

Leni  
A Three Act Drama  
By Ray Uzwysyn

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## LENI

Leni is a three act drama and memory play loosely based on the biography and life of Leni Riefenstahl, actress, filmmaker, photographer, dancer and, ostensibly, Nazi propagandist.

The play reflects on the complex question surrounding the role and choices of an artist in retrograde political times and, in this sense, the play has contemporary resonance. As much as historical figures, the principal characters are archetypes whose dialogues hinge on the sharpness of memory but also its elusive nature.

Historically, the play begins in twenties Berlin and ends on the last day of World War II.

## CAST

*Leni Riefenstahl, Treunker, The Producer, Curtain guards, Chorus Girl #1 and #2, Helga, Captain Heinrich, Goebbels, Bella Balazs, Hess, Frederic, Goebbel's son, Nazi Soldiers (3), Waffen SS Man, Mr. Schmidt, Nazimova, The Ballet Instructor, The Blue Angel, The Projectionist, Clickboard Boy, Nurse.*

THE BAND: *PIANO, TROMBONE, MANDOLIN*

### Principal Characters

LENI - A figure drawn from history but also the psyche. At the play's outset, she is a young woman in a 20's directorial outfit: high boots, flyer pants, beret. She is played strong but fragile, naive but sophisticated, world wise yet innocent. She is an unsoiled virgin yet a Weimar whore. In her speeches there is a cock-suredness yet a relentless questioning.

BELLA - The fool but also the prophet. He is in another place when he speaks. His speeches must be as from another planet - an intellectual who lives in the spirit.

THE PRODUCER - An enigmatic figure. A chameleon who shifts costumes and roles throughout the production acting in various capacities and putting the audience ill-at-ease with shifting sympathies. A documentary filmmaker, historical German UFA couch producer, capitalist exploiter, Nazi sympathizer and Hollywood maven, he serves as foil to Leni.

TREUNKER - Leni's first love and the potential for hope within mankind. An actor who leaves Berlin when war begins, his dialogue is spoken from innocence.

THE BLUE ANGEL - The remaining beautiful ruin to the Greek chorus. She dresses as a prostitute and suggests the Weimar Republic's descent into Dionysian tragedy. Her songs are Germanic renditions sung in sultry cabaret style. Many ironically reprise and act as commentary upon melodies from a previous era of the Broadway/Hollywood musical. The BLUE ANGEL also acts as foil to LENI.

ACT I SCENE I

*A curving spidery leg stage design is camouflaged within the set's construction. Different legs represent psychic locations within Leni's life. The two back elevated legs serve as chorus ramps, a translucent screen separates them from the action.*

*THE PRODUCER'S chair and camera equipment are situated stage right, within a foot of the spider leg. Beside the chair - desk and telephone.*

*At the foot of the stage is a blue spotlight where the BLUE ANGEL sits against a rib-frame chair dressed in a costume which highlights her crotch. Her Weimar "Lotte Lenya" renditions are worn. She has an air of laissez-faire smugness, little empathy for her songs.*

*Beside the BLUE ANGEL sits the band, a motley bunch: piano, mandolin, slide trombone. Often their accompaniment is out of tune or pace with the BLUE ANGEL'S tempo - not amateurs but played out.*

*A plush red velvet curtain splitting center stage and the curtain. At the play's opening, intermission and conclusion, the curtain drapes two long-legged women - GIRL CURTAIN GUARDS. Instead of pants, fishnet stockings and heels.*

*The GIRL CURTAIN GUARDS march open the curtain.*

*Backstage, a viewing screen is lowered.*

*At the lower stage front the PROJECTIONIST enters with an armful of film prints and poster.*

*The poster reads:*

TONIGHT ONLY - RIEFENSTAHL RETROSPECTIVE

FANK'S MOUNTAIN FILMS FEATURING L. RIEFENSTAHL

THE BLUE LIGHT

OLYMPIA

TRIUMPH OF THE WILL

MOTHLIGHT DANCE

REMINISCENCE FROM PERSONAL MEMORIES OF THE DIRECTOR.

THE DIRECTOR WILL BE PRESENT.

*The PROJECTIONIST hammers the poster onto the wall, sets up the first "Mountain Film".*

*Dim house lights and continue projection in background through action - no sound. The PROJECTIONIST remains at the projector keeping an eye on the films but also focusing the action by throwing background projection in and out.*

*A suited man, MR. SCHMIDT, takes a seat next to the PROJECTIONIST. Throughout the play's action his attention is fixed on the screen.*

*THE BLUE ANGEL enters from a side door. Her entrance is workman-like. She prepares for tonight's performance, taps mike, lights cigarette, adjusts blue mohair.*

BLUE ANGEL

*The sun on the meadow is summery warm, The stag in the forest runs free, But gather together to greet the storm, La la la la la la. . .*

*A blue spotlight signals numbers' beginnings. The Blue Angel keeps forgetting lines and restarting (Cabaret's "Tomorrow Belongs to Me," Three Penny Opera's "Mac the Knife," BLUE ANGEL's "Falling in Love Again").*

BLUE ANGEL (cont'd)

*Oh, the shark, babe, has such lips?/teeth?, dear, and it shows them pearly white, just a big knife(?), no jackknife? has old MacHeath, babe. And he keeps it, out of sight. . .*

*The PRODUCER enters and takes his chair. He is dressed as stereotyped Hollywood: baseball-cap, dark glasses, sweats.*

*CLICK BOARD BOY enters stage left.*

BLUE ANGEL (cont'd)

*Falling in love again, Never hum hum hum, what am I to do? Can't help it.*

CLICK BOARD BOY

*(slams down clicker)*

*Quiet on the set. LENI RIEFENSTAHL: a life in film, Act 1, Scene 1.*

*THE CURTAIN GUARDS chant "Riefenstahl". CURTAIN GUARD #1, HELGA, escorts LENI center stage.*

PRODUCER  
Position, Leni.

PRODUCER (cont'd)  
Lights.

*Shift lighting, darken cast, light LENI.*

PRODUCER (cont'd)  
Camera.

PROJECTIONIST  
Rolling.

PRODUCER  
Action.

*LENI does not move.*

PRODUCER (cont'd)  
Action. ACTION!

*Change lighting, cast is re-lit.*

PRODUCER (cont'd)  
Cut. Leni. Let me set this. Your character, Leni  
Riefenstahl, propagandist, toast of the Weimar,  
uncompromising visionary. . .diabolic Mephistopheles...

CLICK BOARD BOY  
(changing the clickboard #)  
And don't forget all that atrocity.

PRODUCER  
The question is put: "Were you aware of the cause?"

CLICK BOARD BOY  
(slams down clicker)  
Leni Riefenstahl: a life in film Act 1, Scene 1. Take  
2.

PRODUCER  
Action.

*The lighting changes from a wide field to a single  
piercing light on LENI.*

PRODUCER'S VOICE  
Cut. This isn't Nuremberg, Leni. We're just concerned  
you come across genuine. . .

CLIP BOARD BOY  
Unaffected.

PROJECTIONIST  
Exposed.

*A photographic burst.*

THE STAGE GOES DARK.

ACT I SCENE II

*The lights go up to reveal a centrally placed ballet bar and mirror. LENI takes off pants and shirt to reveal ballet tights. She wears point shoes and places her leg on the bar - plie.*

*The pianist plays the introduction to Chopin's "Les Sylphides".*

LENI

I wasn't always going to be a filmmaker. I hurt my leg.

*THE BLUE ANGEL hums the German version of 'FALLING IN LOVE AGAIN'.*

PRODUCER

Cut. This doesn't interest people, Leni. Concentrate on drama. How your father "R"ailed. How nearly every actress in Berlin was a PROSTITUTE.

LENI

(ignoring him)

I was standing at the train station.

*The lights go dim.*

*A train whistle blows, wheels chug, a light approximating a train flashes past ballet mirror.*

LENI (cont'd)

I was to tour when I saw it.

*A film poster advertising "DR. FANK'S MOUNTAIN FILMS" lowers next to LENI.*

LENI (cont'd)

(reading the sign)

DR. FANK'S MOUNTAIN FILMS.

## THE BLUE ANGEL

*She sings but forgets the German version of  
"FALLING IN LOVE AGAIN".*

## PRODUCER

Cut. Take ten, Leni. (turns to the CLIPBOARD BOY) I was at a "Mountain Film" retrospective. A genre composed around mountains - avalanches. City girl mountain climbing. Avalanche! Village boy saves her. Avalanche. They were crazy for it and the leader was this doctor, FINK.

## LENI

(moves closer to read the poster)  
His name was Fank.

*The PRODUCER goes to his chair.*

## PRODUCER

Fank had painted live trees to get better film contrast.

## CLIP BOARD BOY

I'm calling the union. . .

## PRODUCER

Unions . . .

## LENI

(ecstatically)  
What Fank put me through!

*A mountain-set rolls into place.*

*LENI climbs.*

*The PRODUCER changes from Hollywood attire into a monocle and knee-boot, 'Sternberg' type suit.*

## LENI (cont'd)

We did stunts ourselves.

*The sound of a camera rolling and cold north wind.*

## PRODUCER

(He now sports a German accent a la  
FANK.)  
Zee right.

## LENI

(calling down )  
Zee right. (to the audience). He zinks I'm crazy? Fank, you zonofabitch, za cheeks of my azz...



PRODUCER

Zee artiste zuffers.

*As the players shout, the sound of the avalanche becomes louder until their speeches are hardly audible.*

LENI

Zis isn't za type of zuffering I zought I was zin for.

PRODUCER

Zmile.

LENI

*(still yelling down)*

Make sure Clipboard Boy and Treunker...

CLIPBOARD BOY

We should have spent the money on a St. Bernard.

PRODUCER

Action.

*Lights fade on Leni.*

*Light PRODUCER.*

*He broods.*

PRODUCER (cont'd)

No good. I zask for avalanche. Zomeone drops zhovel.

*Light TREUNKER.*

*He approaches from a back leg, stage left. He wears a German village boy/mountain winter climbing costume, young and handsome.*

*THE BLUE ANGEL hums "The Hills are Alive with the Sound of Music".*

BLUE ANGEL

*The Hills are alive with the sound of music. With songs they have sung for a thousand years.*

TREUNKER

Leni.

LENI

Here!

*TREUNKER digs her out.*

TREUNKER  
Leni.

LENI  
He's going to make us do it again.

TREUNKER  
Enough.

LENI  
I can't take another avalanche.

*She begins to weep.*

TREUNKER  
There are better things.

LENI  
What?

TREUNKER  
Excuse me?

LENI  
You said, there are better things.

TREUNKER  
Berlin.

LENI  
Berlin?

TREUNKER  
Ringstrasse...parties...cabarets. They tango all night.

*The band begins to play "Jealousy".*

LENI  
All night?

TREUNKER  
Till daylight and champagne.

LENI  
Champagne?

*TREUNKER and LENI step closer to each other.*

TREUNKER  
We'll sit in coffee shops, write romantic lines.

LENI

Verses?

TREUNKER

Rhymes. I'll get jealous. You'll give your attentions  
to other men.

LENI

Other men?

TREUNKER

Not too many.

*TREUNKER breaks from her, assumes a soldier's  
stance.*

*The sound of another avalanche.*

TREUNKER (cont'd)

When I'm bored, I'll join the army.

