things?

SAMUEL

*(pause, calmer)*

Nothing's the matter. Everything's right, everything's fine.

*(SAMUEL moves pensively about the platform)*

It's a lovely day, not a cloud in the sky. Here I am in Germany, in Berlin. All this way, just a weary New Yorker. To visit and see and enjoy....Right? Isn't that....

*(SAMUEL tries for more, but only shakes his head. pause)*

RICA

You look tired.

SAMUEL

I am, I'm very tired....I'm sorry, forgive me Rica. It's been a long day.

RICA

Of course. We'll go to a café. You can get coffee and rest.

SAMUEL

Yes, let's. Coffee sounds great. I've been traveling since seven this morning.

*(he moves to pick up his valise)*

RICA

Seven, no. That's too long for this train to come from Linz.

SAMUEL

I didn't come directly from Linz.

RICA

Why?....Samuel why? Did something go wrong?—

SAMUEL

Rica it's nothing.

RICA

Samuel if something did, please tell me if something—

SAMUEL

The meetings were canceled today.—The second day's meetings were canceled.—And I don't....Okay? All right?

*(she studies him. pause)*

RICA

Why didn't you come early?

SAMUEL

I took a train to Munich.

RICA

München, why? I would have met you early.

SAMUEL

I know, I knew you would have....There were some things I needed see there.

*(they look at each other apprehensively)*

RICA

*München* is very beautiful. I was there once as a young girl. Our sixth form took a trip.

SAMUEL

*(almost a condemnation)*

You should.

RICA

*(pause)*

Did you see the glockenspiel? And the Frauenkirche in *Marienplatz*, the main square.

SAMUEL

I saw as much as one can see in five hours.

RICA

*(pause)*

With having only two days here I decided which sights to see. Many I have not seen myself. Two intrepid travelers explore the big city.

SAMUEL

I understand.



RICA

*(pause)*

There is *Schloss Charlottenberg*, the Royal Palace. And *die Pergammon* museum.

SAMUEL

I don't want to go to museums.

RICA

Yes you do, you always do. I should know, you dragging me each week to exhibits.

SAMUEL

Rica listen—

RICA

*Die Pergammon* is very famous. It has Greek architecture almost intact since early times.

SAMUEL

Rica...I want to see the Nazi sights. The Reich's Chancellery, SS headquarters, the Bunker, everything...I want to see where they were.

RICA

*(pause)*

*Was?*—What are you talking?

SAMUEL

*(pause)*

I want to see those places. What they look like now.

RICA

*(pause)*

I—I don't...I'm not sure where they are.

SAMUEL

We'll buy a guidebook. There's probably a bookstore in the terminus.

RICA

It's a German book store.

SAMUEL

They'll have books for tourists.

RICA

They will *be* in German.

SAMUEL

It's the main Berlin train station, they'll *have* books in English.

RICA

Samuel....

SAMUEL

Just—let's go see them. Okay? Please? Will you do that, will you take me there?

*(RICA makes no noticeable response. He takes her hand,  
rubs it between his)*

It's great to see you Rica, I've missed you very much....I've missed the time we shared.

*(she says nothing)*

**SCENE 3**

*Shortly following previous scene. SAMUEL and RICA sit in the café of the Hotel Adlon. He searches a guidebook as he surveys the room. Her stare bears down upon him.*

RICA

This place is very famous, it's full of history. For many decades.

SAMUEL

*(he turns to the index, then the pages. She watches closely)*

“Hotel Adlon, one of Europe’s grandest hotels, has been rebuilt! The original, host to luminaries T.E. Lawrence and Charlie Chaplin was the acme of style and luxury. It was destroyed in the war’s final days, but this new version aspires to the old opulence. Even if you can’t afford a drink, look in and imagine Europe’s cultural capital.”....We can afford a drink here.

RICA

Yes we can....Samuel—

SAMUEL

So come, tell me, how’s it living in Berlin? To become the *seat* of government again.

RICA

*(pause)*

I don’t feel settled yet. It’s been too short, five months. The city is growing fast with government returning and all the construction in the East. It’s very busy changing.

SAMUEL

For the better I hope.

RICA

Ja, I think, definitely. Just very much sometimes with everything.

SAMUEL

You'll get used to it. People adapt, you adapt faster than most. And socially?

RICA

What do you mean?

SAMUEL

C'mon Rica, I always handled your *gentleman callers* in New York.

RICA

By making fun of them.

SAMUEL

They weren't me, they deserved my ridicule.

RICA

*(she smiles and nods)*

There is no one in particular.

SAMUEL

You're too picky.

RICA

You tell me. I'm not so sure. And you?

SAMUEL

*Me?*—The usual. And the same excuses for why it fails. Why change when it's served me so well.

RICA

Happily alone.

SAMUEL

Maybe that's us, alone together. A *tragic* sort of love.

RICA

It doesn't seem like two and a half years, it seems longer. When I was young, change doesn't seem possible. Things were forever and couldn't be otherwise....Childish, ja? Immature perhaps is better.

SAMUEL

Perhaps just inexperienced.

RICA

Things aren't forever though you wish they were....I've looked forward to your coming. Since I knew, since your letter.—It's funny I should be so excited and pleased at that.

SAMUEL

I was afraid you would be more *apprehensive* to see me.

RICA

I am not apprehensive about you Samuel. I can't imagine being so....Ask me Samuel.

SAMUEL

And *work*?—How's work going?

RICA

It goes slowly.

SAMUEL

I would expect. I never really thought about it, but you make the ideal candidate for the job. Fluent in English, you've lived in the States, *New York*. You have some insight.

RICA

Some, not all.

SAMUEL

No, not all. That degree of insanity takes years to develop....Volkswagen's lawyer for Holocaust reparations. An impressive post for someone so young.

RICA

I am not lead counsel. I am one of many on a team.

SAMUEL

Representing, protecting, *defending*.—Quite the contact sport.—*Meine* elusive *Liebe* is—  
what's the right word, the opposition, the counter party? I'm not good at legalese.

RICA

Those do fine.

SAMUEL

Mmn.—But I'm sure you're as diligent as ever....Goes slowly does it?

RICA

It's *very* frustrating!

SAMUEL

*(laughing gently)*

Rica everything that doesn't work *exactly* as you wish it to is very frustrating to you.

RICA

That's not true!

SAMUEL

Of course it is. The jukebox at Boo's, the Hell's Angel with the directions to Killington.

RICA

He did it on purpose! We should have confronted him.

SAMUEL

Yeah right. All he'd've done was lie again to you then beat the *crap* out of me.

RICA

But these organizations don't see, we never get anywhere! We go round with the same  
arguments. We say this, they say that. We offer this, they counter with something—

RICA

*ridiculous*. It's impossible, it would cripple us! It would cripple the country! What is enough, ten billion, twenty? *A hundred?* You tell me?

SAMUEL

I can't.—They can't either. No number exists that could be enough.

RICA

There isn't.

SAMUEL

*(pause)*

And it's all so tawdry and vulgar, to them too.—And not achieving even some small shred of equivalence only makes them feel weak and helpless all over again.

RICA

*(pause)*

It will never be enough. Will it do good to bankrupt us?—No matter what we say, it's an offense. But you can't compensate for that. Not because we don't want, because it is wrong! They want this, but it is wrong! But you cannot reach agreement with *them!* They don't even *try!*

SAMUEL

*(pause)*

You sound like a character from a sitcom I watched growing up. A merry band of Allied prisoners make their German captors look like idiots. And there was a fat sergeant whose his fatuous catch phrase "I see nut-tiiiing!"

RICA

What does fatuous mean?

SAMUEL

Foolish. Stupid.

RICA

Is it very amusing to make fun of war?

SAMUEL

I guess a little more so if you won.

RICA

*(pause)*

Those years were not good for Germany.

