

CREVASSE

A full-length play

By Tom Jacobson

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CHARACTERS

ERNST JAEGER, 42, film critic and publicist, also plays:
DR. JOSEPH GOEBBELS, 41, Minister of Propaganda
WALT DISNEY, 37, filmmaker

LOTTE JAEGER, 33, fashion designer, also plays:
LENI RIEFENSTAHL, 36, filmmaker
LORELEI, 30s, FBI agent

The action takes place in the fall of 1938 in various locations in Berlin and Hollywood, including ERNST and LOTTE'S home, LENI'S office, outside the Ministry of Propaganda, the deck of the Europa, Walt Disney Studios, LENI'S hotel room and an FBI interrogation room.

SETTING: Minimal and fluid, defined primarily by lighting and furniture. Colors are primarily black, white and gray except for the scenes in Hollywood, which are Technicolor.

ERNST, 42, in a rather worn greatcoat, is seated, isolated in light.

ERNST

(strong German accent)

Confess? I have nothing to confess. My wife, however, may disagree, so perhaps you should be speaking with her. My late wife. Ex wife? What is proper, please?

Lighting expands to include LOTTE, 33, married to ERNST. She is dressed conservatively for 1938 Berlin, a blouse and skirt that might be colorful, but we can only see them in black-and-white. Her long, dark hair might be worn up.

LOTTE

(light German accent)

Ernst, it is proper that I should get a get.

ERNST

(lighter German accent)

You are no longer Jewish.

LOTTE

(taking his coat)

A civil divorce then.

ERNST

Lotte, both parties must in either case consent. I do not consent, dammit!

LOTTE

Language, my dear! You don't want me claiming verbal abuse.

ERNST

I don't want a divorce!

LOTTE

Neither do I, dearest, but it's for the best. You've been working in secret for two years, ghost-writing publicity--

LOTTE sits, begins sketching on a pad.

ERNST
I have my own company!

LOTTE
--For the Fox office in Berlin--

LOTTE
--Reading terrible screenplays and prohibited from writing actual reviews--and all because you like the taste of my hamantaschen.

ERNST
And you chide me for vulgarity!

LOTTE
I'm the vulgar new German woman with no need of a man.

ERNST
But I need you. Frank needs you!

LOTTE
I'm not leaving you--I'm divorcing you. And whatever happens, Frank will stay with me. Judaism is matrilineal.

ERNST
You're both Protestant!

LOTTE
By law we're forever Hebrew. There's no escape for any of us as long as we're married. But if you're legally free of me, you can save me. And *el pequeño castor*.

ERNST
He's not a little beaver.

LOTTE
We need to practice our Spanish, dearest.

ERNST
We do not!

LOTTE
Cuando nos mudamos a Santiago--

ERNST
Nosotros no nos--estamos moviendo--a Chile!

LOTTE
Los niños aprenden idiomas tan fácilmente--

ERNST
Hollywood, if anywhere!

LOTTE
(waving dismissively)

¡Hasta la vista!

ERNST

¡Hasta siempre!

LOTTE

No, no, we'll see each other again: *hasta la vista*. *Hasta siempre* means "until forever," a very final farewell, *mi corazon*.

(shows sketch)

What do you think?

ERNST

(weepy)

No farewells of any kind! Lotte, don't ask me this--

LOTTE

Too Bauhaus?

ERNST

What woman would wear that? It's mannish.

LOTTE

You're so old fashioned and sentimental. You make a show of your emotions but won't do the one thing that will keep us safe.

ERNST

I'm not going to America with her. She's a monster.

LOTTE

But a beautiful one, let's not forget. And she's fond of you--all those fulsome reviews--

ERNST

My criticism is always honest.

LOTTE

--Holding her hand all through Greece--

ERNST

I was never her lover, and you know it. I'm hardly one of her *ubermenschen!*

LOTTE

But she trusts you. And she needs you. No one but you can hold her hand in Hollywood.

ERNST

I can't circumvent international prohibitions--

LOTTE

Yes, you can, my clever darling. She needs you and we need her. We need a friend who's Hitler's friend.

ERNST

She never ceases to remind me of the favors she's done--

LOTTE

So you must do her a favor.

ERNST

She won't--

LOTTE

You're afraid to ask her.

ERNST

No, but--

LOTTE

Let's practice what you'll say. I'll be Leni.

LOTTE puts on a trench coat.

ERNST

Lotte, don't be absurd--

LOTTE

You'll go to her fancy office and surprise her. Ask flattering questions. Flirt a little.

LOTTE either puts on an auburn wig or removes a black wig to reveal auburn hair beneath.

ERNST

That will only disgust her!

Lighting change to LENI'S office. LOTTE has become LENI, bursting with energy and a distinctly different voice. She laughs, charmingly.

LENI

Dr. Goebbels would never permit it!

ERNST

My English is significantly better than yours. If you're going to be treated with the deference you deserve--I know everyone at Twentieth-Century Fox, several people at Warner Brothers--

LENI

You've spoken to them already?

ERNST

Not yet, but I could very quickly--

LENI

(lights a cigarette)

I've missed you, Ernst. Seems you've been in America or England half of every year since 1933.

ERNST

I can work there.

LENI

It's true, in many ways you'd be ideal. You were the only man not accused of making love to me on the Acropolis. I'm sure Storr wouldn't mind.

ERNST

Who's Storr?

LENI

Sound designer. He wouldn't be the least bit jealous. You've never fallen in love with me, God bless you, I mean it!

ERNST

Would the Fuhrer be jealous?

LENI

Would Lotte?

ERNST

We are divorcing.

LENI

Finally!

ERNST

It was her idea.

LENI

Jewish women are highly intelligent.

ERNST

She knows she's hurt my career.

LENI

Hurt it? Killed it!

(suddenly manic)

This changes everything, Ernst! A divorce! Delightful! I'll go see Goebbels at once-- I'm loathe to ask him a favor as I've given him the cold shoulder since he groped under my dress at the opera--Magda sitting right next to him--and I hear he now makes lewd remarks about my alpine movies. I have to ask him just right or he'll be beyond pissy.

(hands him a trenchcoat)

Here: put this on.

ERNST

Why?

LENI

You be Goebbels.

ERNST

I can't—be—someone I despise--

He reluctantly puts on the trench coat.

LENI

Of course you can--you're a film critic!

ERNST

And you're an excellent actress--just tell him--

LENI

(putting a hat on his head)

I can't perform without rehearsal!

ERNST

Are you just going to barge into his office?

LENI

He'd never receive me. But every afternoon he checks on construction of the new wing of the Propaganda Ministry--such a vain little lizard--I'll pretend I'm there to view the parade grounds--

ERNST becomes DR. JOSEPH GOEBBELS,
41. Lighting change. Sound of wind and many
marching feet.

LENI

Dr. Goebbels--what a serendipitous surprise!

JOSEPH

Well, if it isn't the national glacial crevasse!

He walks, she follows. He has a slight limp.

LENI

Do you enjoy watching the Stormtroopers
as much as I do?

JOSEPH

Although I suppose with all the
government work I've thrown your way,
you're now officially the Reich's crevasse.

LENI

So much construction!

JOSEPH

(pointing)

The extension of the Reich Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda will be
linked to the New Reich Chancellery, so we'll always hear marching in Wilhemplatz.

(they listen to the marching)

Some find that sound erotic. Do you?

LENI

Not erotic. Patriotic.

JOSEPH

You made discus-throwing erotic. Everything you do has the touch of Venus. I'm not the
only German male with fond memories of your appearance *sans chemise* in--

The marching begins to fade into the distance.

JOSEPH

Ways to Health and Beauty--

LENI

There is no such film.

JOSEPH
Imaginary perhaps, yet so popular with
German youth--

LENI
I'm so glad to run into you--

JOSEPH
So casually--

LENI
I have news of an unbelievable
opportunity for the Reich!

JOSEPH
Whenever you have an unbelievable opportunity for the Reich, it's invariably an even
better opportunity for you, Fraulein Riefenstahl.

LENI
I'm going to America.

JOSEPH
To hawk your nigger movie?

LENI
The Americans love Jesse Owens.

JOSEPH
Not as much as your lascivious camera does.

LENI
Ernst has already secured a dozen appointments in Hollywood.

JOSEPH
How astonishing! Aren't all German films banned in the United States? What would be
the point?

LENI
Bringing them the most celebrated European film of 1938.

JOSEPH
Best of luck, Fraulein. Enjoy your cowboys.

He walks off. She follows.

LENI
I will be representing the Reich as I have in Sweden, France, Italy--

JOSEPH
In other words, you wish the Ministry of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda to fund
your vacation. Do you intend to dog me all way back to my office?

Lighting change as they enter his office.

LENI

I've always delivered.

JOSEPH

That's what I hear.

LENI

German women have few options these days.

JOSEPH

I understand. You use what you have.

LENI

Ernst Jaeger will be my press agent.

JOSEPH unbuttons his trench coat.

JOSEPH

Such futility, Fraulein! As the husband of a Jewess, he's banned from cultural activities.

LENI

They've divorced.

JOSEPH

I couldn't reinstate him to the Reich Film Chamber even at the request of the Fuhrer.

LENI

(starting to cry)
It's tragic, really. He's suffered so much!

JOSEPH

And I already let him ghost-write that execrable *Triumph of the Will* brochure.

JOSEPH

Permitted him to travel with you to Greece. Why are you always begging favors for this Jew lover--or wait--is he perhaps *your* lover?

LENI

He's far too homely! But he's been very useful to the Reich.

JOSEPH

Your tears may work with Hitler, but not with me.

LENI

Herr Doctor, you've said yourself the Reich's film technology is years behind Hollywood. I'm the only German director who's tested color, but American movies like *The Garden of Allah* and even *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* have proven--

JOSEPH

You wish to make National Socialist cartoons?

LENI

We could learn a thing or two from America.

JOSEPH

We've already learned everything worth studying in American society.

LENI

I'm speaking of the power of film—

JOSEPH

—They've efficiently and comprehensively addressed their schwartzer problem--

LENI

They're also not so fond of Jews. I can persuade Americans to embrace National Socialist ideals: beauty, strength, power.

JOSEPH

That would be quite a feat, Fraulein.

LENI

Imagine *Olympia* in every movie house from Los Angeles to New York.

JOSEPH

Every movie house from Los Angeles to New York is owned by yids. As well as all the studios.