LENI

But what will be my role?

"AVALANCHE".

FADE LIGHTS.

ACT I SCENE III

*A light brightens the PRODUCER who sits in his  
chair.*

*TREUNKER and LENI sit at a finely set coffee  
table. They hold hands over a delicate chess set.*

LENI

Berlin. . . girls in furs. My nights. Taken up -  
glamorous!

PRODUCER

What about politics, Leni?

*LENI turns to TREUNKER. TREUNKER ogles the CURTAIN  
GUARDS who play peekaboo. The BLUE ANGEL seems  
animated.*

LENI

. . . An innocent time.

TREUNKER

Wine and roses.

THE BLUE ANGEL

(singing These Are a Few of My Favorite Things)

*Girls in white dresses with blue satin sashes, Snowflakes that stay on my nose and eyelashes, Silver white winters that melt into springs, These are a few of my favorite things.*

*In counterpoint to LENI's speech, THE BLUE ANGEL mimes putting a little child to bed and singing it this lullaby.*

TREUNKER

I wanted to be a flyer.

LENI

Romantic.

TREUNKER

I thought, "Leni will be impressed".

LENI

Don't think I wasn't.

TREUNKER

Then I left.

*Uncomfortable pause.*

LENI

I didn't want to get involved.

TREUNKER

How I missed you! I wrote, "Leave Berlin."

LENI

How could I?

TREUNKER

I wrote, "Let's go back to the Alps".

LENI

We were never villagers.

TREUNKER

I should have taken you with me.

*TREUNKER exits, retreating.*

*LENI is isolated.*

*The PRODUCER gets up from his chair and walks closer.*

CLICK BOARD BOY

(He slams down clicker)

Leni Riefenstahl: A Life in Film. Act II, Scene II.  
Take five.

*TREUNKER fades into the wings.*

FADE LIGHTS.

ACT I SCENE IV

*The NAZI CURTAIN GUARDS fan a smoky atmosphere.  
The lighting suggests confusion.*

*LENI clutches a script which she hands nervously  
to the PRODUCER now dressed in 20's garb.*

PRODUCER

You want us to fund this?

LENI

"The Blue Light."

PRODUCER

You direct?

LENI

I act. . .apprenticed under Dr. Otto Fank.

PRODUCER

The mountain film man. Because you were in a couple  
mountain films, this makes you a director?

LENI

Yes.

PRODUCER

We don't care about avalanches here. Do you know what  
matters?...Did the mountain man, FANK, teach you that?

*LENI nods "no".*

PRODUCER (cont'd)

Let me spell it out, Fraulein - M-A-R-K-S, Marks,  
Deutsche Marks. Is this film going to bring an  
audience? Turn a profit?

*LENI nods.*

*The PRODUCER looks at her. She's not paying  
attention.*

PRODUCER (cont'd)

(contemplative)

Look, kid, you may not believe this but I used to be like you. Have you seen "Kaiser's Mistress"?

LENI

No.

PRODUCER

Point taken. "Swan Sleeps with Satan"?

LENI

No.

*LENI nods 'no' to all titles*

PRODUCER

"Dishonoured?" "Sold-Out?", Aching with Ambition?", "Hey, Hey, Hegel." - musical.

*The PRODUCER imitates a chorus girl kick, laughing.*

PRODUCER (cont'd)

The bottom line is you don't remember those. They didn't make money. Ideas. For Godsakes, it's a Depression.

*The CURTAIN GUARD GIRLS fumble with curtains.*

*The BLUE ANGEL hums "Falling in Love Again".*

LENI

So you won't fund "The Blue Light"?

PRODUCER

Let's not be hasty, Leni. You're a good-looking woman. Favors can be exchanged.

*He approaches her, puts the script aside.*

LENI

(naively)

It's a good script. A fairytale.

*He starts on her blouse.*

LENI (cont'd)

A mountain girl, a cave of crystals.

*He continues with her blouse.*

PRODUCER

A crystal cave.

LENI

Treunker...loved...it.

*She turns toward the place where TREUNKER sat. The silhouette of an airplane passes against the screen.*

*Lighting change - sleazy.*

*The CURTAIN GUARD GIRLS censor the viewing area.*

*The words "Treunker" and "Who" alternate between them in an increasingly frenetic rhythm.*

PRODUCER

Who?

LENI

Treunker.

PRODUCER

Who?

LENI

Treunker.

*LENI calls out "Treunker" in a gesture that suggests simultaneously "Help" and "NO".*

*The PRODUCER's "Who" descends into animalistic.*

*CLOSE CURTAIN ON "TREUNKER".*

# ACT I SCENE V

*THE CURTAIN GIRLS march open curtains.*

*The PROJECTIONIST changes reels.*

*"The Blue Light" is projected on the background screen.*

*LENI saunters on, lights a cigarette, sits in the PRODUCER's chair.*

*Everything is bathed in green.*

*The BLUE ANGEL hums "Surabaya Johnny".*

BLUE ANGEL

*Surabaya Johnny. Is it really the end?, Surabaya Johnny. Will the hurt ever mend?, Surabaya Johnny. Ooh, I burn at your touch, You got no heart, Johnny, but oh, I love you so much.*

LENI

Greenlighted. Screenwriter was - amazed. Bella, if you knew. Then you left, Goddamn you Bella Balaz. My screenwriter.

*She laughs. There is a change in LENI here.*

PRODUCER

*(He is at the side of the stage.)*

Of course. Can't be denied. Balaz was a Hungarian Jew but he was good. It was allowed.

LENI

Bella.

*BELLA BALAZ appears in a gradual softlit spotlight backstage right on one of the spider feet. A simple writer's set-up; washtable, basin, mirror, comb - across from that, desk and typewriter. Above the desk is a shelf which contains several classics which he consults: Nietzsche, Shakespeare, Spengler.*

*Sidelit, BELLA is a short, spectacle-wearing man. He appears more of the stereotypical Talmudic scholar than conventional screenwriter. His tics and movements betray a nervous writerly manner.*

*He alternates between typing furiously at an old Underwood and standing and looking contemplatively out a window frame and small square piece of wall which hangs from wires. In his right hand he has what could be taken for a large ledger or sacred book.*

LENI (cont'd)

Bella.

PRODUCER

*(remembering)*

Balaz. A property.

*LENI walks up to BELLA'S window and calls to him. He appears not to hear.*



LENI

(to audience)  
He was in his own world.

PRODUCER

Unaware.

LENI

Always writing. Never without that Underwood. I loved "Blue Light" so much I decided to star myself.

*LENI takes off her director's pants to reveal the bottom of her shirt, a cut-off smock.*

*She picks up a picnic basket next to the PRODUCER's chair and begins to climb the mountain-set which rolls in stage left.*

PRODUCER

I remember that telegraph. Female lead fired. Will star and direct myself.

LENI

Sincerely, Leni. And why shouldn't I? (Leni climbs the mountain). Bella was in love with me just as Fank and Treunker...

PRODUCER

And then overbudget! That crystal cavern...ridiculous...

*LENI ascends to the top of the mountain-set. She looks over the precipice.*

LENI

Cut me off in the middle of production. I was at the top of a mountain, risking my life with crew and village of extras. We still had two weeks to shoot.

PRODUCER

Supply and demand, Leni. Mountain movies had their day.

*The light illuminating BELLA fades.*

LENI

What did you expect me to do?

PRODUCER

Economics.

LENI

After all this climbing, clawing. I could never be a white tutu ballerina again. And then, Papa's voice, "Why didn't you listen?"

PRODUCER

Give it the greenlight.

*A greenlight shoots upwards from the mountain-top  
illuminating LENI's face from the bottom.*

PRODUCER (cont'd)

I was getting ready to go home to my wife and kids when that letter came. Someone in the government was interested. Let Riefenstahl finish. Well, I was never one to mix with politics.

LENI

(looking down and picking up crystal)

We had come so far. (Long Pause) The film would be finished. .

*The green light intensifies.*

PRODUCER

Essentially, I'm a businessman. When I got that letter, I thought, "We'll take the loss. Maybe it'll turn out to be a sleeper hit, "Blue Light".(Stares up at LENI). Who was I to interfere with government affairs? That's a pun.

LENI

The air was clear here.

*The BLUE ANGEL BEGINS a minor key version of the  
"Sound of Music's" "DO RE ME, Doe, a deer a female  
deer".*

BLUE ANGEL

*Doe, a deer, a female deer, Ray, a drop of golden  
sun, Me, a name, I call myself, Far, a long, long way  
to run.*

PRODUCER

Could it have been different?

LENI

Were you any different from Treunker?

PRODUCER

I wash my hands.

LENI

(calling down from the ledge in a  
different tone)

Don't say more. Dirtying the memory of my fairytale film?

*LENI falls to her knees and weeps.*

*The lights fade on PRODUCER.*

*Lights up on BLUE ANGEL and CURTAIN GIRLS.*

BLUE ANGEL

*Once in a town...lived a little goat, girl. Yodeleday, yodeleday, yodeledee hoo...There nanannananananan Yodeledeyeyyodedleldyewho".*

*The romantic little coffee table from LENI and TREUNKER'S conversation is now stage right. The CURTAIN GUARD GIRLS manipulate a goat and a little female 'Junta' puppet disarraying the delicate chess piece set-up so pieces tumble to the ground. They parody the Von Trapp children's "Sound of Music" mountain-play. Continue through BELLA and LENI's speeches.*

*Soft light on BELLA.*

*He sits typing. He speaks with a Yiddish accent.*

BELLA

*Three acts. Two conflicts. Five scenes/act. 20c/word. Pay Rent 1st of each month. Boy meets girl. Girl meets boy. Fall in love. The End.*

LENI

*I just wanted to make the film. Is that wrong Bella?*

PRODUCER

*I wash my hands. I have a wife, kids.*

*As the PRODUCER exits mumbling, LENI climbs down the mountain and enters BELLA's writer's world.*

LENI

*So many ideas, Bella. You were always writing.*

BELLA

*Affairs of the world? What could I do?*

LENI

*Let me help with the script.*

*BELLA begins to type, continue through scene.*

LENI (cont'd)

*It must contain a wild girl.*

BELLA  
Wild girl?

LENI  
JUNTA.

BELLA  
Interesting.

LENI  
And mountains. I'm good at mountains.

BELLA  
Mountains.

LENI  
And an AVALANCHE.

BELLA  
Big avalanche?

LENI  
Not too much snow, but this time Junta saves the boy.

BELLA  
Reversal...and who is he?

LENI  
A love-struck artist.

BELLA  
Of course.

*During this time LENI gets closer and closer to  
BELLA.*

*She puts out her hand to caress his cheek but  
stops herself.*

LENI  
I'm sorry.

BELLA  
It's alright.

*BELLA goes to a wash basin and mirror which sits  
on a stool opposite his typewriter.*

LENI  
My hands are dirty.

*BELLA removes his glasses and starts to wash.*

BELLA  
Nothing soap and water won't handle.

LENI  
Dirty with paint.

BELLA  
You forgot. Come.

*BELLA begins to wash LENI's hands.*

*As he finishes, they pause.*

*Leni becomes animated again miming out the role of Junta, the wild girl.*

LENI  
Reviled by villagers and city-folk, Junta, the wild girl, alone in mountains.