SAMUEL

Rica it was just a silly television—

RICA

I don't care....This's a *great* country, you must understand this. The country of Goethe and Nietzsche and Schopenhauer. This is the country of Beethoven, Brahms and Bach. And Einstein!

SAMUEL

And Hitler.

RICA

*(pause)*

Our past has many centuries to it, not just this last. We've brought so much to the world, enlightenment, understanding, beauty.—And it has taken us *very* long to get back to where we are.

SAMUEL

I'm well aware of that.

*(they stare hard at each other)*

RICA

I remember my grandfather as an old man. He had been in the army when young, he was called up as everyone was.—As a little girl I looked at his war pictures. He had them in a drawer he never opened....He was handsome, *mein Grossvater*. A young handsome cadet.—We would visit him, all my family. He was always pulling me to him, catching me, calling me his *Schmetterling*, his butterfly.



SAMUEL

That's adorable.

RICA

Yes it is.—And I would say as looking at his war pictures “*Wer ist das Grossvater?* Who is this?” ...I couldn't understand that that large cadet was the same old man, smelling of cigars and spearmint schnapps trying to hold me. I was only eight when he died.

SAMUEL

I'm sorry.

RICA

*(pause)*

He was not the grandfather I knew. He was not the same man as that in the picture, even a little girl could tell. He was lost in the war's aftermath. A defeated man in the defeated nation. Some never recovered, occupation, division. It was demoralizing....Then with the rise of the West, prosperity returned. And with *our national amnesia*....it was not for *mein Grossvater*. He never forgot what he'd done. And with this memory—his only joy was chasing and catching his *Schmetterling* Rica who always ran away.

SAMUEL

Rica....

RICA

I thought of *mein Grossvater* often when I came back after New York....I hoped he would still be proud of his little Butterfly who flew all that far away to escape.

**SCENE 4**

*April 1996, three months prior to Scene 1. SAMUEL sits on a bench in Washington Square Park with a drink and pretzel. RICA enters carrying a book bag.*

RICA

Hey! Sorry I'm late.

SAMUEL

Not a problem. Anything up?

RICA

*Nein.*

*(they kiss on both cheeks and then she sits besides him)*

I was at the law library researching. There was a line at the desk to check out my briefs.

SAMUEL

I bet there was. Hell I'd camp out on that line myself.

*(she looks at him confused. He waves it off)*

What're we doing?

RICA

I need sunglasses.

SAMUEL

Cheap or pricey?

RICA

Cheap.

SAMUEL

Cool. We'll go to St. Marks. It'll be a real New York adventure for you. A little bit Turkish bazaar, a little bit just plain bizarre.

RICA

Sounds good.

SAMUEL

Two intrepid travelers exploring the big city together. So much city, so little time.

RICA

Sometimes too much city.

SAMUEL

Sometimes too much me.

*(they look at each other, smiling)*

RICA

You wish.

SAMUEL

Yes I do.

RICA

*(pause)*

I didn't get your joke before. The briefs.

SAMUEL

Oh. Uhhh well—underwear, they're sometimes called briefs.

RICA

They are? Why?

SAMUEL

*Why?*—I haven't a clue actually. Probably to distinguish them from the long underwear. Brief as in short. And when you fill 'em as I do, they ought to call them barelys.

RICA

What do you mean?

SAMUEL

Nothing, forget it. It's a silly joke. We off?

*(he stands, rising above her)*

RICA

Samuel what?

SAMUEL

Not on your life.

RICA

No *please* Samuel, you can't do that!

SAMUEL

Oh yes I can, I just have. Sunglasses.

RICA

Samuel....

*(he reaches out to help her up. she just stares beseechingly as he fights looking at her)*

SAMUEL

Rica don't do that, that's not fair.

*(she continues to stare at him)*

That's not going to work....All right, it's probably gonna work, but I won't be happy.

*(she continues to stare)*

Why do I do this? Briefs, *filling* them.

*(she shakes her head, not understanding)*

Oh god, a small....I swear if you're doing this on purpose—

RICA

*No, what?!*

SAMUEL

A small penis! A small penis! *Yes!*

RICA

*Ahhh—*

SAMUEL

A small schvantz, a small schmeckel, putz, something! *Ahhh—verstanden?!*

RICA

*Ich habe dich verstanden.*

SAMUEL

Ahhh yes, splendid. I knew one had to be German or Yiddish or whatever. And they should be, it's a Jewish trait actually.

RICA

That is Jewish?

SAMUEL

Like being short and hairy. That's my story. When in doubt, blame the Tribe.

RICA

*Yes?* Why is that?

SAMUEL

Payback for Steve Guttenberg's success. Jewish men *are* big penises, but have small ones. That's why we *need* big wallets. Pretty girls wouldn't put up with us otherwise. It's Freudian. Insecurity, displacement, *envy*. Freud, classic Jew.

RICA

And Austrian!

SAMUEL

*I know!* I can only imagine how small his penis was.

*(she swats at him playfully and he cowers from it)*

RICA

Don't say that. That's not true.

SAMUEL

You know how big Freud's penis was?

*(she hits him again)*

RICA

I mean *Austrians*, Germans.

SAMUEL

Great. There's another reason to hate you guys.

RICA

You're jealous.

SAMUEL

Absolutely! And penis envy is the most enviable of all envies. That's an old Jewish koan, a paradox. Not Cohen, the big-nosed *Juden* in Economics.

RICA

*(very serious)*

Samuel stop it!—You know I don't like that you putting down like that.

SAMUEL

And leave all the fun to you Nazis.

RICA

Samuel!

SAMUEL

Ssshhh, okay. I'm only joking, I'm sorry—

RICA

You are not, you always do it and it bothers me.—

SAMUEL

Oh *please*, I'm not that bad.—

RICA

You are! You know you are! And I've told you before—

SAMUEL

All right, enough.—

RICA

And I've asked you and you don't lis—

SAMUEL

All right enough, *enough!*

*(a long cross moment in silence)*

RICA

It's not a laughing matter.

SAMUEL

Well you know what, I don't need a lecture from you on sensitivity.

RICA

Then you need one from somebody!

*(an angry pause returns)*

Samuel when you make fun of Jews I cannot avoid thinking of the past. It reminds me whether I want it or not....I can tell the response on faces when they hear my accent. Austrians, even some Swiss and Dutch sound the same, but they assume German.—Once this old woman who heard me speak to a policeman asked me where I was from. I looked at her carefully. She was short and dark-haired, dressed well.—I told her Holland just to see....“Oh,” she said, “that’s nice, your being here.” Then she smiled....It seemed genuine.

SAMUEL

*(pause)*

This isn't a thing between us Rica. This isn't something we need to *work* through and overcome. I'm not judging you. I'm not pronouncing sentence.

RICA

That is very dear to me Samuel.

SAMUEL

You handle your issues your way. I know it, I accept it.—Leave me to mine.

RICA

*(pause)*

It cannot be a treated lightly.

SAMUEL

You know what, this's crap. I haven't done wrong here. You want sunglasses or not?

RICA

In a minute.

SAMUEL

No, *now*.

RICA

Samuel in a minute.

*(pause; SAMUEL roves about the scene)*

What can you expect with the circumscription you people do?

SAMUEL

*Circumscription?*

RICA

Ja, *was*?—Is that not the right word?



SAMUEL

No, it's not. But it *is* very comical. The word's circumcision.

RICA

*(playful)*

*Ahhh.* Okay, ja.—Don't make fun of me!

SAMUEL

I know, it's not nice.—But you *have* named the new gay men's magazine. The *Circumscription*. Sorry, I can't pass up that straight line. We *are* known for our comedy.

RICA

So you keep telling. I don't see why.

SAMUEL

Ah ha ha, *was gut*.

