

ACT I. Scene 1. WELCOME, Willkommen

Setting: A living room is suggested with a TV, two chairs, a coffee table, and a floor lamp (stage left). A café is suggested with a café table, a few straight-back chairs, and a floor lamp (stage right). The center portion of a back wall is blank, with space reserved for projecting images.

Prelude: **MUSIC: Moody GERMAN THEATER music, 1920's**

At rise: **GOLDBERG VARIATIONS, #2**

STAGE HAND enters (stage left), turns on the living room lamp, and exits. HILDEGARD enters (stage left), carrying a cup of coffee and wearing whatever pleases her. It's morning, just after 9. She walks over to the coffee table, puts her cup down and stops suddenly. Her back hurts.

MUSIC STOPS

She carefully stretches her back, and her neck, and then looks up—surprised and delighted to find the audience.

HILDEGARD

Ah, Meine Damen und Herren, Guten Abend und Willkommen! (*remembering that she's in America, starting again*) Ladies and Gentlemen, good evening—or good morning—and welcome. Welcome to my home, the stage! Allow me to introduce myself. I am—

(STAGE HAND rushes back, hands her a remote and exits.)

Thank you so much. (*puts it down on the coffee table, ignores it*) Allow me to introduce myself. I am Hildegard, and this is my home—the stage! Actually, I haven't been on stage since... 1930... 30... (*can't recall, moves on*) I haven't been on stage since I left Germany. But when I lived in Dresden, I was in the theater! The wander theater!

(She signals to the projectionist, maybe with a sweeping hand gesture, or maybe with a simple nod of the head. She is in charge and in control.)

(IMAGE: HILDEGARD as Saint Joan, from playbill)

You see? This was me! I was Saint Joan, in the play by George Bernard Shaw--*Die Heilige Johanna*. Saint Joan, my favorite role!

(a nod to the projectionist)

(IMAGE: HILDEGARD as Saint Joan, close-up)

This photograph was taken by Genja Jonas, a very famous photographer. She was IT in Berlin. (*beat*) But I was never on stage in Berlin. (*deflated*)

(BLACK SCREEN)

Or even in Dresden. I was just in the (*Anglicized pronunciation*) “wander theater”. In German we pronounced it “VAHN-DER TAY-AH-TER” and that was the traveling theater! (*upbeat again*) We traveled all over The Rhineland. But I loved it; I loved the stage. (*beat*) By the way, I just put some water on for coffee. Won’t you join me? I hope we have enough cups.

(*counting heads*)

Ah coffee, so good! You know, my grandmother and I used to go all the way from Dresden to Vienna, for coffee and cake! Ah, the cakes in Vienna!

(*A photo appears automatically. She doesn’t see it at first.*)

(IMAGE: PETER AS A BABY)

Layers and layers of cream and pastry! Yes, we went all the way from Dresden to Vienna, for cake. Or that was the excuse. We took the train.

(*Sensing the photo, she turns and is pleasantly surprised--and forgets all about the water boiling on the stove.*)

Oh Peter, my first born! Such a good baby. We were still in Dresden here.

(*Another image appears automatically, another pleasant surprise.*)

(IMAGE: DRESDEN ON THE ELBE, Bellotto painting)

Dresden, I must say, it was a lovely place to grow up! “*Florence on the Elbe*” it was called, a city of the gods! As beautiful as Canaletto’s paintings of it! (*beat*) Or was it Bellotto? (*remembers*) Yes, Bernardo Bellotto! How we admired the Italians!

(*another pretty image*)

(IMAGE: BRUHLSCHE TERRASSE)

(*happily reminiscing*) On Sundays we used to walk along Bruhlsche Terrasse--a gorgeous promenade overlooking the Elbe River! At the end of the day, the sky would turn a brilliant red.

(*and another one*)

(IMAGE: DRESDEN BY NIGHT)

(*still very happy*) The whole city was **ON FIRE WITH COLOR!**

(*image of Dresden in ruins interrupts*)

(DRESDEN, BOMBED)

And then--(*drops her voice-and mood*) it **WAS ON FIRE.**

(DARK SCREEN)

(*She drops the subject, trying to regain control.*)

HILDEGARD, cont'd.

(moving on) Well, what about a little TV? *(picks up the remote, starts clicking, nothing happens)* This darned clicker! It never works. You know, in Dresden, we never had TV. It didn't exist! But we had beautiful paintings, and architecture!

(IMAGE: DRESDEN LANDSCAPE, Caspar David Friedrich)

(She turns to look at the image. Her face drops. Her mind goes blank. Almost in a panic, she turns to a STAGE HAND off in the wings, whispering loudly.)

I can't remember! I'm not *off-book*.

(The STAGE HAND enters, stage left, with a SCRIPT, her GLASSES, and some water. S/he helps Hildegard get seated, find her place in the script, and maybe adjusts the light—then exits, stage left.)

Ah, thank you so much! *(happy again)* Ah, here we go. Oh, this painting was by Caspar David Friedrich, of course. Who else!

(She now starts READING from script, rather grandly and formally, back in control again—kind of—pretending nothing is wrong.)

“At one time Dresden was only marshland, where pagan people lived, in tribes. Invading Romans called them *barbarians: people with beards*. But around the year 1500, the Princes of Saxony started to build palaces and gardens.”

(IMAGE: AUGUSTUS THE STRONG)

“By 1750 The Emperor Augustus--*Augustus the Strong* as he was called--had built many more palaces and a royal art gallery. And Dresden became a real metropolis, one of the most beautiful cities in Europe. This was the Zwinger Palace.”

(IMAGE: THE ZWINGER PALACE)

“This was the Frauenkirche.”

(IMAGE: FRAUENKIRCHE)

“A magnificent Lutheran cathedral! With a superb organ and acoustics.”

(IMAGE: FRAUENKIRCHE ORGAN)

(DOORBELL RINGS. She ignores it.)

“Johann Sebastian Bach gave the first public recital.”

(IMAGE: J.S. BACH)

“He traveled from his home in Leipzig--on a horse!”

HERR PARKER (*off-stage*)

Hildegard, it's me, HERR PARKER! Are you there?

(add MUSIC: BACH, *Goldberg Variations* #2, again)
(DOORBELL RINGS, again)

HILDEGARD (*ignores it*)

"Later in his life, Bach was *Capel Maester* in Dresden. And this is where he wrote the *Goldberg Variations*—for a nobleman with insomnia. The music was played by a young harpsichordist, Johannes Gottlieb Goldberg." **(STOPS READING)**

HERR PARKER (*off-stage*)

Hello, Hildegard! What's going on!

HILDEGARD

Come in, come in HERR PARKER! (*returning to the audience*) Yes, at one time Dresden was really something. It *meant something*. (*mood turns somber*) Later it was--all *different*. (*drops the subject*)

(DARK SCREEN/MUSIC STOPS)

(*HERR PARKER enters, stage right, with his white cane and newspaper--*
IRRITATED.)
(LIGHTS RISE.)

HERR PARKER (*sarcastic*)

Am I interrupting something?

HILDEGARD

Ah, HERR PARKER! Please, come in. I was just talking with the audience.
(*puts her script down, turns her attention to him*)

HERR PARKER

Not again. Not again!

HILDEGARD

We were just going to watch a little TV and have a nice cup of coffee. Won't you join us?

HERR PARKER

If the audience would excuse us, we were going to read the newspaper. Remember,
reading to the blind?

HILDEGARD

Oh, of course. I forgot.

HERR PARKER

How could you forget? It's 9:30. *(no response)* 9:30 am! We read the newspaper every morning, at 9:30 am!

HILDEGARD

Of course, of course. I always enjoy reading. Come on in. I apologize—I can't get up to greet you. I strained my back.

HERR PARKER

Ah so. Too bad. What happened? *(handing her the newspaper, getting seated)*

HILDEGARD

Oh, I was moving some things around. It's nothing. And how are you today?

HERR PARKER

Still going blind, thank you. But aside from glaucoma, not bad for 94. And you?

