

Hildegard's Wander Theater

Performed in Dresden Germany in October 2006
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Setting: Berkeley, California, in the spring of 1986.

Characters:

Hildegard Barglow. 77 years old, Jewish, and becoming forgetful. Born in Dresden in 1908, she acted on the stage, and emigrated to the United States in 1938. A German language teacher as well as a thespian, her diction is impeccable. Her phrasing, however, occasionally belies the fact that English is not her first language, and that she has forgotten what was just on the tip of her tongue.

Herr Vadim. 79 years old, also Jewish and an immigrant from Germany. He was a journalist. Becoming blind now, he wears lightly tinted glasses and a black beret, and uses a white cane to walk. Close friend of Hilde for over a decade.

Kate. In her early 30s. A struggling musician. The actress playing this role also plays **Young Hilde** in memory scenes.

Roger. In his 20s. Vegetarian, ecologically aware, and a little wild-looking. The actor playing this role also plays **Ralph**, Hilde's brother, in memory scenes.

Melissa Brooks. In her 20s. A college student, majoring in peace studies.

"Hildegard's Wander Theater"
Reading – July 12, 2005

In the reading this evening:

**Elizabeth Orrison will read the role of Hildegard.
Jochen Kretschmer will read the role of Herr Vadim.
Marisa Giannini is the director.**

**(Introduce the other actors and mention Marion Fiedler's
musical contribution.)**

**STAGE DIRECTIONS TO BE READ OUT LOUD ARE PRINTED
BELOW IN BOLDFACE.** The other stage directions may be taken into
account by the readers, but need not be spoken.

**The play takes place in Hildegard's Berkeley home in the spring of
1986.** Furniture consists of a sofa, a table that seats four, four chairs, and a
small table with a television set on it. There is also a radio. Family photos
may be displayed, including one of Hilde's house in Dresden, and a
reproduction of Klee's drawing "Angelus Novus." If feasible, there is a door
that is used to go in and out of the house.

**An upright piano stands on one side of the stage. At the other side is
a trunk that contains Hildegard's belongings.**

Scenes that are centered around the trunk are located downstage, and have
their own lighting, and perhaps a particular piece of music that underscores
them. In Scene 7, "Hildegard and Herr Vadim Walk to a Concert," the trunk
serves as the bench upon which Herr Vadim and Hilde momentarily rest.

Dual roles: one actor performs as both Kate and young Hilde, another as
both Roger and Ralph. Past and present are distinguished for the audience
by differences in lighting, performers' clothing, what they say, how they say
it, and by the dramatic context, including the music being played. In the
silent, Dresden scene, the past is indicated also by changes made to the
stage setting.

Hildegard wears a gold ring on the ring finger of her right hand.

Projected images: **A stage wall or screen serves as a surface upon
which images are projected.** The first of these, an historical photograph of
Hilde playing St. Joan (reproduced on the previous page), is displayed as
audience members take their seats.

**Before the play begins, Kate sits at the piano, playing Weimar period
music.**

Scene 1. Some Kind of Conspiracy.

(Scene 1. HILDE's house. The front door is ajar. Music may continue in the background or it may cease. **Lights are dim. HILDE kneels before the open trunk, illuminated by a pale blue light that emanates from inside the trunk and reads from the German translation of Shaw's "Saint Joan.")**

HILDEGARD

Die Glocken sind's, aus denen ich meine Stimme höere. Hier in dieser Ecke, wo die Glocken aus dem Himmel nidertönen und ihr Echo verweilt, oder auf den Feldern, wo sie aus der Ferne durch die Stille der Landschaft dringen, sind meine Stimmen in den Glocken.

(English original: It is in the bells I hear my voices ... here in this corner, where the bells come down from heaven, and the echoes linger, or in the fields, where they come from a distance through the quiet of the countryside, my voices are in them.)

(Addresses the audience, intense)

She, Saint Joan, listening to her voices, letting in the light, wielding a sword, cutting through the cobwebs and the lies -- again and again.

Until the candle went out, and the voices fell silent.

Captured, interrogated. Who was she, Saint Joan? An innocent peasant girl torn away from her town?

No! She knew what she was doing. She (hands to chest) left her town! Cleaved the family in two, leaving them behind.

At the Hauptbahnhof, through the window of the train, she saw them on the platform below -- her mother and grandmother waving goodbye. Wearing white gloves, gloves for the theater,

(Laughs)

hardly suitable for a wintry afternoon in Dresden.

(MELISSA's hand reaches in from off stage and knocks on the partly open door.)

MELISSA

Hello. Anyone home?

HILDEGARD

(Ignores knocking)

A curtain of steam ... They're gone!

MELISSA

(MELISSA knocks again)
Is anyone there?

(HILDE stands up, walks to the door and opens it for MELISSA, who wears a backpack and stands beside her bicycle.)

MELISSA

Hello, I'm Melissa Brooks.

HILDEGARD

Was I expecting you?

MELISSA

I believe you were. I talked with Michael and ...

HILDEGARD

You talked ...

MELISSA

With Michael ...

HILDEGARD

(nodding) With Michael. Please come in.

MELISSA

Can I bring my bike in too? I forgot my lock.

HILDEGARD

Your bike. There's room in the corner, next to where Roger keeps his bicycle. Have you traveled far?

(MELISSA parks her bike, looks around.)

MELISSA

Not far... have I interrupted you?

HILDEGARD

Well yes, I was talking to ...
(HILDE gestures toward the audience.)

MELISSA

(Peering, MELISSA sees no one.)
Is Michael here?

HILDEGARD

Michael?

MELISSA

Your son. He was going to show me the room.

HILDEGARD

I see. (Doesn't)

MELISSA

Should we wait for him?

HILDEGARD

If you like, you may wait, of course.

(The phone rings.)

Excuse me.

(HILDE looks about for the receiver and finds it, as MELISSA takes her backpack off and sits down.)

-Hello?

(Pause)

-Hello, Michael.

(Pause)

-Yes, she's arrived. She's here right now. But I'm not sure ...

(Pause)

- No way! I don't need any more help. I have plenty of help already!

(Pause)

-I'm aware that I don't remember everything.

"Big deal!" (spoken like a foreigner mastering American slang)

(Pause)

-I've always chosen the people who live here! You have no right!

(Pause)

-Yes, I'm not sleeping well. But she's not the answer to that.

(Pause)
-That's what you say. Goodbye!

(Pause. Hngs up)
(To MELISSA)
I sleep fine. I don't need your help. You'd better go now!

(HILDE picks up the backpack and prepares to give it back to MELISSA.)

MELISSA

Wait, Hilde! Can we discuss this? You and I can go do things together, go for walks. I'll be a companion.

HILDEGARD

A companion?! My mother needed a companion. She was always "sick" and wanted to stay in bed all day long. I'm well, and I don't. I can do things.

(ROGER enters, with his bicycle. In its basket is a verdant potted plant. He feels at home with plants and animals, like Saint Francis. ROGER's missionary zeal targets the ecological predicament of planet earth.)

ROGER

(Parking the bike temporarily)
Hi. Are you the new housemate?

MELISSA

I'm Melissa.

(ROGER and MELISSA regard one another with more than idle curiosity.)

HILDEGARD

Is there some kind of conspiracy going on here?

ROGER

(ROGER, removing the plant and placing it in the room)
Melissa, Hilde, may I introduce our new maidenhair fern. Look at all the leaves.

HILDEGARD

That's fine, Roger.
(To MELISSA)

Look, I don't need your ... your "professional assistance." You're some kind of nurse. Michael sent you here.

MELISSA

No I'm not.

HILDEGARD

Some kind of caretaker.

MELISSA

No, I'm not some kinda! I'm a student at the university.

HILDEGARD

What are you studying? What's your major?

MELISSA

I'm in peace studies. How people can learn to live together without violence.

HILDEGARD

I see. And I'm your school assignment. You'll teach me not to be violent. To sleep better and peacefully accept people like you.

MELISSA

No, no. Yes. Let's accept one another -- be friends.

ROGER

Peace studies, huh? That sounds pretty good to me. Maybe I should have done that.

MELISSA

What did you study?

ROGER

Medicine.

MELISSA

You're going to be a doctor?

ROGER

That's the way it was supposed to be. But I dropped out last year.

HILDEGARD

Being a doctor's not so bad!

ROGER

I loved the science part. But as a career, no, it wasn't for me.

HILDEGARD

Why not?

ROGER

Repairing sick people ... I'd rather help someone not get sick in the first place. You know, "an ounce of prevention" – exercise, diet, COMPANIONSHIP – "is worth a pound of cure."

HILDEGARD

A pound of cure! Yes! I think I'll go for that, and "pass" on the companionship, OK?

ROGER

(ROGER rises.)

You're meant for one another. I'd love to hang out with you longer, but I gotta go now and do my shift at the co-op. Nice to meet you Melissa.

(ROGER exits.)

HILDEGARD

He should have stayed with medicine.

MELISSA

How does he earn a living?

HILDEGARD

Works for ... Abalone Alliance, I think. Have you heard of that?

MELISSA

They're into alternative energy, solar power ...

HILDEGARD

Roger's very noble, and very poor.

MELISSA

I respect that.

HILDEGARD

That's fine, but he doesn't respect education. I think he's wrong.

MELISSA

I love learning new things.

HILDEGARD

(HILDE sits down.)

Are you studying any foreign language?

MELISSA

No, not right now.

HILDEGARD

I used to teach German. I could give you some lessons.

MELISSA

German? Um ...

HILDEGARD

I'm a good teacher.

MELISSA

(MELISSA sits down beside HILDE.)

I'll bet you are. I'd love to read Meister Eckhart in the original.

HILDEGARD

Meister Eckhart ... he lived in the Middle Ages?

MELISSA

(Nods)

Yeah, he was a Dominican monk and a great German mystic.

HILDEGARD

I guess I should know more about him. If I agree with this arrangement, and let you take me on these "walks," I suppose Herr Eckhart can come along too.

MELISSA

(Smiling)

We're all pilgrims on the path.

HILDEGARD

Which passes right through our neighborhood, I'm sure.

(DARK)

Scene 2. Hold the Tofu.