RICA

Yes it is. I'm very funny.

SAMUEL

Oh right, your senses of humor—*legendary*. What do you do for an encore after raiding Poland, bird calls? Twirling plates on sticks?

RICA

No, we tap dance down Main Streets.

SAMUEL

Yes I can see it now! A little Goose Step Two Step across the Great Steppes.

*(she smiles warmly)*

You like?

*(she nods)*

Thank you very much pretty lady.

*(calling out aloud to no one in particular)*

She finds my humor charming! You all bear witness to that!

*(he turns to RICA who beams in on him)*

SAMUEL – con't

The way to a woman's bed is through her funny bone.—But somehow I keep getting lost.

*(RICA rushes to him, engulfs him in a warm deep hug. He is surprised at first, but eventually pulls in as she does.*

*They hold on tightly then eventually release)*

Let's get you some cheap sunglasses.

**SCENE 5**

*Berlin, shortly after Scene 3. SAMUEL and RICA stand on Kurfuerstandaam. He carries the guidebook.*

RICA

Samuel this is the Ku'daam. It is short for the Kurfuerstandaam.

SAMUEL

Kunfirst....

RICA

Kurfuerstandaam.

SAMUEL

Kurfuerstandaam. Kurfuerstandaam?

*(she nods. He turns to view the street. Next is said in phonetical English, not French)*

It's very "tres chic."

RICA

This is the most prestigious shopping street in of Germany. The stores are, how would you say....

SAMUEL

Ridiculously overpriced.

RICA

*(she smiles)*

There is a Gucci and Burberrys. Tiffany's and Harrods. There's even a Gap and Banana Republic on the poor end.

SAMUEL

Add a Starbucks, you'll have the Unholy Trinity.—I worry about this sin American has perpetrated, franchising and fifteen styles of jeans. Gap, McDonald's and pizza by the slice.

RICA

And movie stars with fake breasts.

SAMUEL

Yes, there are some good aspects....*This's* why everybody should hate us.

*(they share a smile)*

RICA

There is the Tiffany's.

SAMUEL

*(pause)*

Someday if I buy my wares on a street like this, Mother'll be so very proud.

RICA

And surprised.

SAMUEL

Yes she would be—*smart* ass....I always have this fantasy when I travel that the dollar'll be so strong that I'll afford all these outlandish things like a *kilo* of Beluga or thousand dollar Armani suits. Something unrepentantly expensive, where it's excessive and its gauche but I'm like, "So what, I've got money to burn."

RICA

Like at the art auction we went to when we put in fake bids.

SAMUEL

*Yeah.*

*(he turns to her, growing solemn, staring a long moment)*

But it never works out that way huh?.

*(she nods. he turns away, his eyes roves the street)*

I like the architecture, the juxtaposition in the designs. Elements of antiquity pinioned in between more contemporary forms. Some Bauhaus, others, much older....It gives it character, *truth*. Almost schizophrenic as if they couldn't make up their minds.

RICA

Some survived the war, enough to rebuild....Most were rubble or made that way shortly after.—The bombing of German cities had been quite extensive. Dresden, Hamburg, Berlin in particular.

*(long pause)*

Look in your book Samuel—look under *Kristallnacht*.

*(SAMUEL searches the book with a look to RICA)*

SAMUEL

“*Kristallnacht*, Crystal Night, the sound of broken glass. November 9<sup>th</sup> 1938, thirty-six Jews were murdered and thousands others hurt in an escalation of Nazi violent anti-Semitism. Attacks by SA men in civilian clothes gave the impression of spontaneous outbursts. In Berlin, passers-by watched as twenty-three synagogues were destroyed.

RICA

The next day they—ugh, my English has gotten so bad. *Erlassen*, put in, made into law?

SAMUEL

Enacted.

RICA

They enacted laws against Jewish businesses, all were *Aryanized* with no compensation....From then on Jewish ownership of stores was—

SAMUEL

*Verboten*.

RICA

*(pause)*

It reminds me of New York more than any other Berlin street. People bustling, tourists, all the different languages you hear. It has the confidence one feels in New York.

SAMUEL

We call that *sophistication*.

RICA

It's that too yes, but it's more. It's the freedom. It speaks to Germans today, our aspirations of esteem....I like it. I often come to walk here.

SAMUEL

It seems very special.

*(she looks at the buildings now and he watches her)*

RICA

The Ku'daam has always been special. A *jewel* of Europe....There were several Jewish businesses here and some of the worst crime.—Beatings, burnings, other things you don't put in tour books....On this lovely street, one of the most famous in all the world.

**SCENE 6**

*Berlin, later that night. SAMUEL and RICA enter her apartment, a small room with a futon, felt chair, wood table and chest. A print of Chagall's "Lovers in Moonlight" hangs on the wall. He peruses the space and though the apartment is immaculate, she arranges miscellany.*

SAMUEL

Rica it's great.

RICA

It's small.

SAMUEL

It's not, it's plenty big.

RICA

It's very small.

SAMUEL

But it's quaint. Reminds me of your place in New York, your personality all over it.

RICA

I haven't had time to put it together. I only moved here recently and have kept busy.

*(he turns to see the Chagall print hanging prominently)*

SAMUEL

"*Lovers in Moonlight.*"...It made it.

*(he turns to RICA for a moment then back to the picture)*

Chagall painted it after he emigrated to France from Russia. Later he escaped Paris too when the Panzers rolled in. He was blessed with good timing besides an expressive color palette.

*(staring at the picture)*

SAMUEL – con't

Lovers stare at the nighttime sky. An angel hovers below.—A blessed union? A *taunt* at humanity?....Trying to capturing forever in one moment....It's magnificent.

RICA

It's the first thing I arranged when I moved here. "Where to put it? Where would Samuel want it hanging?"

SAMUEL

That's a lot of pressure.

RICA

Wherever I am living, it's there with me, a symbol of my home.

SAMUEL

Your apartment is lovely Rica.

*(she smiles appreciatively)*

But Rica dear, where do you sleep?

RICA

In there.

SAMUEL

Must be comfortable.

RICA

More than you would suppose.

*(she begins to make a bed. With the conversation, she completes the bed preparations with a sheet, quilt and bed pillows taken out of the chest)*

SAMUEL

Can I help?

*(a look tells the absurdity of the question. SAMUEL sits)*



RICA

What do you think of the soon-to-be-again German capital?

SAMUEL

*(pause, grave)*

It's very—historic.

RICA

Yes, it is. I like that now. I didn't at first. After the year in the States, I felt very out of place. I was not as German as I left.

SAMUEL

New York has that effect on people.

RICA

It wasn't New York. My absence from Germany had changed my perception. We were not what I thought we were. We live simple lives, same as anywhere. I always assumed that not to be. But then I could see us clearly, not as we are brought up to believe.

SAMUEL

How is that?

RICA

All through Europe, Austrians and the French, *Czechs*, they don't like us. They don't *know* us, but they don't like us. We can tell when we travel through their countries.

SAMUEL

You have to expect that.

RICA

When we travel through your country.

*(SAMUEL registers this as RICA continues making the bed)*

SAMUEL

My country isn't always the paragon of forbearance we hold ourselves up to be.

RICA

That's an odd expression, my country. We don't refer to Germany as that. We don't feel the satisfaction Americans do. It implies a sense of pride that has never felt right to say.

SAMUEL

I can understand that.

RICA

As can I. What has occurred, *has* occurred. We want to move on but everybody reminds us. They expect my shame. They want it.

SAMUEL

I never did.

RICA

*(pause)*

No Samuel. You never did.

*(she finishes, sits down formally, then looks firmly at him)*

It is strange being together, our roles reversed. I now the tour guide and you the tourist.

SAMUEL

I always enjoyed that role. It helped level the playing field between us.