HILDEGARD

Fine, fine. Please, make yourself comfortable, and I shall do the same.

HERR PARKER

Sehr gut, sehr gut. Danke, Hildegard.

HILDEGARD

Now, now! We must speak in English. Otherwise our visitors will not understand!
(picks up the "A Section" of the newspaper, turns to the last page)

HERR PARKER

Of course, *(sarcastic)* the audience—too bad I can't see them!

HILDEGARD *(ignores him)*

Ah, we have lots of good coupons today:

HERR PARKER

That's nice. Any news?

HILDEGARD

(reading) "University Café, buy one dessert, get one for free!" *(tears out coupon)*

HERR PARKER

You know, we are not Chinese. You always begin at the end. Is there any news!!

HILDEGARD

(turns to front page, taking her time) Let's see... news, news. Ah, here we go. *(reading)* "April 1st, 1984". That famous year, 1984!

HERR PARKER

Yes, we know what year it is. Any news?

HILDEGARD

(scans front page) Oh—a man was shot!

HERR PARKER

I hate to say it, but this is news? This is America. Someone is shot every day.

HILDEGARD

Oh, the poor man, his father shot him.

HERR PARKER

Too bad. Any other stories?

HILDEGARD *(still reading)*

He was a singer, a singer! This is terrible. His name was "Marvin Gaye", what a nice name: "Gaye".

HERR PARKER

Any news from Nicaragua?

HILDEGARD

His father was a minister and he didn't like his son's latest hit song, "Sexual Healing"!

HERR PARKER

Well... the news from Managua is bound to be slow. Ah, if I were younger, I'd be there now. We could go together—you and me. *(no response)* It's not impossible!

HILDEGARD *(scowls)*

You are out of your mind. There's a war going on!

HERR PARKER

That's the whole point! There's a war going on, and the truth is being suppressed. Ah, if I were younger, I'd be there... *(sniffing--something odd in the air)* ... today... reporting the facts on the ground, telling people what's really going on! *(sniffing)* I have great hopes for them. We have never really had true socialism yet... *(sniffing, distracted)*

HILDEGARD

Is something wrong?

HERR PARKER

(calmly) Excuse me. I'm sorry, but... *(yelling)* is something on fire!

HILDEGARD *(shocked)*

The coffee! *(stands up abruptly, rubbing her back)* I put it on long ago!
(hurries away, STAGE LEFT. We hear clanging noises, shrieks.)

HERR PARKER

Let's get out of here! *(gets up, fans his face with newspaper, starts to walk away)*

HILDEGARD *(returning)*

There. The pot was burned but I opened the window. Everything is OK.

HERR PARKER *(angry)*

Everything is **not OK!** We may be breathing in toxic fumes! *(continues on to the door)*

HILDEGARD

I know, University Café! We have a coupon, remember?

HERR PARKER

Good idea.

(They both rise.)

HILDEGARD

You go ahead. I'll just get my purse.

(He exits, stage right. She turns to the audience, then looks back to be sure that he won't hear and speaks with a stage whisper at first.)

My friend Herr Parker is a wonderful person, but he is a socialist! Yes! Of all things! But the poor fellow, he has always been on the *unpopular* side of things. As a young man during the Russian Revolution, he was a Menshevik, but the Bolsheviks prevailed. And later he was a Trotskyite, but Stalin prevailed.

And he is still a Trotskyite today--a follower of Leon Trotsky.

(LIGHTS DIM/ IMAGE: YOUNG LEON TROTSKY)

Leon Trotsky was one of the leaders of the Russian Revolution. And, like Herr Parker, he was also a writer, and he was also Jewish.

(A STAGE HAND enters, stage left, hands her a pamphlet, exits.)

HILDEGARD

Oh, thank you. Essays. *(reading title)*: “On the Jewish Question”, by Leon Trotsky.
(pauses) The Jewish question: what should the world do about Jews? *(a beat)* Herr Parker will tell you that if Leon Trotsky had prevailed, we’d have a different world now. *(beat)* But Stalin prevailed. *(beat)* Trotsky was murdered. *(beat)*

(IMAGE: OLDER TROTSKY)

In Mexico, *(a beat)* by an ice pick to the back of the head.

(DARK SCREEN)

Millions of people were murdered. And the “Jewish Question” continues to be asked in many quarters of the world.

MUSIC: GOLDBERG VARIATIONS #2, again

(She exits, stage left. Music continues. She returns, stage left.)

MUSIC STOPS.

(She confides in the audience.)

It’s getting crazy around here. People keep moving the furniture around. And I can’t remember if I mailed that letter! That letter!

(muttering, she sits down, starts looking through her bag, but gives up)

I can’t remember and to tell you the truth, my mind is going backward. Soon I’ll be completely lost in history.

(In an effort to regain control, she turns to her script, and starts to READ.)

“I was born in 1908.” *(looks up)* 1908! *(adjusts her glasses, resumes reading)* “Four years later, the Sarrasani Circus opened in Dresden.”

(IMAGE: CIRCUS SARRASANI, wide view)

“That was it, that round building just across the river.

(IMAGE: CIRCUS, CLOSER)

“It wasn’t what you’d call *high art*. In fact, many people in Dresden wished it would just go away. But it remained, boldly announcing its presence with a circus parade, including a tribe of real Sioux Indians.”

(IMAGE: SIOUX INDIANS)

“Yes, a tribe of real Sioux Indians, riding horses in the circus parade! They came all the way from America! My big brother Ralph was especially excited to see them. Like all the other boys in town, he had read many stories by Karl May.”

(IMAGE: KARL MAY)

“Karl May was an author from Dresden. He wrote many books for children about the American “Wild West”, even though he had never even been to America! (*TAKES A BREATH*) And then we had World War I.

(IMAGE: EXPLOSION)

World War I changed everything. The Sioux Indians went hungry--like many people in Dresden--and some of the horses died. The circus was never the same.”

(BLACK SCREEN)

(looks up) Strange, sometimes I can’t remember what happened five minutes ago, but I can remember those times clearly. I was just a little girl, like the others.

(IMAGE: CLASSROOM, 1919)

“Sitting at our desks in school, our little hands folded, we prayed for victory over the enemy. And we sang patriotic anthems--like *Dear Fatherland, Rest Assured*. (*sarcastic*) The *Fatherland*! My father was a patriot--and he was Jewish. I don’t know if he even believed in God—we never talked about it. But, like all good German patriots, he believed in Kaiser Wilhelm.”

(IMAGE: KAISER WILHELM, 1905)

“And Kaiser Wilhelm believed in going to war with France. And so, my father volunteered for the army. But men who didn’t were drafted, along with many horses, and elephants from the circus, too.”

(IMAGE: ELEPHANTS AT WORK)

“My brother Ralph was completely against the war.”

(IMAGE: RALPH & BICYCLE)

“Ralph was a pacifist. But there were many pacifists then. He and my father had many bitter arguments. But in the end, Ralph was right. WWI, the “War to end all Wars” ended all hope for *The Fatherland*.”

(DARK SCREEN)

“Millions were dead and wounded. Disabled veterans begged on the streets.”

(IMAGE: VETERAN BEGGING)

“The currency collapsed.”

(IMAGE: MAN PUSHING MONEY IN WHEELBARROW)

“Perhaps this man is going to buy a week’s groceries—or his lunch. (*beat*) Many people were hungry and homeless; some died. There were protests:”

(IMAGE: PROTEST)

“--and rallies,”

(IMAGE: RALLY)

“--and fighting in the streets.”

(IMAGE: STREET BATTLE)

HILDEGARD, cont'd.

“And *suicides*.”

(BLACK SCREEN)

“My father returned from the war, however, a decorated hero.”

(IMAGE: FATHER IN UNIFORM)

“And despite the misery all around him, as optimistic as ever. Before the war, he had studied chemistry. After the war, he joined a growing new company, Max Elb, which manufactured *pharmaceuticals*, and special lubricants,

(IMAGE: CARAMBA)

--for cars and other machinery. It was a big success, and so was my father.”