(Scene. Morning. MELISSA has just moved in. She and HILDE are seated at the table, with books and writing materials at hand.)

MELISSA

(With anglicized pronunciation)
"Wer sucht der findet."

HILDEGARD

It's a "Sprichwort", a saying. "Wer sucht der findet."

(ROGER enters from the kitchen.)

ROGER

I don't know how to say this in German, but ... welcome to our house. Would you like some tea, some green tea?

MELISSA

Thanks, Roger.

(ROGER exits. KATE enters.)

KATE

Good morning everyone. Melissa, this is Hilde's day to go to Fernwood. The van will be here in half an hour.

HILDEGARD

The van can come and go as it pleases. We're studying German this morning, thank you.

(To MELISSA)
"The one who searches, finds."

KATE

Roger! Can you come here for a minute?

(ROGER enters.)

HILDEGARD

(To MELISSA)
The Fernwood Senior Center. A petrified forest of the old and the dead.

ROGER

You liked it last week, Hilde.

HILDEGARD

Did I like it, or did you want me to like it?

KATE

We have an agreement. Melissa's living here doesn't change that.

HILDEGARD

We're studying German, and that's final.

KATE

Roger?

ROGER

What can we do? It's up to Hilde to decide ...

KATE

Oh, that's it. Your non-interference philosophy. And with you and me, it's the same thing, right? I shouldn't shape your life either. We'll just ... stumble forward, "You do your thing, I'll do my thing." And Hilde will do whatever the hell she pleases.

(KATE exits. ROGER follows her offstage.)

HILDEGARD

"Wer sucht, der findet." Who's not searching? For God, a lover, a job, or just a roof over your head ... And if you don't find, then you end up at Fernwood, and turn into stone. Kate and Roger found one another right here in this house. For a while, the music they made was Mozart.

(Beat)

These days, I'm searching too. (emphatic) My family didn't all come here from Dresden!

(HERR VADIM, whose eyesight is very weak, walks in. He wears a beret and lightly tinted glasses. His eyesight is quite weak. Tapping his white cane he makes his way toward the kitchen with a paper bag of groceries and a box of eggs.)

HERR VADIM

Guten Morgen.

HILDEGARD

I didn't hear you leave this morning, Herr Vadim. You went out early!

HERR VADIM

We were out of eggs and milk.

HILDEGARD

You shouldn't have gone to all that trouble.

HERR VADIM

It wasn't any trouble.

HILDEGARD

(HILDE, noticing that André is struggling a bit to make his way to the kitchen, stands.)

Those groceries look heavy, André. Let me help you.

HERR VADIM

No. No, thank you. I've got it.

(Sensing an unfamiliar presence)

Is there someone here whom I don't know?

HILDEGARD

Let me introduce you. We have a new housemate. This is ... oh dear ...

MELISSA

Hello Herr Vadim, I'm Melissa.

(The bag of groceries falls out of HERR VADIM's hands and crashes to the floor, dropping the eggs. ROGER and KATE rush in.)

HILDEGARD

André!

ROGER

Is everyone all right?!

(KATE, MELISSA, and ROGER return items to the shopping bag. MELISSA Looks inside the egg carton.)

MELISSA

Looks like just a couple of broken eggs.

HILDEGARD

Only a few eggs – we won't go hungry.

HERR VADIM

(emphatic) Hilde, the one thing we don't need is another person living in the house with us! How did this happen?

KATE

I thought Michael talked with you.

HILDEGARD

It's my fault.

HERR VADIM

(HILDE helps HERR VADIM take off his coat.)

Look, Hilde, when I couldn't work as a journalist any longer, and I needed a place to stay, you invited me to move in. That was kind of you. Then Kate and Roger joined us. Fine. But now someone else?

HILDEGARD

I had a phone call, from Michael.

HERR VADIM

Ach Michael!

HILDEGARD

He says I need help.

HERR VADIM

Your sons – they're always worrying and interfering!

HILDEGARD

I agree! They say I'm forgetful.

HERR VADIM

Who isn't? -- There's no room for me any longer in this zoo!

HILDEGARD

André.

MELISSA

Maybe I don't belong here.

HILDEGARD

You do! Herr Vadim, sit down, please!

(With HILDE's help he finds a chair, but doesn't sit down.)

HERR VADIM

Hilde, what is happening?! When I came here, everything was good. Now there are too many! IF ANOTHER PERSON MOVES INTO THIS – THIS COMMUNE – I MOVE OUT!

ROGER

How about an egg-tofu scramble, everyone? With muffins and fresh orange juice.

HILDEGARD

That sounds good. In Dresden, our cook prepared delicious breakfasts. Fresh baked rolls and even even pretzels with butter on them! And there were always many, many people in the house.

HERR VADIM

(HERR VADIM sits down.)

That house was much bigger, Hilde! Roger's always going on about the "carrying capacity" of planet earth. What about the carrying capacity of our own home!?

(Beat)

I'll have sausage with those eggs, Roger, (gestures with his hands to indicate that he wants none of Roger's vegetarian fare) please hold the tofu.

(Lights go dim, then up on KATE at the piano.)

(During the following song, the tray with tea service is taken away. HILDE – dimly visible to the audience – carries a chair over to the trunk and takes a seat. She opens the trunk and begins to examine her diaries and papers.)

(KATE sings (jazz or boogie-like beat might work here): "Berkeley Breakfast Blues.")

1. Baby will ya break some eggs for breakfast.
I'd really like an omelette or two.
Here we are in Berkeley, home at last,
In Hilde's house, there's room for you.

Refrain: Eggs for breakfast.
An omelette or two.
Past is past.
Time for someone new.

2. Ach wir sind nicht das Haus in Dresden,
Das ist nicht Tiergartenstrasse acht.
We are here at Hilde's, Kinderchen,
Amerika! Wer hätte das gedacht!

Refrain

3. Goodbye to Schnitzl' und Hering salat.
Hello wheat grass and scrambled tofu.
There, there now it's really not so bad.
The sun is shinin', the sky is blue!

Refrain

(Tempo and melody are altered in this last verse)

4. Oh So blue in sunny California.
Forgive and forget -- abolish time!
I'd love to get to know ya.
A pleasant breakfast calms a troubled mind.

Refrain

Scene 3. An Old Trunk and a House in Dresden.

(Scene. HILDE is seated beside the open trunk, shuffling through its papers, albums, and diaries, determined to find something. MELISSA enters, carrying a basket of laundry.)

MELISSA

Good morning Hilde.

HILDEGARD

You scared me!

MELISSA

I'm sorry.

(MELISSA notices that HILDE is looking at the basket.)

We'll do a wash today.

(Puts the basket down and takes a seat near the trunk.)

Where did this trunk come from?

HILDEGARD

It came across the ocean with me. Old photos and papers and things.

MELISSA

May I take a look? I like old things.

(MELISSA inspects a hat that she finds in the trunk, briefly trying it on.) Look at this!

HILDEGARD

That was a long time ago.

MELISSA

What are you reading?

HILDEGARD

It's one of my old Tagebücher. "Diaries" or "journals," in English.

MELISSA

(MELISSA looks into the trunk, begins to thumb through several of the diary volumes.)

Wow! This is incredible! These diaries cover decades! 1928... 58... 74 ... here's one from 1923! May I ask, what year were you born, Hilde?

HILDEGARD

1908.

MELISSA

Amazing! Looks like you wrote down everything that happened to you.

HILDEGARD

I did!

MELISSA

You came here from Germany in ...

HILDEGARD

1938, with my husband David and our son Peter. My father came too. It's odd. I can get pretty confused about what I did yesterday. But things that happened long ago I still remember perfectly well!

MELISSA

When you first got here, where did you live?

HILDEGARD

We settled in a town in Colorado, where my husband became a quite successful doctor.

MELISSA

It's good you all escaped.

HILDEGARD

Not all! My mother and grandmother ... They stayed behind.

MELISSA

In Germany?!

HILDEGARD

Yes! Can you believe it? I came to this country without them. How could I have done that?

(HERR VADIM enters. HILDE quickly returns her diaries to the trunk and quietly closes the lid.)

HERR VADIM

Guten Morgen, Hilde.
(Beat)

Melissa, are you here too?

MELISSA

Yeah, I'm here. We're looking at some of Hilde's diaries.

(HILDE glares at MELISSA.)

HERR VADIM

Hilde, you're burying yourself in your Tagebücher again!?

**(He walks across the floor, tapping his cane to find the trunk.
When he locates the trunk he strikes at it violently with his
cane.)**

Please put this away Hilde! Digging into the past won't change anything that happened!

HILDEGARD

Yes André, I know.

HERR VADIM

Please. Let's move on with our lives!

HILDEGARD

I was just showing Melissa ...

HERR VADIM

I wish you'd stop wasting your time on this. You can't change a thing that happened.

HILDEGARD

I know, I know.

HERR VADIM

This doesn't help anyone, least of all you!

HILDEGARD

I know. Move on with my life – I wish I could.

HERR VADIM

You can!

(Beat)

I'm going out to the cafe now. There will be a teach-in about Nicaragua at 10 AM at the senior center ... (gruffly) will anyone come with me?

HILDEGARD

Herr Vadim, we'll stay here, I think.

(HERR VADIM angrily exits.)

MELISSA

Will he be OK?

HILDEGARD

I usually go with him, but he can manage on his own.

(Re-opens the trunk, takes out a photo-album and opens it)

(Project a photograph of the Dresden house upon a stage screen or wall.)

Hildegard

Our house at Tiergarten Strasse acht is still standing in Dresden ... Did I really, just, abandon them there – my mother and grandmother?

Projection on Screen/Wall



(Looking into the trunk)

I closed the door on the past a long time ago. But these days, I can't stop it from swinging open. I don't fall asleep at night.

MELISSA

(Looking into the trunk)

You think that ... by looking in this trunk ...

HILDEGARD

Maybe I'll discover something.

(Beat)

I don't know how much time I have left to understand what happened.

(DARK)

(Sing Kate Wolf's song "Across the Great Divide.")

Scene 4. Hildegard's Story: Childhood in Dresden.