*BELLA resumes typing.*

LENI (cont'd)  
Each day Junta contents herself with berries. She alone possesses knowledge of the ancient lost blue crystal cave. Until that fateful day when the artist-prince crosses her path.

BELLA  
Interesting.

LENI  
Whether to help him escape from the avalanche or leave him to die. Of course, she chooses to save him revealing the crystal cave.

BELLA  
Expensive. Necessary?

LENI  
Absolutely.

FADE LIGHTS.

ACT I SCENE VI

*Single blue spotlight highlights the BLUE ANGEL. Her facial make-up is a degree starker.*

*A red spotlight punches CURTAIN GUARD #1.*

*She unzips her jacket. On the insole words read "TRANSITIONS".*

*GUARD #2 unzips her jacket revealing "IN - TIME".*

*The BLUE ANGEL cocks her head upward as a puppet.  
She sings Kurt Weill's "Alabama Song".*

BLUE ANGEL

*Oh, show me the way to the next whiskey bar, oh, don't  
ask why, oh don't ask why.*

*The stage is lit - blue, purple and black. The  
NAZI SOLDIERS walk a serpentine path from one foot  
of the spider leg to the other.*

*BELLA goes to his window, looks out, starts to  
type, goes to his window.*

*Still in her JUNTA costume, LENI stands stageside,  
confused.*

*BELLA walks over to his bookshelf, takes down a  
book, pages through it.*

BELLA

*Julius Caesar, I, III, 63: Cassius: Heaven hath infus'd  
them with these spirits to make them instruments of  
fear and warning unto some monstrous state."*

*Lights down on BELLA.*

*Intensify spotlight on BLUE ANGEL.*

BLUE ANGEL

*"Oh show me the way to the next little boy, oh, don't  
ask why, oh, don't ask why".*

*THE BLUE ANGEL gyrates against the chair.*

*The cold sound of wind.*

LENI

*(from darkness)  
Cold that winter.*

BELLA

*(voice only)  
Leni.*

LENI

*I could hardly hear the person next to me.*

*A soft blue light goes on in BELLA's apartment.*

*In silhouette, we see him throwing books into a suitcase, putting on his coat, packing his typewriter.*

*He puts out the blue light, hurriedly exits down a spider leg foot.)*

*A startled scream.*

*A stark blue spotlight illuminates BELLA and LENI.*

LENI (cont'd)  
Bella?

BELLA  
Who did you think?

LENI  
You scared me. Where you going?

BELLA  
Away.

LENI  
From where?

BELLA  
Here.

LENI  
You mean Berlin or Germany?

BELLA  
I don't have time.

LENI  
Don't leave.

BELLA  
Then come.

*He is in a hurry.*

LENI  
We have films.

BELLA  
Not here anymore.

LENI  
Where, if not here?

BELLA

So naive. You can't see.

LENI

What?

*Another set-up illuminates the PRODUCER.*

*He is in his office on a phone.)*

THE PRODUCER

Party convention at Nuremberg. I know just the filmmaker.

*Fade lights PRODUCER.*

*Relight LENI and BELLA.*

LENI

What am I going to do without you? Who will help me?

BELLA

*(takes a bunch of books from his  
suitcase)*

Take these.

LENI

Your books?

BELLA

Too much to carry.

*He starts to walk off the stage.*

*Train sounds.*

LENI

*(She looks at the books)*

How are these going to help?

BELLA

*(yelling)*

You help us!

LENI

*(yelling back)*

How?

*(She sits at the books.*

*The NAZI SOLDIERS come by.)*

NAZI SOLDIER 1

Heil!



LENI

Heil?

NAZI SOLDIER 2

For the burning?

LENI

Burning?

NAZI SOLDIER 1

The book burning.

*LENI looks over the books.*

LENI

No, I don't think so. Why burn any books?

*One of the NAZI PAINTERS takes one of the books.*

NAZI SOLDIER 1

On your way citizen. Heil.

LENI

(still confused)

Yes.

(She continues walking home.)

LENI (cont'd)

They helped me pick up your books.

FADE LIGHTS.

ACT I SCENE VII

*THE PRODUCER'S light comes up.*

*He nods his head back and forth, grabs his chin nervously and paces back and forth. Changing times and what to do.*

*A different set-up reveals LENI dressed in a gown, hair pulled back, holding a glass of sparkling champagne.*

*A chandelier lowers.*

*The CURTAIN GUARDS light candelabra at either side of the stage. They wear tiaras.*

LENI

That summer I was happy. Feted, invited to government affairs. Who wouldn't be thrilled?

*The BLUE ANGEL opens a hand-cranked swan-decorated music box set-up.*

*It contains a jeweled necklace.*

*She puts it on.*

BLUE ANGEL  
Strictly costume.

*A large oil painting is controlled by THE BLUE ANGEL.*

*She lowers the painting into position from a wire attached to the musical crank box. While she lowers the painting, the box churns out "Falling in Love Again".*

*HESS, GOEBBELS and his son, a young Aryan boy, FREDERIC, enter and cross the stage behind LENI.*

*The three stop to admire the gold-framed classical painting which depicts the rape of Leda by the Swan. Both men are dressed in Nazi regalia. FREDERIC is dressed in white - blond hair, blue eyes.*

HERR HESS  
Leni Riefenstahl. A pleasure!

LENI  
(winking at audience)  
The pleasure is mine.

HERR HESS  
Let me introduce Herr Goebbels.

LENI  
Delighted. (winking again)

GOEBBELS  
Madam.

HERR HESS  
His son, Frederic.

*HESS interacts with FREDERIC - overly intimate.*

*LENI rests her hand on FREDERIC'S cheek a moment too long.*

FREDERIC

(uncomfortably)  
Weren't you once a chorus girl?

LENI

An. . . interpretive dancer.

FREDERIC

You used to work mountain films?

LENI

Yes?

FREDERIC

Of course, I'm too young to remember.

LENI

(a bit flustered)  
Of course.

FREDERIC

But Papa...

LENI

I'm sure.

*GOEBBELS, who has been admiring the Rape of Leda  
pivots to LENI.*

GOEBBELS

And what now, Frau Riefenstahl?

LENI

As they say, now, between projects.

GOEBBELS

(turning again to the painting)  
Between.

*There is a parallel in the way that LENI is  
dressed and the way LEDA is depicted in the  
painting.*

GOEBBELS (cont'd)

Surely, a woman, your talents?

*He takes a step closer to her.*

*HESS and FREDERIC exit.*

LENI

Not in every situation, Herr Goebbels.

GOEBBELS

In what situation?

*Dim lights.*

LENI

I don't quite know.

*One of the CURTAIN GUARDS blows a candelabra.*

GOEBBELS

No?

*The other GUARD blows out the other candelabra.*

*The stage is dim except for a single blue spotlight which lights the hand of THE BLUE ANGEL who holds the painting's crank.*

LENI

No.

*The BLUE ANGEL releases the crankshaft.*

GOEBBELS.

No.

*The handle spins out of control.*

LENI

No.

*LENI and GOEBBELS yell "No" in a suggestive manner.*

*The loud thud of the painting dropping to the floor.*

FADE LIGHTS.

ACT I SCENE VIII

*TREUNKER sits on a crate on the back left spider leg foot.*

*He is behind the translucent blue screen wearing a flyer's cap, pants and leather jacket.*

*LENI sits at a Steenbeck editing table, a bright light shining on her. Pieces of film hang from racks on either side of her.*

*As the scene begins, the PROJECTIONIST begins to background project "Triumph of the Will".*

TREUNKER

And then I heard, "Riefenstahl". The other flyers were talking about you, Leni. I thought "Treunker, time to go back. Berlin. Movies".

*LENI pays him little attention.*

TREUNKER (cont'd)

We'll really make mountain films now. With aerial shots and...

LENI

I don't make those anymore.

*TREUNKER ignores her.*

TREUNKER

I can even place a camera with a parachute.

LENI

Didn't you hear? I don't make those anymore.

TREUNKER

What do you mean?

LENI

I work for the party.

TREUNKER

Party?

LENI

Our Fuhrer.

TREUNKER

Fuhrer...Leni, what are you talking about?

LENI

My films.

TREUNKER

But Leni, there's no part for me? Remember how I played that soldier in "Dishonoured".

LENI

No.

TREUNKER

"War is one thing, but I love you."

LENI

I can't hear this any longer.

*Marching sounds.*

*TREUNKER looks away, distracted.*

*LENI also stares into the distance.*

*GOEBBELS, NAZIMOVA, HOLLYWOOD DIETRICH, FREDERIC and BELLA walk onto the back spider leg foot facing away from the audience below the projected screen. They are separated by the blue translucent screen.*

*They slowly turn as the marching gets louder.*

*Simultaneously, marching processions from "TRIUMPH of the WILL" continue on screen.*

TREUNKER

I hate that sound. (waits until the marching noise dies off). So many of us have left.

*Light PRODUCER on the other side of the stage.*

*He is on the phone.*

*Sitting next to him dejected is the CLIPBOARD BOY.*

PRODUCER

What do you mean gone to America? Dietrich too? How am I supposed to run a studio with everyone leaving the country? (Pause) How the Hell would I know if Sternberg is one?

*He slams down the receiver.*

*Fade light on PRODUCER.*

TREUNKER

Leni? Everyone's leaving.

LENI

What's that mean?

TREUNKER

I want to help, Leni.

LENI

You want to help?

*The BLUE ANGEL starts to sing the opening number "Welcome" from "Cabaret".*

BLUE ANGEL

*Willkommen, bienvenue, welcome!, Fremde, etranger, stranger, Gluklich zu sehen, je suis enchant, Happy to see you, bleibe, reste, stay.*

*Her movements are puppet-like. There are strings attached to her hands.*

TREUNKER

No strings attached.

LENI

There are always strings.

*Silhouetted behind the translucent screen people with baggage move across the ramp.*

*Guards march and a spotlight crosses the screen followed by train sounds.*

*MR. SCHMIDT, who up to now has been sitting next to the PROJECTIONIST intently watching the screening, gets up from his chair and makes his way up a ladder to a place that obscures the continuing projection of "Triumph of the Will".*

MR. SCHMIDT

(ironically)

This is what they call "arts funding"? Fank's mountain films were more my style. Even 'The Blue Light'. But marching, political assemblies? I'm a simple man, I don't know art.

*He descends the ladder and makes his way to LENI's editing set-up.*

MR. SCHMIDT (cont'd)

"Blue Light". Remember that, Leni? Critics panned it, but I loved it. Brought my little Helga when it opened. You walked by her, signed her book.

LENI

I remember, Mr. Schmidt.

MR. SCHMIDT

And who am I to say what an artist should do, a grand actress, director now, such as yourself?

LENI

Thank you.

MR. SCHMIDT

Who am I to say "Triumph of the Will" might be a bit over the head of the simple man? (pause) What happened to that screenwriter, Balaz? Didn't he work with you?

*Behind the screen a man runs by with a valise.*

LENI

At one time.

MR. SCHMIDT

At one time you were concerned about your audience. God strike me down if I get in the way.

*SCHMIDT looks toward the sky.*

*The light fades on Schmidt.*

*Lights up PRODUCER.*

*He speaks on the telephone.*

PRODUCER

Moishe, I'll say it once. "PROPAGANDA". Draws crowds. No problem with censors. Smart money Moishe. Little risk, big returns, guaranteed audience. Don't need stars, names. Just bring in the soldiers.