(BLACK OUT, STOPS READING. Sounds of HERR PARKER’S cane, tapping as he approaches, Stage Right.)

HERR PARKER (O.S.)

Hildegard! Did you find your purse yet?

(LIGHTS RISE AGAIN)

HILDEGARD

(suddenly remembering) Yes, but I cannot find that letter. Did I mail it?

(HERR PARKER enters, tapping along with his cane.)

HERR PARKER

How would I know if you mailed your letters?

HILDEGARD

(puts her script down, rummages through her purse) Maybe I put it in here.

HERR PARKER

Please, just forget about your letter for now. Let’s get going.

HILDEGARD

All right. And where shall we go?

(rising)

HERR PARKER

(losing his patience) To University Café, of course! We were just talking about it!

HILDEGARD

Oh yes, of course. I forgot.

HERR PARKER

University Café--we have a coupon! Now, let’s concentrate on where we’re going.

(They start walking.)

HILDEGARD

Of course, of course. *(offering her arm)*

Scene 2, The Walk

(The STAGE HAND turns off the living room lamp. The gobo lights come on.)

HERR PARKER (taking her arm)

Ah, a good idea, this! I still have the good memory, and you still have the good eyesight! I can remember where we are going, and you can see the way!

HILDEGARD

(starting to limp) My problem with walking is hammertoes.

HERR PARKER

Ah so, hammertoes.

HILDEGARD

Yes, when I was a child and needed new shoes, my father said, “No, we must save leather for the soldiers.” And so, my shoes pinched, and now I have hammertoes.

HERR PARKER

Hammertoes, too bad. Do you see Vine Street? We must turn the corner at Vine Street.

HILDEGARD

Not yet. *(looks around)* You know, my back is still bothering me at bit. *(rubs her back)*

HERR PARKER

Too bad. Now, Vine Street--I’m sure it’s not far.

HILDEGARD

It’s around here somewhere.

HERR PARKER

(getting upset) Yes, SOMEWHERE.

HILDEGARD

Is something wrong?

HERR PARKER

No. But do you see College Dry Cleaner?

HILDEGARD

Do you need to go to the dry cleaner?

HERR PARKER

No! But the dry cleaner is where we turn left!
(They turn left.)

HILDEGARD

Oh, we'll find it. (*distracted*) Yes, Berlin was really something. But I was never in Berlin.

HERR PARKER

Neither was I. What's Berlin got to do with anything?

HILDEGARD

I was never on stage in Berlin.

HERR PARKER

You used to be in the theater. And your mind is still there.

HILDEGARD

The theater in Berlin was really something!

HERR PARKER

Yes, you said that already. The theater in Berlin was really something. But who could afford a ticket?

HILDEGARD

That's one nice thing about movies—the tickets are cheaper.

HERR PARKER

(*silent for a while, then--*) Hildegard, I've been thinking about you.

HILDEGARD

And what have you been thinking?

HERR PARKER

Just that Peter may be right. It may be a good idea, the assisted living.

HILDEGARD

My sons! My sons are entitled to their own opinions. Must we discuss this again?

HERR PARKER

Assisted living, it's a new idea! It's not like a *nursing home*. They have films—and lectures! An elevator!

HILDEGARD

An elevator, big deal!

HERR PARKER

I, for one, can appreciate an elevator! (*beat*) Some of these buildings even have dining rooms! (*no response*) So don't go to the nice assisted living.

HILDEGARD

If it's so great, why don't you go?

HERR PARKER

There's a waiting list. But I put my name on it anyway, for subsidized housing.

HILDEGARD

Good. But I'm not going anywhere today.

HERR PARKER

Not at this rate. Maybe we should take a taxi.

HILDEGARD

A taxi? We're only a couple of blocks away.

HERR PARKER

Do you see a taxi?

HILDEGARD

No. No taxi. Let's keep going. Maybe one will come along. *(beat)* But I was happy in the theater. *(ignoring him)* Yes, I was happy in the theater, especially when I played Saint Joan.

HERR PARKER

Saint Joan. Too bad she was burned at the stake, just like that other girl you played.

HILDEGARD

In *Faust*, Marguerite! Yes, the poor girl.

HERR PARKER

Like Saint Joan--burned at the stake by an angry mob. The Weimar Republic-- It was built on eggshells. And then everything was burned by angry mobs. *(smoldering anger)* We knew it wouldn't last.

HILDEGARD

The culture lasted! The plays of Bertold Brecht and the music of Kurt Weill are still performed.

HERR PARKER

Yes, everyone in America knows that song "Mack the Knife"! There were a few interesting years in the '20's, and that was about it.

HILDEGARD

And then there was that election, and no Jewish actors could be on stage.

HERR PARKER

What good was the theater then, when we were up against the Nazis? Some of us fought him, you know! We fought Hitler!

HILDEGARD

George Bernard Shaw fought in the theater! *(beat)* I loved George Bernard Shaw!

HERR PARKER

(stops suddenly, losing his temper completely now) Shaw? What do you know of Shaw?

HILDEGARD

(intimidated) Shaw. Shaw was--he was... *(looking toward heaven)* a great playwright. Saint Joan was my favorite.

HERR PARKER *(bullying)*

Shaw! When he received the Nobel Prize, he shared it with other writers. George Bernard Shaw believed in something! He believed in the redistribution of wealth. What do you believe in?

HILDEGARD *(upset)*

Believe, believe. I believe *(beat)* we are Jewish. Yes, absolutely, we are Jewish.

(An uncomfortable silence.)

HERR PARKER *(remorseful)*

I am sorry, my dear, dear friend. What is wrong with me? Yes, we are Jewish. Please, forgive an old man, just an old man lost in the dark.

(HERR PARKER and HILDEGARD exit, stage right.)

(MUSIC: MACK THE KNIFE)

Scene 3. UNIVERSITY CAFE

MUSIC: continues, BRIEFLY

STAGE HAND enters--stage right--TURNS ON THE LAMP in the Café, and exits.

HILDEGARD enters, stage right, carrying her handbag, and takes a few steps towards her chair, and stops.

MUSIC STOPS.

She suddenly remembers her LETTER. Her happy mood vanishes. She plops down in a café chair, and begins searching her bag, worried—but soon gives up.

Unable to find her letter and a bit gloomy, she finds her script instead. Her happy mood returns. She opens her script and finds her place, then looks up at the audience.

HILDEGARD

Strange, I was just looking for something and now I can't remember what I was looking for! And things are always changing. You never know what people will do, how they will rearrange the furniture, what they will invent! In Dresden, for example--my home town--many things have been invented.

(her mind goes blank; she rallies gracefully by signaling the projectionist)

(IMAGE: BRUHLSCHE TERRASSE)

Thank you so much. *(READING AGAIN)*

"This is Bruhlsche Terrasse. It's where those trees are. People call it *Europe's Balcony*. Hundreds of years ago, just under those stairs,"

(IMAGE: CLOSE-UP OF STAIRS)

"--an alchemist was locked up, in a prison laboratory. He never discovered how to turn base metals into gold, but he did discover a process for manufacturing fine porcelain."

(IMAGE: MEISSEN CHINA)

"And just north of Dresden, the town of *Meissen* became world-famous for manufacturing fine china and Dresden became synonymous with delicate porcelain figurines--*Dresden dolls*."

(IMAGE: DRESDEN DOLL)

"My father spent a lot of time in laboratories, too. In the laboratories at Max Elb, he helped to develop and manufacture many pharmaceuticals--drugs. Oh indeed, Max Elb was a big success and so was my father--and he was a very nice man. Everyone liked him, especially *women*. Not that he was a *womanizer*. He just had *a way with women*, except for my mother. Yes, my father was a very nice man and everyone liked him, except my mother."

(BLACK SCREEN)

HILDEGARD, cont'd.

"After WWI, my mother began to feel that he didn't love her, that he'd only married her for her money. She got *depressed*, and "*took to her bed*". I never really knew why. In any event, with Mother in bed and Father at the factory,

(IMAGE: RALPH)

"my big brother Ralph became the center of my world. Ralph, he was so intelligent, a brilliant student! I understood that one day he would go away to school, and he did. Eventually he went away to *medical school*, in Leipzig."