LENI

Exactly. What Jew would pass up the opportunity to make an enormous amount of money distributing the best film of 1938?

JOSEPH

Your lips pout so prettily whenever you say the word "Jew." Perhaps Arnold Raether's research on you is correct.

LENI

Herr Goebbels, your mind is so agile I have no idea what you're talking about.

JOSEPH

(laughs)

Yes, you are pretty, but I do believe it's *your* mind I find most sensual, so clever and flexible, inventive. What man could possibly say no to Leni Riefenstahl?

He starts to move toward her as the lights on him go out instantly and LENI is isolated in light.

LENI

What Dr. Goebbels did next should have shocked me, but of course it was inevitable. He shoved one hand inside my blouse and gripped my buttock with the other. Fortunately, I'm athletic and he's so gimpy shrimpy I easily squirmed away and rushed to the door, the Minister of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda's hot breath on my neck--well, actually more like the middle of my back--he threw his club-footed little body against mine, pinning me to the wall long enough for him to grab my head--he actually got one of his greasy baby fingers in my mouth and twisted my neck around for a kiss. I could feel his dachshund erection poking my thigh as I fumbled for the servant's buzzer on the wall. The instant he heard the buzz, Goebbels backed away, colliding with a potted heliotrope before he straightened up and buttoned his trench coat just as the servant arrived. I'm sure the servant noticed the Minister's misaligned buttons. Only I saw the wet ooze staining the crotch of his uniform.

Lighting change reveals ERNST dressed for travel on the deck of the *Europa*. He holds a list.

ERNST

Joseph Goebbels tried to rape you?

LENI

Incompetently!

ERNST

You don't seem the least upset.

LENI

I'm furious. But once I threatened to tell the Fuhrer, Goebbels approved your travel immediately.

ERNST

I find it difficult to believe he jumped you unprovoked.

LENI

Of course you'd say that, Ernst--you're a man.

ERNST

Blackmailing the Propaganda Minister!

LENI

I've never seduced anyone in my life...except with my films.

ERNST

And your dances.

LENI

Ja, even Hitler was mesmerized by my dance--

ERNST

Before we land let's review our Hollywood appointments--

LENI

--On the beach in *The Holy Mountain*, like I cast a spell without even trying, so embarrassing. I'm glad I used an alias on my luggage so no one pesters us.

ERNST

An alias?

LENI

Lotte Richter, so I can keep my initials.

ERNST

Lotte?

LENI

A tribute to your wife. I hope you don't mind!

(Sound of the ship's horn.)

Is that the Empire State Building?

ERNST

How distressingly vertical New York is!

(re: list)

As soon as we dock, I'll make calls to confirm, but so far we have Jack Warner, Barney Balaban at Paramount, Spyros Skouras at 20th-Century Fox--

LENI

Not Darryl Zanuck?

ERNST

Working on it, but Spyros is rising--

Who at RKO?

LENI

Pan Berman.

ERNST

Not Selznick?

LENI

ERNST

He has his own company and distributes through United Artists, so we have an appointment with him, too.

Anyone else?

LENI

ERNST

Hal Roach wants to host a party for you.

Any other studios?

LENI

ERNST

BB Kahane at Columbia--

LENI

Siberia! MGM?

ERNST

Louis B. Mayer.

LENI

Truly?

ERNST shrugs with mock humility.

LENI

Anyone who *isn't* Jewish?

ERNST

Walt Disney.

(off her withering look)

Snow White is second only to the *Birth of a Nation* in box office--

LENI

But *Olympia* beat *Snow White* at the Venice Film Festival.

ERNST

And Michael Mouse is better known than any movie star.

LENI

They're cartoons!

ERNST

Cartoons watched by every child around the world. The Michael Mouse Club has more members than Hitler Youth. Think of how he's inculcating all those tiny innocent minds!

LENI

With capitalism!

Another blast of the ship's horn.

ERNST

And those innocent children grow up to be the capitalist film distributors of tomorrow. One last thing.

LENI

Yes?

(peering)

Are those journalists? In dinghies?

ERNST

You said I'd be able to telephone Lotte through the Reich line--

LENI

Yes, it's all arranged by the Ministry. But be careful as they always listen! So many reporters, for me?

ERNST

(consulting another list)

As per Dr. Goebbels' order, all the major East Coast papers are represented. Also the *London Times*, *Le Figaro*, *Corriere della Sera*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Los Angeles Times*, the wire services--

LENI

The *Volkischer Beobachter*?

ERNST

Of course. Can't you see the little swastikas on their paddles?

Lights out on LENI waving demurely to the journalists. ERNST is isolated in light.

ERNST

Fraulein Riefenstahl is the toast of New York, the most famous German in America and invited out to dinner every night. We'll be off to Washington in a few days, then Chicago to visit Avery Brundage and other representatives of the International Olympic Committee. Henry Ford is touring us through his factory in Detroit. That's the official news from America.

LOTTE

(isolated in light)

Any unofficial news?

ERNST

This is an official line, for official news only. Officially, are you well?

LOTTE

Officially, I miss you terribly--I'm surprised how much--

ERNST

Officially--!

LOTTE

Officially, there is outrage over the shooting of a German diplomat in Paris--

ERNST

I had not heard--we've been at sea--

LOTTE

By a--by a--*judío*--

ERNST

By a what?

LOTTE

En Español, por favor--

Sound of breaking glass in the distance at LOTTE's end of the line.

ERNST

¿Si, si, en Español--como estas?

LOTTE

No bueno--

(more glass breaking, a scream in the distance)

My God--!

ERNST

¿Y el pequeño castor?

LOTTE

En escuela--no mas--something's happening outside--!

Shouting voices in the distance at LOTTE's end of the line.

ERNST

What? *¿Que?*

LOTTE

Estoy pensando--oh! Thinking of exporting--I don't know the Spanish! A Inglaterra con el pequeño castor--Ernst, I have to go--!

Pounding on LOTTE's door.

ERNST

¡Si, hasta siempre!

LOTTE

¡No, hasta la vista, mi corazon!

(Sound of breaking glass very close)

Ernst, they're here!

ERNST

Who's there?

Sounds of a big crash and lights out on LOTTE as she screams. All sound ceases abruptly as the line goes dead.

ERNST

Lotte? Lotte, are you there?

Terrified, frustrated and defeated, ERNST seems on the verge of collapse.

But with a lighting shift, he pulls himself together within his worn overcoat and sits as in the first scene.

ERNST

(heavy accent)

We arrived in New York on November 4. On November 7, seventeen year-old Herschel Grynszpan, a Polish Jew whose mother and father had just been deported from Germany and refused by Poland, marched into the Paris office of his homosexual lover, German diplomat Ernst vom Rath, and shot him five times to protest his parents' expulsion. On November 8, all Jewish children, I presume including my 8 year-old son Frank, were expelled from German public schools. On November 9 the SA and Hitler Youth broke the windows of 7000 Jewish businesses. More than 200 synagogues destroyed, graves desecrated, and 30,000 Jews sent to camps in Buchenwald, Dachau and Sachsenhausen. And *hasta la vista* were last words I heard from my wife, Rose Charlotte Neumann Jaeger. My late wife. Ex wife? What is proper?

Lights up on LENI speaking to the press, wrapped in a silver fox fur.

LENI

I cannot believe it. What is the English word? Slander. Slander against the greatest man to ever walk the earth. This could not have happened in Germany. It is lies given birth by American newspapers controlled by--by--moneymen!

Lighting change puts LENI and ERNST in the same space, riding on a train.

ERNST

As your press agent, I have to say that was not your best interview.

LENI

They all think I'm sleeping with Hitler anyway!

ERNST

Which was very useful up to a point. We've passed that point.

LENI

The Americans will forget about this Jewish business as soon as there's another distraction. They can't blame me! I wasn't even in Berlin.

ERNST

Lotte was in Berlin.

LENI

But she's all right, certainly.

ERNST

I haven't heard from her since Kristallnacht. I have to go back to Germany.

LENI

You'll do her more good here.

ERNST

How?

LENI

I'll make some calls.

ERNST

Would you?

LENI

Of course.

(pats him comfortingly)

Let's go over our Hollywood appointments.

ERNST

The Hal Roach party is confirmed.

LENI

Marvelous!

ERNST

And the Los Angeles Olympic Committee is screening your film at the California Club.

LENI

Will Glenn Morris be there?

ERNST

And Johnny Weismuller.

LENI

Do you think Glenn will behave himself?

ERNST

He's unlikely to rip off your blouse--

ERNST
 --At the California Club. It's exclusive.

LENI
 (dreamily)
 In front of a hundred thousand people with
 his gold decathlon medal around his neck!

LENI
 Surely in Hollywood they won't mistake me for Marlene Dietrich, confusing *The Blue Light* with *The Blue Angel*. If one more hick asks me to sing that song--!

ERNST
 And Jay Stowitts has arranged--

LENI
 Dear Jay! How wonderful to see him again. I was always meant for Hollywood! Won't he be jealous of my suite at the Garden of Allah!

ERNST
 Change of plans.

LENI
 Why? It's perfect! All the American stars stay there.

ERNST
 Just as many stay at the Beverly Hills Hotel, which has the advantage of no picket lines.

LENI
 Picket lines? Because I limited the American newsreels at the Olympics?

ERNST silently hands her a newspaper. She
 reads for a moment.

ERNST
 The same advertisement appears in *Daily Variety*.

LENI
 They control everything in Hollywood, don't they?

ERNST
 The German Consul General booked you at the Beverly Hills Hotel as Lotte Richter.

LENI
 Why?

ERNST
So they can't find you.

LENI
But I want to be found!

ERNST
Not by the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League for the Defense of American Democracy.

LENI
Has this--campaign--affected our studio appointments?

(ERNST looks down)

I can imagine some moguls--out of sympathy for their--co-religionists--might be hesitant--
I mean, Columbia could be intimidated--

ERNST
Yes--

LENI
Or RKO--

ERNST
Correct--

LENI
But not the biggest studios--Warner--

ERNST
Unavailable.

LENI
Fox--you worked for them--

ERNST
Cancelled.

LENI
Selznick?

ERNST
Indefinitely postponed.

LENI
Not...Louis Mayer?

(ERNST just looks down)

All? All!?

ERNST

We still have one studio.

LENI

(after a moment of disbelief)

Walt Disney?!

(ERNST nods)

Gott im Himmel!

ERNST

He's very influential--

LENI

I crossed the Atlantic and bounced across North America by steam locomotive for an appointment with a mouse!