*Fade on PRODUCER.*

*SCHMIDT now turns to the audience.*

MR. SCHMIDT

I don't know about you but I'm here to be entertained. Spent a hard day at work. I like something. . .like those mountain films. Leggy city girl in Alps. Avalanche! Type of thing you take the wife and kids to. But this! Puts ideas in my kids' heads.

TREUNKER

Ideas?

MR. SCHMIDT

We leave the theatre and my little boy tells me he wants to join the Reich.

*TREUNKER gets up, moves closer to LENI to examine celluloid strips.*

*He then goes to SCHMIDT with a bottle he has pulled from his jacket.*

*The two share a drink.*



*Schmidt wipes his forehead with a hanky and walks back to his viewing seat.*

*The BLUE ANGEL sings "MAC the KNIFE".*

BLUE ANGEL

*Oh, the shark, babe, has such teeth, dear, and it shows them pearly white. Just a jackknife has old MacHeath, babe, And he keeps it, out of sight.*

*Two NAZI Soldiers walk onto the stage and confront TREUNKER.*

NAZI SOLDIER 1

*Frau Riefenstahl mustn't be disturbed.*

TREUNKER

*(carrying a bottle)*

*Out of my way.*

*They push him down the back left spider leg and off stage.*

*LENI gets up from her work which she has been pursuing with vigor and follows.*

*She lowers her glasses, looks pedantically at the unfolding TREUNKER drama.*

*A blue light focuses on the BLUE ANGEL who sings "Mac the Knife".*

*A black-suited SS MAN enters, slaps boots together.*

WAFFEN SS

*Leni Riefenstahl?*

*THE SS MAN repeats this gesture.*

*Lighting change.*

*A severe but beautiful woman enters lower stage right, NAZIMOVA, LENI's old Ballet instructor. She speaks with a heavy Russian accent.*

NAZIMOVA

*Mademoiselle Riefenstahl. Always last to put point shoes on. If you are a dancer, you must be punctual, n'est-ce pas?*

*NAZIMOVA exits.*

*The light illuminates the PRODUCER still on the telephone.*

PRODUCER

Moishe, I don't give a damn if she is. Get me Riefenstahl. She packs 'em in.

*The PRODUCER slams down the phone, grabs his coat and exits stage left.*

*Lighting change.*

*The SS man grabs Leni to shake her out of the dream state she has entered at the editing table.*

*The PRODUCER runs into the Steenbeck scene breathing heavily.*

*The PROJECTIONIST begins to screen "Olympia".*

PRODUCER (cont'd)

We need a director for the Berlin Olympics. I hate to be blunt but you weren't our first choice. (somewhat embarrassed). Those guys have left the country or....

LENI

I'm tired.

PRODUCER

Leni, I'm promising support and can hand pick cameramen (looks worriedly around) from what's left in the country.

*The lighting highlights LENI.*

*She looks toward the spot where TREUNKER was taken.*

LENI

Tired.

*The PRODUCER opens a folder he has brought along.*

PRODUCER

(to SS MAN)

Look at these receipts!

WAFFEN SS

Good?

PRODUCER

Do you guys issue death threats for non attendance?

*The SS man nods his head not getting the joke, unimpressed.*

*LENI looks up with displeasure.*

LENI

I spent months on "Triumph of the Will". A labor of love.

PRODUCER

I was making a joke, Leni.

LENI

Not funny.

PRODUCER

(taking the SS MAN aside)

Be careful. This is an artist, not a. . .

*THE PRODUCER winks knowingly at the audience.*

*The SS MAN nods.*

LENI

I should leave Berlin. Join Bella...sail. America.

PRODUCER

The decision is really up to you, Leni. Half the industries up and packed their bags. Got out while the goings still. . .good.

LENI

(to audience)

And go to what? Two-bit mountain movie actress? Aging German actress looking for work? Strong German accent, unintelligible to American audiences included.

*The BLUE ANGEL starts to sing FAGAN'S "I'm Reviewing the Situation" from "Oliver".*

BLUE ANGEL

*I'm reviewing the situation. If you want to eat -- you've got to earn a bob! Is it such a humiliation. For an actress to perform an honest job? So a job I'm getting, possibly.*

PRODUCER

(to WAFFEN SS)

Give her time.

LENI

Who's going to employ me? The ones on your lists I passed over?

BLUE ANGEL

*I wonder who my boss'll be? I wonder if he'll take to me...? What bonuses he'll make to me...? I'll start at eight and finish late, At normal rate, and all..but wait! ...I think I'd better think it out again.*

SS MAN

*(to PRODUCER)*

The party higher ups need a decision.

PRODUCER

Tsh, give her space.

LENI

A few years ago, life seemed simple.

*The PRODUCER whispers something into the SS MAN'S ear.*

*The SS man leaves nodding.*

PRODUCER

*(approaches LENI)*

Remember that letter?

LENI

I get lots of letters. . .

PRODUCER

When you were doing "The Blue Light".

*He opens his folder and looks at the box office receipts.*

PRODUCER (cont'd)

Ring any bells?

LENI

I don't know what you're talking about. (Pause)

*The light grows intimate around the PRODUCER and LENI.*

*A separate light on the back left spider leg isolates the SS MAN in profile.*

*Another light on the opposite side of the stage isolates TREUNKER sitting on a crate.*

*TREUNKER mimes a Baron von Richtoven war flyboy game.*

PRODUCER

These Olympics will be good.

LENI

Take my mind off 'home' concerns.

*The PRODUCER walks away from the Steenbeck set-up tracing his path up a spider leg.*

PRODUCER

This is a delicate topic....My sons see your films. Monkeys imitate.

LENI

What's bad about imitation, mimesis?

PRODUCER

I used to think, we make movies, shake hands, no damage. I'm not certain.

*TREUNKER mimes getting shot through the heart, falling off the crate.*

PRODUCER (cont'd)

Say I were a filmmaker who got a government letter which smoothed over a project's funding "no strings attached"...(A smile comes over LENI's face). Do you continue to deny it, Leni? You're working with the right hand of the party...

*LENI walks centre stage and looks defiantly upwards.*

LENI

I am an artist. I have never been a member of any party. If you have anything to say, say it.

*The PRODUCER cannot look her in the face.*

*LENI returns to her editing table.*

*The mandolin plays the overture from "The Third Man" with trombone accompaniment.*

*A set of gaudy flashing bulbs which read "HOLLYWOOD" descends from the ceiling to the upper back ramp.*

*TREUNKER is on the crate. War-type blackout lighting illuminates his mime.*

*Sounds of bombs and a plane going down.*

*BELLA, holding a book and HOLLYWOOD DIETRICH, holding a long cigarette holder enter watching TREUNKER'S mime. All are on the back spider leg foot behind LENI.*

LENI (cont'd)  
Treunker!

*A loud "Cut, take five" from the wings.*

BELLA  
(greeting him)  
God, Treunker. Glad to see you in the Hollywood Hills.

TREUNKER  
Whoever thought I'd be in flyer pictures here? When I left Berlin, I thought, career - kaput.

*The CLIP BOARD BOY walks by. He carries a camera.*

BELLA  
Have you met Marlene?

TREUNKER  
Enchante. Blue Angel - Incredible.

*TREUNKER converses with HOLLYWOOD MARLENE.*

*BELLA notices LENI watching.*

BELLA  
It's not the same without you, Leni. We're not 'all' here.

LENI  
Don't think I don't miss my crew.

BELLA  
There was no choice, Leni.

LENI  
I read your books at night, Bella.

BELLA  
They haven't all been burned?

LENI  
(laughs)  
You were too smart for me.

TREUNKER  
(exiting with HOLLYWOOD DIETRICH)  
We miss you, Leni.

LENI

(ironically)

I see.

HOLLYWOOD DIETRICH

There's still time. There's enough work here.

*A translucent screen descends and a movie scene with CLIPBOARD BOY, now camera man, DIETRICH, TREUNKER, and BELLA in a director's chair is set up.*

*On the lower left the WAFFEN SS MAN enters.*

*LENI remains center stage.*

*The NAZI PAINTERS (HEINRICH carrying bucket and brush) enter on the lower left with the SS MAN but march clumsily past him, bumping into LENI and then stopping on the lower front right spider leg.*

*They are hooligans and ogle the CURTAIN GUARDS and BLUE ANGEL.*

LENI

(to audience)

God, world's changing! That boy, I mean man...I was still scraping to get work, an extra. He was a grip pushing a dolly. Now look. Captain in the SS. Soldiering.

*CAPTAIN HEINRICH of the NAZI PAINTERS points to a piece of wall.*

*LENI walks over.*

LENI (cont'd)

Heinrich, you remember me, Leni Riefenstahl?

*LENI puts out her hand which HEINRICH shakes.*

*When she takes it back, she realizes she has dirtied it with paint.*

*Lighting change.*

*On the other side of the stage THE PRODUCER stands next to the WAFFEN SS MAN.*

*The light switches back to LENI and HEINRICH.*

*The band plays an out-of-tune rendition of Olympic theme music.*

LENI (cont'd)

(trying to find comfort in HEINRICH)  
Those were days. An innocent time.

*LENI moves from HEINRICH in displeasure seeing his uniform.*

*The translucent screen is illuminated.*

*TREUNKER sits on the crate.*

*The BLUE ANGEL reprises "These are a Few of My Favourite Things" with lewd gestures.*

BLUE ANGEL

*Raindrops on roses, And whiskers on kittens, Bright copper kettles and warm woolen mittens, Brown paper packages tied up with strings, These are a few of my favorite things.*

*FREDERIC is posed in a stance reminiscent of an Olympian next to the PRODUCER. He is archetypal Aryan youth.*

FREDERIC GOEBBELS

*I will apprentice under Riefenstahl (pause), according to father's wishes. Although I can do without mountain films. (unconvincing). But, I do need to learn process. Fraulein Riefenstahl will acquaint me. I will take her offer. (slaps boots together)*

*Light change.*

*FREDERIC takes a place next to the WAFFEN SS MAN.*

*LENI turns away from HEINRICH, looks toward TREUNKER.*

BLUE ANGEL

*Cream-colored ponies and crisp apple strudel, Doorbells and sleigh bells, And schnitzel with noodles, Wild geese that fly with the moon on their wings, These are a few of my favorite things*

LENI

*Don't think I've forgotten, Treunker. Your hand on my leg. You wrote love letters. How frightened I was the first time, gentle!*

*An air raid whistle sounds.*

*Blue light on BLUE ANGEL. The BLUE ANGEL sings in a Chevalier-accent, punctuated by coughing "ISN'T IT ROMANTIC" (pause).*



BLUE ANGEL

*Isn't it romantic, Music in the night, a dream that can  
be heard, Isn't it romantic, That a hero might appear  
and say the word Brought by a secret charm or by my  
heart's command,*

*She has a coughing fit.*

BLUE ANGEL (cont'd)

*My prince will ride in armour just to kiss my hand.*

*She must get water from a pitcher atop the piano.*

BLACKOUT.

ACT II SCENE I

*LENI sits at her editing table splicing together film.*

*The WAFFEN SS MAN and PRODUCER enter.*

LENI

I can't concern myself. Politics. (splicing film pieces) I put things together.

PRODUCER

The Olympics are at hand. We need a decision.