(IMAGE: LEIPZIG, DOORWAY)

"I missed him terribly. And after Ralph left, my mother's low moods grew even lower."

(BLACK SCREEN)

"My father missed Ralph, too, but every morning while my mother was in bed, he'd get up and have breakfast with me. I used to love those apple pastries--what do you call them?"

(IMAGE: APPLE STRUDEL)

"Apfel strudel, that's it! Anyway, my father was a wonderful father, I must say. I adored him. Of course I loved my mother, too, (*dropping the subject*) anyway, after breakfast a *chauffeur* would pick him up and take him to the factory."

(IMAGE: REAR VIEW OF CAR)

"And I would *walk* to school. Father didn't want me to be spoiled and he didn't want people to see me arrive in a limousine, and so I walked. He just wanted me to get some exercise and be a regular kid. And I was."

(IMAGE: HILDEGARD AS A CHILD)

"I was a regular kid, and a very *mediocre* student. I attended the customary school. There was *nothing special* about my school at all, except that during religious instruction, I had to go to a *special room* with the other Jewish girls. It didn't bother me at all."

(BLACK SCREEN)

(NOT READING)

The only thing that did bother me was that some girls had parties and didn't invite me. Even before Hitler, many parents wanted no *Jewish influence*. That's how they put it, they wanted "no *Jewish influence*". (*staring off into the distance*)

Anyway... (READING AGAIN). "My mother was depressed, and after Ralph left for medical school her low moods grew lower. She blamed it all on my father! And so, since no anti-depressant medicines existed then, and since divorce was still socially unacceptable, my mother went to The Alps."

(IMAGE: DAVOS)

HILDEGARD, cont'd.

She went to Switzerland, to a spa in Davos high up in the Swiss Alps, to take the waters and breathe in the fresh air. She loved the mountains, and went there more and more often. My father didn't mind a bit.

(BLACK SCREEN)

He was often at work, or out with friends. And me? With everyone in my family gone, I went to stay with my grandmother. She lived right on the Grosser Garten,

(IMAGE: GROSSER GARTEN)

Grosser Garten) the "Big Park", right across the street from the zoo!

(IMAGE: THE ZOO)

My grandmother was very kind, and often took me walking in the park, to visit the animals. And she had a big, beautiful house

(IMAGE: VILLA SALZBURG, exterior)

filled with wonderful paintings! A real Monet! And she loved to have parties--*soirees*.

(IMAGE: VILLA SALZBURG, interior)

She invited all kinds of talented people: painters and musicians, and actors and directors. And ME! And she took me to plays! And that's when I fell in love with the theater.

(IMAGE: CENTRAL THEATER)

Thanks to my grandmother, I discovered at an early age that I wanted to be an actress, nothing else. My parents were completely against it.

(IMAGE: STAGE EMBRACE)

Many Germans at that time thought that actresses were simply another kind of prostitute—AND SOME WERE!

(MARLENE DIETRICH, BLUE ANGEL)

My proper Jewish parents were horrified. My grandmother was Jewish, too--of course--but she understood. She *encouraged* me. She even paid for my acting lessons, *in secret*. She knew that my parents would never agree to it.

(DARK SCREEN)

And so, while my big brother was studying medicine, I studied acting. My life went on like this, quite happily-until:

(IMAGE: RALPH IN SUIT)

It came as a complete shock. At first we couldn't even believe it. But my brother—my dear, dear brother-- took his life. He took his own life! My poor mother! We all grieved for Ralph, but my mother couldn't get over it. Yes, it was bad, bad enough; and then Erich Kastner wrote *Fabian*, and *everyone knew*. It was published all over Germany.

(IMAGE: FABIAN BOOK COVER)

Fabian. Erich Kastner was an up and coming writer from Dresden.

(IMAGE: ERIC KAESTNER)

He'd met Ralph in Leipzig and wanted to understand why a young man with everything going for him, like my brother, would take his own life. We all did. And so he wrote all about it, all about Ralph's life, and death. But he also wrote all about my parents' unhappy marriage--my father's busy social life and Mother's frequent sojourns in Switzerland. Of my brother's suicide, he wrote: "***What a punishment for a bad mother!***" Can you imagine how my mother felt after that? She couldn't get it out of her mind, "***what a punishment for a bad mother.***" **(DARK SCREEN)**

HILDEGARD, cont'd.

But Erich Kastner was also writing about Germany during the rise of Fascism,

(IMAGE: Nazis)

with an eerie feeling of impending doom.

(DARK SCREEN)

In 1933, in Berlin, Nazis tossed Erich Kastner's books into a bonfire.

(IMAGE: BOOK BURNING)

He was the only author present to witness his books burning in the flames.

(DARK SCREEN/ LIGHTS RISE/ BACKGROUND CAFÉ NOISE)

(The STAGE HAND enters, begins to "set" the café table with coffee cups and plates of cake, and exits. HILDEGARD rises, moves aside, looking disoriented again as we hear sounds of HERR PARKER's cane, tapping. He enters--stage right--newspaper under his arm. She goes to him.)

HILDEGARD

That's the way. That's it. You know, it's funny but I have the feeling that I've forgotten something.

HERR PARKER

We all forget things.

HILDEGARD

Yes, but this was—*important. (getting him settled)* Here we go. Here we go. But I have forgotten something important. *(seating herself, rubbing her back)*

HERR PARKER *(ignoring her)*

Ah, University Café! I like to come here and see my friends—young and old! It is good to be part of the college community. Mmmm. Smells good!

HILDEGARD

Yes, coffee, so good! And—*(examining her cake, poking it with a fork, displeased)*

HERR PARKER

There is nothing like a nice cup of coffee and piece of apple cake at University Cafe!

HILDEGARD

Yes, coffee, so good! But cake. It is still morning.

HERR PARKER

Oh, who cares what time it is! Come now, Hildegard, get in the spirit, have some cake!

HILDEGARD

Well, OK. *(pushes her cake away)* You know, my grandmother took me to Vienna, all the way from Dresden to Vienna—for cake and coffee! Ah, the cakes in Vienna, layers and layers of cream and pastry!

HERR PARKER

That's nice. But we aren't in Vienna. Now, do you see any familiar faces?

HILDEGARD

(looks around) No, nobody.

HERR PARKER

So then, it's a good thing I brought the newspaper!

HILDEGARD

The newspaper? Must we read the paper now?

HERR PARKER

It was your idea!

HILDEGARD

Mine?

HERR PARKER

Yes. When you volunteered for Reading To The Blind. Anyway, you like to read!

HILDEGARD

Not in a café! I am quite reluctant to read the newspaper in a café.

HERR PARKER

Why not? People do it every day.

HILDEGARD

But not aloud. They read silently, to themselves. No, we should talk, have a conversation!

HERR PARKER

We could read one article! I want to stay informed about Nicaragua. I have great hopes for them. We've never really had true socialism anywhere!

HILDEGARD *(irritated)*

Socialism, it never works! The bankers don't like it.

(CHARLIE enters—stage left--wearing a white apron, carrying a cup of coffee and a newspaper, looking for a seat and notices Herr Parker.)

CHARLIE

HERR PARKER, HERR PARKER!

HILDEGARD

Nicaragua is a poor little fish, swimming along-- *(interrupted)*

HERR PARKER (*hearing him*)

CHARLIE, is that you? Over here!

CHARLIE

Yeah, it's me! HERR PARKER, how you doing!

HERR PARKER

Fine, Charlie, fine. And you?

CHARLIE

Good, good.

HERR PARKER

Can you join us?

CHARLIE

I'm working, but I'm on break.

(HILDEGARD moves over. CHARLIE pulls up a stool, sandwiched in between her and Herr Parker. CHARLIE AND HILDEGARD have instant chemistry.)

CHARLIE

I didn't mean to disturb you.

HILDEGARD (*smile*)

You do not disturb us one bit.