ERNST

Thanks, in fact, to Jay Stowitts who's friends with him.

LENI

Disney's homosexual?

ERNST

He's married, but he dresses very dapper for an American.

LENI

The warm brothers always love me. And he is not Jewish?

ERNST

He was in fact protested for the caricature of a Jewish peddler in *The Three Little Pigs*.

LENI

We have that in common at least.

ERNST

If you charm him, he may persuade others.

LENI

He's made so many of them rich with his little mouse and piggies.

ERNST

He's had one big hit, but my Fox friends say Disney's spent most of that windfall. Set a new standard, but feature animation is ridiculously expensive, a model that's not sustainable.

LENI

So...I should bring a little cheese for the mouse.

ERNST

What are you thinking?

LENI

Not sure yet. But I'm skilled at improvisation.

ERNST

True, but let's rehearse.

ERNST takes off his great coat, revealing a colorful shirt.

LENI

Rehearse what?

ERNST

This is a very important meeting.

ERNST puts on a colorful cardigan and turns away.

LENI

It is my *only* meeting!

ERNST

I'll be the King of Animation, and you be you.

ERNST turns back around with a Disney mustache and becomes WALT. Out of nowhere, a lit cigarette appears in his hand.

LENI

(heavy German accent)

Oh, Mister Disney, what an honor to meet you!

WALT takes her coat, revealing a colorful skirt and blouse. He coughs--a smoker's hack--and a lighting change turns the black-and-white world magically color.

WALT

(Midwestern accent)

Please call me Walt. Everybody does.

LENI

I apologize for my poor English!

WALT

Much better than my German!

LENI

English has German roots, so it is easier for me than French. And so much Americans with German ancestors--it is in many ways like house.

WALT

Home.

LENI

See! I must to apologize again!

WALT

And I apologize for the studio being such a mess.

(moves sketches off a chair)

We're building a new one over in Burbank. Costing me an arm and a leg!

LENI

Hollywood, where even ugliness is beautiful!

WALT

And beauty is expensive. Please have a seat. How do you like California so far?

They sit. She notices he sits with his foot tucked under him.

LENI

People are so kind. I have been to Yosemite with your friend Jay Stowitts, who says hello.

WALT

More of an acquaintance, actually. Hell of a set designer, as I recall.

LENI

You know his nudes?

WALT
(coughs)

I beg your pardon?

LENI
He painted fifty five of the Olympic athletes completely naked!

WALT
You don't say!

LENI
The male athletes, of course.

WALT
How was Hal's party?

LENI
Very exclusive.

WALT
Sorry I couldn't join you. I never go to parties.

LENI
May I tell you of a charming coincidence, is that the English word?

WALT
Very good, yes, coincidence!

LENI
When I was five years old, my mother took me to my very first stage play, can you guess what it was? *Snow White!*

WALT
What do you know!

LENI
I went out of my mind with excitement. On the train home, the other passengers begged my mother to stop me chattering. But from that moment, I became a creature of the theatre, dropped out of school to take dance classes--

WALT
I had to drop out, too!

LENI

School is wasted on some of us. These so-called intellectuals look down their nostrils at anyone without the “proper” education and praise to the heavens the imbecile with his certificates!

WALT

My first lesson in cartooning was a book I borrowed from the Kansas City Public Library!

LENI

I am feeling some of that same excitement meeting you today--I apologize once again!

WALT

Not at all! I'm a great admirer of yours as well. *Triumph of the Will* is quite literally a triumph--you--and your friend Mr. Hitler--hold your audience in the palm of your hand! I haven't seen *Olympia*, but it must be something! I should be jealous it beat *Snow White* in Venice, but how can I hold that against a pretty girl like you?

LENI

(is he condescending to her?)

You know you could see it--

WALT

Really?

LENI

I'm in Hollywood to negotiate--is that the proper English--?

WALT

You know all the best words!

LENI

I'm negotiating for American distribution of *Olympia*--

WALT

Distribution--the final hurdle--!

LENI

Hurdle! You are so clever!

WALT

But not as clever as you! You *invented* the documentary film--!

LENI

Oh, no--!

WALT

Such power in your images! The massive groups, a thousand people visually unified as a single object, healthy, athletic young people, all focused with military precision on a leader the camera adores!

LENI

You understand so well--!

WALT

Now everybody's doing it--massing bodies to create effects--Busby Berkeley--

LENI

Busby Berkeley?

WALT

I've even borrowed from you a bit myself!

LENI

Mass public meetings had become rare, but we find them highly effective--

WALT

Mr. Hitler flying into Nuremberg through the clouds like a god--

LENI

Ach, Mr. Disney--!

WALT

Walt!

LENI

You embarrass me!

WALT

And on top of that you're a wonderful actress!

LENI

You've seen me act? Which films?

WALT

All of them!

(sings a la Marlene Dietrich)

Falling in love again--

WALT

(singing)
--Never wanted to--

LENI

I am here to learn about animation from
the King of Cartoons.

WALT

Now I'm embarrassed! What would you like to know?

LENI

Everything! German animation is--paltry--*ja*? But you--you have elevated it to an art form with *Snow White*. Every family in America awaits your next feature--my brother and my parents, too--every child in the world loves Michael Mouse!

WALT

You saw *Snow White*?

LENI

You know it is my favorite. And so Teutonic!

WALT

Teutonic?

LENI

The story is from the Brothers Grimm! You've translated not only the language but an entire world!

WALT

I'm afraid I have stubborn faith in animation, always have. It's not just a novelty, filler on a matinee program--what better way to make fantasy real?

LENI

I believe that in the future all films will be cartoon. Who needs actors when you can animate dinosaurs, space creatures, build impossible worlds with nothing more than imagination--

WALT

--And engineering!

LENI

And emotion!

WALT

That's the trick! Our cartoon characters have personalities--they're not just moving shadows--their actions come from who they are--with recognizable human weaknesses we exaggerate like a funhouse mirror held up to life!

LENI

We both make mirrors.

WALT

Wow! You're right. We work the same magic with different tools.

LENI

(winning him over)

You've seen my mountain movies, *ja*?

WALT

The camera work in *The Blue--*

LENI

Light!

WALT

--Yes, *Light*--what did you think I was going to say?

LENI

Nothing! Go on!

WALT

The Blue Light--mysterious and alluring--

WALT

--You flying the plane in *SOS Iceberg*, *The White Hell of Pitz Palu* with that awful crevice in the ice--

LENI

Is that the English? Or like the French: crevasse?

WALT

Crevice, crevasse, terrifying either way! Ever since I saw *The White Hell* I started having nightmares I'd fall into that crevasse and freeze to death in the dark--!

LENI

Oh, no, they are beautiful! When we filmed *Pitz Palu* I rappelled down into the crevasse and found myself in a huge ice cave. Then the sun came out above and the cave was filled with--

WALT AND LENI

Blue light!

LENI

(laughs)

A kind of fairy land--at the bottom of a crevasse! The most magical places in the world are also the most dangerous to get to. Something to think about--who could animate an alpine movie better than Walt Disney?

WALT

Are you suggesting some kind of collaboration?

LENI

Who knows? I'm getting an idea that could make both of us rather a lot of money.

WALT

Really?

LENI

A way around the financial--disruptions--throughout the film industry--

LENI

--With all this talk of war--

WALT

I'm bleeding money these days!

LENI

Exactly! Your new studio that is costing you the arm and the leg--

WALT

What's your idea?

LENI

(twinkling)

I need to learn animation. Tell me more of Michael Mouse.

WALT

Well, here we call him Mickey. And I understand Mr. Hitler isn't so keen on Mickey, says he's silly, that mice are dirty--

LENI

But Michael Mouse is very popular at home. More in Michael's Club than Hitler Youth!

WALT

The Soviets call Mickey a capitalist war-monger--can you believe it? They invented a hedgehog named Yozh to defeat Mickey with proper Marxist dialectic!

LENI

Mickey a war-monger?!

WALT

Mickey would never hurt anyone, especially a child. But he's not just for kids. He's got a special audience, the Mickey audience: that innocent, childlike, eternal part of all of us that gets lost in the day-to-day, but every once in a while remembers to play with toys and laugh with joy and sing in the shower--the Mickey in everyone!

LENI

The child inside us. Waiting—hoping—to learn how to live—from someone with the answers.

WALT

I guess.

LENI

Do the voice!

WALT

What voice?

LENI

Even in Germany we know you are the voice of Michael Mouse.

WALT

(Mickey voice, saluting)

Heil, Hitler!

LENI

(Donald Duck voice, saluting)

Heil, Hitler!

WALT AND LENI

(cartoon voices, saluting, goose-stepping)

Sieg heil! Sieg heil! Sieg heil!

Astonished and delighted, WALT collapses with laughter, ends up coughing.

LENI

(over his laughter)

You know I am actress! That rare German with a sense of humor. Did you see *The Great Leap*?

WALT

Funniest comedy of 1927--thought I'd bust a gut! Listen, how much time do you have today?

LENI

I am at your disposition.

WALT

Can I show you around the studio? Like I said, it's chaos, but I think you'd be interested in our projects--and our processes. You wanna see some?

LENI

Nothing could please me more!

WALT

Great! Great!! Let's go! And while we're touring, you can tell me your idea.

They walk. Lighting change.

LENI

I am hoping the Reich will build me a studio, so I am stealing all *your* ideas!

WALT

I'll show you every one, from soup to nuts. Since sketching is the basis of animation, we have a life drawing studio--

(they enter a room, lighting change)

--Where our characters literally come to life.

They observe an unseen model and artists.

LENI

Oh, what an impressive physicality!

WALT

Isn't he a beaut? We get the best models in town.

LENI

The body is also my obsession, the divine in us, whether running, leaping, diving--

WALT

The very principles of animation--we deal in motion, movement--

LENI

Do you know Glenn Morris?

WALT

Sure! Won the decathlon! Friend of yours?

LENI

A very special friend. When he was awarded his medal he jumped off the platform, tore open my shirt and kissed my brrreasts in front of a hundred thousand spectators!

WALT

(embarrassed)

Did he now? A hundred thousand, you say?

Suddenly a donkey brays: the model.

LENI

Why are they drawing a donkey?

WALT

We got a bunch of 'em in *Pinocchio*. Say, there's something in *Pinocchio* you could help me with.

A sketch pad and pencil magically appear in WALT's hands.

LENI

How could I be of help?