*(she stares hard at him)*

RICA

What happened in Linz?

SAMUEL

Please Rica, I'm tired. And all I want to do is—

RICA

Something has occurred and I will know it.

*(a long pause. SAMUEL stands, moves about, then eventually starts disquietingly calm)*

SAMUEL

Time returned. Time went back.

RICA

What was? How?

SAMUEL

I don't know, but it was me. It had to be me.

RICA

Tell me.

SAMUEL

*(pause)*

I was late for the meeting. I got lost coming out of the hotel and it took a while. And I was very late. You know I'm never late.

RICA

I do.

SAMUEL

*(pause)*

And the meeting had long begun. Representatives from the Louvre and Alte Pinakothek, some other institutes specializing in art repatriation. But I'm the youngest so it's already like—and when I was introduced, a *pall* fell over the room.

RICA

A what?

SAMUEL

A pall. A gloom.—And the silence just hung there....My name—it never dawned on me. We don't think about those things anymore, not as we used to. People my age—we feel

SAMUEL

the same, connected like everyone else. *At least* in New York.—My mother, it's always on her mind. Always concerned with acting *too* showy, *too* Jewish. She never hears her name aloud without thinking everybody else's thinking *Jew*.—Then *immediately*, awareness.

RICA

Of what?

SAMUEL

Of still needing to be grateful for being here, for surviving, helping others survive.

RICA

Ja.

SAMUEL

If we'd known, I wouldn't've come! The Foundation would've sent someone else. Hell, we have *goyim* on staff for good reasons, maybe they'd've been more receptive to one of their own.—As soon as I said my name, you could see the change. Disappearing smiles, postures straightening....I've seen anti-Semitism before, little bullshit things, an asshole cop, some fraternity douche bags. But this was real, they were German. Large confident Teutons, it's a whole other league....I knew we weren't getting what we needed.

RICA

What was that?

SAMUEL

Art listings, transfer details, bills of sale. Who they stole it from, where they sent it, whereabouts of certain works even, I don't know. You begin to hope.

RICA

Of course.

SAMUEL

And they have them, you know they do. It would be very *un-German* not to keep records. Not to be *meticulous* as to possession and location as Germans are. And considering that the *Führer* was quite the art hound, our favorite little Austrian art student, besides systematically killing millions and depredating Europe, they were busy too! The most expansive unrestrained pillaging of art in *world history*! Because things are worth doing right! Everything on a grand scale! And what a supply they chose from. The wealthy Jews of France! Rothschilds and Schlosses and David-Weils, others. *Appropriating* them back to Germany, to Austria, to their own collections or *Nationale Galerien*. To Linz, the *Führer*'s childhood home, to build the *Uber-Museum*, greatest in all the world, as a testament to his *ego* and the glory of the Thousand Years Reich! But darn, *no*, that didn't pan out, though many of mankind's supreme works were lost in the process. Or destroyed! Never to be treasured or adored for what they were. Art! High art! Life-affirming creations! The direct opposite of all *their* intentions! And still 50 years later, Degas' "*Gabrielle Diot*," Morisot's "*Woman in White*." Manet, Corot, Renoir, the list goes on. *Picasso!* Literally *hundreds* of them!

*(pause, she watches him as he walks and rambles)*

And every once in a while one'll turn up, suddenly *reappearing* in the home of a wealthy aristocrat who's died. Some *Von* somebody who's been hiding it all these years, knowing full well how they "*bought*" a work by a great master for a fraction of what it was worth.

RICA

Maybe they didn't know.

SAMUEL

Oh *please* Rica.

RICA

All I am saying is—

SAMUEL

Of course they knew! They've known for *years!*

RICA

But Samuel maybe they—

SAMUEL

They've got the provenance, they know where it comes from!

RICA

Maybe they didn't know! Maybe they were never told! It could be that!

SAMUEL

*Please Rica!—*

RICA

And all these years, if they had never found out the truth—

SAMUEL

They knew!—

RICA

If they had never known. You might be mistaken—

SAMUEL

Of course they knew!—

RICA

You may be mistaken! You may be mis—

SAMUEL

*But they have the provenance! They've got the fucking provenance!*

*(a long pause)*

RICA

I don't know what that is.

SAMUEL

*(pause, calmer)*

It's a resume for a work of art. From its first day to every owner whoever possesses it, no one buys art without it....Looted works have no listing from 1935 to 46, or if they do,

SAMUEL – con't

they're forged by some French *quisling* selling to Nazis. Buyer, dealer, Berlin, Vichy all pretending the Rothschilds suddenly got rid of all their Impressionists.— Hitler hated Impressionism, thought it *degenerate*.—What a *bourgeois* eye the boorish fuck had.

RICA

And you didn't get your records?

SAMUEL

*(pause)*

The German representatives claimed there were filing troubles, lost records and recently a fire. And what they thought, wasn't really what they had or wasn't where it was or some other bullshit.—Press as we did, and we did press—we never got a straight answer.

RICA

Maybe it was true. Maybe it was, and all the rest, all of it—maybe you just thought it.

SAMUEL

*(pause)*

I've seen it before. The way they said my last name.—They weren't helping a Jew....The meeting ended two hours later.

RICA

And you took the early train to *München* the next morning.

*(they stare then SAMUEL moves to his bag, crouching down besides it. Pause. RICA gets undressed in silence)*

SAMUEL

I should've taken a hotel room.

RICA

Berlin hotel rooms make New York's look large. Two hundred dollars for a shower and bed that fits not even one.—I would not have you come to suffer that.

SAMUEL

I don't want to be trouble to you.

RICA

*(pause)*

It is not a trouble. You have traveled a great distance....You will sleep on the right.

SAMUEL

Is that a command?

RICA

*(stopping, pause)*

It is a request.

SAMUEL

Rica....

*(he only nods)*

Rica I need to—

RICA

Tomorrow....tomorrow Samuel....Come to bed now.

*(he remains crouching near his bag)*

**End of the First Act**



**ACT II, SCENE 7**

*(A split scene: RICA's apartment and Washington Square Park. SAMUEL sits as does RICA in her apartment. Sometimes they read, sometimes they talk aloud)*

RICA

Hallo, my Jewish boy! Two months and I miss New York very much. Green grocers and cabbies, better liquor pours and fries with gravy. I even miss the street people.

SAMUEL

How about missing me?

RICA

Germany is featureless to me. Life moves in long segments, not the short pulses of New York. There is more time but less is vital. I always knew my home was elsewhere, yet I expected always to feel at ease here.—I miss you Samuel.

SAMUEL

Rica my dear it's about time! I was beginning to think Germany had swallowed you whole. But you've resurfaced and with it my mind races. I am *irreplaceable* to you. Those fifty or so rejections were well played, but I could tell.—You wanted me.

RICA

Samuel thank you for your note. Dream big dear boy, it suits you well. I am glad to hear the foundation has taken you. Jewish enough after all.—Will it bring you to Europe? If you visit, will you rekindle my fascination? Will I just be another girl? I suspect, but you must write with the truth.

SAMUEL

Rica you know only too well where you stand. I wish you didn't, it might give me more leverage with you. Yes I was Jewish enough. My *circumscription* put me over the top.

RICA

Samuel, *sie sind lustig*.

SAMUEL

It's interesting work but there are few successes. We have some leads but mostly though it is just memories of dislocated grandchildren. It's a little like being a detective. It's a lot like a fool's errand. After my time chasing you, I am well suited for it.

RICA

Ciao Samuel, it is now a year and a half into my post and it is concerning. You and New York were a daydream and Germany is real now. Six years after Unification it is hard. Are we too different after these years apart?—Will you and I be too different after our time apart? I wonder.

SAMUEL

Dear Rica, daydreams are my provender. I find it difficult navigating my own reality. Destinations shift and plotting the future is beyond my ken. So here's my advice: Don't worry so much. Just paint your life with all the spirit it can hold. I think of you often—Samuel.