HERR PARKER

Hildegard, this is CHARLIE, a new friend! CHARLIE works here in the café. He is a writer!

HILDEGARD

CHARLIE! Nice to meet you! You are a writer!

CHARLIE

Well, I try. I'm trying.

HERR PARKER

Writing, it's quite a process! CHARLIE, this is Hildegard, one of my oldest friends.

CHARLIE

Hildegard, nice to meet you!

HERR PARKER

Hildegard, CHARLIE is a screen writer!

CHARLIE

Oh, I'm just a beginner.

HILDEGARD

Ah, you are going to Hollywood!

CHARLIE

In my dreams.

HILDEGARD

I used to dream of going to Hollywood, but I had an accent.

CHARLIE

Marlene Dietrich had an accent. Everyone liked it.

HERR PARKER

Ah, to be a successful actor, all you need is the right look. To be a successful screen writer, you need the right idea!

HILDEGARD

Yes, something that fascinates people!

HERR PARKER

I started writing in Vienna. I published a magazine there, called "The East"—about the Middle East. And I've been writing ever since. When I started to lose my vision, Hildegard became my typist! I wrote my last article after Jaws came out.

HILDEGARD

Jaws! A terrible movie to frighten little children!

HERR PARKER

That's why I wrote it. Sharks, they normally don't hurt humans.

HILDEGARD

That article! A young man just lost his arm, swimming. A shark ate it. Sharks are a very dangerous kind of a fish. The poor fellow, missing an arm! It was *beyond the Pale*.

HERR PARKER

I SAID "NORMALLY". (*scowling*) *Beyond The Pale*! I've been *Beyond the Pale* for most of my life! CHARLIE, did you know that The Pale was once a real place?

CHARLIE

The Pale.

HERR PARKER

The Pale—I once lived there. It was a place between Russia and Poland where Jews lived, and where Jewish identity was formed in Europe, largely through Yiddish: Yiddish poetry, Yiddish theater.

HILDEGARD

He doesn't want to hear about Yiddish.

HERR PARKER

Everyone wants to hear about Yiddish, the language of the people!

HILDEGARD

The poor, poor people of The Pale! (*sincerely*) They spoke YIDDISH. It was terrible!

CHARLIE

What's wrong with Yiddish?

HERR PARKER

Nothing. But the German Jews felt superior to the rest of us, who spoke Yiddish.

HILDEGARD

Yes, (*sincerely*) we were superior.

CHARLIE

Ah, excuse me, but you just said you were superior.

HILDEGARD

Yes, we were superior.

CHARLIE

But that's racist! That's—that's terrible!

HILDEGARD

Oh, how could I explain it? You see--the poor people from The Pale, they came with their BUNDLES and their children. In RAGS! The women in their long black skirts! And they spoke **Yiddish**. It was terrible.

HERR PARKER

I myself was one of those poor people!

HILDEGARD

I didn't mean you.

HERR PARKER

I KNOW what you meant! We Eastern Jews, the *Ostjuden*, we spoke **Yiddish**. It's true-- many were orthodox and wore black, but there is no law against wearing black. And we harmed no one!

(HERR PARKER and CHARLIE freeze. HILDEGARD approaches the audience.)

HILDEGARD

Oh, how could I explain it, how it felt to hear people speaking ***Yiddish*** after being raised on what we called ***High German***? Well. Maybe if you listen to this, you'll get an idea of how it felt. Here is a classic American song, originally written in English for the Broadway musical, Oklahoma.

(MUSIC: AMERICAN SONG, IN YIDDISH)

Do you see what I mean? *(no response)* Doesn't it seem strange to you? *(silence)* Well, maybe you had to be there.

(She returns to the table as the others talk.)

CHARLIE

How can you be friends with someone like that!

HERR PARKER

Oh, we are old friends.

CHARLIE

(turning to Herr Parker) But racial superiority? After everything that's happened?

HERR PARKER

Charlie, Hildegard and I are old friends. Sometimes we must overlook certain differences. Let's not make the mistake of turning friends into enemies!

CHARLIE

OK, (*shrugs*) whatever!

HILDEGARD

(*re-asserting herself, smiling*) I used to be in the theater.

HERR PARKER

But you were never in the Yiddish theater!

HILDEGARD

I was in the wander theater, and that's where I met Boris.

HERR PARKER

Oh, God, not Boris again!

HILDEGARD

Boris! He was a big wheel in the theater, an actor and a director, exactly the kind of man my father never wanted me to meet--a dark, handsome Russian Jew. Yes, he was Russian, but his German was better than mine! He was so talented. Well, one night after a performance, I went to bed early.

HERR PARKER

No one wants to hear about Boris.

CHARLIE

I do!

HILDEGARD

Well, for some reason I was completely exhausted. It was dark and quiet. I was just starting to fall asleep when I heard someone enter my room. It was Boris! I was too frightened to move! Then I heard him creeping closer to my bed. Closer and closer. And then I felt him gently lift the blankets over my ankles and kiss--my *feet*!

CHARLIE

Your feet?

HILDEGARD

Yes. It was Boris. He loved my feet. The next morning I discovered, to my amazement, that I liked him even better. After that, we spent even more time together. When we were apart, I felt starved for his presence.

CHARLIE

This could be your story for Hollywood!

HERR PARKER

You call this a story? An older man preying on a girl!

HILDEGARD

But I wanted to be caught! Yes, I was just a girl, starting out in the theater and Boris worked with me every day, helping me polish my performances. Soon after that, I landed my first big role! I was just 17.

CHARLIE

This could make a great story for Hollywood! You could call it “Boris”!

HILDEGARD

Actually, I did write a story about it, called “Feet”.

CHARLIE

“Feet”! Wow. Maybe you could option it out, or adapt it, write a screen play! (*no response*) You just said that going to Hollywood was your dream!

HILDEGARD

Write a screen play. How could I do that?

CHARLIE

Well, if you don’t have anyone else, I could help you.

HERR PARKER (*disgusted*)

“Feet”, the story of a foot fetish! Exploitation and decadence.

CHARLIE

We can have a little fun once in a while.

HERR PARKER (*fed up*)

Fun, Americans always want to have FUN. What is this FUN?

CHARLIE

Once in a while.

HERR PARKER

Americans like to have one idiotic fiction after the next.

HILDEGARD

“Feet”, it was a true story. Non-fiction.

HERR PARKER (*ignores her*)

Illusions and more illusions! Hollywood movies, the dramas are so thin and flat-- compared to the dramas out in the real world!

CHARLIE

Like what?

HERR PARKER

(calm again, thinking) Let's see. Hmm. Like the Dreyfus Affair.

HILDEGARD

It's been done.

HERR PARKER

It could use a re-make. It's still important! Dreyfus, a Jewish officer in the French military, accused of treason. It was nothing but anti-Semitism. But it caused many European Jews to follow the ideas of Herzl, and go to Palestine.

HILDEGARD

(picking at her cake) All wrong, it's all wrong.

HERR PARKER

It was neither right nor wrong. There were few choices. Some Jews were with Herzl and Zionism. Some were with The Bund. I was with The Bund, the labor organization.

CHARLIE

Speaking of labor. Excuse me, but I've gotta go back to work! Hildegard, it was nice meeting you. I'd really like to read your story some time.

HILDEGARD

You are welcome--any time!

(They all say good-bye, and CHARLIE exits.)

HILDEGARD

This cake, it's all wrong.

HERR PARKER

How can a piece of cake be wrong? People are wrong, not cakes.

HILDEGARD

The cakes in Vienna were much better. My grandmother and I sometimes went to Vienna. We took the train, all the way to Vienna for coffee and cake! Ah, the cakes in Vienna! Layers and layers of pastry and cream!

HERR PARKER

I lived in Vienna for many years. And as far as I'm concerned, they can keep their cake.

HILDEGARD

It's strange. I can't remember what happened to them. My grandmother--

HERR PARKER *(firmly)*

We have discussed this before.

HILDEGARD

I was my fault, all my fault.