WALT

(sketching)

One of the characters is the Blue Fairy, a lovely young woman, but not a glamourpuss like our Hollywood starlets. She's athletic like you, flies in the window like you leap a glacier, full of power, including the power to give *Pinocchio* life--

He shows her the sketch, which looks surprisingly finished, like the Blue Fairy in *Pinocchio* but also a lot like LENI.

LENI

I am immortalized! May I keep this?

WALT

Sure, I think I captured the idea. But would you do me another favor?

LENI

Of course! I am the Blue Fairy! Granting wishes always.

Script pages magically appear in WALT's hands and he shares them with LENI.

WALT

Lemme see how you look saying her lines.

LENI

I have not much acted in English--

WALT

You'll be great! Great!!

LENI

(reading)

Honorable Gepetto, after a lifetime of creating joy for the world, you have earned your heart's desire. Wooden doll-boy made of teak, open up your mouth and speak!

WALT

(reading)

I can speak! I'm alive!

LENI

Dear Pinocchio, this night you receive the gift of life because Gepetto wants a real boy.

WALT

I'm alive! I'm real!

LENI

Not yet, Pinocchio! You won't be flesh and blood until you show the world you're not just a real boy, but a good boy.

WALT

How?

LENI

You must be strong and generous and most of all, tell the truth! Then you will be flesh and blood.

WALT

Flesh and blood!

LENI

But only if you learn the difference between good and evil, and always choose the good.

WALT

Will you help me choose?

LENI

No, Pinocchio, only your conscience, your heart, can choose what's right!

WALT

If only your accent was Italian!

LENI

It is very clever! And teaches an important lesson.

Lighting change as they keep walking.

WALT

I don't want our cartoons to be too silly. Especially the features! But sometimes we get to have a lot of fun and be at least a little silly. Do you have Foley in Germany?

LENI

Folly? Silly mistakes?

WALT

No, Foley, sound effects added after filming.

LENI

Oh, of course, but in Germany we call it *Geräuschkulisseneinfüßungsgerät*.

WALT

In animation the *Gerocketkugelfungunjerry* is even more important than with live actors.

(picks up cymbals)

If we want lightning and thunder--

(clashes cymbals)

Or a train whistle--

(blows a whistle, hands her a pane of glass)

Or a screeching brake--

(she scratches her fingernail across the glass)

You're a natural! And of course some sounds are easiest for people to just make themselves--

LENI

Such as what?

WALT

My favorite is raspberries.

LENI

I was not aware the fruit had a sound.

WALT

It's not very polite, but kids love it:

(makes a raspberry)

What's that in German?

LENI

Furz.

WALT

Nice onomatopoeia!

WALT and LENI play with a variety of other
sound-making devices.

LENI

You are teaching children flatulence? Don't they already know?

WALT

Kids know everything--instinctively! They sense what's true and what's not, even in fantasy. That's why we have the responsibility to teach moral lessons, like you said.

LENI

Cartoons are crucial in childhood.

WALT

Not just cartoons, movies of all kinds! Seeing is believing—when you show people who wins the Olympics, they all believe you. You've got more magic than the Blue Fairy, more than any woman in the world, really!

LENI

Herr Disney, your nose is growing!

WALT

You're the queen of documentary film!

LENI

The queen!

WALT

Not long ago they tried to get me to run for mayor of Los Angeles, can you believe it? And I said "Who wants to be mayor when you're already king?"

LENI

We are two sides of the coin.

WALT

You show the world as it is--I show the world as I want it to be. Opposite, almost. Funhouse mirror and true reflection. Art and reality.

LENI

Oh, no, not reality exactly.

WALT

Don't you just set up your cameras and record? You documented the Nuremberg rally just as it happened.

LENI

(laughs)

Think of the muddle if I did that! No, I directed the rally from the very beginning for film. All those grand effects you mentioned--I made them! Several speakers had to be re-shot because the film spoiled--and you know what happened to *Victory of Faith*?

WALT

I don't know that one.

He gestures, and they walk.

LENI

It was almost rehearsal for *Triumph of the Will*. The year before, I filmed the first Nuremberg rally, but just as I finished editing we had to throw it all away, thanks to Ernst Rohm who was in every frame.

WALT

What'd he do?

LENI

He fell out of favor with the Fuhrer so he couldn't be shown.

WALT

Wait, I remember the name...sometime between *Peculiar Penguins* and *Mickey Plays Papa*...was in all the papers. Why was he out of favor?

LENI

He was homosexual--

WALT

He was killed, wasn't he?

LENI

By his lover, I think. So embarrassing for the Reich.

WALT

I'm not so good with current events. All I want to do is cartoons.

LENI

Which is your genius! The Mickey in you! You will always have the heart of a child, so you touch the heart in all of us. You are unique, Herr Disney!

WALT

Walt, please! I'm the furthest thing from unique. Other producers hire marketing departments to figure out what the man in the street wants in his movies, Mr. Average, Mr. Middle of the Road. That's me--I don't have to ask what he wants because I'm him!

He gestures for her to go ahead of him.

LENI

I just realized--you *are* America!

Lighting change and suddenly they are surrounded by orchestral sound, about 90 seconds into *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* by Paul Dukas (*not* the *Fantasia* recording). WALT is instantly manic.

WALT

Great! Great!! This is my scheme to get Mickey back on top!

LENI

With a whole orchestra?

WALT

Right now we call it *The Concert Feature--*

LENI

It's *The Sorcerer's Apprentice!*

WALT

One of eight symphonies, but not silly at all! I want Americans to appreciate classical music, not fall asleep like they do at the philharmonic. Now they're gonna see the music so they'll understand it!

Unable to help herself, LENI moves a bit to the music.

LENI

You know this is a German story.

WALT

Yes! From a poem by Goe-thee!

LENI

Goethe—

WALT

And this isn't the only song in the show
that's German--

WALT

—Bach, Schubert, Beethoven--!

LENI

(starting to dance)

So, Mickey is the apprentice?

WALT

Yes!

WALT narrates as LENI dances.

WALT

The sorcerer's called Yen Sid--my name backwards, a bit of an Easter egg--and Mickey steals his magic hat one night to bring a broom to life to do his work. To Mickey's astonishment, the spell works, and he trains the enchanted broom to carry water for him.

LENI's dance gets wilder, rather like her dance on the beach in *The Holy Mountain*. WALT is a bit embarrassed but keeps narrating.

WALT

Mickey falls asleep dreaming of his new god-like power, but awakes to find the broom's been carrying water all night and the room is flooded. Mickey's only an apprentice--not the master--doesn't know how to stop the enchantment, so he chops the broom to bits, but all the pieces come to life--an army of brooms--and the flood swirls around and around until the sorcerer catches him and--

(the dance is too distracting)

--And--

LENI

(ecstatic)

Ja, keep going!

WALT
 --And--breaks the spell!

With a wizardly gesture, WALT silences the orchestra. LENI freezes dramatically, then laughs. WALT laughs with embarrassment.

WALT
 I know it all sounds kinda highbrow, but Mickey brings it down to earth.
 (to the orchestra)
 Thanks, boys!

LENI
 I have the perfect song for you!

WALT
 Is that what you wanted to tell me?

LENI
 No, I thought of it just now, inspired by your orchestra.

WALT
 I have a little surprise for you, too.

LENI
 You do?

WALT
 I'll tell you when you tell me your secret. Been planning it for a while.

LENI
 (coy)
 When we are ready, we will share. For now, a gift of melody.

WALT
 We're pretty set for music already--

LENI
 Another German song with a story, a folk song.

WALT
 What's the story?

LENI

(seductively)

A beautiful woman named Loreley lives above the Rhine, and her song is so seductive sailors hear her and forget to sail, crashing their boats and drowning in the river.

WALT

A hard sell with families--

LENI

But the tune! Simple--and sublime!

(sings)

Ich weiss nicht, was soll es bedeuten [I don't know why]

Dass ich so taurig bin? [I feel so sad]

A solo instrument in the orchestra picks up the tune, much to WALT's astonishment.

LENI

Märchen aus alten Zeiten [There is an old tale]

Das kommt mir nich aus dem Sinn [I can't get out of my mind]

More instruments accompany LENI. She uses him as a prop, draping herself on him as she sings.

LENI

Die Luft is kühl und es dunkelt [The air is cool]

Und ruhig fliesst der Rhein [The Rhine flows quietly]

The entire orchestra plays along.

LENI

Der Gipfel des Berges funkelt [The mountain glows]

Im Abendsonnenschein [In the twilight]

The orchestra applauds LENI, which she acknowledges. WALT steps away from her to applaud.

LENI

You see? Americans are just Germans in disguise!

WALT

Boy, can you sing!

LENI

I sing, I dance, I direct. What do I not do?

WALT

The Sorcerer's Apprentice is almost the end of *The Concert Feature*, but now I want to show you the very last sequence.

They walk. Lighting change.

WALT

After a lot of action, the audience needs a slower walk to the end. You might have noticed in *Snow White* the ending seems kind of rushed--the Prince kisses her and two minutes later everybody's exiting the theatre.

He helps her climb up onto the multiplane camera, a tall series of platforms. She's pretty agile and doesn't need his help.

LENI

You always find something you want to change after the premiere!

WALT

Exactly!

LENI AND WALT

So you fix it in the next one!

(they laugh)

WALT

This is our invention--the multiplane camera. Take a peek! It allows us to move through animated space in three dimensions. Imagine pilgrims in procession through this background landscape at sunrise--

LENI

(peering down into the machine)

It pulls you right in. What a transcendent dawn--

WALT

Transcendent! That's the word!

LENI

The bridge becomes the forest becomes the cathedral--

WALT

God and nature--yes!

LENI

It is a religious film?

WALT

No, but the final piece of music is *Ave Maria*--by Schubert!--so the tone is reverential--beautiful, we hope! There's still a lot of Christians in the world, no matter what's happening in Russia. We think it could have commercial appeal--and in non-Christian countries you could just cut the last five minutes.

LENI

They let you get away with this in Hollywood?

WALT

What do you mean?

LENI

Hollywood isn't very...Christian.

WALT

(laughs)

No, I guess not.

He tries to help her down from the multiplane camera, but she descends like a mountain goat.

LENI

You're the most creative force in Hollywood these days. Jews can't create, only mimic, which is why so many are actors--and then the Jewish press praises them to the skies!

They walk.

WALT

I don't make my movies for Hollywood--I make them for America.