RICA

How close you are to me Samuel. I cannot express it and feel foolish trying. I don't see you, I don't know if we ever will again. Yet you remain and grow. I only notice it now when apart. We two are outside of our places....Samuel I have something to tell you. Promise it will be all right. I am sure you will say it, I am unsure it will be true.

SAMUEL

*(aloud to himself)*

Oh *goddamn it*, she's getting married. She's got some *Rolf* or *Werner* and she's getting married.

*(back to a letter)*

Rica, if you are getting married, I swear I'm jumping to my death off the Chrysler Building. I'm going right to the top, then right down *express* onto 42<sup>nd</sup> Street. And you know how much I hate going above 23<sup>rd</sup> Street.

RICA

*(to herself, smiling)*

Oh *mein gott*, don't joke *dummer Junge*.

RICA – con't

*(to him)*

No Samuel, no. No it isn't that....I have changed law firms to a more prestigious one. They are moving me to Berlin, I will be there in the spring.

SAMUEL

Bigger bucks, cooler digs, why wouldn't I be happy?

RICA

Samuel my firm defends Volkswagen. We handle all their Legacy affairs.—Our case is their settlement with Jewish organizations, in Israel and several in New York too.

*(pause, he stops stone still)*

The company has agreed to pay for the forced Jewish labor. Payments go to the living, to families of the deceased and to a fund for remembrance....It is one of the first cases and much depends on its outcome.

*(long pause, he walks, but doesn't respond)*

Samuel, where are you? I haven't heard from you in some time. Are you too busy, have you found another obsession?—Was it my last note?....My fading will come but my mind says it can't yet.—Please write me, even if it is something perfunctory.

SAMUEL

Perfunctory.

RICA

When you write I feel your presence as we were in New York. I turn pages, feeling your thoughts over me. But without them, somehow I feel you more.—I search for your attention instead of having it at my command....In those moments I realize *how much* about you....Write soon. Write of yourself.

SAMUEL

*(pause)*

Rica I can come to Germany. I will be in Austria for two days for a meeting. I can come when it's done if you want....I'll accept it either way, whether you want me to come or not. But I must know soon to plan....Shall I come Rica? Do you want me to?

**SCENE 8**

*Berlin, the day following the last scene. RICA and SAMUEL are “standing” on the center pathway of Unter de Linden. He carries the guidebook and circles the tableau surveying the surroundings. RICA watches him.*

SAMUEL

What does that mean?

RICA

Under the Lime Trees.

SAMUEL

The *Lime*?

*(RICA nods and SAMUEL continues walking)*

It has a very regal aspect. *Imperious.*

RICA

It is a triumph path. Official celebrations throughout German history take place here. Since before Metternich.—It ends in *Brandenburger Tor*. Where Kennedy visited.

SAMUEL

I can see the arch.

RICA

Down there was the dividing line between East and West Berlin. There is a dotted line on the road where the wall stood.

SAMUEL

And this was the route? Down here, this way?

*(no response. He turns back to the tableau)*

The way the trees are aligned, all so scrupulously maintained.

RICA

When I moved here it was coming into bloom then. Uh, *die Knospe*, on the branches?

SAMUEL

The buds.

RICA

They had broken out in these little white flowers.—With their leaves in the wind, it was like a broken pillow come loose. You cannot imagine, but it was very beautiful.

SAMUEL

I believe it.

*(SAMUEL searches the book)*

RICA

A yellow snow drifting down on the passersby....People were moving without noticing, busy with their lives. They didn't see splendor around them. As if it happens everyday.

SAMUEL

*(reading)*

“The first saplings were planted by the *Great Elector*?”

RICA

*(pause)*

Friedrich Wilhelm.

SAMUEL

“To line the *Tiergarten*. The arch, modeled on the Acropolis, is a symbol of German unity. Napoleon took the horse-drawn chariot that tops the gate but it was returned years later. Revolutionaries of 1848 and 1918 met under its gilded form, but later it became a favorite for Nazi torch-lit marches.”

*(SAMUEL closes the book and walks the street anxiously)*

I can just imagine it. Like in a *Riefenstahl* film, battalions of brown-shirts strutting by as bands played and the faithful poured out “*Deutschland uber Alles*” ....They were so satisfied with themselves then. *Pleased* with their country and their *Führer*.

*(after a pause, SAMUEL's gaze settles on RICA)*

RICA

I want you to see this.—This plaza is *Bebelplatz*.

*(RICA leads him to a glass square cut in the pavement.  
SAMUEL bends, stares down into it a long moment)*

SAMUEL

It's shelves. An all white room with white shelves. But bare, nothing on them.

RICA

It is "The Empty Library." It represents the *Buchverbrennung*, the Burning of Books.—  
Read in your book, under *die Buchverbrennung*.

*(he searches momentarily, with a wary glance at her. She  
moves behind him to a bronze plaque in the ground)*

SAMUEL

"On May 11, 1933, Propaganda minister Goebbels ordered the burning of thousands of books, mostly Jewish authors like Mann, Remarque and Einstein along with foreigners H.G. Wells, Ernest Hemingway and Jack London. Any book that conflicted with the prevailing Nazi ideology fueled the flames."

*(SAMUEL moves to the cut in the pavement again)*

RICA

Here.

*(SAMUEL walks to her. He reads to himself, then aloud)*

SAMUEL

"Where they start by burning books, they'll end by burning people." Heinrich Heine,  
German Jewish Poet.—1820.

*(SAMUEL looks to RICA, then down at the plaque again)*

RICA

We have attempts. The totality cannot be eclipsed so we atone for the incidents.—  
Hopefully it is in the particular that we stop the whole from repeating.

SAMUEL

Do we ever really stop repeating?

*(he moves back to the cut, pause)*

RICA

I am told what happened here and verily I accept that it did.—I don't understand how.

SAMUEL

I'm sorry but really. Acknowledgment and acceptance? It's pretty cold comfort they offer.

RICA

*(pause)*

I cannot solve the world....But it starts with me.

*(he looks down into the cut and stares there throughout)*

SAMUEL

Where are the other sights?

RICA

This way, further down *Unter den Linden*. Down to the left—on *Wilhelmstrasse*.

SAMUEL

The Bunker, the *Luftwaffe*, the Reich—

RICA

They're *all* there....the ones that you want.

**SCENE 9**

*November 1995, six months before Scene 4. RICA and SAMUEL are sitting inside a café in the West Village of Manhattan. They are reading the newspaper, SAMUEL earnestly while RICA holds one lost in thought.*

RICA

Samuel....why are you ashamed to be Jewish?

SAMUEL

*S'cuse me?*

RICA

Is that the right word?

SAMUEL

It's *a* word all right.

RICA

You are, aren't you? You know.

SAMUEL

*Do I?....What brings this on?*

RICA

The review of this movie.

*(she shows him the paper)*

SAMUEL

The solemn duty of every Jew: Explain Woody Allen to the Gentile world.

RICA

Just parts of him.



SAMUEL

Yeah but never the young Asian girl part.

RICA

Please Samuel, I want to understand.—Sometimes I do. But all of it, I know I can't.

SAMUEL

I think I'm discerning. A man is judged by the people he dislikes. And Hasidic chic, wearing pinstripes in the summer heat—*not* unless you're playing baseball in the Bronx.

RICA

If you're not going to be—

SAMUEL

Of course *there's* Koufax, the *Michael Jordan* of the Jews. Won't play Yom Kippour.

RICA

Be serious, will you please?

SAMUEL

It's kind of an odd question coming from you.

RICA

Because I'm German?

SAMUEL

Because you're German.