HERR PARKER

Your fault! You of all people were not to blame. You did what you could. You were up against the whole world.

HILDEGARD

My father was a good father! A wonderful father!

HERR PARKER

No doubt! But it was their choice. They chose to stay. Your grandmother was getting older and your mother was not well.

HILDEGARD

It was my fault. I wrote that letter. Me, no one else. *(pause)* Did she die?

HERR PARKER

Hildegard, we've told you before. No one knows, exactly.

HILDEGARD

That letter. Did I mail it?

HERR PARKER

It could have been easy. They had money, and your mother spent half her life in Davos! They could have gone to Switzerland. Switzerland, that was the place!

HILDEGARD

(sad resignation) Switzerland, of course. *(happy)* Ah, but the cakes in Vienna!

LIGHTS DIM.

(Characters exit—stage left.).

(IMAGE: CHOCOLATE CAKE)

(MUSIC: CHOPIN, “Minute Waltz”)

INTERMISSION

During this time, a selection of Hildegard's writings, photographs and other memorabilia will be on display, including “Feet”.

ACT II. Scene 1. "BORIS"

Setting: Hildegard's living room. The floor lamp is back on. Everything has been put back into place, with the addition of several boxes, which sit on the coffee table.

At rise: HILDEGARD enters, somewhat confused, rubbing her back. She takes her usual seat, opens her script, and READS, very soberly. Photos appear automatically.

HILDEGARD

"I'm not sure when Jews first came to Dresden; but during the 14th century, local barbarians blamed them for The Plague, and burned them alive in the town square."

(IMAGE: A BURNING AT THE STAKE)

"Like Saint Joan! I grew up in a Jewish family, but we never had any serious problems. My parents were not particularly *observant*, but we went to temple on High Holy Days."

(IMAGE: SYNAGOGUE)

"We had only one temple in Dresden. It was designed by the famous architect, Gottfried Semper. He happened to be a gentile, and he also designed the famous Dresden Opera House."

(IMAGE: DRESDEN OPERA HOUSE)

"That was in the 19th century, the Golden Age of German Unification! The age of Beethoven--and the Industrial Revolution! Dresden became a center not only for fine art but also for *feinarbeit*--for precision work.

(IMAGE: FEINARBEIT)

Tourists and workers came from all over Europe. Outnumbered by foreigners, Jews who were already living in Dresden could assimilate easily into the mix."

(IMAGE: MAP)

(not reading) That's Dresden there, by the arrow, in the eastern part of Germany, near the Czech Republic and Poland, south of Berlin. Yes, people came from all over Europe. And everyone wanted to be in the Altstadt. The old part of town.

(IMAGE: ROOFTOPS)

"There was plenty of room in Neustadt, the new part of town. But it lacked *ambiance*. By 1919, the Altstadt was quite overcrowded. The *ambiance* was lovely, but the air was bad. The Golden Age was over."

(BLACK SCREEN)

HILDEGARD, cont'd.

“And then Germany lost WWI; someone had to be blamed. The old medieval anti-Semitism of the previous centuries returned, with a vengeance. In the midst of all the chaos and suffering in Germany after WWI, however, a fragile new republic was born: *The Weimar Republic!*”

(IMAGE: WEIMAR COUNCIL)

“Reforms were instituted, like the eight-hour work day. Life was still very, very difficult, but some people began to find new things to do.”

(IMAGE: “GERMAN WHEELS”)

“These were called “German wheels”, a new sport entered into the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, when Jesse Owens, the American athlete—

(IMAGE: JESSE OWENS, RUNNING)

“--proved Hitler’s racial theories to be ridiculous. Some Germans discovered music from America--George Gershwin and Duke Ellington--and new dances,

(IMAGE: AMERICANS DANCING)

“--like the Charleston, and the jitterbug! I always loved to dance. And when I was old enough, I studied with a very famous choreographer, Mary Wigman.

(IMAGE: MARY WIGMAN)

“Mary Wigman started a school of modern dance in Dresden and created a new kind of women’s *MOVEMENT*, about moving your body.

(IMAGE: MARY WIGMAN, OUTDOORS)

“We called it “out from pressure” dancing. Release your nervous system! *(beat)* Many Germans, however, did not want to release their nervous systems. They wanted more pressure, not less. They wanted to go backward not forward.”

(BLACK SCREEN-image disappears, left)

“They longed for the “good old days” of order and authority and traditional German culture. And after all the slaughter of WWI, they wanted a powerful military. Again! They missed The Kaiser.

(IMAGE: NEWER PHOTO OF THE KAISER)

They wanted to wave the flag and say, “We’re number one!” They were drawn to Fascism,

(IMAGE: NAZI RALLY)

and anti-Semitism. Their flag became The Swastika.”

(IMAGE: NAZI FLAGS)

HILDEGARD

“Arnold Schoenberg, a modern composer living in Berlin, wrote that he was no longer a German, nor even perhaps a human being, *but a Jew*.”

(BLACK SCREEN)

“I didn’t feel that way at all. Anti-Semitism was growing, it’s true. But so was I. And I was determined to follow my plan to be an actress. My proper parents disapproved, but I did it anyway.”

(IMAGE: HILDE, WITH TIE)

“I got my first big break with the Stadt Theater in Dusseldorf, where I met a promising young medical student, *David*, my future husband! David shared my love of the theater and often came to the shows. My parents couldn’t believe their good luck. I soon married a man who would one day be a nice Jewish doctor! But I kept working. A year later, I became pregnant and stopped acting for a while. We had a child, a little boy, and my happiness was complete.”

(IMAGE: HAPPY FAMILY)

(CLOSE-UP) (STOPS READING)

But that happiness was not to last.

(BLACK SCREEN, LOOKING UP)

(LOOKS UP, NOT READING) I was there during that election, in 1933. After that, Jews were no longer allowed to be on stage, or to practice medicine. And the other children wouldn’t play with Peter, such a good, sweet child.

(IMAGE: CHILDREN SALUTING HITLER)

(READING AGAIN) “In 1933 David and I took Peter and went to Italy.”

(IMAGE: TRAIN THROUGH THE ALPS)

“Italy, how we loved it! In Dresden, we always loved the Italian artists!”

(IMAGE: Raphael, Sistine Madonna)

“We were in heaven!”

(IMAGE: Raphael, cherubs, detail from Sistine Madonna)

We all learned Italian and David studied for the Italian doctor’s examination. Such happy years! In Dresden, however, things got bad, very bad. In 1938, the synagogue was set on fire.”

(IMAGE TEMPLE IN DRESDEN, STAR SAVED)

“Firefighters--good people--came to put out the blaze, but Nazis shot at them and kept shooting until they left. The next day, Jews from the congregation were forced to clean up the mess, and pay for it. And then Nazis blew up the whole synagogue.

(BLACK SCREEN)

The same thing was happening in other cities. This was a temple in Frankfurt.”

(IMAGE: BURNING SYNAGOGUE)

“And then Fascism came to Italy.”

(IMAGE: MUSSOLINI)

“In March of 1938, we went to America.”

(MUSIC: GERSHWIN, AMERICAN IN PARIS/IMAGE: STATUE OF LIBERTY)/DOORBELL RINGS)

CHARLIE (*off-stage*)

Hello, is anyone here?

(MUSIC STOPS/CHARLIE enters stage left)

CHARLIE

(*peering in*) Hello?

HILDEGARD

(*in her own world*) Oh, you startled me! I'm over here!

CHARLIE

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to.

HILDEGARD

No need to be sorry.

CHARLIE

Do you know your door was open?

HILDEGARD

Oh, it's a nice day, why not open the door? And I strained my back, so it's hard to get up. Please excuse my rudeness—come on in!

CHARLIE

(*looking around, confused*) I can come back another time when you don't have company.

HILDEGARD

I was just talking with the audience; you are welcome to join us!

CHARLIE

Ah, the audience. Er, ah. (*looks back at the door, takes a breath, wishes he hadn't come*)

HILDEGARD

By the way, I am Hildegard, and it is very nice to meet you.