(Scene. A pale blue light coming from inside the trunk illuminates HILDE and MELISSA. 20s-30s music may play in background. HILDEGARD takes a photo album out of the trunk and they look at it together. The album images are projected. Before or while they are being projected, a class-room chair with a wooden tablet hinged to its side appears on the stage.)

Hildegard

Projections on Screen or Wall

This was Dresden. One of the most beautiful cities in Europe. "Florence on the Elbe," Dresden was called.



It was the home of the FrauenKirche,



The Semper opera,



And the Zwinger Palace. All of these buildings were only a few streets away from where I lived.



This was the Synagogue. My family wasn't very observant, but we went there for the High Holidays. Look how many floors. Ralph and I ran up and down the staircases. Our parents scolded us and we stopped – for maybe five minutes.



The Nazis burned it down.

Right across the river from the synagogue was the Sarrasani Circus, (points to photo) in the background there. It was the most famous circus in Europe. One day Ralph and I skipped Hebrew class and walked across (points to photo again) this bridge to get there.



The circus doors were open. Inside we saw some performers juggling balls and some lumbering elephants.

That was Dresden when I was little, but there was also a war – the First World War – going on.

(Cross fade to a class-room chair. YOUNG HILDE enters, played by KATE, carrying a bookbag. She sits down on the chair and lifts its tablet into horizontal, writing position. She removes books and a notebook from her bag and begins to write in the notebook.)

HILDEGARD

(observing herself as a school-girl)

In school, we sat at our desks and prayed for God's help against the enemies. We needed a lot of help. I saw our neighbors crying, many men came home wounded, or didn't come home at all.

YOUNG HILDE

There used to be plenty of food in the house. Now, we make bread out of potato flour. And my shoes ...

HILDEGARD

When my feet grew faster than the rest of me, I couldn't even get new shoes.

YOUNG HILDE

I'm a healthy girl with sore feet. All the leather has to be used for the soldiers' boots.

(She stands, walks down stage.)

HILDEGARD

Projection on Screen or Wall

Everything had to go for the war. The circus was shut down -- the elephants and camels were recruited into the war effort. We would see them carrying food supplies and tobacco to the soldiers camping in the city. The soldiers were fed but not the animals. They died of hunger.



The war ended and I went to Gymnasium – what you call high school. These were strange times too. We listened to our teachers and tried to do our work while rioting was going on a few blocks away.

(Beat)

About that time, my grandmother introduced me to the theater. She took me to performances at the Staatstheater in Dresden, and I knew right away ...

YOUNG HILDE

That is what I want to do. Create on the stage a world that's not the one we live in – a world of freedom and adventure.

HILDEGARD

Sometimes we even traveled to Vienna to see the classics -- Shakespeare, Chekhov, Ibsen.

YOUNG HILDE

Last Sunday my grandmother and I went to see "King Lear." Of course I imagined I was Cordelia. Afterwards we walked on the Ringstrasse to a pastry shop nearby.

HILDEGARD

I remember that shop.

YOUNG HILDE

The street light slanted through the window, and only a thin glass separated us from the wonders inside.

HILDEGARD

Then we stepped in and I asked for a Sachertorte, decked in layers of chocolate and cream.

MELISSA

(To HILDEGARD, teasing)
No wonder you liked the theater so much!

HILDEGARD

I loved it. And neglected everything else. When I was seventeen, I shocked my family.

YOUNG HILDE

If you won't let me study acting, I'll run away or kill myself.

(YOUNG HILDE stalks off. MELISSA lifts a scarf out of the trunk, tries it on, and then hands it to HILDEGARD, who puts it around her neck, with perfect grace.)

HILDEGARD

And you know, that would have been pretty easy to do.

MELISSA

Kill yourself?

HILDEGARD

No! Become an actor. There was a lot of demand for actors in Dresden -- cabaret theater, children's theater, puppet shows, even the circus. After the war, the Sarrasani circus started up again, and there were shows featuring real American Indians, and Maharajahs on elephants. They needed showgirls too. But that wasn't what I really wanted. I wanted to be an actress. Against my parents' wishes, I joined a traveling theater -- "Wandertheater" in German -- and we staged plays all over the Rhineland. German plays mostly. Also Ibsen, Shaw, Oscar Wilde. We would go into a town and weave a story for the audience. Put reality aside for a few hours, and live in the imagination. Although reality wasn't easy to escape.

(HILDE takes an old German newspaper out of the trunk.)

HILDEGARD
(Project
photographs.)

Officially the war had ended. But in every town we visited, it seemed to be going on and on.

Workers went on strike. There were many protest marches and rallies.

Projections on Screen



And battles in the streets



The poverty was crushing.



This was still a man's world, but you'd be surprised at the number of women who got involved, even holding their own protest marches sometimes.



(Project a triptych of photographs – Ralph, Hilde's father, Hilde.)



(Returning to the photoalbum and pointing)
My father Alfred wanted to shelter us from all of this. He served as a military officer in the First World War, and he admired the Kaiser. I admired him. He had been educated as a chemist, and after the war he started a company that made medicines. He was a good father and wanted us to be strong, like he was. I took that in the right way, but my brother Ralph didn't. He wasn't impressed by my father's military uniform or his medals. That hurt my father's feelings, but still – all of us loved Ralph a lot.

MELISSA

What happened?

HILDEGARD

Ralph was very idealistic, and very political. He insisted on living life without illusions. I took a different path. My life was dedicated to illusions – theatrical ones.

(DARK)

Scene 5. Dresden Family Recollection.



While the stage is being set for this scene, Kate plays music at the piano. She ceases when the scene begins, and canned music of Germany in the 20s commences.

The next scene is a flashback, indicated by stage lighting. Members of Hilde's current household bring her Dresden family to life: Kate plays the role of Hilde as a teenager. Roger is Ralph, four years older than Hilde. Herr Vadim is

Hilde's father, and Hilde plays her own mother. Their dress suggests a socially assimilated German-Jewish family, circa 1923.

The scene plays like a silent movie, with background music. A photo of the interior of the Dresden House will be projected. An ornate chandelier will be lowered in, and the stage décor will be modified to resemble that of the interior of the Dresden house.

ROGER

Ralph, a medical student in his early 20s, sits at a table, studying a medical textbook. He takes notes on what he is reading.

HERR VADIM

Hilde's father, a man of middle age, wearing a businessman's suit, returns home from work. Ralph stands up. They acknowledge one another in a formal way. Ralph returns to his studies. Hilde's father takes a seat on one end of the sofa, and retreats behind his newspaper.

HILDEGARD

Hilde's mother enters, dressed as if she has just gotten out of bed. A bit disheveled, she approaches first Ralph and then her husband, as if to inaugurate social interaction. But both feel awkward and helpless around her. They acknowledge her briefly and return to their reading/studying. She sits down on at the other end of the sofa and occupies herself with some objects in her sewing basket.

KATE

Hilde, a girl in her teens, bounds into the room, carrying a bookbag. She walks over to Ralph, who greets her with a hug. She then walks over and places her hand on her father's shoulder. He acknowledges her affectionately. She notices her mother but pays little attention to her. Hilde sits down, with her bag beside her.

HILDEGARD

Defeated, Hilde's mother picks up her sewing and exits.

ROGER

Ralph notices all of this, and is saddened. He and Hilde exchange an understanding look. Hilde takes her books and a notebook out of her bag and begins to write in the notebook. Ralph returns briefly to his studies.

HERR VADIM

Ralph exits, leaving only Hilde and her father on the scene, indicating an alliance that will continue upon emigration to America. A few moments later, her father exits.

(MUSIC STOPS, LIGHTS FADE UP)

Scene 6. Kate, Roger, and the Garden.

(Scene. Return to the present. HILDEGARD is seated beside the open trunk, going through its materials.)

KATE

(KATE picks her belongings up from the floor – where the last scene left them – and puts them away. Having performed as YOUNG HILDE in the previous scene, she now returns to being herself, removing her 20s clothes as she addresses the audience.)

Germany in the 20s, when Hilde was young, was a bundle of contradictions. Millions of people were hungry and homeless. But it was also a very open, creative time. In theater, painting, architecture – music too. In a way, yes, it was all an illusion.

(KATE walks over to the piano and sits down. She plays a few bars from a Brecht operetta song – e.g. Pirate Jenny, Mac the Knife, Alabama Song, Barbara song.)

When I met Hilde a couple of years ago, I was still living with my friend Susan. Hilde would come over to our place and the three of us would sing together – Cabaret songs, Schumann, Strauss -- even some songs I composed myself. That ended when Susan went off to graduate school in New York, leaving me and Hilde behind. So, I and my piano moved in here.

(Plays a few more bars of music. ROGER enters, wearing gardening gloves and carrying an attractive potted plant.)

ROGER

Hi Hilde. Are you finding what you're looking for?

HILDEGARD

No, I'm not.

ROGER

Would you like to take a break, work with me in the garden this morning?

HILDEGARD

I may as well.

(Points to trunk)

This isn't doing me any good.

ROGER

(ROGER hands HILDE a pair of gloves.)

Do these fit?

(HILDE puts on the gloves and she and Roger go out the front door, leaving it ajar. KATE stands up from her piano seat and on tip-toes peers through the front door opening, trying to see what HILDE and ROGER are doing outside. Then she addresses the audience.)

KATE

I used to work in the garden with Roger.

(Sits back down and plays a few bars of music from the song she will sing at the end of this scene)

He really belongs off on a farm somewhere, communing with his organic vegetables. Yes he's attractive – nature's wonderboy, uncorrupted by civilization. And he's good with Hilde – caring, patient, sometimes to a fault. Hilde decides she won't go to the senior center, Hilde decides she's going to skip lunch. Fine by Roger. (gestures) "Nature will find a way."

(Plays a few more bars of music)

In the beginning nature boy did send some affection my way. We went camping and smoked some dope. Listened to the Grateful Dead and Kate Wolf.

(A few more bars of music)

Being with Roger was good, helped me get past the misery when Susan left. But I'm not a farm girl. I grew up in Los Angeles. I'd like to live in ... Vienna. My piano teacher when I was a kid was Jewish and had come to America from Vienna.