RICA

Yes I suppose so....We used to search for answers before.—Now the answers are so, we don't want anyone to search....We all read this book when young. It talks of people after the war who go to this nightclub crowded with all kinds, aristocrat, laborer.—A band plays music but people sit silent, anxious, waiting.—With much salute, they are handed at a time, an onion, a knife and *schneidebrett*, a cutting board....Slowly the music builds to a pitch. And at an appointed moment, the people cut into the onion, *carving* to the center. Then with the smell and juice, they begin to cry. They cry greatly with such force. With

RICA – con't

the tears and pain, they begin to speak of things hidden deep within....Acknowledge the acts, feeling the shame and remorse.

*(pause)*

This's the German way now. Perhaps always so stoic we need an onion and knife to release to let us approach the past.—*I* hate that! I hate us that!—Forever we've had two speeds, extreme and asleep.—We are so afraid of the first, for too long it has been the last....But Americans, *Jews*. Your feelings, your emotions, *all* of them, it's okay, it's good.

SAMUEL

Yes it is.

RICA

You see, I don't understand. You say, but you don't feel that.

SAMUEL

It's complicated Rica and it's not a topic I really care to uh....

RICA

Please Samuel.

SAMUEL

*(pause)*

I don't even know if I *can* explain it.—I don't quite understand it myself.

RICA

You have such opposition.

SAMUEL

It's not opposition, it's more embarrassment. *Mortification*.

RICA

What about you?

SAMUEL

It's not *me* I'm defensive about. *I'm* fine! It's the others. Don't group me in with them. The stereotype! The prototype! Pushy, argumentative, always complaining. *Cheap*. But not cheap, that's just an easy cliché for bigots.—Specific, *particular*. Wanting things *exactly* as they want them. I can hear them a mile away.

RICA

Go on.

SAMUEL

And I shudder at the sound. *Masters* of the scene. Not content with getting their way, but wanting clear victory. Leaving no room for retreat.—But the rival is some lowly receptionist or unaware attendant who didn't come through. Then pounce! A scene! Never pass that up. What's the point if nobody overhears? The *Coleslaw* Jews!

RICA

What are the—

SAMUEL

“I didn't *order* Cole slaw! I don't care if it comes with it, take it back. Remove it from the table *and* the bill. I'm not paying for it!” *God almighty*, how difficult they make it for me? Everybody crowds us together but some of us are quiet and shy and don't *need* to be out front. But we aren't what you see. The others stick in people's minds, feed their prejudices.

RICA

Not everyone is prejudice.

SAMUEL

Everyone is prejudiced, it's the natural human state. To thine own self be true. Then the self-interest expands outward from yourself.

RICA

We don't consider that prejudice in Germany.

SAMUEL

Well no, you people set the gold standard. Not that you're wrong about those others. Did you hear Daimler-Benz brought out a new self-cleaning oven?—Seats six Jews.

RICA

Samuel that's not funny!

SAMUEL

Well it's a little funny.

RICA

It's not! You of all people shouldn't make fun!

SAMUEL

How can I not joke? Maybe it should be me?

RICA

Be serious!

SAMUEL

You think I'm kidding, but I'm not. Let me tell you, it's a lot easier. Safer, probably smarter, and *definitely* easier. Maybe that's the lesson: Can't cry anymore? Laugh in its face. It's enough already buying into this *covenant* but always ending up short. We say *Chosen*, we never question "For what?" Inquisitions and Holocausts? In *God's* name, because of it. It's risible. The obstinacy to remain true after all that. The arrogance of believing "you know." *You* know the truth, *you* know the *Word*. Despite the *repetitive facts* of history, *your* suffering is special. *That, that's* fucking laughable. Shit, I can understand why they hate us.

RICA

Samuel—

SAMUEL

I'm not saying "Don't believe in God," I'm not. You want to believe in some fantasy *Unmoved* creator of everything, go ahead, go *nuts!* Don't include *me* in that delusional

SAMUEL – con't

act, but if that helps you sleep and survive, *believe*. Follow! But for *God's* sake grant that this *insane* compulsion makes you choose and defend your choice with your *life*. It feeds our unquenchable thirst to be right and find *others* wrong. There are natural things, earthly, *human* differences. The way we laugh, how often we sneeze. We can do *nothing* about those, do we need artificial ones? Which version of *God* we worship? Whose *myth* got it right? That's what puts men to killing each other! People kill Jews because they're Jewish! That's all! Because who their parents are and what their grandparents believed! Don't they understand this?!

*(he stops. He's gone too far. They stare a long moment)*

I forgot the golden rule: Talking religion—surest way of never getting the girl.

*(RICA smiles wanly. SAMUEL is dismayed as his outburst)*

It's a handicap, it's a risk. I didn't ask for it....Do you understand?

*(she nods, pauses)*

How do you say that in German, "Do you understand?"

RICA

*Verstanden.*

SAMUEL

*(pause)*

*Verstanden?*

RICA

*(pause)*

I like how you think.—When you explain to me a painting, when you show me New York, when you tell me about your mother.—Even when you talk of your many dislikes....And I like how you think of me. I am *seen* by others. Beautiful, strong—German. You see me as myself....And I wish you could see you through my eyes.

SAMUEL

Be careful what you wish for.

RICA

Either way, it will be you....Shame I know also.

SAMUEL

*(pause)*

There's this song, "*Dixie Flyer*,"—it was barely on the radio, but I heard it one late night in college. It's about this train that a boy and his Mom take to her family in Louisiana after the Jewish father's been sent off to the war. The family's Christian, and the boy's never met them and all his distant aunts and uncles come down to New Orleans to meet them. And the boy is "*watching what the Gentiles do. And doing what the Gentiles do. Hell they want to be Gentiles too. Who wouldn't there, wouldn't you?*" ...He pauses a beat, and sings—"*An American Christian. Goddamn!*—And right after, there's this riff.

RICA

This what?

SAMUEL

This riff, this horn run....it's in the background. "*An American Christian, goddamn! Banna bump bah!*"....And it's as if he's saying—*my god*, isn't that the greatest thing you could ever be? Safe and secure, firmly accepted and established in *God's* country with *God's* religion....I remember hearing that and feeling—yeah, that's what's been missing. That aspect—it's all you should want to be. It's all anyone could ever want to be.

*(pause, then with muted awe)*

An American Christian....Hmph—goddamn.

**SCENE 10**

*Berlin, just following Scene 7. RICA and SAMUEL walk in silence down Wilhelmstrasse. Anxious and agitated, he searches the buildings as if they might offer some clue.*

SAMUEL

It was here....It was here?

*(he turns to RICA who doesn't respond, then to the street. she just looks back at him)*

It was right fucking here.

*(SAMUEL searches the guide, frantically. Rica watches)*

RICA

Samuel you must remember time has passed.—We have moved on. The past has a place in the present but should not dominate it.

SAMUEL

The Reich's Chancellery, Wilhelmstrasse.—Behind, the bunker. The Bunker!....The War Ministry, Wilhelmstrasse. Luftwaffe, Gestapo Headquarters, Wilhelmstrasse! *The SS!*

*(SAMUEL paces, scanning the buildings)*

When you think, if you just stop and think!—The ideas, the planning. Orders. *Directives!* I can't, I can't fucking....

RICA

Today stands on the past, but is above it. It contains hope and uncertainty.—

SAMUEL

What is that there?—

RICA

The past only contains unchangeable fact.

SAMUEL

What is that? On the windows of that building?

RICA

Where? I don't....

SAMUEL

Right there! On that building's windows. *There!*

RICA

They are *ausschneidefiguren*. Uh....

SAMUEL

They're cut-outs.

RICA

Ja, cut-outs. Paper cut—

SAMUEL

They're cardboard cutouts! What is that....

*(SAMUEL views frantically the buildings and the street)*

RICA

Children probably cut them for a class.

