

CHARACTERS

MICHAEL: Early 20s.

GISELA [GEE-sah-lah]: Early 20s.

CUTTNER/HOULLEBEC: Late 20s/early 30s.

VON SCHLIEFFEN [SHLEE-fen]/WEIS
[VICE]/LYON [LEE-Own]: 60s.

SCHICKFUSS/FABRICE/BOSCH/VILPON/HELMUT:
Early 20s.

TIME

Act One, scene two takes place in 1911. The rest of the action of the play is set chronologically as follows:

Act One: August 1914 - November 1914 (except Act One, scene One, set in 1918).

Act Two: April 1917 - August 1918.

LANGUAGE

English (without an accent) will be spoken for German unless otherwise specified.

In passages where other languages are spoken translations are provided in parentheses for reference only.

ACT ONE: 13 SCENES

ACT TWO: 14 SCENES

ACT I

SCENE 1: CHIEF OF STAFF HEADQUARTERS - EVENING

August 1918, the last months of World War One. Corporal Schickfuss sits at the entry area to the offices of General Cuttner, Chief of Staff of the German Army.

Michael Weiss enters, holding a weathered knapsack. His overcoat has large blood stains across the bottom. Schickfuss puts on his glasses, flustered.

SCHICKFUSS

Yes? What is it? Who are you?

MICHAEL

I want to see Cuttner.

SCHICKFUSS

He's not here. Who let you in?

MICHAEL

I'm here to see Cuttner.

Schickfuss reaches for a folder on his desk, sees the knapsack and stops.

SCHICKFUSS

What is that? Who are you?

MICHAEL

Weis. These are orders.

Schickfuss opens the folder.

SCHICKFUSS

Weis? Michael Weis?

Schickfuss shakes his head, looking down at the folder.

SCHICKFUSS

Those orders need to be distributed to field generals in the western front in hours. How can you be here?

MICHAEL

I need to see Cuttner.

SCHICKFUSS

Please stop saying that. He's not in.

MICHAEL

I can wait.

SCHICKFUSS

What gives you the right to barge in here and demand a meeting with the General Chief of Staff?

(MICHAEL stares back at him
blankly)

You have been given orders, highly sensitive orders. You were specifically chosen to deliver them. What's happened?

Silence. Michael sits down at a bench against an upstage wall.

SCHICKFUSS

You won't respond?

MICHAEL

I've told you why I'm here. You've asked me not to repeat it.

SCHICKFUSS

This is treason, you understand? Explain yourself.

(Michael says nothing)

I'll call the guards. They'll take you into custody.

Michael is now sitting back, tired.

SCHICKFUSS

What are you doing?

MICHAEL

Waiting for Cuttner.

Schickfuss looks out towards the hallway.

SCHICKFUSS

Landwerhman.

(to MICHAEL)

I'm calling the guards.

(calling back outside)

Landwerman! Reich! Come please! Right now.

Silence. Schickfuss looks at Michael,
who now has his eyes closed.

SCHICKFUSS

What's on your coat?

(gesturing to the blood stain)

Landwehrman!

(no response)

Where are the guards?

(no response)

There are two guards stationed outside this room.

MICHAEL

Landwehrman and Reich.

SCHICKFUSS

Yes, where are they?

MICHAEL

No longer at their post.

SCHICKFUSS

Why- why not?

MICHAEL

Please sit back down.

SCHICKFUSS

You can't intimidate me.

Michael stands up, very close to
Schickfuss. Schickfuss immediately
retreats back to his desk, terrified.
Michael sits back, again closes his
eyes.

SCHICKFUSS

Can you tell me how you got here?

MICHAEL

I walked.

SCHICKFUSS

This is a restricted zone. You cannot simply walk into this compound.

(Michael shrugs)

Why do you want to see Cuttner?

MICHAEL

I have a question about my mission.

SCHICKFUSS

You should have completed the mission first than come back to ask the question.

MICHAEL

I couldn't wait.

He again puts his head back against the wall and tries to sleep. Schickfuss looks down at his folder.

SCHICKFUSS

You've served Germany for four and a half years, you received an Iron Cross, five wound badges. Why, after all that, would you disobey the most critical orders you've received?

Michael reaches into the knapsack and takes out two documents. One is a thin, loosely-bound notebook with an engraved seal that's been broken, and a larger leather-bound book with a gold-embossed insignia on the cover.