(Few more bars of music)

Vienna, Berlin, Dresden – when Hilde was young, these sparkling cities attracted Jews from all over Europe, including Herr Vadim, who came to Germany from Rumania.

(More music)

Then, in the 1930s, everything changed. From Dresden, Hilde went first to Italy, then to Switzerland, before coming to America. Europe became impossible for Herr Vadim too.

(DARKEN, THEN SPOTLIGHT ON KATE AT PIANO)

(While she sings the following song, "Herr Vadim and Hilde," HILDEGARD and HERR VADIM enter, walking together. They are on their way to a concert.)

When we were young, the cities danced, Hilde.
Our quickened feet, oh they were nimble too.
Over rooftops and streets, paved with fire,
We flew, we flew, we flew!

A suitcase in hand, we loved and leaped, Hilde.
And do you know, "Les jeux ne sont pas faits!"
(Spoken without tonality to end of line) We're still playing the game.
Though our dear ones were lost, long ago,
We roll the dice again!

Was it in Berlin, Zurich, or Rome?
Our Mem'ries fade and fall away, ach Kind!
Like the tumbling leaves, in our front yard,
They vanish, they vanish in the wind!

With a wind from hell behind us, we went, Hilde.
We took our dreams on a train, a bus, a boat.
Crossing borders, signing papers, going for broke,
We kept a crazy hope.

Was it in Berlin, Zurich, or Rome?
Our Mem'ries fade and fall away, ach Kind!
Like the tumbling leaves, in our front yard,
They vanish, they vanish in the wind!

(Can repeat the last two lines above.)

(DARK)

Scene 7. Hildegard and Herr Vadim Walk to a Concert.

(Scene. This scene is played downstage, away from the set. HERR VADIM and HILDE can even enter and begin their lines from the audience. The trunk can serve as the bench upon which HERR VADIM and HILDE briefly sit, near the end of this scene. **It is dusk. As they walk, HERR VADIM holds HILDE's arm and taps his way forward with his cane.)**



HERR VADIM

A good idea this... you still have the good eyes ... and I can remember where we're going!

HILDEGARD

I know where we're going. To listen to a string quartet.

HERR VADIM

At Temple Beth El. And we should be getting there.

HILDEGARD

(Peering)
We're on Vine Street.

HERR VADIM

Good! The temple should be nearby now.

HILDEGARD

Vine Street crosses ... I don't remember.

(HILDE chooses a direction, and they continue walking.)

When I was on stage, I had to memorize so many lines!

HERR VADIM

It is getting dark, isn't it?

HILDEGARD

A little dark. We played mostly in the smaller cities. We weren't paid well, but I loved it. Performing "Saint Joan."

HERR VADIM

I wish I had known you then, Hilde, and could have seen you perform. I'll bet you were great.

HILDEGARD

Saint Joan, she believed so strongly!

HERR VADIM

But what did she believe in, Hilde? A bunch of religious nonsense!

HILDEGARD

(HILDE stops walking for a moment)
She believed in her voices.

HERR VADIM

(Wondering where they are)
Will you please ask Joan to consult her voices and help us find the concert this evening?

HILDEGARD

What were her voices telling her? To liberate her country!

HERR VADIM

Come on Hilde, nationalism is madness. Look at what happened in Germany! At what's happening in the United States today!

HILDEGARD

Yes, but was it right for England to rule France?

HERR VADIM

Saint Joan wasn't the answer to that. People put their faith in leaders, hoping they'll save them. In Germany, the voices that working people needed to hear were those of their own experience, their own history!

HILDEGARD

Aren't you leaping too quickly from one historical situation to another that's entirely different?

HERR VADIM

People didn't take power into their own hands, and the result was the Weimar Republic, weak as an eggshell. No wonder it failed.

HILDEGARD

Yes, André. But within that shell, how much creativity! New forms of music, experimental theater. Kandinsky and Kokoschka – they lived and painted in Dresden.

HERR VADIM

Hilde, you came from an upper class family, you had money, and could entertain yourselves with these things. But what use were they to working people, to those of us fighting in the streets?!

HILDEGARD

As I remember, leftists spent as much time fighting one another as uniting against the "class enemy"! And don't forget, artists were political too! I performed in a play about the Dreyfus Affair. Ernst Toller, while he was in prison, wrote some very radical plays! When one of them opened in Dresden, the Nazis came to the theater and shouted it down. That was the first and the last performance. I had just joined the Wandertheater, and that "scared the hell out of us!" (spoken like a foreigner mastering American slang)

HERR VADIM

I didn't know that.

HILDEGARD

And don't forget, there was Berthold Brecht!

HERR VADIM

(HERR VADIM Stops walking)
Brecht, he was the best. But that didn't help us fight the fascists! Avant-garde theater – all the crazy angles and painted shadows – too bad it didn't last.

HILDEGARD

(Schubert music – see a few lines below – can begin here, but only if played very softly, not yet heard by HERR VADIM or HILDE.)

Art does last! Art is the way we ... answer death. It's what our dreams are about. The promise of happiness, "la promesse du bonheur."

HERR VADIM

Romantic nonsense!

(HERR VADIM stumbles and falls into a heap on the sidewalk, where he lies motionless.)

HILDEGARD

My God, are you alright? André!

HERR VADIM

It's completely dark!

(She helps him, patiently and with difficulty, stand again.)

HILDEGARD

Are you alright?? Let's sit down for a moment.

(They sit on the trunk, which doubles as a street bench.)

HERR VADIM

(Softly)

Dreams and promises ... What can we look forward to, Hilde? Not even a little chamber music this evening. And you know, I'll never see a Kokoshka painting again, or view the Golden Gate Bridge, the sun setting over the Bay.

(Beat)

I'll not see your face again, Hilde.

(In the distance, Schubert quartet music – the Andante of "Rosamunde" or "Death and the Maiden" – is heard. HERR VADIM and HILDE smile at one another. They stand up and are still for a moment, listening.)

Do you hear that? Somehow, we two refugees have found our way

(Beat)

It escapes me – how this can be so wonderful!

HILDEGARD

Ach André, "The heart has reasons that reason does not know!"

HERR VADIM

Pascal, Saint Joan ... I don't know about the company you keep, Hilde, but you are a dear friend.

(They resume walking, toward the music, accompanied by the tapping sounds of the cane.)

(DARK)

Scene 8. Fresh Greens.

(Scene. The next morning, in the living room of the house. HILDE, MELISSA, and HERR VADIM are seated, drinking coffee.)

MELISSA

You guys were out pretty late last night. We got a little worried.

HERR VADIM

No problem! Hildegard and I walked to the concert, walked back home again – “piece of cake” as you say.

(HILDE smiles knowingly. ROGER enters. He’s wearing a gardener’s garb, and carries a seed packet and a tray of lettuce seedlings, arranged in small square seedling pots, like one would see in a nursery. In each pot, the fledgling green lettuce leaves are visible.)

ROGER

Top o’ the mornin’ everyone!

(ROGER puts the seed packet aside and lays his tray down on the edge of the table.)

EVERYONE

Good morning, good morning.

ROGER

(ROGER walks over to give HILDE a bear-hug)
It’s a gardening good morning.

(ROGER sits down near her.)
How you doin’, Hilde?

HILDEGARD

Fine, fine.

(HILDE pours him a cup of tea.)

ROGER

(Roger moves the tray of seedlings in front of HILDE.)

Look at what I've got here -- do you see all these guys happily greeting the light of day?

(Pokes the seedlings gently with his fingertips)
Thanks to them, we're gonna have lettuce for some delicious salads!

HILDEGARD

(skeptically) I'm sure that bowls of lettuce will come out of that.

ROGER

"Ask, and it shall be given abundantly to thee." We'll plant these seedlings in the garden, and before you know it, we'll be awash in glorious waves of green.

HERR VADIM

Roger, shall we all be washed away with you?

ROGER

Let me show you.

(He carries the tray over to HERR VADIM, and holds it nearby as HERR VADIM leans over, touches a few leaves, and removes his tinted glasses to get a very close look.)

HERR VADIM

Yes I can see these ... very green, very nice, Roger. They smell good too.

ROGER

We'll plant them out in the garden, alongside the tomatoes. After that, no more supermarket salads.

HERR VADIM

I'm not sure why you're so interested in all this greenery, Roger. What have you been smoking lately?

HILDEGARD

(Catching on, laughs)
I've been noticing something very sweet-smelling in the air.

ROGER

Very funny. OK folks, if you want to, go on shoppin' and droppin' your dollars at Safeway for TV dinners and Twinkies.

HERR VADIM

Twinkies be damned! Safeway does provide something to eat and jobs for a lot of people. What it needs is a stronger labor union!

ROGER

Yeah, but it also needs whole foods. No additives, no growth hormones -- healthy like these sprouts that'll be happy growing in our garden.

HERR VADIM

(Sarcastically) A true humanitarian! What a wonderful housemate we have here, Hilde, someone who speaks out on behalf of the world's helpless lettuce plants!

ROGER

On behalf of everyone, on behalf of the planet.

HILDEGARD

I knew people who said that sort of thing. They lived in Hellerau.

ROGER

Heller

HILDEGARD

Hellerau, utopian community in Dresden. People shared everything. Made their own clothes, grew wonderful gardens.

HERR VADIM

Germans wasted a lot of time growing vegetables.

HILDEGARD

"Es wächst hienieden Brot genug
Für alle Menschenkinder.
Auch Rosen und Myrten, Schönheit und Lust,
Und Zuckererbsen nicht minder."

The earth grows bread enough
To feed all humanity with ease.
As well as roses and myrtle, beauty and joy,
Even sugar peas!

HERR VADIM

Heinrich Heine.

ROGER

I bet he would have considered frozen peas at Safeway some kind of nightmare.... Herr Vadim, we too are fighting for a better world. Like you did in Europe. We are your children!

HERR VADIM

Heaven forbid!

MELISSA

(MELISSA smiles, takes the tray from ROGER and touches her cheek to the lettuce plants.)

(Calming the situation.)

I for one wouldn't mind eating healthier. Plants are living beings ... they feel things! I've heard that if you play music for a tomato plant, it'll grow faster ... there's scientific research that ...