LENI

Haven't I made enough wrong decisions?

PRODUCER

What kind of wrong decisions? Everyone is raving about your films. I gotta kid beating the doorstep to work with you.

LENI

A kid?

PRODUCER

Not some snot-nosed punk either. Frederic Goebbels. (cynically) Gold medallion of Aryan youth.

LENI

Whatever that means. Yes

PRODUCER

(Surprised)

Yes? (wiping sweat off brow). She'll do it?

LENI

Now don't bother me.

WAFFEN SS

Certain points must be followed.

LENI

I agree.

*The two men look at her suspiciously.*

PRODUCER

Now, Leni, you don't have to agree to everything. You still will have 'artistic control', won't she?

WAFFEN SS

Artistic control will be in Frau Riefenstahl's hands.

*LENI glances at her hands still trying to wipe the paint off them.*

LENI

I've always wanted to do a film about the Olympics. Sweaty men's bodies...Celluloid (she fondles a piece of film. (pause) And Frederic Goebbels.

PRODUCER

I wouldn't go so far as that, Leni. You will have to stick within the realm of decency.

LENI

(ignoring his comment)

Get me Frederic.

*The WAFFEN SS MAN and the PRODUCER look somewhat amazed at LENI's turn around.*

PRODUCER

(to audience)

Why did I think this was going to be difficult? Some chess game.

*THE BLUE ANGEL hums Fagan's melody from OLIVER'S "I'm reviewing the situation".*

BLUE ANGEL

*I'm reviewing, the situation can a fellow be a villain all his life? All the trials and tribulations, better settle down and get myself a wife.*

LENI

Chess? Checkers.

PRODUCER

We've been through a lot, Leni. We go back a long way.

LENI

Not that long. My road begins before yours and ends after yours is complete. People are not going to forget my name.

PRODUCER

You'd think she's on stage.

*LENI walks to the stage side and sits, feet dangling.*

LENI

I remember my first ballet lesson. Maman said, "She will be a dancer."

PRODUCER

Ridiculous. You were born a filmmaker, Leni. That hawk eye. (She turns away) A director's ideal.

LENI

Director's ideal.

PRODUCER

(exasperated)

You order the cameramen!

*She tries to move away but he follows.*

PRODUCER (cont'd)

Dissatisfaction gnaws like some rabid dog. What kind of monstrosity would it create to deny that? What kind of monster would it unleash to bind those energies? What devil raised if you said 'no'?

*A dark uniformed silhouette marches across the upper ramp, behind the translucent blue screen.*

*The light fades on the PRODUCER and SS MAN.*

*Another lights up TREUNKER background left.*

*He sits at a table writing in a journal.*

*MR. SCHMIDT rises from his chair next to the PROJECTIONIST, takes a seat next to TREUNKER.*

SCHMIDT

Give me Screwball Comedy, Cooper, Garbo - I've had enough.

TREUNKER

(ironically)

If you're going to the movies, you might as well be entertained.

*SCHMIDT ignores TREUNKER's comment and continues a dialogue with the audience.*

SCHMIDT

Anything wrong with distraction?

*TREUNKER stares at a poster of "THE BLUE LIGHT" which has been lowered into place by the pulley-crank box of the BLUE ANGEL. The poster features a picture of LENI and TREUNKER embracing on a mountain.*

TREUNKER

I didn't think I'd be able to adjust - the transition to Hollywood, German accent, no connections.

SCHMIDT

Weren't you in that B picture "Fly Boys From Rio"?  
Plane down, you escaped. You were good in that, for a "B".

TREUNKER

I sleep at night.

SCHMIDT

No need to take it the wrong way. Just an observation from the man on the street.

TREUNKER

Man on a 'German' street.

SCHMIDT

There's a difference?

TREUNKER

Big difference. And after the war you live with it, buddy.

SCHMIDT

I'm an ordinary man.

TREUNKER

Get away.

SCHMIDT

I'm your fan.

*TREUNKER laughs.*

TREUNKER

Remember this?

*Treunker acts out 'noirish' type mimes of guns, prisoners and death.*

TREUNKER (cont'd)

How bout this?

*Treunker mimes again.*

TREUNKER (cont'd)  
Or this?

*He continues his laughter.*

*TREUNKER is now on the table imitating the  
hangman's noose.*

MR. SCHMIDT  
Ridiculous.

TREUNKER  
Ordinary man? You're an actor.

MR. SCHMIDT  
Actor? I've never acted a single day in my life.

*TREUNKER laughs.*

TREUNKER  
Never acted.

*TREUNKER mimes scenes in which a man is variously  
blind and deaf.*

TREUNKER (cont'd)  
Guess.

*He makes a horse's whinnying sounds.*

TREUNKER (cont'd)  
Guess.

SCHMIDT  
I can't.

TREUNKER  
(laughing)  
Horse with blinkers.

MR. SCHMIDT  
My good man. I'm a working Schmidt. I don't play  
charades.

TREUNKER  
The Hell you don't.

*TREUNKER exits.*

*SCHMIDT is left on the stage alone.*

*He fumbles about and then retakes his place as  
part of the audience next to the PROJECTIONIST.*

*The PROJECTIONIST stops the reel and puts on "Olympia Part II".*

FADE LIGHTS

ACT II SCENE II

*Lights up PRODUCER and LENI. They have not moved from previous positions.*

LENI

I never thought - 'propaganda'. I remember seeing Pickford - "Broken Blossoms". I could hardly speak. Skipping, hopping, then lights up. I couldn't understand. She'd disappeared. . .

PRODUCER

Yes?

LENI

All the way home I wondered where Pickford had gone.

PRODUCER

You didn't understand.

LENI

How could I? I was barely five, but the memory is there. I didn't understand where she'd disappeared..Is there something now I'm not understanding? Am I different now?

PRODUCER

(annoyed)

Of course. We're adults. Take responsibility. This isn't a child's jest. It's life.

*The PRODUCER puts on his coat.*

LENI

You feel it's right, these Olympic games? Another move in the chess. . .

PRODUCER

Games. You've taken the decision. Right or wrong. We aren't moral philosophers. We're workers in an industry.

*PRODUCER exits.*

*LENI pauses.*

*She moves furiously back to work at the editing table.*

*Behind the translucent screen BELLA and HOLLYWOOD MARLENE are at a candlelight dinner.*

*The BLUE ANGEL tries to sing Cabaret's "TOMORROW BELONGS TO ME". She has forgotten the "TOMORROW BELONGS TO ME" chorus.*

BLUE ANGEL

*The sun on the meadow is summery warm, The stag in the forest runs free, But gathered together to greet the storm, LA LA, LA LA LA LA LA LA.*

*Every time she comes to this part, she sings "LaLaLa". The musicians and CURTAIN CHORUS girls are also in despair.*

*On the opposite side of the stage is TREUNKER and the SS MAN.*

*TREUNKER is in his original village boy back-packing outfit scaling the mountain-set replica.*

BLUE ANGEL (cont'd)

*The branch on the linden is leafy and green The Rhine gives its gold to the sea, But somewhere a glory awaits unseen, LA LA LA LA LA LA LA LA.*

TREUNKER

Actors nowadays, stand-ins, doubles. I've always done my own stunts.

SS MAN

Come down. You're disfiguring state property.

*The SS MAN pulls on the rope which TREUNKER has fastened to himself but TREUNKER is safely up.*

TREUNKER

Safety line.

HOLLYWOOD MARLENE

Thank God I got out!

BELLA

Country's going to Hell.

HOLLYWOOD MARLENE

I don't want to think about it.



TREUNKER

Quit pulling my line.

HOLLYWOOD MARLENE

Leni going to stick it out?

LENI

(calling from editing table holding  
celluloid)

Decision's taken. Out of my hands.

*LENI wipes her hands, black with paint.*

*BELLA and DIETRICH continue with their dinner.*

*BELLA refills champagne.*

HOLLYWOOD MARLENE

So...ambitious.

LENI

Misguided.

HOLLYWOOD MARLENE

We were smart to leave.

LENI

(trying to reach out)

You could have tried harder to make me see.

*The BLUE ANGEL begins Kurt Weill's "September  
Song".*

BLUE ANGEL

*But it's a long, long while from May to December, And  
the days grow short when you reach September, And the  
autumn weather turns the leaves to flame, And I haven't  
got time for waiting game.*

*TREUNKER cuts the safety rope that the SS MAN has  
hold of.*

TREUNKER

Wasn't hard cutting lines? An umbilical chord.

SS MAN

Umbilical chord! Good riddance.

TREUNKER

To you.

SS MAN

Good luck in America (laughs cynically).

*TREUNKER exits.*

*The SS MAN exits in opposite direction.*

*A light focuses on BELLA and HOLLYWOOD MARLENE.*

HOLLYWOOD MARLENE

Bella, you're crying?

FADE LIGHTS.

### ACT II SCENE III

*Fade background lights and intensify on LENI in foreground who works at a furious pace.*

LENI

There's work to be done but I'm tired.

*The lighting changes to suggest a dream.*

*A ballet bar and mirror roll into place.*

*NAZIMOVA, the ballet instructor, walks onto the stage. A sign above the bar reads "NAZIMOVA'S BALLET CONSERVATORY".*

*The piano plays Chopin's introduction to "Les Sylphides".*

*The two CURTAIN GIRLS wear ballet skirts and have taken classical positions at the bar.*

*FREDERIC is also present, dressed in ballet leotards.*

NAZIMOVA

Seven, eight. Pliet, Pliet. Start again. Not together. Mademoiselle Riefenstahl - place at bar. Leni, tu comprends?

*LENI moves timidly from editing table lighting set-up stage left to the bar set-up stage right.*

NAZIMOVA (cont'd)

Pants, Mademoiselle.

*LENI takes off her pants to reveal tights.*

*The music starts again.*

NAZIMOVA (cont'd)  
Pliet, together.

*LENI does not arch enough.*

*Nazimova carries a little stick, taps LENI's back.*

NAZIMOVA (cont'd)  
Arch. Grace.

*NAZIMOVA pushes LENI'S back into an arch.*

NAZIMOVA (cont'd)  
Your mind is on other things, little swan.

*LENI nods.*

NAZIMOVA (cont'd)  
Accompanist, halt.

*The piano player stops.*

NAZIMOVA (cont'd)  
Leni. What is in this brain?

LENI  
Movies.

NAZIMOVA  
(arching LENI's back)  
Do we want to be movie stars or ballerinas?

*The CURTAIN GUARD GIRLS giggle and pipe out  
"ballerinas".*

NAZIMOVA (cont'd)  
Leni, are you listening?

LENI  
Yes.

NAZIMOVA  
Leni, ballerina, swan.

LENI  
Yes.

NAZIMOVA  
Concentrate. You wish to be a movie star? Go to  
Hollywood. This is swan training school. Accompanist,  
begin. Girls. Ready. Seven, eight.

*They march forward almost gracefully doing poses  
from Les Sylphides.*

NAZIMOVA (cont'd)

Pliet, pliet, step, together. Leni. Aren't you interested in playing swan today? You can go home.

LENI

Home.

*Leni moves to get dressed.*

NAZIMOVA

Home? (Shocked) You are sick. I'm going to write a note to your father.

LENI

Treunker said come with him.

NAZIMOVA

Ahh, some schnitzel, a love-sick prince. I knew it was something.