CHARLIE

I'm—ah, I'm Charlie.

HILDEGARD

Charlie, a very nice name!

CHARLIE

I was just on my way to work. I can come back another time.

HILDEGARD

It's a fine time! And it is very nice to meet you.

CHARLIE

(trying to relate) Ah, thanks. Actually, we met yesterday, at the café.

HILDEGARD

We did?

CHARLIE

You were with HERR PARKER. I work in the café. *(no response)* You offered to show me one of your stories.

HILDEGARD

I did?

CHARLIE

Your story, about Boris. "Feet". *(He's not sure whether to stay or go.)*

HILDEGARD

Oh yes, "Feet". I wrote it long ago. And I wrote *that letter*. Did it get there?

CHARLIE

Ah, er—ah, I don't know.

HILDEGARD

I'm not sure if I mailed it or not. Did it ever get there?

CHARLIE

Well, why don't you just call the person you sent it to, or the company or whatever.

HILDEGARD

I can't. *(getting upset)* I can't. I just have to find it myself.

(He hesitates, conflicted, but his kindly nature wins out—and his ulterior motive.)

CHARLIE

OK. Well, I could help you look.

HILDEGARD

Oh, that would be just great! Because I moved those boxes, and I hurt my back.

CHARLIE

Oh, that's too bad, but, ah you know, ah, when we were in the café yesterday you were talking about your story, "Feet". It sounded like a great story!

HILDEGARD

I have lots of stuff in there.

CHARLIE (*sits down*)

I didn't hear the whole story, but it sounded like it might make a good screen play. And that's a great title, "Feet"!

HILDEGARD

It could be in there.

CHARLIE

Oh great, your story!

HILDEGARD

No, that letter. Well—actually, my stories are all in there. (*waves the thought away*) I put them in there myself. But that letter, to tell you the truth, it's driving me crazy.

CHARLIE

I'm working on a screen play that's driving me crazy. I wish I'd never started it.

HILDEGARD

And I wish I had a better memory. Then I'd know what's really going on! And then I hurt my back. Those darned boxes—they're too heavy.

CHARLIE

These boxes?

(*HILDEGARD indicates the boxes at hand. He leans over, opens one of the boxes, and starts taking things out, mostly bills.*)

CHARLIE

You have a lot of old bills here!

HILDEGARD

Oh yes, quite old.

CHARLIE

(*trying to make a joke*) I hope you paid them all!

HILDEGARD

Oh, my son Michael pays them—or maybe Peter. I don't know.

CHARLIE

(*removes MORE bills*) Bills... bills... receipts. Actually, I should be getting to work.

HILDEGARD

Oh, never be late for work. (*studying her old electric bill*)

CHARLIE

I won't. (*starts to get up when an old diary in the box catches his eye. He is tantalized, and takes it out.*) Oh my God—this is really old!

HILDEGARD

Oh yes! Really OLD. (*distracted by the bill*) My electric bill, it was really low then!

CHARLIE

1962! Wow, you have a diary here from 1962. Amazing!

HILDEGARD

(*tries to relate, can't*) Absolutely, amazing!

CHARLIE

1962, that was the year I was born! Wow. Mind if I look at it?

HILDEGARD

Of course not. Go right ahead.

CHARLIE

(*reading silently*) Oh, it looks—personal.

HILDEGARD

It's not a state secret! (*READING OVER HIS SHOULDER*) Oh, Eric Bernstein! He was so handsome! I met him after my first husband died. I was in love--"ihn lieb"!

CHARLIE (*reading*)

"We drive to a small hotel, and live as Mr. & Mrs. Bernstein, happily then for four unforgettable days of love, ocean, sand, peace, and lazy happiness! (*shocked*) This could go in the screen-play, too!

HILDEGARD

But he didn't want to get married. His reason was: (*scans diary, reads*)

"Ill health." (*drops her enthusiasm*) Oh yes, of course. He is going to wait and see whether he won't improve after his trip to--Australia.

CHARLIE

OH, Australia. Too bad. (*puts diary back, notices an old brochure*) The Europa!

HILDEGARD

Yes, we were very fortunate to sail on The Europa. We got the *last tickets*.

CHARLIE

That was lucky, the last tickets on the ship.

HILDEGARD

The last tickets on *any ship* leaving Germany then.

CHARLIE

Oh.

HILDEGARD

Those tickets cost us everything we had, but we traveled in style! A string quartet in the dining room—even in tourist class! (*taking more things out of the trunk, making a mess*) And then we had nothing. We had to start all over.

CHARLIE

At least you were OK.

HILDEGARD

Yes, we were OK. I think we were OK. Were we OK?

CHARLIE

You seem to be.

HILDEGARD

Of course we were FINE. We came to America and we had a good life. But after we left-- I never thought they'd do it. But my parents got divorced!

CHARLIE

Wow, that was a switch!

HILDEGARD

Yes, but then they changed their minds.

CHARLIE

They got re-married? (*looks up, listening closely*)

HILDEGARD

No, they hated each other! My father left. He came to live in America, with us. Mother stayed in Dresden, with my grandmother.

CHARLIE

I don't understand.

HILDEGARD

Mother and Grandmother changed their minds, and asked me to help them!

CHARLIE

What'd they want you to do?

HILDEGARD

Help them come here. They didn't know how bad it would get. They wanted to join us.

CHARLIE

Oh.

HILDEGARD

Yes. We were in Colorado by then. I *tried* to help them. I wrote so many letters. And affidavits—and the depositions! And Father was with us so I had to do it in secret.

CHARLIE

You didn't tell him?

HILDEGARD

No. I couldn't tell him they were coming. I knew that if he found out, he'd try to stop me.

CHARLIE

But living in the same house, wouldn't he find out sooner or later?

HILDEGARD

Yes, sooner or later he found out.

(CHARLIE freezes. She approaches the audience. LIGHTS ADJUST for slides coming up. She rises, takes a few steps closer to the audience.)

And then he gave me that idea about *Palestina*—***Palestine***. He said *Palestine* would be a much better idea. They had relatives there, who could help them more than we could—

(images appear behind her, automatically. IMAGE: ISRAELI KIBBUTZ)
and the weather was warmer.

(IMAGE: TEL AVIV BEACH)

Yes, he said, write again--to the government in Dresden—to the Nazi's in charge, and say that they will not come to America but will go instead to Palestine. There will be money for them there--and relatives who can help them more than we could. *(beat)* And I was persuaded.

(BLACK SCREEN. She rises, crosses the stage.)

He persuaded me. But I wrote that letter—me, no one else. My father was a good father. It was all ...my fault. *(beat)* My grandmother and I continued to write each other. Back and forth, this and that. I don't know. I don't remember what we wrote. And then—suddenly, her letters stopped. We didn't know what to think. Had they gone to Palestine, or to some other country? Had they stayed in Dresden and gone into hiding?

If they'd gone into hiding, a letter from America could attract attention, and they'd be found out. After that, we didn't even dare to write to them again. After that, we couldn't even write them a letter! *(BEAT)* The war went on.

(IMAGE: LONDON, BOMBED, woman with baby in pram)

London.

(IMAGE: ROTTERDAM, BOMBED)

Rotterdam.

(IMAGE: WARSAW, BOMBED)

Warsaw.

(IMAGE: BERLIN in ruins, woman with baby and gas mask)

Berlin.

(BEAT) The war went on, and on. By February of 1945, most of the cities in Germany had been bombed, into ruins.

(IMAGE: HAMBURG IN RUINS)

Dresden had largely been spared. No one expected it. The overcrowded apartments and the fine architecture went up in flames—and the Opera House. The Opera House died, all dressed up.

(IMAGE: SEMPER OPERA HOUSE, BOMBED)

For two days the bombing and the fires continued.

(IMAGE: DRESDEN IN RUINS)

It was the largest firestorm the world had ever seen. Fourteen square miles of the city were destroyed.

(upset, lost, turns to a STAGE HAND in the wings.)

I can't!

(She stops talking. Charlie, re-aminated, escorts her away, STAGE RIGHT.)