HERR VADIM

(Interrupting)

Thank god for science, Melissa, but will making lettuce and tomatoes happy really improve our lives?

ROGER

You know, there are certain Chinese herbs that can improve vision.

HERR VADIM

Roger, of course I'd like to see better, but that is nonsense!

ROGER

I can show you the article where I read about this ...

HERR VADIM

(Interrupting)

Roger, please, I see a doctor for my eyesight... Who really needs our help are the farm workers, they suffer from the chemicals.

MELISSA

(MELISSA stands up, begins to tidy up the breakfast table.)

I heard Cesar Chavez talking about that – the pesticides that poison the campesinos and ruin the environment.

ROGER

The farmlands and the rainforests are being raped! Look how ignorant we are about what we eat. Food shows up by magic on the supermarket shelf, sealed, vacuum-packed. Do we care where it came from? What chemicals were used? How much top soil was lost?

HERR VADIM

Oh you're really striking our heartstrings.

ROGER

(carried away) Who notices the grains of wheat in a slice of bread, the sun and rain and earth inside each grain? (Herr Vadim responds by looking quite irritated.)

MELISSA

I'll be happy to help you in the garden, Roger.

HILDEGARD

(gesturing) Let me get at those weeds.

ROGER

I guess we're ready.

(ROGER stands and picks up the lettuce tray. HILDE stands up too and she, ROGER, and MELISSA head for the door.)

(pointing) Have you seen our chestnut tree lately? I've been looking after it, and my guess is that we'll have roasted chestnuts in October.

MELISSA

That brings back some memories! We had a chestnut tree in our back yard.

ROGER

(Pauses)

I like nuts and fruit that have fallen naturally ... not even plucked off the branch. You know – "walk lightly on the earth."

HERR VADIM

(HERR VADIM stands, shakes his head slowly, and walks toward an exit.)

An apple fell on Isaac Newton's head, and he made some great discoveries. I'm sure you will too, Roger.

(DARK)

Scene 9. Hilde's Story: The Final Weimar Years and A Gold Ring.

(Scene. A month later. HILDE and MELISSA sit beside the trunk.)

HILDEGARD

Looks like a nice day out there. Was tun wir hier? Digging into the past, when we could be outside "catching some rays," as you say. Instead, we're buried in this trunk which isn't telling us a thing about what happened to my family in Dresden.

(HILDE reaches into the trunk and takes out the elegant scarf and hat – the same ones that MELISSA has previously found there. She hands these to MELISSA, who puts them on. HILDE admires MELISSA. Then MELISSA takes a photo album from the trunk and turns to a page displaying the Hofkirche in Dresden.)

(Project a photograph of the church on the screen or wall.)

MELISSA

A beautiful church.

(Looking at the caption of the photograph and pronouncing the words as they might sound in English)

"Katholische Hofkirche, 1924"

HILDEGARD

(With German pronunciation)
"Katholische Hofkirche." It was a Catholic church, lavishly decorated inside and out. Look at all the Baroque ornamentation. There were many Catholics in Dresden.

MELISSA

I was raised Catholic.

HILDEGARD

I didn't know that.



MELISSA

If my family had lived in Dresden (pointing) that's where we would have gone to church.

(With irony)

I can just see the community of the faithful, piously crossing themselves in their pews.

HILDEGARD

I appreciated the art, I didn't pray there. My brother Ralph took this photo. We walked about in Dresden, and took pictures of everything -- churches, flower gardens, coffeehouses, elephants in the zoo right across the street from us. Ralph and I were very close, and liked many things together. On long winter evenings in Dresden, we read to one another. Schiller, Goethe, Shakespeare.

MELISSA

Your adventures were pretty erudite!

HILDEGARD

We read Rilke's "Duino Elegies." "Wer, wenn ich schrie, hörte mich denn aus der Engel Ordnungen?" "If I cried out, who would hear me, among the ranks of angels?"

MELISSA

"Aus der Engel Ordnungen." "Engel" means "angel" in English.

HILDEGARD

Rilke's Engel.

(She turns her right palm face up, displaying the gold band on its ring finger.)

This was a gift from my brother Ralph.

(She removes the gold ring from her finger and looks at the inscription on its inside surface. She hands it to MELISSA.)

MELISSA

(Peers at the inscription inside the ring and reads each upper case initial distinctly)

"R" ... "E" ... zu .. "H" ... "Z". "HZ" I get, but "RE"? Your brother's name was Ralph ZUCKER.

HILDEGARD

(Takes the ring from **MELISSA** and looks at the ring)

"RE to HZ." "RE" – "Rilke's Engel," "Ralph's Engel" to me, Hildegard Zucker. Rilke, Ralph. Das ist ein Wortspiel, a play on words, the kind of joke only Ralph would invent.

MELISSA

Oh, I see.

(Beat)

HILDEGARD

But Rilke's angel is not comforting, not protective.

MELISSA

He gave this ring to you ...

HILDEGARD

Yes, for my 18th birthday. He had left home and was a student at the university in Leipzig. I remember the day the ring came in the mail, in early December. "RE to HZ," that was his last message to me. Two weeks later, he took his own life.

MELISSA

(Takes HILDE's hands.)

Oh my God. I'm sorry. I'm truly sorry!

HILDEGARD

We could never understand why! Rilke's Engel, Ralph's Engel to Hildegard Zucker. What was he thinking? That an angel could substitute for ...

MELISSA

A brother. Ralph was ...

HILDEGARD

(HILDE, replacing the ring on her finger)
My dearest companion.

(HILDE, distraught, is comforted by MELISSA.)

After that, there was a darkness in our family that lasted and lasted. My mother and grandmother, even when the Nazis started marching in the streets, they hardly noticed. Time stopped, because whatever we had been aiming at, didn't matter anymore. But I ... couldn't stay in that place. I was a young person, and had to pick up the pieces, had to go on living.

MELISSA

That must have been ...

HILDEGARD

On stage, I had to crush my true feelings!

(HILDE takes the photo album from Melissa and turns to a page displaying family photos, which are projected.)

One evening, after a performance (points to David in photo) David introduced himself to me. He had come from Poland to Germany to attend medical school. Attractive, intelligent, confident. The next thing you know, we were married. That's our first child, Peter, sitting in my father's lap.

Although this photo was taken right in our own backyard, my mother wasn't with us. She rarely left the house.

Photo projection:



Here I am with Peter.



We're joined by my mother, who is sitting up in bed for the occasion.



(Turning to another page in the album)

Look at all the Nazi flags flying. After Hitler came to power, just being Jewish was frightening. We had to wear a yellow star. In the Grosse Garten, across the street from where we lived, Jews weren't even permitted to sit on the benches any more. (Beat)

As for our neighbors, they supported the Nazi regime. Protestants and Catholics.



MELISSA

That doesn't surprise me.

HILDEGARD

They wouldn't even talk to Jews any more. Their children wouldn't play with Peter, a sweet, good boy. When I was ready to return to the stage, Jews weren't allowed to perform any longer.

(MELISSA removes the hat and scarf.)

I wonder if those things ever looked that good on me!

MELISSA

I'm sure they did.

HILDEGARD

We decided to leave. But not all of us. My father Alfred agreed to come to America, but not my mother or my grandmother. I stayed with them as long as I could, but I had to think also of the safety of my child. Our last day in Dresden, they came with us to the station. We got on the train with our suitcases and then I waved from the window of our compartment. We didn't take any photographs this time. Down below, my mother and grandmother were waving to us, and crying. But they chose to stay behind! I couldn't do that!

(Beat)

All I've got now is a ring and (gesturing to the trunk) this box. I wonder if I still have Rilke's "Duino Elegies."

MELISSA

(Gesturing to trunk) We haven't seen that in here.

HILDEGARD

My old German books are stored in the attic.

MELISSA

Maybe we can find it.

HILDEGARD

There's hardly any light up there, but you can take a look.

MELISSA

I'd love to hear you read Rilke, in German.

(Lights fade, HILDE enters a spotlight. Project photos of the sundial angel at Chartres.)



HILDEGARD

My brother liked this Rilke poem, about the stone angel at the famous cathedral at Chartres:

Im Sturm, der um die starke Kathedrale
wie ein Verneiner stürzt der denkt und denkt,
fühlt man sich zärtlicher mit einem Male
von deinem Lächeln zu dir hingelenkt;
lächelnder Engel, fühlende Figur,
mit einem Mund, gemacht aus hundert Munden:
gewahrst du gar nicht, wie dir unsre Stunden,
abgleiten von der vollen Sonnenuhr,

auf der des Tages ganze Zahl zugleich,
gleich wirklich, steht in tiefem Gleichgewichte,
als wären alle Stunden reif und reich.

Was weißt du, Steinerner, von unserm Sein?
Und hältst du mit noch seligerm Gesichte
vielleicht die Tafel in die Nacht hinein?

In the storm that swirls around the mighty Cathedral
Like a skeptic who thinks and thinks,
One suddenly feels gently drawn to you by your smile:
Beguiling angel, feeling figure,
Your mouth fashioned out of a thousand mouths:
Are you at all aware of how our hours
Slide off your full sundial

On which all the day's numbers are arranged
and present, remaining in deep equilibrium,
as if all moments were ripe and rich?

What do you know, O stone one, of our life?
And do you smile even more blessedly
When you hold your slate out into the night?

(FADE)

Scene 10. Fighting Abroad, Fighting at Home.

(Scene. HILDE sits at the table, HERR VADIM on the sofa. She reads to him from the newspaper.)

HILDEGARD

"The United States Congress handed the Reagan Administration a major victory today by approving military aid to the Nicaraguan Contras, who oppose the Sandinista government. 'Communism must not be allowed to establish itself in the Western Hemisphere,' the White House spokesman said..."

HERR VADIM

(Interrupting) Das ist schrecklich! Reagan, the actor, is playing his latest cowboy role in Nicaragua.

HILDEGARD

Reagan's a "lousy" actor.

("lousy" is voiced like a foreigner mastering American slang)

On the one hand, I'm happy for him that he had the chance to change careers. On the other, wouldn't it be better if the Nicaraguans didn't have to pay for that? A cowboy actor can't be President.