He holds up the leather-bound book.

MICHAEL

You know what it is?

SCHICKFUSS

Of course I know what it is.

MICHAEL

We went to war because of this.

SCHICKFUSS

We went to war because there was a threat to the Fatherland.
That was the Plan to meet that threat.

MICHAEL

It's impossible. This could never have worked.

SCHICKFUSS

General Von Schlieffen was the most brilliant military
planner in our nation's history. You think you can judge it
now?

MICHAEL

(gestures to the smaller,
loosely bound document)

And now Cuttner wants to recreate this plan that failed four
years ago with our starving army of half-wits and elderly?

SCHICKFUSS

You had no right to unseal those orders.

Michael picks up both books, holds them
tight against himself and collapses
back in his chair.

MICHAEL

I want to see Cuttner.

SCENE 2: MILITARY SCHOOL, BRANDENBURG - EVENING

Flashback: Fall of 1910.

General Schlieffen is sitting on a
bench, watching training exercises at a
military school for officers. He may
have binoculars. Cuttner enters, stands
before Schlieffen and salutes.

SCHLIEFFEN

You're the fastest in your company.

CUTTNER

Today I was. Fullman beats me some days.

SCHLIEFFEN
(squinting out)
Yes, that little runty one was just behind you.

CUTTNER
Yes, sir.

SCHLIEFFEN
Hm.
(back to Cuttner)
How are your studies? I was told you're the brightest.

CUTTNER
No sir.

SCHLIEFFEN
You dispute this or is this false modesty?

CUTTNER
Not the brightest sir.
(beat)
But the best soldier.

SCHLIEFFEN
The best soldiers are ones that listen quietly, take orders
and let someone else do their thinking for them. Is that what
you are?

CUTTNER
I hope to be a soldier and a strategist like you.

SCHLIEFFEN
Strategists are born, not made.
(looking through binoculars)
Your commander is bow-legged.

CUTTNER
I never noticed.

SCHLIEFFEN
He likes you. Are you good with people?

CUTTNER
Sir?

SCHLIEFFEN
I need someone to handle the people.

CUTTNER

What people, sir?

SCHLIEFFEN

All of them. Ambassadors, diplomats, generals. The young coward Von Moltke especially, he's at me constantly.

He imitates Von Moltke, perhaps sounding a bit like Schickfuss.

SCHLIEFFEN

General, oh, General Von Schlieffen, my uncle respected you so much....

(Cuttner smiles)

I need someone who can make them go away. You would be involved in planning the most important military initiative in our nation's history. You would meet with the most senior members of military staff, possibly the Kaiser.

(beat)

I also need someone to walk me to the bathroom. Does this sound appealing to you?

CUTTNER

Yes sir.

SCHLIEFFEN

The two in the rear can't keep formation. Are they buggers?

CUTTNER

I don't know.

SCHLIEFFEN

Can you keep a secret?

CUTTNER

Yes sir.

Schlieffen looks over Cuttner, assessing this.

SCHLIEFFEN

We may go to war.

(Cuttner smiles slightly)

This is amusing to you?

CUTTNER

No, sir. But I wouldn't consider it a secret.

(Gesturing out to the field)

Most of us feel there will be a war. With respect sir, it's why I'm here.

SCHLIEFFEN

You're here to fight a war?

CUTTNER

Yes, sir.

SCHLIEFFEN

You think we would win this war?

CUTTNER

I do.

SCHLIEFFEN

Why?

CUTTNER

Because our forces are superior. Our will is stronger.

SCHLIEFFEN

What are our weaknesses?

(beat)

None? No challenges we face in this war of yours?

CUTTNER

We may have to face enemies on two fronts simultaneously.

SCHLIEFFEN

Which we cannot do. How can this be avoided?

CUTTNER

(beat)

Set them against each other?

SCHLIEFFEN

Diplomatic trickery. Are you a diplomat?

CUTTNER

No sir.

SCHLIEFFEN

Good. I despise diplomats.

CUTTNER

(smiling slightly)

Yes sir.

SCHLIEFFEN

This is not a joke. Diplomats are the enemy, as much as those on the other side. You understand?

CUTTNER

Yes sir.

SCHLIEFFEN

Good. So we still have our enemies on both sides.

(he gestures out)

Germany is in the center of the parade ground.

(to the left)

To the west is France, hovering over by the schoolyard.