LENI

The world! And you are calling this film *The Concert Feature*?

WALT

It's kind of hard to sum up because it has so many different sequences in different styles, giving the illusion of improvisation, one idea leading to the next--

LENI

In music that is called a fantasia.

WALT

Is it? Certainly the animators are treating it that way. Of course, in animation, nothing is improvised—every fraction of a second is planned! Do you know what an Easter egg is in movies?

LENI

I am not sure.

WALT

A hidden reference or image that most people won't get but insiders discover to their delight. Like finding Easter eggs.

LENI

In Germany we call that *EineinfreierSichtversteckteBesonderheit*.

WALT

(pause, is she messing with him?)

Sometimes the animators sneak images in that go by so fast no one notices, but they stick in the subconscious. They think I don't notice either, but I go through their wastebaskets at night, and last week I found this.

He produces a drawing of naked breasts.

LENI

Brrrrreasts!

WALT

They fill the screen for a fraction of a second! It's a harpy from *Night on Bald Mountain*. The things we get away with! We could send secret messages telling the public to vote for...for...Joseph Stalin! But I guess you know all about that.

LENI

What do you mean?

WALT

Well...I heard *Olympia* got banned in Great Britain as propaganda.

LENI

Olympia is the farthest thing from propaganda! It's about sport! The whole world coming together! I focused on the American athletes more than the Germans--

WALT

They won more medals--

LENI

And I got so much trouble and criticism for that! It's a film about peace, the games as a pacifist alternative to war.

(starts to cry)

If anything, the message is that Germany has no interest in conquest, only healthy athletic competition!

WALT

Oh my goodness--!

Lighting change as they enter a new room and he gives her his pocket handkerchief.

LENI

Propaganda is single-minded--one message hammered home in different ways but always the same. It is simple and addressed to the people--not to the intellectuals always looking to criticize.

WALT

You've given it a lot of thought!

LENI

I hate when my work is misinterpreted--

WALT

Sorry--let's look at how we draw figures--

LENI

Why would we want war? Especially after the last one was such devastation!

WALT

This is Jiminy Cricket, the conscience of Pinocchio.

WALT flips images on a flip pad to animate them.

LENI

Some Americans are against Germany, but if they see *Olympia*, they will stop planning for war.

WALT

See, he's only got three fingers since it's simpler to draw and animate--

LENI

By getting me distribution, you could save the world!

WALT

A movie could prevent a war? Pardon me, but that sounds like propaganda--

LENI

If *Olympia* is propaganda, *Snow White* is propaganda!

WALT

Snow White? Propaganda?

LENI

Women are either innocent like Snow White or evil like the Queen with her potions and spells.

WALT

Not all women--

LENI

Maybe not Snow White's mother, but she is dead. Do you hate your mother?

WALT

(suddenly weepy)

No. No! My mother--look--I only make movies I'd take my family to see, but life is both light and shadow, and if you don't show the shadow there's no contrast, and it would be a lie, insincere, fake, and no one would buy it.

LENI

(wipes his face with his handkerchief)

I am sorry. I have made both of us cry.

WALT

It's the critics make us cry.

LENI

Ach! Critics!

WALT

Which is why we're always on to the next project, to prove them wrong--

WALT steps quickly away from her to show some animation cels.

WALT

This is another sequence in *The Concert Feature*--based on Greek myth--what we're doing here is photographing the cels in sequence, each slightly different, so when you put 'em all together they move, like the flip pad--

LENI

These are centaurs?

WALT

Both male and female--it's a lot of fun--

LENI

What music?

WALT

Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony--believe me, this is gonna make Beethoven!

LENI

So you like Greek myth?

WALT

Like I said, one of the more lighthearted sequences--

LENI

Do you know the story of *Penthesilea*?

WALT

Who's he?

LENI

She was an Amazon queen. Achilles fell in love with her and pretended she defeated him in battle so she could marry him. But she found out the truth--that he defeated her, actually, and so she killed him, brrrrrutally.

WALT

Seems kinda tragic.

LENI

I have always wanted to play Penthesilea.

WALT

In a cartoon? Is that your big idea?

LENI

No, no, just something to think about now that you are doing more serious work. With your big new studio, can't you do as you wish?

They keep walking.

WALT

I like to be democratic, but I realized it's not fair to the studio if I get too friendly with everybody--gives the apple-polishers too much of an edge--

LENI

Democracy! It is so overrated. Parliaments are stupid people compromising with each other--the opposite of genius--

WALT

I'm no genius!

LENI

You are perhaps too modest. I have a question—maybe it is too forward—

WALT

That's—okay—

LENI

We've toured half your studio, but you've introduced me to no one. Am I an embarrassment?

WALT

No—no! I don't care about propaganda—

LENI

(getting out a cigarette)

Or do you just want to keep me to yourself?

She's gotten really close to him. He lights her cigarette. Are they about to kiss?

WALT

Is this the conversation your press agent imagined we'd have?

LENI

No, the conversation I imagined us having.

She touches him.

WALT

(abruptly moving away from her)

What I care about is quality! You're the best at what you do, and that's all anybody should care about.

I pay the best animators more on purpose--it's natural law that the strong survive with the weak weeded out--and it's communism to think anything can change that!

Lighting change as they enter another room.

LENI

Exactly! Natural law keeps the planets in orbit and moves our species forward, with the unfit making way for superior specimens. We can only try to understand this law, not alter it! In Germany, there is no more communism. You hate them as much as we do?

WALT

It's not my nature to hate anybody, and I'm not political by a long shot--this is our maquette room--

LENI

But everything is politics, all moral choices, like Pinocchio being strong and generous and telling the truth!

WALT

Taking sides is bad for business, and I'm not some billboard patriot--
(picking up a maquette)
These figurines help the animators visualize a character from all angles--

LENI

When you condemn communism, you only tell the truth, even when it is hard!

WALT

My dad was a socialist in Kansas City, and when they found out, a mob of Irish boys working for the Democrats beat me up, stuck hot tar on my--!

LENI

On your what?

WALT

I don't want to forget you're a lady.

LENI

A German lady. We are not afraid of words. On your penis?

WALT

No--uh--close, but--

(gestures lower)

LENI

Your scrrrrrotum?

WALT

As a result, now I vote Republican.

(hands her the maquette)

Here--a souvenir!

LENI

A Negro centaur?

WALT

We call her a centaurette. This little pickaninny's eating a watermelon when Pegasus charges up to her, then Jesus Christ, she skedaddles! It's gonna get huge laughs!

They walk.

LENI

Another thing to admire about America--no race-mixing.

WALT

What do you mean?

LENI

America started off Teutonic, and you keep it that way with proper laws. Not like in Latin America where the races mingle and the Spanish blood is diluted. That is why you dominate the hemisphere--

WALT

Oh, no, we don't dominate--

LENI

--With your superior culture!

Lighting change and they enter a room with many sketches tacked to a wall.

WALT

Here's a little something we dreamed up, and now everybody's using it. We call it a story board.

LENI

What a cute little baby deer!

WALT

That's *Bambi*, the other feature we're working on. This is the final sequence and it's giving us a lot of trouble.

(points out each image)

Bambi's mother finds him tender spring grass after they starved all winter eating bark and snow. She hears something, looks around, then tells Bambi to run, run fast without looking back--just as she's leaping a log, a shot rings out!

LENI

Oh, no! Does his mother die?

WALT

It's awful, isn't it? We're really struggling with her death.

LENI

My heart is breaking!

WALT

Mine, too. It's too much. Twisting the knife.

LENI

Do we have to see it? Couldn't we just...hear the shot?

WALT

(pointing)

And cut right to Bambi safe in the thicket?

LENI

In *Triumph of the Will*, I don't show Hitler flying into Nuremberg--

WALT

You just imply him--

LENI

And we see the village from the Fuhrer's point of view--the shadow of his aeroplane on the rooftops--

WALT

(sniffing)

So much more powerful--

LENI

(pulling the death sketch off the wall)

If we never see Bambi mother again, and neither does he--

WALT

Then we're Bambi--

LENI

Missing his mother.

That's really...beautiful—

WALT

WALT cries.

LENI

I am so sorry!

WALT

Not your fault—

LENI

Even cartoon emotions are real emotions!

WALT

A few months ago—sorry—Roy and I bought our parents a house in North Hollywood, our present to them, finally we could provide—
(he can hardly speak)

There was a problem with the gas, so we sent a repairman from the studio. But the next morning, my mother went into the bathroom and never came back. My father found her on the floor, then he fainted. The maid and a neighbor dragged them outside and gave them mouth-to-mouth. My father revived.

LENI

And your mother?

WALT just shakes his head. Impulsively, LENI holds him, comforting him like a mother as he cries, a change of tack. She may use the handkerchief.

LENI

How long ago was this?

WALT

November 26.

LENI

Twelve days only!

WALT

We bought it for her!

LENI

How drrrrreadful!

WALT

I don't know who's more broke up about it, Roy or me.

LENI

The mother is the first love, the most precious. Nothing can replace her.

WALT

Do you ever--regret?

LENI

Regret?

WALT

To get ahead sometimes you gotta close your eyes and hold your nose, but later there's--doubt—lost in the rush—

LENI

Of course, all artists have sometimes doubt--

WALT

I shoulda paid more attention!

Uncomfortable and embarrassed, WALT gently but awkwardly extricates himself from LENI's embrace.

WALT

Wow! Bet you weren't expecting that. I know I wasn't! Sorry to be so gloomy all of a sudden--let's go to the Rainbow Room to cheer ourselves up.

They walk, lighting change.

LENI

What is this room?

WALT

The ink-and-paint department. Where we mix powders and paints, boil colorful chemicals and put 'em on palettes for the paint girls to use.

LENI

So bright!

WALT

Our first color was in 1932, and Mickey went color in 1935--

LENI

And of course *Snow White*!

WALT

Which isn't to say I don't appreciate dramatic contrasts in black-and-white, especially the way you do it.

LENI

(tightly)

Thank you.

WALT

Imagine what you could do with color! Your Nazi flags are awful bold with the black-and-white, but it's the red that grabs your eye.

LENI

Red is blood of the German people.

WALT

And communism!

LENI

We are nothing like the communists! I am like you--not political. The French have a word: naïve.

WALT

In English, too! I admit I'm naïve about politics, but I don't trust those communists, either. They keep trying to get my animators to unionize.