LENI

I apologize.

NAZIMOVA,

Ayyaiyai, lovesick, apologizing. I'm trying to run a school, put on Les Sylphides. Leni, commitment. If you want to fall in love, fall in love. If you're going to be successful, throw yourself into it. Passion.

LENI

Yes.

NAZIMOVA

Don't look back. If you've done your best, been true to your talent, there is nothing to fear or be ashamed of.

LENI

Yes.

NAZIMOVA

(correcting a ballerina's posture).

Now get some rest, tired swan, and tell Prince Treunker not to keep you out so late. I need an awake ballerina.

*Light fades.*

*The girls' ballet bar moves away.*

*NAZIMOVA disappears.*

*The CURTAIN GUARDS retake positions - stage right and left.*

*Light rises on LENI at editing table.*

LENI

"Use your talent and there's nothing to fear or be ashamed of". Isn't that what I'm doing?

FADE LIGHTS.

ACT II SCENE IV

*A blue light goes up on the BLUE ANGEL. Her make-up is a shade starker. She wears an armband.*

THE BLUE ANGEL

(hopelessly)

"Que sera sera, whatever will be, will be, the future's not ours to see."

*The piano accompaniment has a Chopinesque style alluding back to Nazimova's class.*

*BELLA and TREUNKER enter on the upper back spider leg.*

*They walk slowly, not talking to each other.*

*They pause awkwardly but find only silence.*

*The lighting suggests dusk.*

TREUNKER

(hesitantly)

To leave her. What else could we do?

BELLA

I was afraid myself.

TREUNKER

Who is to blame?

*From the wings CLIPBOARD BOY yells "Quiet on the set".*

BELLA

She could have started again. We would have helped.

TREUNKER

Goddamn too proud. Brick wall. Help me with these.

BELLA

Give them to me.

*TREUNKER hands BELLA his script*

TREUNKER

"She should have died hereafter; There would be been a place. . ."

BELLA

"Time."

TREUNKER

'Time'. "There would have been a time for such a word. Yesterday..." No, I've forgotten. I can't.

BELLA

"Tomorrow, and tomorrow..."

TREUNKER

"Tomorrow and tomorrow and. . .Creeps in this petty pace from day to. . ."

*Pause.*

*TREUNKER cannot remember his lines.*

BELLA

"To the last syllable of recorded time".

TREUNKER

"To the last syllable of recorded time and all our yesterdays have lighted fools the way to dusky death."

BELLA

Dusty.

TREUNKER

Dusty?

BELLA

Dusty death.

TREUNKER

Dusty death. (pause)

*BELLA hands back the script and looks toward LENI.*

BELLA

She would have been successful here.

TREUNKER

Erase...Forget her name. Everything to do with her.

*Another "Quiet on the Set, 5 minutes, People take your positions."*

BELLA

We escaped, Treunker.

TREUNKER

The weather here. California. Nothing to complain about.

*From the wings "Voodoo Macbeth Take II".*

BELLA

My work...I remember good.

*TREUNKER turns away.*

*From the wings "Macbeth to make-up, Macbeth to make-up".*

*TREUNKER walks away without looking back.*

*A light illuminates LENI at the editing table.*

*She looks up.)*

LENI

I think about you, Bella.

BELLA

*(A father trying to understand a  
miscreant child)*

You must have realized...Were you that ambitious?

LENI

You got out. Fate, Bella.

BELLA

Don't talk fate, Leni.

*From her work at the editing table she turns to him.*

LENI

What do I say?

BELLA

What can you say?

*She turns to her work.*

LENI

Work.

*She holds celluloid to the light).*

BELLA

When I was leaving...

LENI

Does anything else matter?

BELLA

If I stayed?

*LENI turns completely away from him.*

LENI

(annoyed)

There's such a draft.

BELLA

What would have happened to this old screenwriter?

LENI

(she is forcing herself)

How Bella's stories wound. One place, another.

*BELLA takes out his typewriter, places it on a desk beside him, puts paper into typewriter.*

BELLA

Still never sure things will work.

*LENI splices another two pieces of film together and looks at her work through the Steenbeck.*

LENI

They always did.

BELLA

(He is typing.)

Before I left. My story lines - confusion. I started (he rips out piece of paper, crumples it up and throws it backstage), had to start again.

LENI

Nothing worse. Abandoning work.

BELLA

Coming to America without the right language, ethnicity...

LENI

Hanging over my head.

BELLA

An old man, opportunities. Bella Balaz, the toast of Berlin. (Pause) Before I left I saw my friend Walter

(MORE)



BELLA (cont'd)  
Benjamin walking, eyes averting everyone, one-way street. We recognized each other. He stopped, said "We're brothers"... .

*BELLA nods, pauses, tries to express something beyond comprehension.*

BELLA (cont'd)  
I went home, remembering him saying, "We're brothers". Packed my bags. His voice, "We're brothers". Bought my ticket, got on that boat.

*BELLA returns to typing.*

BELLA (cont'd)  
To give up a career...paled in comparison.

*Illuminate PRODUCER on phone in office.*

*SOLDIERS run around.*

*Confusion.*

PRODUCER  
Leni, you been getting checks? (nervously) I've got a studio to run and they're late with checks.

LENI  
I care?

PRODUCER  
Listen, Leni. They seem to be diverting funds. Military exercises. So many actresses...left, deported, simply disappeared.

LENI  
(humming to herself)  
Never "simply"...

PRODUCER  
Leni, I'm talking economics. If you're not getting paid it's my business. No idealistic Nazi crap. Simple economics and I need an actress.

LENI  
Never "simple" and my acting days are over.

LIGHTS DOWN.

ACT II SCENE V

*The PRODUCER rushes into Nazimova's Ballet Academy.*

*FREDERIC, in ballet tights, plays a sexual game with one of the NAZI CURTAIN GUARDS, HELGA. Both NAZI GIRL CURTAIN GUARDS wear soiled tutus.*

*NAZIMOVA, regal, but older and walking with a cane, discusses something with the accompanist who repeatedly plays the opening to Chopin's "LES SYLPHIDES."*

NAZIMOVA

(recognizing PRODUCER)

Decision's final. We train ballerinas - a ballet conservatory. Nothing to do with acting.

*The lighting suggests nightmare.*

*LENI works in her editing space now compressed into a smaller area in the front right spider leg foot, bordered by a smaller pool of light.*

*NAZIMOVA begins practice of LES SYLPHIDES but the dancers are untrained, sincere but untrained as classical dancers, boys and girls off the street who have decided to dance "Les Sylphides".*

LENI

Berlin, not the same.

PRODUCER

(to NAZIMOVA)

Madam - our need for actresses has little to do simply with economics. It's a question of Motherland.

*The piano crashes to a halt.*

*FREDERIC drops HELGA.)*

NAZIMOVA

(defiantly)

I care nothing about the Reich. (To ACCOMPANIST)  
Continue.

*The ACCOMPANIST and DANCERS resume.*

*BELLA, TREUNKER and HOLLYWOOD MARLENE enter and assume places behind the translucent screen stage right.*

*HESS and GOEBBELS back stage left.*

*MR. SCHMIDT, checks his watch, puts on his coat, gets up from his spot next to the PROJECTIONIST.*

*He enters the ballet studio waving to one of the CURTAIN GIRLS, HELGA, now dressed as a ballerina.*

SCHMIDT

*(proudly to audience and then  
approaching the PRODUCER)*

My daughter! Thought this would take her mind off those films. Spouting lines about her duty. More healthy type of thing, ballet, this is. Expand her horizons, instead of that dark theatre.

*The PRODUCER punches SCHMIDT in the face.*

*SCHMIDT goes down.*

*HELGA and FREDERIC rush to him.*

*NAZIMOVA and the other CURTAIN GIRL separate the two men.*

SCHMIDT (cont'd)

Are you crazy?

NAZIMOVA

*(to PRODUCER)*

Would you leave now? You've disrupted us enough.

*THE PRODUCER stands defiantly at the side of the stage underneath GOEBBELS and HESS.*

*Fade lights foreground.*

*Light background TREUNKER who holds a newspaper.*

TREUNKER

I can't understand what's happening in Germany.

*(Light LENI foreground splicing together film.)*

LENI

This has taken too much out of me.

TREUNKER

I can't remember lines. No wonder they let me go. What good's an actor if he can't remember lines? (Pause)  
Still, I'm glad I left.

*Fade lights TREUNKER.*

*LIGHT PRODUCER.*

*The SS MAN stands next to him.*

SS MAN

She's done work but we're entering different times.  
Belligerency will no longer be tolerated.

LENI

Belligerency? I've sacrificed everything for (it  
exasperates her to use the word) the Reich. Family,  
friends, any idea of beginning again.

*Lights NAZIMOVA.*

NAZIMOVA

If you're here to dance, dance. If you're going to be  
successful at anything, never look back. There is  
nothing to fear or be ashamed of.

*Lights down NAZIMOVA.*

*Lights up SS MAN.*

SS MAN

She has done the state some service...

*Lights up GOEBBELS and HESS*

HESS

Of course, we will use her again...She's given us help,  
no question.

GOEBBELS

Vienna, that Spring.... She was...mountain  
air...accommodating.

*Lights down GOEBBELS.*

*Lights up PRODUCER.*

THE PRODUCER

Regrets, Leni?

LENI

(firmly)

Nein.

THE PRODUCER

Cause for discontent?

*Soft lit and unobtrusive, a dark black  
shadow appears behind LENI.*

THE PRODUCER (cont'd)  
Answer.

LENI  
(hysterical)  
I don't know...I know nothing except work (laughing).  
Not even that...What's that biblical quote?... "We are  
born naked..."

*The dark shadow hovers closer.*

THE PRODUCER  
Bella gave you books. Could you have educated yourself?

LENI  
I don't know (throwing down her editing). It's cold.

PRODUCER  
Was it right?

LENI  
Tell me.

PRODUCER  
(slowly)  
You sure?

LENI  
Yes.

PRODUCER  
(screaming)  
Cut. It's a take.

*The house lights go black. The film which has been  
projected throughout the production stops.*

CURTAINS SHUT.

ACT III SCENE I

*Curtains open.*

*BELLA is wheeled in on a wheelchair by a NURSE to a warmly-lit podium that faces the audience. A blanket covers his legs.*

*The NURSE takes a microphone from the podium and hands it to BELLA.*

*He thanks her, fumbling through papers.*

BELLA

*(coughing)*

An old man. Grateful you asked me here and also, (looking up) surprised you should be putting on such a retrospective. The University of Santa Cruz. (putting on reading glasses) I've been asked to say a few words about Leni Riefenstahl. I knew her before most of you were born (looks around, chuckles). We worked together at UFA - Berlin before the War (coughs). Most of you probably don't know this but Leni started as a dancer. I was working as a critic and was sent to review a solo dance concert. Unusual, back then. Avant garde. She had entitled her show "Leni and the Swan". An allusion. Clever she was, even then (loses his train, coughs)...The last time I saw her I was fleeing Germany. . .Now you've organized a retrospective with even some of old Fank's mountain films. This is probably going to be as interesting for me as for you. I haven't seen many of these films (coughs) for fifty years. Many of my friends, now dead, (coughs) worked in them. At least Fifty years ago....