HERR VADIM

(Laughs and shakes his head) This cowboy is "riding the range" all over the world! Last year Reagan went to Bitburg and honored Nazi soldiers buried in a cemetery.

HILDEGARD

Nazis? Sometimes the United States reminds me of what Germany used to be like.

HERR VADIM

The government here will try to crush any country that tries to take an independent path. If I were still a journalist, I'd write an article on this. The Contra soldiers target schools, cooperative farms, health clinics. To defeat the revolution, they've killed thousands of people. If the revolution does succeed, that will give hope to every liberation movement in Latin America.

(MELISSA enters, wearing exercise clothes and holding her backpack.)

MELISSA

Hi everyone.

HERR VADIM

Hello Melissa.

HILDEGARD

What are you doing today?

MELISSA

Well, I'm going to school – and I'm starting a new yoga class ... (playfully)
I'll learn to stand on my head today.

HERR VADIM

Oh I see .. and what is wrong with your feet?

MELISSA

(Not getting the joke)
My feet are fine!

HERR VADIM

Yoga. Take care Melissa, if you stand on your head, the last bit of common sense might run out onto the floor.

MELISSA

What do you know about yoga? It's an ancient spiritual tradition that ...

HERR VADIM

(Interrupting)
"Spiritual tradition" -- this is mystical mishigas, all of it! Even the Kabbala isn't all that great, but the Hindus are the worst. Their religion justifies the caste system!

MELISSA

You probably don't even know a single Hindu.

HERR VADIM

I know it's an escapist culture of myths! In Germany the spiritual seekers were called the "Wandervögel," young people who lived in communes and worshipped nature, hiking, bicycling – just like you and Roger.

MELISSA

Sounds pretty good to me.

(MELISSA starts to walk away, toward her bicycle.)

HERR VADIM

(HERR VADIM detains her.)
What were they trying to do, hike their way out of the Depression? Meditate the reality away?

MELISSA

You can't blame people meditating for what happened! And don't you think that people do have a need for community?

HERR VADIM

The Nazis felt the same way. They wanted to restore a "sense of community," of belonging, and they were quite successful!

HILDEGARD

But the "Wandervögel," you can't connect that with – they were just young people enjoying themselves.

(MELISSA heads again for her bicycle.)

HERR VADIM

Soon the enjoyment was over, and people recognized the enemy, but it was too late.

MELISSA

(MELISSA stops in her tracks)
I can't look at anyone as "the enemy."

HERR VADIM

No matter how you look at them, sometimes other people are your enemy!

MELISSA

I don't see it that way.

HERR VADIM

Do the Sandinistas have the right to take up arms to defend themselves against the Contras, their enemy?

MELISSA

"We're right and they're wrong" – does that solve anything?
(MELISSA makes it to her bike and puts her back-pack on.)

HERR VADIM

Is that what they're teaching you in school?! Melissa, you want to embrace everything, accept everything. Thank God there were nations that would not let the Nazis have their way, that fought tanks with tanks, airplanes with airplanes, soldiers with soldiers!

HILDEGARD

André, please. We are friends here!

MELISSA

Each war creates out of those soldiers – and civilians too – new martyrs, new debts that the next war must pay. I heard you say yourself that the First World War set the stage for the Second.

HERR VADIM

Sure, Melissa. Go run away with your friends and hug a tree. Stand on your head and recite a prayer for peace!

MELISSA

HERR VADIM, IS THERE ANYTHING YOU DON'T KNOW!

(She wheels her bicycle out the front door.)

HILDEGARD

André, what have you done! You've chased her away!

HERR VADIM

We were having a perfectly good discussion, and then she leaves.

HILDEGARD

Oh, she had no reason to? You wounded her feelings.

HERR VADIM

She's fine! She is a good, strong fighter! She can fight me!

HILDEGARD

Fighting, fighting.

(DARK)

Scene 11. Steep as any Rocky Mountain.

(Scene. A newspaper and television guide lie on the table. HILDE enters, looks around the room.)

HILDEGARD

It's the darkest thing. I just forgot what I came in here for.

(Spots the television guide on the table)
Oh, here it is, my "TV Guide."

(Checks the date in the newspaper)
July 12th. It's the 12th.

(Looks in the guide)
"Love Boat" is at 2 PM.

(Looks for and finds the remote, tries unsuccessfully to turn on the TV, and flings the remote to the floor)
This damn thing, it's not working!

MELISSA

(Off stage)
What's wrong?

HILDEGARD

The TV won't turn on!

(Melissa enters, walks up to the TV and effortlessly turns it on. HILDE sits down to enjoy her show, but can't. MELISSA tidies up. HILDE stands up and switches off the TV.)

Something's wrong with me. What is it?

MELISSA

We don't know for sure, Hilde. We have an appointment with the doctor tomorrow. He wants to schedule a CAT scan (pronounced: "cat scan.")

HILDEGARD

What's that?

MELISSA

It's like an x-ray. We'll find out what's going on, and maybe you'll take some medication.

HILDEGARD

(HILDE sits back down)
I don't know ... No. I am not going. Definitely not. Roger has some different ideas about helping me. He doesn't trust Western medicine.

MELISSA

Hilde ...

HILDEGARD

I'm so damned confused! My God, I'm scared!

(She closes her eyes, trembles. **MELISSA sits down beside her and puts an arm around her.** Hilde falls silent and still.)

MELISSA

Where are you Hilde, what's happening?

HILDEGARD

What's wrong with me?

MELISSA

We don't know exactly.

HILDEGARD

I'm not well.

(She looks into MELISSA's eyes.)

It's like ... someone's erasing a blackboard, and as the writing vanishes, I do too.

MELISSA

You're very much here, Hilde. We'll see the doctor tomorrow.

HILDEGARD

(Calming down)
Doctors. I lived with one for over twenty years, in Colorado.

MELISSA

How was that?

HILDEGARD

At first, it was completely charming, like being in the Swiss Alps. Making up for the lost years, my husband dedicated himself to his medical practice ... but not to me. Our marriage went down ... as steeply as any Rocky mountain. And when he died, I didn't want to live there any more.

MELISSA

What did you do?

HILDEGARD

I left Colorado. It was 1960.

MELISSA

Is that when you became a language teacher?

HILDEGARD

Yes. My first job teaching German was at a college in ... Little Rock, Arkansas, of all places. Then I moved to Iowa and taught in an Amish high school. I had some new adventures, I started my life back up like an old motor car. But I couldn't leave the past behind, I never could.

Now, the past is leaving me behind, and I'll have a doctor in my life again. I kind of doubt it'll be better this time around.

(DARK)

Scene 12. Ralph.

Scene. (A month later. The radio plays music from the 1980s. MELISSA sits at the table, doing her homework for school. HILDE is seated on the couch, reading a brochure she's found.

Lying on top of the closed trunk are a book and several diary volumes. RALPH, played by ROGER, lies on the floor near the trunk. He wears wings and is dressed as he was in the silent Dresden recollection scene.)



HILDEGARD

(HILDE holds a brochure) What is this? Is this yours, Melissa? "Witness for Peace"?

MELISSA

(MELISSA walks over to HILDE and sits down beside her.)

I was going to talk to you about that, Hilde. This is a group of peace activists in Nicaragua, and they're inviting people to come down there and help them.

HILDEGARD

Help them do what?

MELISSA

Try to end the war.

(MELISSA Looks at the brochure photo.)

The volunteers in this photo are from Canada, and from Germany! I might like to join them.

HILDEGARD

(In jest)

Well I might like to join them too ... What are you talking about?

MELISSA

(Smiles)

I like living here with you ...

HILDEGARD

I like having you here.

MELISSA

But I'm going to graduate in two months. With a degree in peace studies, I'm not gonna do very well in corporate America ... but this (points to the brochure) looks like something I could do – go into a real situation and use what I've learned in school. In Nicaragua ...

HILDEGARD

No... No!

(Pause, looks at MELISSA)

I thought you disagreed with Herr Vadim about Nicaragua.

MELISSA

Well, not completely. It's true that we don't take the same approach. I believe --, and I guess he doesn't -- that non-violence can work even when a war is going on.

HILDEGARD

As he pointed out, the Sandinistas themselves are not pacifists.

MELISSA

Yes, but they want to move in a peaceful direction. One of the first things the revolutionary government did was abolish the death penalty.

HILDEGARD

(HILDE reads from the brochure.)

"Witness for Peace sends its international teams to stay in villages at high risk from Contra violence. Our expectation is that the presence of unarmed foreigners will deter attacks on civilians in war zones."

My God! That sounds very dangerous!

(Lighting shifts to make RALPH more prominent.)

You know, in Germany, we had a revolution too. I knew many idealistic persons like you. Many of them lost their lives. Some even took their own lives!

MELISSA

You mean that ...

HILDEGARD

Ralph wanted to change the world too. And for a time, that seemed possible. After the war there was a revolution in Germany, and for a time we had a leftist government in Saxony where I lived, a very humane government.

Ralph and his friends were very radical, and defended the government from its enemies – among whom was my own father!

MELISSA

You mean, your family was divided.

HILDEGARD

People like my father were scared to death by what was happening. They were afraid that everything would be taken away from them – like in Nicaragua where you want to go. My father favored the conservative side – the side that was not at all friendly to Jews, as Ralph kept on reminding him. I and my mother would sit there in the evenings watching them argue. And then the leftist government was defeated -- violently defeated. Young people we knew were badly wounded or even killed.

MELISSA

Your brother Ralph ...

HILDEGARD

He wasn't hurt physically, but he felt – devastated, kaputt. He would go into his room and stay there, and not want to talk with anyone.

(Beat)

Then, for a time, he seemed to be doing better. When he went off to Leipzig to study medicine, we thought he'd be OK. We were wrong.

MELISSA

Yes, you've told me ...

HILDEGARD

When my second son was born in this country, I wanted to name him "Ralph," remembering my brother. My husband said no. We settled on "Ray."

MELISSA

What was Ralph's life like, in Leipzig?

HILDEGARD

(HILDE walks over to the trunk and rummages about.)

A German author, Erich Kästner, was friends with Ralph in Leipzig, and wrote a novel about all of this, about how young people were totally disillusioned. I've got a copy.