LENI

I was touring a film studio in Paris when the stage hands, lighting men, other technical people saw me and began to sing. It was so charming until I walked up to thank them and saw their clenched fists--they were singing *The Internationale*! I was mortified by my naïveté.

WALT

The reds are ruining Hollywood!

LENI

You're misunderstood. Everyone thinks you are only after box office, but money is just the means to an end--

WALT

Yes!

LENI

You want money to build a better world. We are the same. Have you ever attended a Bund meeting?

WALT

A what meeting?

LENI

The German American Bund. They are headquartered right here in Los Angeles if you're interested.

WALT

If that's your great inspiration--

LENI

Oh, no, I'm still developing that, not quite ready to tell you. But everything you've showed me today tells me it will work, and the Bund could be part of it.

WALT

Well, maybe, but like I said, I don't even have time for Hollywood parties, much less political parties!

LENI

It is a cultural organization.

WALT

I'll bring my production manager Harry Tytle.

(off her look)

To translate the German for me. I'm kidding! Here, have another souvenir--

(hands her a cel)

LENI

It is...mushrooms?

WALT

Dancing mushrooms from The Nutcracker Suite, the Chinese Dance. See their slanny eyes and coolie hats? Cute, huh?

LENI

Adorrrable!

WALT

You know, you're right. Sometimes I am misunderstood. A couple of rabbis gave me shit about *The Three Little Pigs*, and it really hurt my feelings.

Harry Tytle's half Jewish and I told him if he was all Jewish he'd be better off. But I get criticized just the same. People don't know!

(LENI giggles)

What?

LENI

Walt Disney using profanity! People rrrreally don't know!

WALT

(confidentially)

I'm not *actually* Walt Disney. Walt Disney doesn't smoke, but I'm a two-pack-a-day man. Walt Disney doesn't drink, but I enjoy a scotch every goddamn afternoon at five.

LENI

I'm misunderstood, too.

WALT

Because of *Triumph of the Will*?

LENI

Before! The "democratic" newspapers in Berlin called *The Blue Light* "inwardly sick." As long as Jews were film critics, I never had good reviews. But now that Hitler's in charge--

WALT

Felix Salten is banned in Germany.

LENI

Who?

WALT

The author of *Bambi*.

LENI

Oh, *ja*, he is banned for writing a pornographic novel about a prostitute!

WALT

His real name is Sigmund Salzmann. I understand he recently moved to Zurich.

LENI

I have no prejudice against Jews. My press agent here--his wife is Jewish--I got special permission for him to join me in America.

WALT

No prejudices, but regrets--?

LENI

I buy my clothes at Jewish stores, work with Jewish producers, which gets me much criticism from the Party. So, you see, I'm not prejudiced against Jews. But they are prejudiced toward me! Such unhappy people, always complaining--have you noticed?

WALT

(laughing)

Always asking for raises--

LENI

(laughing)

Always kvetching! Of course you understand, as the only studio in Hollywood not run by Jews.

WALT

Well, now, some of our best animators--

LENI

How fortunate to not depend on them for distribution--

WALT

But--

LENI

So you do not bow your head when criticized for your piggies or *Snow White and the Seven Little Jews*.

WALT

Uh...dwarfs. Seven dwarfs!

LENI

(laughing)

But of course they are Jews! Little miners straight out of Wagner, greedy Nibelungen with their enormous red noses.

WALT is stunned silent for a moment, then suddenly bursts into laughter. She laughs with him. His laughter turns to coughing.

LENI

Are you all right?

WALT

Sure, sure. Just a little cough I give when I'm coming down the hall as an early warning--
(she laughs)

I don't do my own distribution, you know.

LENI

You don't?

WALT

RKO.

LENI

But you have influence?

WALT

You bet! Say, talk about building a better world--can I show you my big dream before you go? And then maybe you can tell me your idea.

They walk.

LENI

My time is infinite!

WALT

For the *Snow White* premiere we built a dwarf's cottage and that gave me the idea of an amusement park across from the studio, a little something to show people who visit.

LENI

You should talk to Albert Speer. He is planning a new Berlin, a perfect garden city.

WALT

I'm not talking about a whole city--

LENI

Why not?

WALT

I don't wanna get too grand--

LENI

The bigger it is, the more you control, the less it's affected--degraded--by what surrounds it--

WALT

The outside world?

LENI

The inside world is your world, your personality. Everything the way you like it.

WALT

Huh!

LENI

That would suit you, I think. Everything you have shown me today is the work of genius.

WALT

(laughs)

I keep telling you, I'm no genius! Just a kid from Marceline, Missouri!

LENI

Adolf Hitler is just a kid from Braunau am Inn. Would you like to hear a funny story?

WALT

About Hitler?

LENI

It is quite amusing. The night Hitler became Chancellor of Germany, I was in a sauna out in the country with friends. A telephone rang, someone went to answer and came back saying Hermann Göring had to speak to me immediately. I wrrrrrapped myself in a towel and picked up the receiver. Göring told me Hindenburg named Hitler Chancellor and all of Berlin was bursting with celebration, a torchlight parade through Brandenburg Gate-- the Thousand Year Reich had begun and I was completely naked!

WALT

Gee!

LENI

I went out of my mind with excitement! This perfect man, so beautiful and full of wisdom. His eyes glow with the purity of his passion, like yours!

WALT

You're comparing me to Adolf Hitler?

LENI

Why not? You are as great in your way. You know Hitler has fully funded many of my films and, as I mentioned, the government will build me my own studio.

WALT

You know him really well!

LENI

Not as well as some people gossip, but very well indeed.

WALT

And he listens to you.

LENI

Ever since he saw my dance in *The Holy Mountain*--

(a quick move from her *Sorcerer's
Apprentice* dance)

I have his attention. Is there anything you would like me to say to him?

WALT

Like what?

LENI

American movies are banned in Germany, thanks to that reptilian Minister of Propaganda.

WALT

Yes--

LENI

And I am looking for distribution of *Olympia* in the United States. I have on more than one occasion received a no from the reptile and a yes from the Fuhrer. What was the box office for *Snow White* in Germany?

WALT

Why, the best in Europe, second only to domestic--

LENI

What if Walt Disney Studios had all of the German market to itself, no other American films?

WALT

That doesn't seem--fair--

LENI

But it's attractive?

WALT

Perhaps with an adjustment: all Hollywood movies in Germany would come *through* Disney.

LENI

A stamp of approval?

WALT

Quality control.

LENI

They would be safe if...Disneyfied?

WALT

We could act on behalf of other studios. Like a *shabbos goy*.

LENI

Hitler does not believe in peaceful world conquest through commercial penetration, but together we could prove him wrong. And make for us all the happy ending, including the Fuhrer.

WALT

If I can help you get distribution here. That's your big idea!

LENI

I think we understand each other, Walt.

WALT

Leni, I think we do.

LENI

(smiles)

I have for you a book--

A red and white bound book appears in her hand, perhaps magically.

WALT

Oh, I never read anything unless we're thinking about turning it into a cartoon.

LENI

I read this incredible philosophy while I was working on *The Blue Light* and knew instantly I would work for the author. I read it as I rode the train, at the film set, by pure mountain brooks and in cool woods. My heart was captured!

WALT

Really, I don't have time--

LENI

But you already agree with most of its principles.

WALT

Oh, no--

LENI

When we speak of natural law or intellectuals or Communism or Jews--I am quoting always from this book. And you respond as if you have read it yourself!

WALT

I don't think so--

LENI

Only the strong survive, you said--

(taps the book)

What if I just leave it here?

(sets the book down)

WALT

Sure, that's fine, but like I said, I only read what I can use--

LENI

You can use it, I am sure. With this book soon the new Germany will be the happiest place on earth.

WALT

But what about...the unhappy people?

LENI

What unhappy people?

She smiles. He stares at her, intrigued or horrified, unsure.

LENI

Today is very important for me and I think for you. Sometimes a conversation between two people can change the whole world.

She smiles again. He lights a cigarette.

WALT

How many people came to the party Hal Roach threw for you?

LENI

Oh, it was very exclusive! Hal himself, of course, the Italian Consul General, my press agent, the German Consul Dr. Gyssling, the editor of the *California Staats-Zeitung*, Werner Klingeberg from the German Olympic Committee, Winfield Sheehan and his wife Maria Jeritza--

WALT

The Austrian opera singer?

LENI

Ja, the Moravian Thunderbolt, very sweet and helpful to me! And of course our mutual friend, Jay Stowitts.

WALT

No one from the studios?

LENI

Mr. Sheehan from Fox--

WALT

Not since 1935. He's independent now--

LENI

Mr. Roach on behalf of MGM--

WALT

Poor Hal! After he tried to partner with Vittorio Mussolini on *Rigoletto*, MGM dumped him and forced him to sell the rights to his *Our Gang* series. Now his distributor is United Artists. You shouldn't blame yourself if nobody came.

LENI

United Artists--that's right! Hal said he'd introduce me to David Selznick.

WALT

Distribution in America is complicated. Until this year we dealt with Sam Briskin at RKO, but he's back at Columbia working for BB Kahane, so now we're at the mercy of Pan Berman.

LENI

I see, all the Jews, you are dependent on them--

WALT

It's more than that. RKO's got a hundred theaters around the country from Hillstreet in Los Angeles to Proctor's in Spanish Harlem.

LENI

But you can set yourself free--

WALT

The RKO Orpheum in New Orleans has a balcony just for Negroes, and sometimes you gotta play to the balcony. Of course we're all of us under the constant vigilance of that cocksucker Willie Bioff at the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees which represents studio workers and projectionists, not to mention that prissy-ass leprechaun Joe Breen enforcing the Hays Code over at the PCA!

LENI

Well, that is Hollywood.

WALT

That's America. We're beholden to everybody because that's our audience.

LENI

I see the complication.

WALT

So...

LENI

So if you are going to help me, perhaps you should see *Olympia*.

WALT

I'd love to, but--!

LENI

I have a print at my hotel. I can arrange for it to be sent over--

WALT

Well, you see--

LENI

(holding it together, barely)

I know you are busy, so you can keep it until you have time--

WALT

The problem's my projectionist.

LENI

He's Jewish?

WALT

He's union. And can never keep his mouth shut. By tomorrow everyone in Hollywood would know.

LENI

Are you a puppet of Hollywood or a real boy?

(cries)

I am not a secret!

WALT

But you are picketed. And I don't want a boycott.

LENI

I see.

WALT

I'm very sorry. I hear *Olympia's* powerful and even moving.