(Herr Parker enters, STAGE LEFT. He approaches the audience, seriously.)

HERR PARKER

Not everything in Dresden was destroyed. Some people were prepared--for small bombs. Small bombs could be dumped into sand, and small fires could be put out. Some people kept buckets of sand and water near their homes, and some buildings were saved. One of them was that house on Tiergartenstrasse--the home of Hildegard's grandmother.

During the war, her house was used by the Red Cross. After the bombs fell, a brave man rushed past armed guards to the roof, and threw the bombs that landed on the house onto the street below. The house was saved, but her grandmother was not there.

(IMAGE: VILLA SALZBURG, AGAIN)

HERR PARKER

(*very controlled*)

According to witnesses, Hildegard's grandmother died of natural causes, in a *Juden Haus* in Dresden. Not the usual fate of an (*stern*) elderly Jewish woman in Germany. But according to witness' testimony, this is what occurred.

Years ago, Hilde received word that her mother had been seen in Riga, Latvia—and had been killed in a concentration camp there. A noted Jewish historian Simon Dubnow was also killed at Riga. He exhorted people to “write and record”. But few witnesses to the crimes at Riga lived to write or record anything.

(DARK SCREEN)

In the end, some pieces of this story are missing. And it is not for us to fill in the blanks, and replace facts with fiction. The truth must not be confused.

I, too, lost people, people who were never heard from again—lost, *disappeared*. But stories, do we need another one?

Lights dim.

He exits.

ACT II. Scene 2. A New Day

Setting: *LIGHTS RISE. The same old living room again, but a tote bag sits on the table. It contains Hildegard's story "Feet".*

At rise: *CHARLIE enters—stage left. He's vacuuming, a dust rag in a pocket. HILDEGARD enters, wearing a watch. Maybe she takes her seat or maybe she just remains standing; but she bends over to pick up the remote, and stops suddenly. Her back hurts but she tries to turn on the TV. Nothing happens. The doorbell rings.*

HERR PARKER (*off-stage*)
Hello! Hildegard, are you here? (*letting himself in*)

HILDEGARD (*yelling*)
Yes, HERR PARKER. I'm right here.

HERR PARKER (*yelling*)
(*entering, STAGE RIGHT, wearing a new beret*)
Ah, and what are you doing inside on such a nice day?

HILDEGARD (*yelling*)
I was trying to turn on the TV, but this darned clicker! It's for the birds!

HERR PARKER (*yelling*)
Ah, the birds, too bad I can't see them any more.

(*CHARLIE turns off the vacuum.*)
CHARLIE
Herr Parker, what's goin' on! Good to see you, man!
(*they shake hands, warmly*)

HERR PARKER
Charlie, good to see you again, MAN! But, excuse me, are you here vacuuming?

CHARLIE
Yeah! I'm the new *cleaning lady*! I got a new job—here! Well, I got work to do! Auf Wiedersehn!

HERR PARKER
Wiedersehn, Charlie!

(*CHARLIE turns the vacuum back on, vacuums his way off-stage. Silence.*)

HILDEGARD
And by the way, HERR PARKER, you have a new beret! Very nice!

HERR PARKER

Thank you, Hildegard. I decided it was time for a change. (*loudly, so Charlie can hear*)
So, what about a nice coffee, or maybe an ice-cream soda at University Café!

HILDEGARD

Good idea! I'll just get my purse. (*notices bag on the table*) Oh, here it is, right here.
Let's go! (*offering him her arm*) It's funny, but for some reason, I have the idea that it's
your birthday.

HERR PARKER

That's because it is!

HILDEGARD

Ah, I knew it! Happy birthday!

HERR PARKER

Thank you, Hildegard.

HILDEGARD

It's funny, but I have the feeling that your birthday was also YESTERDAY.

HERR PARKER

That's because the I.S. had a lovely party for me, YESTERDAY.

HILDEGARD

The "I.S."

HERR PARKER

Yes, my group, the International Socialists. My comrades! But today is my real birthday!
(*beat*) And today--I am 95!

HILDEGARD

95! Many happy returns of the day!

HERR PARKER

Thank you so much. Yes, 95.
(*They start inching their way to the door, stopping every few feet to talk.*)

HERR PARKER

Now, Hildegard, Charlie has planned a very nice surprise party for me, at the Café. So,
when we get to the café, be sure to act surprised.

HILDEGARD

OK. I will act surprised. You know, I used to act, in the theater!

HERR PARKER

I know that. (*beat*) Yes, I am quite old now, but it is good to be quite old. In five years, I'll be 100.

HILDEGARD

And why would *this* be so marvelous?

HERR PARKER

Because then maybe I could get on TV and be interviewed. I want to explain what's going on.

HILDEGARD

That *would be* marvelous! And, by the way, you look very nice today. Why don't you just explain it now? We have a perfectly good audience right here.

HERR PARKER

Now? But this is YOUR SHOW.

HILDEGARD

It is my show, but I share with you. Go ahead. Go ahead.

HERR PARKER (*tentatively*)

Well, I would like to explain that Nazis still exist. After WWII, many Nazis went to Argentina by way of an "Underground Railroad", with funds provided by the Catholic Church from an office on Jerome Street--in Rome.

HILDEGARD

Do we have to talk about this today?

HERR PARKER

Yes! Because some of them are still around--people from The Iron Guard, too! Some of them went to Detroit.

HILDEGARD

Detroit.

HERR PARKER

Yes. And some of them are active in THE ANTI-COMMUNIST LEAGUE! If you don't believe me, do the research.

HILDEGARD

We believe you. We believe you. But our time here is almost over. Alfred, please. Can't you say ANYTHING about your SELF!

HERR PARKER

Why would I do that?

HILDEGARD

Alfred, the show is almost over. Just give it a try.

HERR PARKER

Well. I'm already living on borrowed time, which is a potential problem. But let's see. What could I say about my self? Well, I was in the *Algemayner Yidisher Arbeiter Bund*, the labor bund. It started when I was a child—to protect the rights of workers.

HILDEGARD

The Jewish Labor Bund--we don't have this type of thing any more.

HERR PARKER (*ignores her*)

I was a *Bundist*, first and always. We were Jewish and we were workers. We fought for the rights of workers everywhere in the *world*. Now I belong to the I.S., The International Socialists.

HILDEGARD

This will never work on TV.

HERR PARKER

I told you, I wanted to be interviewed on TV, by an experienced professional.

HILDEGARD

(*approaching the audience*)

Excuse me, please. HERR PARKER is now 95 years old, and he wishes to be interviewed on TV. If anyone out there has any contacts for him, please speak to us after the show. As a matter of fact, I wouldn't mind appearing on television myself, or in films.

(**LIGHTS BLINK OFF AND ON.** HILDEGARD checks her watch. HERR PARKER starts walking away.)

HILDEGARD

Oh, that's my cue. We have run out of time! Ladies and gentlemen, we thank you for joining us. I hope you'll come back and visit us again very soon, and I'll tell you about my trip to Dresden when it was still behind the Iron Curtain! (*beat*) Ok, ok, and so let's see, what else? Oh yes. (*takes "Feet" out of her tote bag*) I found my story, "Feet"!

(**LIGHTS BLINK OFF AND ON**)

Oh, of course. Sadly, we must now say auf Wiedersehen. We can always read my story another time. We do thank you for joining us here, and we hope to see you again soon! And so, ladies and gentlemen, we bid you a fond farewell. Auf Wiedersehen!

(MUSIC: KLEZMER/JAZZ)

(They start walking away. She stops. He stops.)

HILDEGARD

What's this? Klezmer!

HERR PARKER

Yes, Klezmer! Good dance music!

HILDEGARD

How did we get Klezmer music here?

HERR PARKER

I paid someone to play it! I'm 95 years old now. I can do what I want!

(He claps his hands to the music a few times. Then he takes her by the hand, and they exit, bickering and joking.)

CURTAIN

(MUSIC: TRADITIONAL KLEZMER/AND MORE KLEZMER)