SAMUEL

*Children?* What is that building?!

RICA

I don't know.

SAMUEL

What is it doing with cut-outs on it?



RICA

I don't know, it's a kindergarten maybe.

SAMUEL

It's a *kindergarten*?

RICA

*Maybe*, I don't know.

SAMUEL

*It's a kindergarten?!—No.* That's, that's not....

RICA

I don't know! Please Samuel—

SAMUEL

That's not right! That's not *fair!*

RICA

Samuel we all must try—

SAMUEL

It's *indecent* to even bring children here! To even let them anywhere *near*—

RICA

Nobody can live with that always. It was so long—

SAMUEL

Don't you know what this street was? Don't you?

RICA

Not anymore!

SAMUEL

Don't you know what they did here?

RICA

But not anymore!

SAMUEL

What they wanted and *tried!* What they *actually* did!

RICA

Samuel it's been fifty years! It has been so long!—

SAMUEL

They built a kindergarten here!

*(SAMUEL paces wildly. Pause, RICA begins calm, firm)*

RICA

We all must move forward. If we are forever to be—

SAMUEL

*(overlapping)*

No Rica—

RICA

*Reminded* and have it brought up before us—

SAMUEL

Not here! Not here!—

RICA

Before anyone knows who we are and how we've—

SAMUEL

They built a kindergarten here.—A *fucking* kindergarten!

*(SAMUEL searches the book frantically)*

**SCENE 11**

*RICA's apartment, shortly after previous scene. They enter in silence. RICA sits composed on the bed as SAMUEL moves to the chair, holding the guidebook. Several moments pass before they speak.*

RICA

Will you talk to me?

SAMUEL

What is there to say?

RICA

What does that mean? Explaining what is going on in you.

SAMUEL

Don't you know?

RICA

You tell me.

SAMUEL

I wouldn't know what to say. And frankly, I don't even know if I want to.

RICA

Why not?! Why now, what has happened?

SAMUEL

Oh come on Rica!

RICA

Is it Hitler?! Is it the Nazis, is that it?!

SAMUEL

No, it's the *fucking* weather!

*(SAMUEL rises and roves the room. RICA begins calmly)*

RICA

It is our past, I cannot change that. *You know*. Why now? Tell me this.

SAMUEL

Rica I can't—

RICA

You do know! You do know! I want you to tell me!

SAMUEL

*What do you want from me!* To bleed for you on command like some circus act!

*(SAMUEL moves about. RICA again begins calmly)*

RICA

Yes, you do know. You always know.

SAMUEL

What do you want me to say Rica?

RICA

What is the truth, what you are thinking.

SAMUEL

Oh *c'mon!* Like I'm going to say—

RICA

What has made you this way, when after all—

SAMUEL

*(overlapping)*

*Please Rica!—*

RICA

After all this time you have been—

SAMUEL

What do you expect me to say?!—

RICA

All right with *everything!* It has been punch lines! It has been humor!

SAMUEL

WHAT DO YOU WANT! Answers! Names, whereabouts, records! Shall we get the bright lights! Is that what this is?! Vee have *vays* of making you *talk!*

RICA

*(pause)*

Samuel—

SAMUEL

Because it all ends. It all ends if I do. You and I....And I can't have that. I can't. After all this time.

RICA

*(pause)*

What can do that to us?—My little Jewish Boy can lose his love for his little Nazi girl?

SAMUEL

No Rica, that's not possible.

RICA

Ja, I believe....*München?* So much city, so little time....We must talk Samuel. Talk and say and get past.—What is there now of us, if we don't?

SAMUEL

*(pause)*

I want to understand Rica, I need to understand it.

RICA

Yes.

SAMUEL

How could it happen? How and why?

*(he staggers around the apartment squeezing the guidebook mindlessly, seeking courage in the scattered bric-a-brac)*

Munich....I went straight to the *Marienplatz*. "Go see the glockenspiel," everyone says. "You have to see the glockenspiel."

RICA

Ja.

SAMUEL

And I did. It's exceptional. The craftwork, so intricate, so Bavarian.—And the church and Royal Palace and Old Town Hall. They're all right there, just a few blocks apart. You can see them all so quickly.

RICA

I have been.

SAMUEL

*(pause)*

I was trying to keep busy. I had gone there to see it. But now that I was there, I lost my nerve. Imagine that....So I hustled to the *Hofbrauhaus* to get a beer instead. How can you be in Munich and not go to the *Hofbrauhaus*, it would be a crime....But it's still very early.—It's not the first time I've had a nooner, you know, you and I have together. And the beer felt good and warm. So I had another, to keep busy, to keep it away.

RICA

Yes.

SAMUEL

And the second beer felt better and warmer and I felt so welcomed there. But I looked at my watch and there was still so much time until the train to Berlin. Three and a half *hours* left. I can't drink that much.

RICA

And you went there.—

SAMUEL

*Nobody* can drink that much.—

RICA

You went there Samuel.—

SAMUEL

I did Rica, I did, I had to.—I mean sixth forms do it ja?—To learn, to remember. For the same morbid, morose—

RICA

Tell me what you saw.

SAMUEL

*(pause)*

It's so close, it's not even a train, it's a fifteen minute *tram* ride. Like a Subway stop, like the 9 we took to Columbia that time. and you get off the tram and the people are all hustling on and off as if nothing ever happened there.

RICA

It was long ago.

SAMUEL

Mothers with their children, old women with packages. Men in suits and kids after school, all busy, all going on with their lives.

RICA

Of course, it was long *ago*.

SAMUEL

And you get off the tram and there are no *signs* there for it. To tell you where to go, which direction. All the bustle and commotion, I don't understand, people must come.

RICA

They do.

SAMUEL

Tourists must come. I know it's October and it's cold and it's not the season, but *year round*, people must come to see it.

RICA

Samuel they do.

SAMUEL

But there are no signs!—You walk outside the station searching and all that's there is this large map on the wall. That's all, just this enormous—*map!* So I go to look at the map but it's *huge!* The whole city taking up the whole station wall. I can't find *one* street! And maybe it's not there? Maybe it's not 'cause I can't find it.

RICA

Verstanden.

SAMUEL

But there's this old woman there and she's waiting, I don't know for what. For a ride, for her daughter or grand kids to pick her up, she's watching me search this map. And she's old. She's small and looks like this bundled-up depiction of the Old Country, this Dutch Master, Potato-Eater visage. Where the carved *incisions* on her face tell the story *far* beyond my capacity to. And maybe it's my backpack or my sneakers because that's how Europeans know, because *they know!* And she knew. She knew what I was looking for.

RICA

Yes.



SAMUEL

And this bus pulled into the station just then, and she motioned to catch my attention, then she pointed towards a bus. More she flailed, with this thick arm—waving, and she nodded her head. She nodded and I nodded in reply. I nodded. I nodded and smiled....then I got on the bus. I just—I went and got on the bus.

RICA

Samuel....

SAMUEL

She had been there, she had to've been. She's lived her whole life in that town, she had that look. The type that's born and lives and dies within a few *miles*. She's never been to Berlin, she's never been to *Wilhelmstrasse*. 'Cause who could move there after that? To that town, to that place, no one would. So she had to've been there and *stayed!*

RICA

I understand.

SAMUEL

Do you?!—Do you?! Because I don't. *I don't! I can't!* As hard as I—

RICA

Samuel.

*(he continues roving, wringing the book, thoughtlessly)*

SAMUEL

I walked the grounds. There's nothing left now but building foundations. These rectangular *curbs*, outlining the living quarters, if you can call them that. Eighteen inches high, row and row, there must be a *hundred!* You just kept walking by, one after another on a path down the middle, they're on both sides!

RICA

I know.