LENI

I think so--

WALT

Chock full of your usual genius! I'm a big fan, I hope you realize--

LENI

(wiping tears)

Of course! You've been most kind--

(gets up)

WALT

Wait.

LENI

Ja?

WALT

I will see *Olympia* if you'll do one thing for me.

LENI

And what is that?

WALT

It's not a small thing.

(she glares at him)

Stay.

LENI

(relieved)

Of course I will stay to watch *Olympia* with you!

WALT

Stay--in America.

LENI

What are you proposing?

WALT

Don't go back to Germany. I can sponsor you--

LENI

I can't--

WALT

--Find you work--you're the greatest lady director--

LENI

The greatest director!

WALT

Hollywood will embrace you if you stay, if you turn your back on Mr. Hitler--

LENI

On my family?

WALT

You're afraid for them if you don't go back, of course--

LENI

Not at all! They are perfectly safe!

WALT

--But I figured it out!

WALT

We'll arrange for the American premiere of *Olympia* and invite your parents and your brother. The Nazis couldn't possibly object--klieg lights, parties at the Roosevelt Hotel! Then, after the celebrations, none of you return to Germany.

LENI

They would not agree. My father has been a party member since 1933.

WALT

Then of course they're perfectly safe.

LENI

I would not agree! This is your surprise--a Faustian bargain? Selling my soul for Hollywood immortality? You are asking me to turn my back on my country, on my friends, on *mein Fuhrer*--!

WALT

Your Fuhrer has no friends! The whole world is against him--against *you* as long as you prop him up with your movies--you said before you had doubts--

LENI

Doubts? About Hitler?

WALT

What's his future? What's yours?

She stares at him, then takes out a cigarette, waits a moment for him to light it for her. He does not. She lights the cigarette herself, takes a drag, exhales slowly.

LENI

I thought we understood each other, Herr Disney, but it is crystal clear we do not. If you imagine that I would so casually abandon everything I am--like rejecting a faithless lover! Hitler is higher than the greatest men of Germany--Frederick, Nietzsche, Bismarck--all men of contradiction and flaws. But Adolf Hitler is without blemish.

WALT

(exhales cigarette smoke)

I do understand. But what might have been is breaking my heart.

LENI

I appreciate your--very considerate offer--but you have broken my heart also.

WALT

(standing)

Well. Before you go--may I show you--do you know what a sweat box is?

LENI

I am not sure.

WALT

It's just a small, stifling theatre where we view scenes of rough animation to smooth 'em out. I make the boys sweat while they wait for my opinion--

LENI

Oh, *ja*, we call that *SchwitzkastenFolterkammerScheisskopf*—

They walk.

WALT

And today we've scheduled the rough of one scene from *The Concert Feature*, the climax, really--

LENI

I would love to see it, but--

WALT

It's kind of a tribute to your work, a bit of borrowing from your techniques--there's even a mountain!

LENI

How flattering!

WALT

The most serious part of the movie, in some ways about the consequence of moral choices--bad ones--like *Pinocchio* but scary instead of sweet--

LENI

I am intrigued.

WALT

I may have to talk you through it if it's too rough. I was shy about showing it to you, but after our conversation, I just have to.

LENI

What is the music, please?

Lighting lowers as they come into a room and sit down.

WALT

Good afternoon, boys! Pay no attention to us, we'll just sit in the back!

(to LENI)

The music is *Night on Bald Mountain* by Modest Petrovich Mussorgsky--

Flickering, multicolored light illuminates them as the music begins (*not the Fantasia recording*).

WALT

This is one I'm especially in love with!

After a few seconds of music, WALT starts to narrate and act out the animation, almost as if he can't help himself, caught up.

WALT

See? There's the mountain--jagged, bare, no trees, not even snow to soften it--forbidding under a full moon and ominous, gusting clouds. Slowly we climb to the pinnacle--and it moves! Great black bat wings unfold. It's the dark god Chernabog himself, unveiling his power. We approach him from below, so he is monumental, magnificent, without blemish! But his eyes--empty, glowing, cunning, soulless! We see the village from his point of view: tiny, insignificant. He stretches out his claws, his muscled arms casting a terrible spell, his shadow reaching down into the quaint, quiet village, stretching across rooftops and streets, summoning his followers, the evil dead, from their graves in churchyard and river.

LENI leans forward, drawn in by the music, images and WALT's narration.

WALT

They're drawn to him, compelled, more and more of them floating upward, streaming to his feet atop the mountain, hundreds and thousands of spiritual slaves. Not just the dead, but also the witches, their hellhounds and familiars, demon soldiers astride their wicked steeds--up, up to the mountain to worship him! They swirl around their leader, an indistinguishable mass, ready to do his will, his army, as it were, acting as one, they *are* his power!

LENI fidgets, uncomfortable, unsure.

WALT

But it's not enough--he wants more! He opens a crevasse, the gates of Hell, releasing creatures even more malign! Illuminated by the flames below, we see him towering above, drawing them from the inferno like beasts of smoke. Chernabog reaches down, captures live flames--they dance among his fingers, slowly taking shape as he coaxes them to life--lithe and lovely maidens of fire--

(he dances for a moment like LENI)

--No woman has ever danced with this grace, the grace of blazing beauty animated by a curse!

They capture his attention, amuse him for a moment, their bodies perfect, but it's not their shapeliness that attracts him, it's their malleability! He waves his hand--they stretch and compress and change, three comely girls deform into a wolf, a goat and a swine--

LENI, while still fascinated, is starting to look irritated, skeptical.

WALT

--Dancing with ecstasy for their great *fuehrer*. Toadies, wraiths and gorgons jump and fly about, fighting among themselves, completely naked harpies dropping demons into the dark maelstrom, then flying at us--look quickly!--see the titties? There they come again! Boobies! Boobies! Flying brrreasts!

LENI has become silently furious.

WALT

The music faster, louder, pounding--an orgy of flesh and flame--fire engulfs Chernabog, shooting up from his--uh--groin--like a thousand torches--he's in ecstasy, too, reveling in his limitless power, the triumph of his will! He bares his fangs as for a meal--he will devour them all--devour the world! Then:

(freezes)

Was that a church bell? He hesitates. Again, a bell. A flash of white, holy light that blinds the demons and their master. Their *Walpurgisnacht* is ending, comes the dawn!

Behind WALT, LENI quietly leaves.

WALT

The evil ones slither back to Hell, the dead to their tombs. The air itself becomes a river of souls flowing down, down. Good has won the war. How? Simply with the coming of the light! Truth! High above, Chernabog rails silently at heaven in his defeat, then wraps himself in dragon wings and goes to sleep, until the world awakens him again.

(coming out of it and turning to LENI)

Surprised I know about *Walpurgisnacht*? It's from *Faust*, by Goethe.

But she is gone. He turns back to the animators.

WALT

Goddammit, boys, you got me! Wait till the kids see this!

Lights out on WALT and up on LENI, raging.

LENI

He was like a little child! Showed me silly cartoons, gave me a picture of mushrooms and a golliwog doll, then went on about the moral choices of Pinocchio! Refused to help me with *Olympia*, made ridiculous excuses about his projectionist, suggested I turn my back on Germany, and finally--to twist the animated knife--he screened an idiotic and insulting "tribute" to *Triumph of the Will*! This is the entire result of your paltry efforts in Hollywood where you know everybody--I am toyed with by an adolescent mama's boy who sketched me as a magic fairy!

Lights up on ERNST with LENI as she thrusts the sketch at him in her hotel room. He wears his greatcoat.

ERNST

It's a credible caricature.

LENI

I am not--a--cartoon!

ERNST

That he spent a whole day with you showed he was serious.

LENI

I know what you're doing.

ERNST

What do you mean?

LENI

Did Disney pay you? Maria Jeritza told me everything and Mrs. Whitehead confirmed it.

ERNST

Confirmed what?

LENI

You've been working against me this whole tour! Starting all the way back in Berlin you were spying for Hollywood, then in America copying my letters, tipping off the Anti-Nazi League, asking my friends for money--and Mrs. Whitehead says you aren't even planning to go back to Germany with me.

ERNST

Of course, I'm going back--I have to find Lotte.

LENI

Find her?

ERNST

I haven't heard from her since the--the--I don't know what else to call it but a pogrom--!

LENI

I am sure she's fine--

ERNST

You said you'd find out, but it's been six weeks and I've heard nothing from her! No answers to my letters--friends haven't seen her--or our little boy!

LENI

Do not turn your betrayal into my failing!

ERNST

With one telephone call you could find her!

LENI

Why would I do that when you've destroyed any hope for *Olympia* in America?

ERNST

You've always been a friend to Jews--sympathetic--you got Kunneke work when his wife was declared a half Jew, you protected the wife of that set designer--Robert--

LENI

Herlth--yes--

ERNST

--From the Gestapo--

LENI

And what has it gotten me? A reputation as soft on Jews! And now the poisoning of all Hollywood against me. I should have listened to Goebbels.

ERNST

What would I tell the studios they don't already know? Of your boyfriends? How would I profit?

LENI

Maria's sending photostatic copies of the checks her husband gave you so I can see them with my own eyes!

ERNST

She implicated her own husband?

LENI

And proved herself my friend! You've only proven yourself my bitter enemy!

ERNST

After all you've done for me, for Lotte? Why would I betray you? When you have the power to save Lotte's life with a word?

LENI

Save her from what?

ERNST

From a detention camp! From death!

LENI

I hope your little kike cunt is *already* dead!

Lights out on LENI as ERNST returns to his seated position at the beginning of the play. The black-and-white palette returns, no more color.

ERNST

(strong German accent)

So of course I didn't board the steamer, didn't go back to Berlin. My Lotte is almost certainly gone, cursed by Fraulein Riefenstahl's selfish attention to her own needs—the rest of humanity be damned! And of course I betrayed her. Her and her monstrous Reich that stole from me my wife, my little son.

(weeps)

Only eight years old Frank was, Lotte only 33. Leni could have saved them. Some sins cannot be forgiven, cannot be forgotten. If you need proof of my loyalty to America, I give you proof of my betrayal of Leni Riefenstahl.

Lights up on a WOMAN in a tailored, mannish skirt suit as ERNST hands her a tabloid newspaper. The WOMAN is very butch, with short blonde hair and a warm smile.

WOMAN

(Midwest accent)

The Hollywood Tribune?

ERNST

The feature article.