*The sound of applause.*

*BELLA is wheeled off stage.*

*Lights fade signalling a transition in time.*

*Six tiered rows of old movie seats with an aisle down the middle occupy center stage.*

*The WAFFEN SS MAN accompanies LENI to one of the seats.*

*The PROJECTIONIST's set-up now faces the other way, toward the audience. No film is projected simply a beam with a spinning empty projector.*

*Sounds of bombs and air raid sirens.*

*LENI sits blocking the beam.*

*The BLUE ANGEL starts to sing "FALLING IN LOVE AGAIN".*

BLUE ANGEL

*Falling in love again, Never wanted to, What am I to do? Can't help it, Love's always been my game, Play it how I may, I was made that way, Can't help it.*

*GOEBBELS enters the back of the theatre, takes a seat next to the SS MAN. They are screening dailies from a film that will not be made. Their voices lack confidence..*

GOEBBELS

Useless. Completely not what was expected on 'higher' levels.

LENI

*(tired)*

Did he expect. . .

GOEBBELS

Something less theatrical.

*GOEBBELS moves closer.*

*LENI moves away.)*

GOEBBELS (cont'd)

Are you still interested in filmmaking?

LENI

What a question!

GOEBBELS

For two year's work...this is disappointing.

LENI

What would have been inspiring? To feature that Negro, Owens, winning gold?

GOEBBELS

There's no need to.. .

LENI

I used to do films people liked...Treunker and I would secretly go to the cinema and watch couples watching us on the screen.

*GOEBBELS uncomfortably shifts.*

GOEBBELS

I've never understood those...

LENI

Please. What's going to happen? .. .Defeat. . .

GOEBBELS

We go back to our previous lives.

LENI

That easy?

*GOEBBELS gets angry.*

GOEBBELS

We begin again.

LENI

Somehow, I don't think so.

*Sound of bomb going off*

LENI (cont'd)

How am I to erase my name from these?

GOEBBELS

Time. People forget.

LENI

Not after what you've done. (pause) I was thinking about my ballet teacher last night, Nazimova.

GOEBBELS

Regrettable. She was good. My son Frederic took lessons.

*Long pause.*

LENI

There was a north wind when I got that letter saying funding was back in place for "The Blue Light".

GOEBBELS

Soon, you can go back to filmmaking.

LENI

Yes(totally unconvinced). Your uniforms tire me so.

GOEBBELS

(tired)

I'm an actor playing a role. If you want to hate me for this.



LENI

And countless other things.

*They laugh a chilly laugh.*

LENI (cont'd)

My former screenwriter, Bella Balaz. He gave me his books. He wanted to help.

GOEBBELS

We had to burn a lot of books.

LENI

What did this accomplish?

GOEBBELS

Steps towards truth.

LENI

Steps towards truth by destruction?

GOEBBELS

*(he rises to leave)*

A new society...the hardest thing, Leni. (pause)

*GOEBBELS exits.*

*Lights down.*

*Blue spotlight on BLUE ANGEL. She sings "Everybody Loves Somebody Sometimes."*

BLUE ANGEL

*Everybody loves somebody sometime, Everybody falls in love somehow, Something in your kiss just told me, My sometime is now.*

*TREUNKER appears in his village boy costume on the translucent screen behind her.*

TREUNKER

I've found this romantic cafe, Leni. Granted, Hollywood Hills not old Vienna but, you'll love it. I'll write you verses. We'll drink Cappuccino.

*Leni stands in her seat waving to the PROJECTIONIST.*

LENI

Stop this screening. I have to get out of Berlin.

*The BLUE ANGEL continues her song.*

*The music shifts to the opening of Chopin's LES SYLPHIDES.*

*NAZIMOVA, two NAZI CURTAIN GIRLS and FREDERIC are dressed in coats which loosely cover ballet outfits.*

*They carry valises, trying to escape Berlin and paying LENI little attention.*

*A classically orchestrated BALLET FIGHT between them and the NAZI PAINTERS, HEINRICH and the SS MAN.*

*NAZIMOVA is killed.*

THE LIGHTS GO DIM.

ACT III SCENE II

*The stage is empty except for the mountain-set from the play's beginning and LENI's editing table placed below the mountain-set.*

*TREUNKER wears his mountain costume.*

*LENI is asleep at her editing table. The sound of bombs.*

TREUNKER  
Leni, wake-up.

LENI  
I'm too old for climbing. Leave me.

TREUNKER  
I won't leave you...I want to marry you.

*LENI looks up, startled but then resumes her sleeping posture.*

LENI  
Many people want to marry me.

TREUNKER  
Give me your hand.

LENI  
I don't have time. I've got work.

TREUNKER  
I saw Bella last night.

LENI

Bella?

TREUNKER

He's doing fine.

*LENI resumes editing.*

LENI

Give me your hand, Leni.

*She gives him her hand.*

LENI (cont'd)

I'm too old.

*TREUNKER hoists her up.*

*They both stand on the mountain-set precipice.*

LENI (cont'd)

It's nice.

TREUNKER

I told you.

LENI

There's a breeze.

*TREUNKER starts to say something.*

LENI (cont'd)

A bed of blue moss! How strange!

*She kneels down.*

*TREUNKER kneels down with her.*

TREUNKER

I was telling everyone. The war will soon be over.  
Leni's coming.

LENI

Don't speak.

TREUNKER

Everything's going to be like it was.

LENI

Hush.

TREUNKER

It's true.

LENI

It's beautiful here. Reminds me of that peak where we did "Blue Light".

TREUNKER

Remember how we ran out of money? Where did the money ever come from?

LENI

A little bird.

TREUNKER

No. You got a letter.

LENI

Shh...

TREUNKER

And then you had to leave.

LENI

Nonsense.

TREUNKER

It had an official seal.

LENI

Hush.

TREUNKER

And when you came back, we had money, but something was. . .

LENI

Nothing. Sssh. Lie down.

TREUNKER

(He doesn't lie down.)

I didn't understand what was different but now. . .

LENI

Lie.

TREUNKER

I understand.

LENI

Down.

TREUNKER

(angry now)  
...With a...whore?

LENI

Treunker.

TREUNKER

Not a common whore though, oh no...

LENI

Treunker.

TREUNKER

Oh, no!

*He falls upon her and rips open her skirt.*

LENI

Treunker.

TREUNKER

Not your common slut but one who is flown in from the Alps.

LENI

Treunker, you don't see anything.

TREUNKER

To think I was gentle.

LENI

Treunker.

TREUNKER

(disgust)  
A gentleman, my ballerina.

LENI

Don't.

TREUNKER

You're telling me don't...whore.

*He slaps her face*

LENI

Please.

TREUNKER

I spent nights lonely, drinking...for some. . .?

LENI

Treunker, please.

*LENI gets up.*

*Treunker pulls her down toward him.*

*Lights up BLUE ANGEL.*

*A single penetrating blue light. Her makeup is a degree starker - she wears a military jacket, hums Chopin's Les Sylphides.*

LENI (cont'd)

Please. (she begins to weep) Stop.

LIGHTS DOWN.

ACT III SCENE III

*Centerstage is black.*

*Punched by single spotlights: on one side of the stage, BELLA in his wheelchair.*

*On the other side GOEBBELS in a burnt uniform.*

*A large "V - DAY" descends from the ceiling.*

GOEBBELS

(To audience)

You must have guessed about us. Ashes to ashes. Dust to dust. (laughs coldly)

BELLA

Back to Berlin? An old Hungarian Jew?

GOEBBELS

Riefenstahl alive. That's good? (Laughs again.)

BELLA

I have my life.

*Lights go down on BELLA and GOEBBELS.*

*Centre stage. SCHMIDT walks suitcase in hand. Behind him is his daughter, HELGA (formerly one of the NAZI GIRL CURTAIN GUARDS) still wearing coat over ballet tutu. She clings to the hand of FREDERIC, also in his previous ballet/coat outfit.*

*Pieces of rubble from the mountain-set are strewn about. The group walks through ruins.*

*Among the ruins is a scattered chess set and the former "Leda and the Swan" painting from the government house.*

*The painting is ripped out. Only the gold-gilt edged frame remains.*

SCHMIDT

Won't be any filmmaking here for a while. I'll make a documentary. Garbage dump Berlin, (examining gold frame) I wonder if this is real inlay?

*FREDERIC stops to rest.*

*HELGA follows suit.*

SCHMIDT (cont'd)

(to audience)

Essentially, I'm a family man, always have been, always will be. Don't like to be shaken. This war for instance, too much. After all, I'm no superman, just your ordinary SCHMIDT.

*He takes HELGA'S chin.*

SCHMIDT (cont'd)

And here simply a chorus girl daughter of a Schmidt.

*HELGA curtsies.*

*LENI walks onto the stage opposite them, disoriented, wearing a coat, carrying a can of film - haggard.*

SCHMIDT (cont'd)

Leni Riefenstahl, the Nazi filmmaker?

*LENI turns, unsure who is calling her.*

*SCHMIDT approaches.*

*HELGA has found a chess piece and shows it to FREDERIC.*

SCHMIDT (cont'd)

(He calls over his daughter.)

Helga, come here. You know who this is?

*HELGA shyly nods her head "no".*

SCHMIDT (cont'd)

You went in Vienna to get her autograph. It's the Nazi filmmaker, "Leni Riefenstahl".

LENI  
Not Nazi, simply filmmaker.

SCHMIDT  
(insistent)  
Nazi filmmaker. Your films, "Olympia", "Triumph of the Will" - all made for the party.

LENI  
I was never a card-carrying member.

SCHMIDT  
Come, come...

*LENI walks toward FREDERIC recognizing him.*

LENI  
Frederic, Frederic Goebbels. You remember me?

*FREDERIC nods yes, embarrassed.*

LENI (cont'd)  
You were to apprentice under me. You never showed up.

FREDERIC  
(revealing his tattered dancer's outfit)  
I never showed up.

LENI  
You chose to...dance? (laughing)

FREDERIC  
I never wanted to be a filmmaker. My father put me to it.

LENI  
You didn't listen?

FREDERIC  
A voice said, "Don't listen."

SCHMIDT  
Dance among these rocks for us. (laughs)

FREDERIC  
I thought, "I don't want to serve my country."

SCHMIDT  
Thatta boy...see, Leni, your movies didn't fool everybody...

*FREDERIC goes to LENI*



FREDERIC

I apologize if I caused you inconvenience, Frau Riefenstahl.

*LENI continues to laugh.*

SCHMIDT

Lay off the pleasantries, Fred. This is a full-blooded war criminal. (laughs again)

FREDERIC

Frau Riefenstahl, even though I express no sympathy for your cause...I wish you no ill will.

SCHMIDT

No ill will. (laughing)

LENI

(softer)

This was not my cause.

SCHMIDT

(still laughing to HELGA about FREDERIC)

Where did you pick him up?

*SCHMIDT and DAUGHTER exit.*

FREDERIC

(the naivete of youth)

What will you do now that war is over Frau Riefenstahl? You're still alive. (pause) It must be unbearable.

*SCHMIDT returns carrying a couple bottles of wine and a table cloth.*

*HELGA enters soon after with a picnic basket.*

LENI

Unbearable?

*FREDERIC takes a step closer to her.*

SCHMIDT

Three meals a day, bottle of wine when we find it. These are my concerns.

FREDERIC

(whispering to her)

The camps, people will not forgive that.