(She finds the novel in the trunk and hands it to Melissa.)

MELISSA

This is about your brother?

HILDEGARD

Yes, it's based on his life.

(MELISSA hands the book back to Hilde, who opens it and reads from the title page.)

"Fabian," published in 1931. This book was banned, when the Nazis took over.

(HILDE turns a few pages, and stops at one them. RALPH sits up.)

HILDEGARD and RALPH

(HILDE reads from the book) "I know that I'm lying."

RALPH

"I know the system is wrong. A blind man could see that. But I serve the wrong system with devotion. For, within the frame of the wrong system, which makes use of my modest talents, the wrong measures are right by the very nature of things, and the right are obviously wrong."

(HILDE goes to a different section of the book)

HILDEGARD and RALPH

(HILDE reads from the book) "I'm sitting in a great waiting room..."

RALPH

"And its name is Europe. The train is due to leave in a week. But no one can tell me where it's going or what will become of me."

(RALPH stands and walks downstage.)

HILDEGARD

For my mother and grandmother, it was as if time had stopped when Ralph died. As if that loss held them in Dresden, so that, however menacing the storm, they could not leave.

(Looking at her ring)

Ralph's angel, Rilke's angel – didn't offer much protection. Did Ralph see what was coming?

(FADE)

(Project photo of Paul Klee's drawing, "Angelus Novus.")

RALPH

(Addresses the audience)

Walter Benjamin: "Über den Begriff der Geschichte," 1939:

Es gibt ein Bild von Klee, das Angelus Novus heißt. Ein Engel ist darauf dargestellt, der aussieht, als wäre er im Begriff, sich von etwas zu entfernen, worauf er starrt. Seine Augen sind aufgerissen, sein Mund ist offen und seine Flügel sind ausgespannt. Der Engel der Geschichte muß so aussehen. Er hat das Antlitz der Vergangenheit zugewandt. Wo eine Kette von Begebenheiten vor uns erscheint, da sieht er eine einzige Katastrophe, die unablässig Trümmer auf Trümmer häuft und sie ihm vor die Füße schleudert. Er möchte wohl verweilen, die Toten wecken und das Zerschlagene zusammenfügen. Aber ein Sturm weht vom Paradiese her, der sich in seinen Flügeln verfangen hat und so stark ist, daß der Engel sie nicht mehr schließen kann. Dieser Sturm treibt ihn unaufhaltsam in die Zukunft, der er den Rücken kehrt, während der Trümmerhaufen vor ihm zum Himmel wächst. Das, was wir den Fortschritt nennen, ist dieser Sturm.



(Translation:

This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe that keeps piling ruin upon ruin and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.)

(BLACKOUT)

Scene 13. Letter from Dresden.

(Scene. 20s Weimar Republic era music plays on the radio. YOUNG HILDE, played by KATE, and RALPH, played by ROGER, are seated at the table and having tea. Both are dressed as they were in the Dresden recollection scene. HILDEGARD sits on the sofa, observing them. Until MELISSA enters this scene, the lighting indicates that it is taking place in HILDE's memory.)

YOUNG HILDE

Hildegard, thank you for inviting us. Your cups are beautiful.
(Beat)

HILDEGARD

Those cups are Meissen-ware, from Dresden. They belonged to my grandmother, Felicia.

YOUNG HILDE

I remember them. Would you care to join us?

HILDEGARD

(HILDEGARD walks over to the table, takes a seat, and speaks to YOUNG HILDE.)

Do you know what came of her?

YOUNG HILDE

Who?

HILDEGARD

Grandmother.

YOUNG HILDE

No, I don't.

HILDEGARD

She and I went to the theater together. Do you perform on the stage?

YOUNG HILDE

Yes I do. I'm currently performing as Katharina in Carl Zuckmayer's play "Katharina Knie."

HILDEGARD

Katharina, I loved that role! When I left Germany, though, my acting days were over.

YOUNG HILDE

I'm glad you knew when to leave! Your lives here in America seem -- not so bad!

HILDEGARD

It's funny how many of us "wandering Jews" ended up here in California.

(HERR VADIM enters, carrying a platter with Rugelach.)

HERR VADIM

This "wandering Jews" stuff is nonsense! We didn't wander, we were driven out! Not only Jews – Communists, homosexuals. Then what happened to them when they got here, to the "land of liberty"? They were persecuted again!

RALPH

Liberty. You shouldn't have had to come here to look for it. In Germany, we held a new world in our hands!! If we hadn't been so divided ...

HILDEGARD

(To RALPH)

You and I used to go together to demonstrations in the Altmarkt, until they got too violent.

RALPH

You were a loyal comrade Hilde, I remember that.

HERR VADIM

(HERR VADIM sets the platter on the table, sits down.)

Let's have some of Roger's homemade rugelach, whole wheat, made without any dairy products of course.

YOUNG HILDE

Hilde, would you like some?

HILDEGARD

(HILDEGARD takes a piece)

What do you call this?

HERR VADIM

Hildegard, you know — “Ru-ge-lach.” You’ve had it a million times!

RALPH

(RALPH. to HILDEGARD)
How do you like living here in Berkeley, so far away from Europe?

HILDEGARD

All of us get along quite well!

HERR VADIM

It’s entertaining living with a young man who worships lettuce, and a crazy American girl who throws I-ching coins and prays to ghosts.

HILDEGARD

We have great meals together.

HERR VADIM

Sure we do, if you like mashed tofu with yeast and seaweed sauce. One of our housemates is threatening to go macrobiotic and everyone’s boycotting meat.

RALPH

“Macro-by-otic” -- what’s that?

HERR VADIM

Another dietary madness! You know, my mother always kept kosher. She was very strict, but this house gives her a very strong competition.

HILDEGARD

(Laughing)
Herr Vadim, it’s really not that bad.

HERR VADIM

You’re right, it’s not so bad. I can’t really bite into this rugela and complain. Not only delicious, it’s organic!

HILDEGARD

(HILDEGARD tastes the rugela)
This is good.

(To YOUNG HILDE)
Remember the pastry shops in Vienna?

(To RALPH)
When grandmother and I returned from the theater, I always brought back a Linzer Torte for you.

RALPH

Yes, that was my favorite.

HILDEGARD

For mother, I brought home Viennese strudel and cakes. She never said thank you, or asked me how the evening had gone.

(MELISSA bursts in, holding the original German edition of Rilke's "Duino Elegies." She hands the slim brown volume to HILDE.)

MELISSA

Hilde, look at what I've found! It was in the attic.

HILDEGARD

(HILDEGARD opens the book of poetry to the title page)
Rilke, the "Duino Elegies," published in 1923.

YOUNG HILDE

(YOUNG HILDE stands and approaches Ralph.)
Ralph, you gave me that book when I turned sixteen!

HILDEGARD

You've written a note here.
(Reading)
"Alles Gute zum Geburtstag, Hilde!"

(Continues reading to herself, as RALPH stands and looks at YOUNG HILDE.)

RALPH

"Best wishes on your birthday, Hilde. Now that I'm away, I miss you so."

HILDEGARD (or YOUNG HILDE)

You were studying at the university in Leipzig.

RALPH

"Our walks in the Grosse Garten, our evenings at home. When I return next week for vacation, let's read together again."

(MELISSA sits down in the chair from which RALPH has arisen. **YOUNG HILDE and RALPH meet one another upstage and, during the following lines spoken by HILDEGARD and MELISSA, they shed their 20s Dresden clothes, resuming their identities in the present as KATE and ROGER. The lighting returns to normal.** They can help one another with this transition, e.g. KATE helps ROGER take off his formal jacket. They then sit on the sofa.)

HILDEGARD

(HILDEGARD reads from the Rilke volume.)

“Daß von den klar geschlagenen Hämmern des Herzens keiner versage an weichen, zweifelnden oder reißenden Saiten”

(translation, not spoken by Hilde: “May the cleanly hit hammers of the heart strike no uncertain, loose, or broken strings ...)

(A letter tumbles out of the poetry volume.)

Look!

(HILDEGARD, astonished, picks up the letter and hands it to MELISSA, who opens it.)

MELISSA

Das ist auf Deutsch, Hilde. Kannst du es lesen?

(Hands the letter back to HILDEGARD)

HILDEGARD

It’s from my mother. I don’t remember ever seeing this.

(Reads)

“Dresden, September 15, 1939. Liebe Alfred, wir hoffneten ...”

(Continues reading in English, translating from the German as she goes)
“Dear Alfred. We were hoping to come to America. But that is no longer possible. The American Consulate has informed us that the U.S. government is not granting any more visas. We’ll stay here in Dresden, and hope for the best.”

(Reads a few more lines in silence)

“We think of you often and wish you well.”

(HERR VADIM, agitated, throws his hands up into the air.)

When we arrived here in America, David and I wanted my mother and grandmother to come here too. But my father strongly disagreed with that idea! He said they should go somewhere else, Palestine for example. My father was a good man! But he and my mother did not get along. When she and my grandmother chose to stay behind, he accepted that. In coming to America, yes, he escaped Hitler ... and he escaped his wife!

MELISSA

And then, the door closed behind him.

HILDEGARD

He knew all along how dangerous it would be for them to stay in Germany. That's why he gave them the tablets.

MELISSA

The tablets?

HILDEGARD

Just before we left Dresden, my father came home one evening and talked with my mother. This time, they didn't argue. He had brought home pills for her and for my grandmother, poison tablets manufactured by his company. Just in case they would need them, he said. And ... I didn't say a word!

HERR VADIM

What could you say? Your mother and grandmother refused to leave.

HILDEGARD

Had I suspected I would not ever see my mother and grandmother again, I would have told my father, "You cannot do this! They have to come with us!" I would have grabbed them, and not let go!

(HILDEGARD bursts into tears. **MELISSA and HERR VADIM comfort HILDE. KATE and ROGER stand. KATE exits.**)

HERR VADIM

These were very difficult ... impossible times, Hilde!

(ROGER walks over to the table and places a hand on HILDEGARD's shoulder.)

You did what you could do!

(ROGER exits.)

HILDEGARD

(firmly) Thank you André, but I don't want to be reassured; I want to understand. He was willing to let them die!