WOMAN

(reading)

How Leni Riefenstahl became Hitler's Girlfriend. Really?

ERNST

She always claims they're not intimate while teasing that they are. It serves her.

WOMAN

So the article's a bit misleading.

ERNST

Just the headline. But I think you'll find the articles demonstrate I'm not a Nazi spy.

WOMAN

Articles? There's more than one?

ERNST

An eleven-part series from April to July, 1939.

WOMAN

Words on a page. The Federal Bureau of Investigation requires more concrete evidence.

ERNST

Words are all I have. *All I do!* I'm a film critic.

WOMAN

Perhaps in Germany, but here in Hollywood, you're apparently just a gossip-monger.

ERNST

It's not gossip--it's the truth.

WOMAN

According to you, Herr Jaeger, a man under arrest and answering questions about overstaying his tourist visa. Your story seems a bit of a concoction, a fantasia, to coin a phrase. How could you know the details of the Walt Disney conversation?

ERNST

Fraulein Riefenstahl told me herself when she came back to the hotel!

WOMAN

Before or after she accused you of extorting her friends?

(he has no response)

In any case, Fraulein Riefenstahl isn't here to defend herself.

ERNST

She's on her knees before Dr. Goebbels begging funds for her epic *Penthesilea*.

WOMAN

You said he tried to rape her.

ERNST

She said it. I have my doubts.

WOMAN

You've painted a damning picture, pretty much calling her a whore--

WOMAN

—And a blackmailer—

ERNST

She's had many lovers, by her own admission--her own pride!

WOMAN

She feigns tears to get her way--

ERNST

I have witnessed this.

WOMAN

And she called your wife a kike cunt?

ERNST

No man would ever say such a thing!

WOMAN

She was right when she accused you of a masculine point of view.
(again, he just looks uncomfortable)
But for all your personal criticism, you still admire her movies?

ERNST

In the *Film-Kurier* I wrote many positive reviews of Riefenstahl's work as a director and as an actress. I championed *The Blue Light* when everywhere else it was--potted--?

WOMAN

Panned?

ERNST

Ja, everywhere panned!

WOMAN

I admire her work as well.

ERNST

You've seen it?

WOMAN

The mountain movies. She's really athletic. Did she do all her own stunts?

ERNST

Ja, a strong woman. Ice and snow suit her.

WOMAN

Do you admire *Olympia*?

ERNST

It is genius. She captures the emotions of the Olympic games, not only the spectators but also the athletes. The exhausted stamina of the marathoner, the slow-motion grace of the divers, the humanity and dignity of the American Negro Jesse Owens. She made of him the star, even when the Nazis ordered her to cut his footage. I despise sport, but *Olympia* made me love it. Even more, *Olympia* made me love the world, gave me hope for peace. But this is a lie, as we saw three months ago when Germany invaded Poland. That is why *Olympia* is ten times the evil of *Triumph of the Will*--its seductive beauty cannot be forgiven.

WOMAN

I love sports! You make me want to see the movie!

ERNST

Triumph of the Will only lied to Germany, *Olympia* lies to the world.

WOMAN

We are not at war with Germany.

ERNST

You will be. Your wife is not yet ex.

WOMAN

Late.

ERNST

My late wife, yes, that is proper, thank you.

WOMAN

You have my deepest sympathy, Herr Jaeger. I hope someday you will find your wife safe and sound. Your son, too.

ERNST

Thank you--Miss--?

WOMAN

Richter. Lorelei Richter.

ERNST

Lorelei?

LORELEI

But you can call me Lora.

Lights out on LORELEI as ERNST stands and changes clothes, a more prosperous look, late 1940s fashion.

ERNST

(light accent, agitated, excited)

I didn't expect the FBI lesbian to believe me, but you do, don't you? Leni told me the whole ridiculous story of Walt Disney, the uneducated American cartoonist outwitting the most brilliant filmmaker in Europe--her olympic ego wouldn't permit her to omit a single slight! In fact, knowing her, every *faux pas* was embellished and dramatized, shot from below to make her look godlike and monumental and Disney a dwarf. Then he spent the war making propaganda cartoons, using her techniques against Hitler. Was I wrong to destroy her name in America?

LOTTE appears, isolated in light. She wears slacks and a blouse that match her sketch in the first scene, but her hair is still the same, long and black, feminine. She looks gorgeous.

LOTTE

No, *mi corazon*, you saved America, and maybe the world.

ERNST

(weeping)

I can hardly speak I'm so overwhelmed to hear from you!

LOTTE

You've spoken rather a lot, my darling, and don't you dare start crying!

ERNST

Of course, of course! Speak, Lotte! Tell me everything! You're alive--I'm afraid to ask--is Frank?

LOTTE

He's here with me in Santiago.

ERNST

Thank God!

LOTTE

Thank someone.

ERNST

What do you mean? Why didn't you contact me sooner?

LOTTE

There was a war between us.

ERNST

But--a letter--a message through friends--? I thought you were dead!

LOTTE

I was in a labor camp, Ernst. They discourage pen pals.

ERNST

A concentration camp?

LOTTE

Slave labor for Petrix Works outside Berlin making batteries from 1938 to 1942. Someone--some influential advocate--got me released for heart trouble and into the hospital, then kept us from being sent to Poland. After the war, I had a pathetic little tailor shop in Wilmerdorf until we came to Chile four months ago.

ERNST

Four months ago! Why are you only calling me now?

While she speaks on the telephone, LOTTE starts changing clothes.

LOTTE

At Petrix we had no protection--toxic gases, heavy metals, cadmium, lead, and they beat us--hoses filled with sand. Apparently Petrix calculated 80 of us would die each month, with a life expectancy of six months from arrival. I stayed alive believing you were in Los Angeles and would send for me and *el pequeño castor* as soon as you were able.

ERNST

I heard nothing! For years!

LOTTE

El pequeño castor is now *el gran castor*, a grown man, out of the apartment presently--engineering class. He still works like a beaver, but no longer little!

ERNST

I can't believe it! You're making me so happy!

Silence.

ERNST

Lotte? Are you there?

LOTTE

Have you remarried, *mi corazon*?

ERNST

Yes...you were...dead...I thought...

LOTTE

What's her name?

ERNST

Mera.

LOTTE

I hope she's not Jewish.

ERNST

I don't know.

LOTTE

You don't know! My dear, you mustn't keep making the same mistakes.

ERNST

Possibly a bit of Jewish ancestry generations back.

LOTTE

Like Leni Riefenstahl.

ERNST

What?

LOTTE

Didn't she tell you she was furious with Goebbels because he had Arnold Raether dig into her genealogy?

ERNST

Arnold Raether! What a thing to remember!

LOTTE

It's relevant, darling, try to recall. Apparently he found a sheeny in the woodpile, Leni's mother's mother was her grandfather's second wife but not actually Leni's grandmother-- her real grandmother was Jewish.

ERNST

She denied it, of course.

LOTTE

But it explains my influential advocate in the government.

ERNST

I begged her to help you and she refused, called you--!

LOTTE

Something she no doubt feared Goebbels might call her. I have no proof who got me out of Petrix and kept me from Poland, but I can't think of anyone else.

ERNST

Her last words to me were vile! Unforgivable!

LOTTE

She did us and many Jews a lot of favors.

ERNST

Not this time! I can't believe it.

LOTTE

One must believe in something, as I believed in you while plating cadmium with nickel oxy-hydroxide and potassium hydroxide.

As she finishes getting ready for bed, LOTTE removes her black wig revealing extremely short hair, patchy or perhaps no hair at all.

ERNST

(weeping)

Lotte, try to forget about that—horror! I'll divorce Mera and bring you and Frank to Hollywood--I'll practice Spanish and fly down to Santiago--

LOTTE

Forget?

LOTTE laughs as charmingly as LENI while she pulls a scarf over her head.

ERNST

I know--I know--

LOTTE

How could you know?

ERNST

We've both been through so much--!

LOTTE

You haven't changed a bit, have you?

LOTTE

You're crying again!

ERNST

My love hasn't changed--

LOTTE

Shhhh, my dear! It's bedtime here--

ERNST

And you'll love Hollywood!

LOTTE

I'm four hours ahead of you.

ERNST

So...*buenas noches?*

LOTTE

¡Hasta siempre!

ERNST

No, no! *¡Hasta la vista!*

LOTTE

¡Hasta siempre, mi corazon!

Lights out on LOTTE but ERNST remains isolated in light. He hesitates, then:

ERNST

To Whom It May Concern: Please accept this as my sworn statement in support of the denazification of Frau Leni Riefenstahl-Jacob. While I was editor of the Berlin *Film-Kurier*, I charted her rise to the top of the film pantheon. From 1933 to 1938 I worked closely with her on all of the films she directed. After I was banned from the Reich Press Corps, she championed me at great risk to herself. Joseph Goebbels and other Party officers denounced her independent and honorable actions toward Jews, Frenchmen, technicians and artists, including her Jewish physician who was barred from practicing medicine by the Reich. Today, her masterpiece, *Olympia*, is shown throughout the United States, not as propaganda, but simply as one of the most inspirational films of all time. I have not been in contact with Frau Riefenstahl since 1938 and write these words without her knowledge.

She was a great artist before Hitler destroyed Germany, and the world awaits her next work of film art. I await her vindication as a filmmaker and a human being with a clean conscience and an open heart. Signed, Ernst Jaeger, Hollywood, July 11, 1948.

Lights out on ERNST and up on LENI, young and full of idealism, almost orgasmic.

LENI

I was struck by lightning! A vision--almost apocalyptic--burned into my soul forever. The earth opened itself before my eyes, a crevasse of infinite depth, and a geyser of water burst forth from below, baptizing the heavens and vibrating the entire planet. I could not move. I was bewitched, spellbound! The first time I heard Adolf Hitler speak—the day of my own rebirth!

LENI gazes at the memory of a torchlit rally as WALT appears in his office at the end of his day with her. She stays in the black-and-white palette, but he and his office are in cheerful Technicolor. He pours himself a Scotch Mist with water. A chord of music, and a light illuminates the red and white book LENI left behind. Another chord of music as WALT sees the book. Two more musical notes as he walks to the book. Another two notes as he picks up the book and opens it. He reads *Mein Kampf* as he walks back to a chair and settles in, fascinated, accompanied by *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* (approximately 2 minutes in as Mickey brings the broom to life), not the *Fantasia* recording! Lights fade on WALT and LENI, each at the beginning of a soul-defining journey.

THE END