LENI

What has that to do with me?

SCHMIDT

Join us, Frau Riefenstahl. The Americans haven't caught you yet.

*FREDERIC takes a step closer to LENI.*

*HELGA comes and puts her arms around FREDERIC.*

HELGA

Eat.

FREDERIC

(still a whisper to LENI)

Collaborator. Make that the subject of your next film.

*LENI slaps his face.*

SCHMIDT

Hey, hey, war's over. Behave.

FREDERIC

I pity you, Frau Riefenstahl.

*FREDERIC turns to HELGA.*

*LENI stands center stage - stunned.*

SCHMIDT

Everybody. What is that saying?... "A loaf of bread, some wine, you next to me vacationing in the Alps".

FREDERIC

(ironically)

What was that Alp film, Frau Riefenstahl?

SCHMIDT

(good naturedly)

"Blue Light?" Would that be the one?

*LENI stands silent.*

SCHMIDT (cont'd)

That actor who played opposite you? Treunker? What happened to him? Come on, everybody sit.

*SCHMIDT opens up a bottle of wine.*

*LENI, FREDERIC and HELGA reluctantly sit down together. The tension is thick.*

*LENI gets up and walks to the stage front looking for something.*

*The light goes down on SCHMIDT, FREDERIC and HELGA.*

*They continue to eat and look curiously at LENI.*

*LENI is bathed in a small circle of light.*

LENI

What happened? (A cry of despair) Treunker!

*Punch spotlight.*

LENI (cont'd)

Where did I take the wrong turn?

*Punch spotlight on BELLA - backstage stage right.*

BELLA

Blindness?

LENI

What am I to do?

BELLA

Questions on my back?

LENI

What was it I couldn't see?

*Lights fade on LENI.*

BELLA

I want desperately but..Treunker asked me last night if it's possible? What am I to do? Pretend none of this happened? It did. It must never happen again. It will not.

*Light dies on both of them.*

*Soft light LENI, SCHMIDT, HELGA and FREDERIC*

*TREUNKER now appears next to the BLUE ANGEL.*

*He is bathed in mysterious blue light and dressed in a janitor's costume with a broom.*

*He repeatedly does a Gene Kelly dance with the broom.*

TREUNKER

Don't think it was easy for me to leave. Hollywood. (Pause) Aging German-Jew. Looking for work as male lead. Thick accent. Thinning hair. Paunch included.

MR. SCHMIDT

(to LENI)

Come have something to eat.

TREUNKER

(dancing with broom)

I'm not ashamed to admit it. My grand return. Sweeping out the studio lot.

*TREUNKER continues softshoe with broom.*

TREUNKER (cont'd)

(to audience)

You were wondering where Gene Kelly got the idea?

SCHMIDT

(To LENI)

Your audience awaits, Leni.

TREUNKER

(letting his rage escape)

Easy? (addressing audience) Where were you? I

SCHMIDT

Leni, eat.

LENI

Get Away.

(SCHMIDT looks at her amazed.)

LENI (cont'd)

You disgust me. You're making me sick. Please.

SCHMIDT

An ordinary man asking you to have lunch. If that's too much. .

TREUNKER

(to audience)

Pride? Then a voice says "You feel humiliated, this broom, Treunker. Think about about it. You're alive"...I can start again.

SCHMIDT

Frau Riefenstahl, you're free. Do as you like.

TREUNKER

A man learns about himself in these circumstances.

SCHMIDT

I leave you to your demons.

LENI

My demons are your demons.

SCHMIDT

Oh no, I watched those films in silent protest. What could I do if the Devil engulfed our country? What could one ordinary Schmidt do against the likes of...you?

TREUNKER

The effect on the children?

LENI

A woman who possesses a womb.

SCHMIDT

You're insulting me, aren't you?

LENI

Who can say what the future brings?

*THE BLUE ANGEL hums "QUE SERA SERA".*

BLUE ANGEL

*Que sera, sera, whatever will be will be. The future's not ours to see, Que sera sera.*

SCHMIDT

How am I supposed to talk back to an actor or piece of celluloid? What argument? (long pause)...To be polite to a...Reich whore.

*LENI recoils.*

*She stands paralyzed with rage.*

*With a resounding crash, her film can falls.*

*Behind the translucent screen the SS MAN walks by, valise in hand.*

*Dressed and positioned as at the play's beginning, the PRODUCER appears stage left: baseball cap, sneakers, sweats, glasses.*

*He is going through a folder next to TREUNKER who still sweeps.*

TREUNKER

Excuse me, sir. I used to be an actor.

PRODUCER

Everyone used to be an actor.

TREUNKER

Really.

PRODUCER

You sweep floors now.

TREUNKER

Yes, but only temporarily. Perhaps you know my B films.  
"Fly Boys of Rio", "Voodoo Macbeth", "Assault Attack".

PRODUCER

Those early Nazi-funded pictures - "The Blue Light"?

TREUNKER

*Long Pause*

No.

PRODUCER

I thought I recognized you from "Blue Light".  
Riefenstahl, wasn't it?

TREUNKER

Wouldn't know.

PRODUCER

What ever happened to her?

TREUNKER

Couldn't say.

PRODUCER

Do a good job.

*The PRODUCER checks the legs of the BLUE ANGEL who  
now wears a gang member's jacket.*

PRODUCER (cont'd)

You, though, I use. Make an appointment.

*Fade on TREUNKER, PRODUCER.*

*Blue light on BLUE ANGEL.*

*She sings the German version of "Falling in Love  
Again".*

*TREUNKER enters behind the screen with BELLA.*

*They walk centre stage.*

*Sitting underneath them among the rubble is LENI.*

BELLA

Rome wasn't built in a day.

TREUNKER

It's going to take longer than a day to kick this career back into gear.

BELLA

Lives.

TREUNKER

If I said I was thinking about going to see her?

*Long pause.*

BELLA

I think about her.

TREUNKER

The thing is....

BELLA

(heroically)

Forgiveness. We can't descend to their level.

TREUNKER

Goddamn proud. If I knew she'd changed.

BELLA

Perhaps.

TREUNKER

We should see.

TREUNKER (cont'd)

She does photography now. African tribes, Nuba, People of Kau, coral reefs...

BELLA

That ambitious struggle.

TREUNKER

Civilization, progress, history, people buy her books.

*BELLA turns toward TREUNKER and puts his hands on his shoulders.*

BELLA

Before Leni was a filmmaker, I saw her dance in Berlin - "Mothlight". She placed a candle center stage and with her scarf danced. Each time, she got closer to the

(MORE)

BELLA (cont'd)  
 flame. The trick was the wind from her flight put the candle out. House lights dim. That candle. Shadows...Leni round. The whole hall. She spun round that candle. No one taught that - the way she flew. Then...flame out.

*Fade TREUNKER and BELLA.*

*LENI is bathed in soft light.)*

LENI  
 Leave here? Go, to what?

*Behind the translucent screen we see BELLA put on a prayer shawl.*

*He takes out a book, begins "Kaddish".*

LENI (cont'd)  
 Goodbye, Bella.

*One of the former soldiers walks by in civilian clothes carrying a valise.*

LENI (cont'd)  
 Treunker?

*She approaches him.*

LENI (cont'd)  
 I'm sorry, I thought you were. . .

*Pause*

LENI (cont'd)  
 So tired. Hearing voices.

*The PRODUCER enters front stage left rolling a cigarette.*

PRODUCER  
 I've got a project for you, Leni.

LENI  
 Not interested.

PRODUCER  
 Let's not be hasty, Leni. Funding's in place. You hand pick the crew. Locations might be tricky but nothing you can't handle.



LENI

Not interested.

PRODUCER

What were that ballet teacher's words, "Never look back? Nothing to fear or be ashamed of".

LENI

Except. . .a government letter.

PRODUCER

Government letter? You're worried about some letter? We're all whores here. "What's that Bataille expression, "when I think - I'm a whore undressing".

LENI

Get dressed.

PRODUCER

You're among friends, Leni.

LENI

Get out.

PRODUCER

We're connected, Leni. Let's not let boundaries get in the way....

LENI

Please.

PRODUCER

Funny, this, even for me, to take.

LENI

Take it.

PRODUCER

(smiling)  
Don't have to, Leni..

LENI

Stop.

PRODUCER

We don't care what you produce. It doesn't matter anymore.

LIGHTS DOWN.

ACT III SCENE IV

*LENI isolated center stage.*

*From her valise she takes scarf and candle.*

*She takes off her coat, shivers, reveals a simple dancer's outfit.*

*The pianist plays the opening of Chopin's "Sylphides."*

*LENI clears rubble center stage, kneels at the candle.*

*The SS MAN, HEINRICH and one of the soldiers appears backstage behind the translucent screen.*

*They appear as characters in Film Noir, hunted, in disguise, trying to appear calm.*

*One of them tries to whistle the opening lines to "Falling in Love Again."*

*HEINRICH tries to light the SS MAN's cigarette.*

*His hand shakes.*

*THE SS MAN takes the lighter from him.*

*He cannot get it to light.*

*LENI lights her candle.*

*A bomb going off sounds.*

LENI

*(Startled)*

That scared me. I don't know why, but it did.

*LENI looks to the distance. The men are blocked from her.*

LENI (cont'd)

I can hardly see.

*TREUNKER appears behind the translucent screen opposite the NAZIS.*

TREUNKER

Who would have thought that they'd give me this? The only job I get - off Broadway Nazi villain. I spent the entire war fleeing Nazis.

LENI  
Hollywood.

TREUNKER  
Playing a Nazi commandant and Bella can't pump out the war dialogues fast enough"

LENI  
Gentle memories...

TREUNKER  
Vee have vays.

*Another bomb sound.*

LENI  
This time.

TREUNKER  
My memory for these. Incredible. Seems...(eerily) natural.

*The lights come down a degree.*

*The NAZI ACTORS take a step closer to TREUNKER.*

*LENI warms her hands.*

TREUNKER (cont'd)  
You'd think I'd have picked it up.

LENI  
Everything seems dark, even stars.

*LENI and TREUNKER utter the next line simultaneously.*

*They look at each other through the screen as if there is some connection.*

LENI (cont'd)  
That first mountain film

TREUNKER  
That first mountain film.

*Bomb sounds.*

*One of the soldiers whistles "Falling in Love Again".*

*LENI looks toward the darkness, then the flame.*

*The accompanist begins Chopin's "Sylphides".*

*LENI dances, gracefully - a professional.*

*After the dance she gets dressed in a set of street clothes. )*

LENI

That was the dance I did. Long ago. "Mothlight". Thank you for coming. I'm feeling a bit frightened. Perhaps, the night. Did I entertain you? I did that dance before entering...the business of film. (Long Pause) How I danced!

*The SOLDIER ACTORS take a step toward TREUNKER.*

*One takes a knife.*

*We hear "Quiet on the set".*

*The PRODUCER races center stage in the darkened atmosphere.*

PRODUCER

(quickly)

Commandant, Treunker, Positions, Leni?

*Leni looks at the PRODUCER*

PRODUCER (cont'd)

Lights.

*Darken all except LENI and candle.*

VOICE OF PRODUCER

Camera.

PROJECTIONIST

Rolling.

PRODUCER

ACTION!

As the PRODUCER says this, pound the candle.

*Lights down.*

CURTAIN.

THE END.