HERR VADIM

Who can understand these things? It was an insane time for your father, for all of us. We were up against ... the whole world! The lives of six million Jews were taken! Your mother and grandmother, my entire family. You wish to remember, Hilde. I wish to forget!

KATE

(KATE re-enters, carrying a tea kettle. She pours a cup for HERR VADIM, then cups for HILDEGARD and MELISSA.)
Please have some tea, Herr Vadim.

HERR VADIM

(HERR VADIM, taking her hand into his trembling hands)
Thank you very much Kate.

ROGER

(KATE pours tea for the others also. ROGER re-enters, carrying a flower bouquet, which he sets on the table. It is resplendent.)
From our garden!

HERR VADIM

Ah Jasmine!

(Lighting may become pale blue, dim, etc. to indicate memory.)

HILDEGARD

In Dresden, we had a garden. My mother never slept well.

(spoken intensely)

One summer night, when I was ten, we stayed up very late and I put on a new white dress my grandmother had given me for my birthday. While everyone else was asleep, we went outside, my mother and I. Lilacs and primroses were blooming in the moonlight. She was smiling and admiring me.

(Beat)

The garden was very beautiful that night.

(SLOW FADE)

Scene 14. Goodbye.

(Scene. A month later. KATE is seated at the piano, playing the melody of the song that will be sung at the end of this scene.)



(Project photo -- taken from Dresden's City Hall after the bombing.)

KATE

After a war – when the battle fields are quiet, the concentration camps are closed, Dresden has been bombed, Hiroshima has been bombed – life goes on. What's it supposed to do? Should buses stop rolling? Kids no longer go to school? Banks close their doors? No. Life starts up again. For the survivors, there's another day to live, and the day after that.

(Lights fade to dim. Hilde kneels before the open trunk. Illuminated by a pale blue light that emanates from inside the trunk. Hilde speaks as Saint Joan.)

HILDEGARD

(The following monologue, from the German translation of Shaw's "Saint Joan," may be too long. Feel free to abridge it.)

Ihr verspracht mir mein Leben, aber ihr habt gelogen! Ihr glaubt, das Leben sei nichts als nicht mausetot sein Mich vom Licht des Himmels und vom Anblick der Felder und Blumen auszuschliessen, meine Füße zu fesseln, so dass ich nie wider mit den Soldaten reiten noch auf die Berge steigen kann – mich üble feuchte Dunkelheit atmen zu lassen und mir alles fernzuhalten was mich zur Liebe Gottes zurückführen könnte wenn eure Schlechtigkeit und Torheit mich ihn zu hassen verleiten ... wenn ich nur noch den Wind in den Bäumen, die Lerchen im Sonnenglanz, die jungen Lämmer in der frischen Morgenkühle – und die lieben, lieben Kirchenglocken hören konnte, die die Stimmen meiner Engel auf Windesflügeln zu mir herabschicken. Aber ohne diese Dinge kann ich nicht leben. Und weil ihr mich oder irgendein menschliches Wesen dieser Dinge berauben wollt, weiss ich, dasss euer Wort des Tefuels, meines aber Gottes ist!

(The original Shaw: You promised me my life; but you lied [*indignant exclamations*]. You think that life is nothing but not being stone dead.... to shut me from the light of the sky and the sight of the fields and flowers; to chain my feet so that I can never again ride with the soldiers nor climb the hills; to make me breathe foul damp

darkness, and keep from me everything that brings me back to the love of God when your wickedness and foolishness tempt me to hate Him ... if only I could still hear the wind in the trees, the larks in the sunshine, the young lambs crying through the healthy frost -- and the blessed church bells that send my angel voices floating to me on the wind. But without these things I cannot live; and by your wanting to take them away from me, or from any human creature, I know that your counsel is of the devil, and that mine is of God.)

(HILDE stands up and walks out of the spotlight – which remains on, although unoccupied – over to the sofa.)

My brother and I lived at Tiergartenstrasse acht, right across the street from the park. Every kind of flower bloomed there. In the evening, we took walks in the park -- away from the city lights, we could see the Milky Way, and the constellations. I used to know all their names.

(Spotlight fades, HILDE sits down.)

Now, I'm lucky if I remember the names of my housemates.

KATE

(Addressing the audience)

Hilde's hanging in there. She has good days, but pretty soon, she's gonna need more help than we can give. I don't see our household holding together that much longer. Melissa's going off to Nicaragua to join "Witness for Peace." Roger – when Hilde's Wander Theater leaves this house, he told me he's planning to move to the Valley and help organize farm workers. I'm sure he'll do well.

(A few more bars of music)

And me? (shrugs her shoulders) I'll go on teaching piano for the time being. I'll still be friends with Hilde and Herr Vadim. Instead of Roger, I may end up being the one who collects the chestnuts in the fall. But I may have company. Susan has written me that she's coming back to Berkeley in the summer. Says we should get together and sing. I'm a musician -- I won't say no to an offer like that.

(MELISSA enters, carrying her suitcase and back-pack. With HILDE observing, she sets her suitcase down near the front door.)

HILDEGARD

Everything's changing, always changing.

MELISSA

I've packed my things, Hilde.

HILDEGARD

I see that you have.

MELISSA

(Sits down beside HILDE.)
Michael will come over later this morning.

HILDEGARD

I understand.
(Laughs.)
It was the archangel Michael, you know, who counseled Saint Joan.

(ROGER and HERR VADIM enter.)

HERR VADIM

What you're doing is courageous, Melissa, but I hope you'll be safe. I only asked you to come to a teach-in about Nicaragua, not to go there and put yourself in the war zone!

MELISSA

(Kidding)
I'm going only because of your brilliant arguments, Herr Vadim.

HERR VADIM

When you're gone, who will I depend on to keep me peaceful, keep me from beating up on people?

MELISSA

Our other housemates will have to defend the world from you.

KATE

Melissa, we've prepared something for you.

(Everyone except MELISSA gathers around KATE at the piano, and they sing.)

Ay Nicaragua, Nicaraguita
La flor mas linda de mi querer
Abonada con la bendita, Nicaraguita,
Sangre de Diriangen.*

Ay Nicaragua sos mas dulcita
Que la mielita de Tamagas.

(This Translation is included in the program notes:

Ay Nicaragua, little Nicaragua
Prettiest flower of my desire
Nourished with the blessed
Blood of Diriangen.*

Ay Nicaragua you are sweeter
Than the honey from Tamagas

Pero ahora que ya sos libre, Nicaraguita,
Yo te quiero mucho mas,

But now that you are free, little Nicaragua,
I love you all the more.

Pero ahora que ya sos libre, Nicaraguita,
Yo te quiero mucho mas.

(*Diriangen was a warrior of the Chorotega
tribe who fought the Spanish invaders in the
sixteenth century.)

MELISSA

Thank you for the serenade.

HERR VADIM

We'd like you to have also this going-away gift.

(Hands her a gift-wrapped book)

These are poems by a Sandinista priest in Nicaragua, Father Ernesto Cardenal.

MELISSA

(MELISSA accepts the gift)

Thank you everyone. My parents thank you too -- everything I'm doing is wrong, except that I'm going to a Catholic country! They're hoping I'll leap back into the arms of the Church.

HILDEGARD

(Approaches MELISSA – she and HILDE look at one another. Time stands still, this is a moment of epiphany.)

"Stay a while, you are so beautiful."

(beat)

MELISSA

(smiling)

"Verweile doch, du bist so schön." Hilde, I've enjoyed living with you so much. Ich liebe dich.

(beat)

HILDEGARD

You're making me cry. I love you too.

(HILDE's housemates hug Melissa. MELISSA walks over to her suitcase, as HILDE watches.)

HILDEGARD

The Wandertheater (pronounced in the German way: "Vander-tay-ater") never stayed in one place for long. I was always packing my bags. Now I'm the one who's staying behind, and you're the one with the suitcase.

MELISSA

(MELISSA and HILDE look at one another for another moment. Then she looks at everyone.)

I'll keep you all right here (hands to her heart), and I promise to write.

(Picks up her suitcase and exits. Stage goes to dark, then spotlight on HILDE downstage.)

HILDEGARD

I was a girl in Dresden. I was Saint Joan.
In the traveling theater, learning new lines, performing new shows.
After that, changing countries like changing clothes.
(looks toward the trunk) A diary, a photo, a ring,
(looks in the direction of the door) A doorway, a chestnut, a wing.

(Lights widen to include the entire cast, who have joined Hilde downstage.)

I was always packing my bags, and I'll do so again. But (dismissively) that's tomorrow. Let's stay here (looks at everyone in the cast) a moment longer, and appreciate (looks out into the audience) this ... this circle of friends.
(Beat)

Meine Damen und Herren, guten Abend.

(KATE or HILDE sings: Brecht's "An die Nachgeborenen" ("To Those Born Later") as set to music by Hanns Eisler. Can be sung in either German or English translation.)

END OF PLAY

[Optional, depending on the reading or performance setting, after the house lights come on.

We now invite you to a soirée, in the lobby of this theater. The actors and others who contributed to tonight's drama will join us. And you will also find there Hilde's Tagebücher, letters, and photos.]

The play can employ these additional materials:

1. More photographs from Hilda's albums and diaries, and other photographs of life in Germany in the 20s and 30s.
2. Cabaret songs and other musical works. E.g. compositions of Kurt Weil, Hanns Eisler, Wolf Biermann. New songs can be composed for this play.
3. Video/film footage of historical Dresden. The Filmverband Dresden has produced a Filmography that provides a guide to this footage.

4. Readings from, and/or songs based on, the works of writers such as Walter Benjamin, Berthold Brecht, Rosa Luxemburg, and Heinrich Heine. See as well: Raymond Barglow, "The Angel of History: Walter Benjamin's Vision of Hope and Despair," published in "Tikkun Magazine," November 1998 (www.barglow.com/angel_of_history.htm)

In Germany in the 1920s, theater became quite experimental, employing light, music, screens, projected images, cabaret, and cinema in innovative ways. Such vehicles – and new ones made possible by today's technologies – can be used in this play, giving expression to the two realities, past and present, that are constantly at play in Hilde's mind.