SAMUEL

And the path leads off into the woods. And you walk to a house, this meaningless little stone house like something out of a *Grimm's* tale. Some dark and perverted gingerbread house like the home of a blacksmith or a collier. And the door is open. The door is open, inviting you to go in. Inviting you, *drawing* you, so you go in because you have to, because something's there, something menacing sinister as in a nightmare. As if all that came before wasn't enough, the foundations and the grounds, the iron gate door with words on it, "Through work, Freedom." As if all *that* wasn't, there's something *death* there, something *deadly!* And you walk up the slate gray steps into this gingerbread house, this *deadly* gingerbread house that should've been home to a family, should've known children and dogs but there are ovens there. There are three ovens there! Three ovens to kill me! JEWISH ME! THERE ARE OVENS THERE TO KILL ME!

RICA

STOP IT! STOP IT!

*(long pause)*

That is not me Samuel, that is not me there.

SAMUEL

If not you then who?!

RICA

That is not me!

SAMUEL

*No?!*

RICA

That is our past! That is our history!

SAMUEL

Too convenient.

RICA

That's forty years before my birth!—

SAMUEL

*(overlapping)*

*Too fucking convenient!—*

RICA

Before my parents are born Samuel!

SAMUEL

But it's *in* you! It's who you are!

RICA

IT'S NOT IN ME! IT'S NOT IN ME! I was not alive!

SAMUEL

But it's your people! The German people!

RICA

*It's not my people!* It was those people then! They are gone! They are dead and gone!

SAMUEL

But they were Germany!

RICA

*They were not Germany!* They were crazy! They were lunatics! But we are not!

SAMUEL

But they were! And something deep in the German psyche!

RICA

That's insane!—

SAMUEL

*(overlapping)*

The Will to Power. Destined to rule and conquer!—

RICA

That's insane and absurd!

SAMUEL

And that's part of you! They're a part of you!

RICA

THEY'RE NOT A PART OF ME! THEY ARE NOT A PART! You! Your country!  
You have killed, is that you?! Is that who you are?

SAMUEL

It's not the same!

RICA

Why not the same?! Why is it not?! Are you who killed Indians?! Who killed slaves?!  
Millions too! Torn from their country. *Hanged and burned!*

SAMUEL

But the Jews Rica!

RICA

*Yes, Jews!* Are they somehow better?! Is the loss of their lives somehow more?!

SAMUEL

But the massacre!

RICA

*What is your outrage?! Where is your outrage for yourself?! For your past!* You have  
killed as surely as I! Where is your outrage for yourself?! *Where is it?!...I will tell you,*  
it is gone. It is *gone* Samuel, gone away! Time takes it away. Time moves on and  
allows you to live again. It allows a people to live again!

SAMUEL

It's too soon!

RICA

To live with shame! To live with humility!—To survive and exist under the shadows of the past. It is *time* that does this! It has happened to you, it has happened to others.

SAMUEL

That's too fucking easy! It's too fucking soon!

RICA

It is time and it is now!

SAMUEL

NO!

RICA

Now is time for me, for my people! For *my* country!

SAMUEL

***IT CAN'T BE!***

*(SAMUEL throws the guidebook against the Chagall print smashing it. It crashes to the ground. Long pause ensues)*

RICA

Samuel listen to me. *Listen.*—We have wronged. Yes! What occurred, what was done, I can't explain. No one can.—But that is not me Samuel, it is not who I am. You know this. You know me, and you know this.

*(he does not respond)*

Is this my role to play? Is this the character my generation gets to play? Descendents of that terrible past? The children, the children's children and on forever?—You have a need. Your need is lashing out and our part is to take that lashing?—Then I will take it. I will take it! I have trained, I have been practiced and I will take it.—But make no mistake, it is I who grant you your role. You may force mine on me with your *loss* and your *claim*, but accepting my role grants you yours. What value has your claim if I don't honor it! If I don't say, "*Here Samuel, take this from me Rica!*" ...I am German Samuel. Look at me and *see!* And have no doubt!—I am German.

*(no answer, RICA moves away from SAMUEL)*

RICA – con't

I will answer your question, your favorite to ask....because you had not gone through. For all your thoughts and reflections, you did not know yourself....How can I love someone who didn't know himself enough to know me?—What is it someone offers, when they offer everything they are, but don't know who they are?....An imitation. A representation, a wonderful facsimile—but not love Samuel. As much as I wished, as much as you wanted it.

*(RICA moves to the broken picture but stops)*

It is time. You must recognize this. If not you, if not through you and I...It must eventually be time.

*(she starts picking up the picture remains. She stops when he speaks, but does not turn to him)*

SAMUEL

As I took the train into Germany yesterday, after that meeting and those people—I couldn't help but think of all those who had taken it before. Not just Germans Jews, members of *my* extended family—but from Poland and France, Holland, Italy, all of them. *This* train was death.—Some had taken the same route, but they were riding to their deaths....And here I was traveling through this wonderful country—to see this beautiful girl I have loved ever since I first saw her....They are with me Rica. Those Jews of Europe, the Jews of everywhere, they are with me now....And they have been with me always.

**SCENE 12**

*August 1995, two months prior to Scene 8. (NOTE: there should be no break from previous scene as the actors move directly from last to this) RICA sits in a Greenwich Village café studying orientation pamphlets. SAMUEL moves by, looking for a seat. He searches then notices her. Her English is hesitant when she speaks.*

SAMUEL

Excuse me, is this seat taken?

RICA

No.

SAMUEL

You mind?

*(RICA nods barely. SAMUEL sits, noticing the pamphlets)*

SAMUEL

Thanks. There isn't an empty table what with the first days. Nobody knows where to go or what to do, myself included. Orientation's a pain, huh?

RICA

Excuse me, I do not....

SAMUEL

*(indicating towards pamphlets)*

You're going through orientation?

RICA

*Oh, ja.*

SAMUEL

Yeah, we had ours yesterday, School of Fine Arts. Quite the pain in the ass. Yourself?

Myself?  
RICA

What are you studying?  
SAMUEL

The class schedules.  
RICA

No, I mean what field?  
SAMUEL

*Ah.* Legal.  
RICA

You're a law student, excellent. Your mother must be happy. Are you here full time?  
SAMUEL

No. I am doing one year in a program.  
RICA

Yeah, I figured that accent wasn't Outer Borough. Norse, Saxon?  
SAMUEL

Yes I am. I am German.  
RICA

*German, super! A real blonde in the city. Have you been to New York before?*  
SAMUEL

Ja, once. When I was a little girl.  
RICA

Cool. I bet it hasn't changed much.  
SAMUEL



RICA

*Ja*, very. It seems bigger.

SAMUEL

By the way, I'm Samuel.

RICA

Samuel?—I am Ulrike.

SAMUEL

Hello Ul, Ulrike, pleasure to meet you.

*(she nods as they shake hands)*

That's quite a mouth full. I can never manage to speak German well.—Do you have a nickname, something your friends call you?

RICA

Ja, Rica.

SAMUEL

Rica? You mind if I call you that?

*(she nods)*

Thank you. I don't have a gift for languages. I've a gift for cursing. And your surname?

RICA

*Vas?*

SAMUEL

Your last name.

RICA

*Ahh*. Harwig.

SAMUEL

Harwig. With the "w" as a "v"?

RICA

Ja. That you say well. And yours?

SAMUEL

And my—oh my last name? Goldstein.

RICA

Goldstein.

*(he nods, acknowledging. pause)*

*Goalshtine?*

SAMUEL

Uh huh huh—*yeah*. That's uh, that's it all right.

RICA

What? Is there something....

SAMUEL

No—there isn't. It just sounds a little more *German* when you say it.

RICA

It can be a German name.

SAMUEL

My family was from Germany originally.

RICA

*Yes?* Ah.

*(another awkward pause)*

It is a Jewish name.?

**End of Play**