(gesturing to the right)

To the east is Russia, gathering up forces all the way back to your latrines. How can I win a war on two fronts?

CUTTNER

(looking to the right)

We enlist our allies in the east to split the enemy.

SCHLIEFFEN

Untrained and undersupplied. Plus that's more diplomacy.

We've discussed my feelings on diplomacy. How can I defeat two enemies with one army?

CUTTNER

We're better soldiers.

SCHLIEFFEN

Have you seen them in battle?

(Cuttner shakes his head)

Never underestimate your enemy. You've studied Hannibal?

CUTTNER

Yes sir.

SCHLIEFFEN

What do you know of him?

CUTTNER

He defeated the Romans at Cannae.

(beat)

He defeated two armies with one.

SCHLIEFFEN

How?

CUTTNER

By allowing Roman gains then encircling their army.

SCHLIEFFEN

Correct.

CUTTNER

So we draw the Russians in and then use our speed to encircle them and attack their rear and flank--

SCHLIEFFEN

From where? There's no such thing as speed in Siberia. I don't want my army near Russia.

CUTTNER

They have 2 million soldiers, we can't ignore them.

SCHLIEFFEN

Yes we can. And we will. How long would it take Russia to mobilize those 2 million soldiers?

CUTTNER

Six to eight weeks.

SCHLIEFFEN

So then we need to defeat France in six to eight weeks.

While he says this he makes a sweeping motion with his hand right to left.

CUTTNER

(smiling)

Of course.

SCHLIEFFEN

The Russians will not be eager to fight us if France is already out of the war.

CUTTNER

(he sees Schlieffen is serious)

But how can you take France in six weeks?

SCHLIEFFEN

If you work for me you'll find out.

CUTTNER

And what kind of -- help are you looking for?

SCHLIEFFEN

I look like I need help? Do I appear so feeble?

CUTTNER

No sir.

SCHLIEFFEN

Well I do and I am. It's too much work, I'm not well, and there are men who want my job. I need someone to help with the details so that I can finish. I need to convince the Kaiser of the need for a quick surprise attack.

CUTTNER

I have seven months left in officer training school.

SCHLIEFFEN

Is that the height of your ambition then? To become an officer?

(Cuttner shakes his head)

What's your goal, Cuttner, what do you want?

CUTTNER

To lead.

SCHLIEFFEN

To lead what, a company, a battalion?

CUTTNER

The army. To lead the German army to execute your plan and win this war.

SCHLIEFFEN

Good. Very good. You'll learn more next to me in one night than in a year of schooling.

A beat. Schlieffen clarifies.

SCHLEIFFEN

I work at night. I don't sleep.

(Cuttner nods)

You don't speak more than necessary. I like that. I'll talk to your administrator.

SCENE 3: OUTSIDE AUSTRIAN EMBASSY, BERLIN - DAY

August 1914.

A pro-war rally. Officer CUTTNER reads from a sheet of paper.

CUTTNER

"A fateful hour has fallen upon Germany. Envious people on all sides are compelling us to resort to a just defense. And now I command you all to kneel before God and pray to him to help our gallant army."

(He carefully folds the paper)

The Kaiser, eight hours ago at the Reichstag. He looked out to thousands who had been gathered for days, heard their roar and said softly: "Their voices will be heard in heaven."

(beat)

The threat is real. Our enemies have joined together, they do surround us on all sides. But in defending ourselves, we have an opportunity. We know in nature that for the strong to survive is not only necessary, it is progress. If it takes a war to move us forward, to erect a new world order, we will not back away.

(beat)

I had the honor of working with General von Schlieffen. He died creating a strategy to defend us against aggression. In a burst, in weeks, not months, his vision will be realized.

(he looks out to the audience)

To the young men here not enlisted, your families are counting on you. Your girlfriends are counting on you. If you don't have one, get in uniform, you'll have better luck... There could be no more grave responsibility than defending the Fatherland. But there can be no greater honor and glory than helping it to victory. And you, the men who do not wait, you will be its natural leaders, rulers of a remade world.

SCENE 4: GISELA'S ROOM - EVENING

Later the same evening.

Michael and Gisela in her room. Michael is wearing an army uniform, which she is helping to straighten.

GISELA

You have to tell him.

MICHAEL

He won't understand.

GISELA

He won't understand any better if you leave without saying anything.

MICHAEL

He'll lecture me.

GISELA

You'll be polite and say you understand but you've made your choice.

MICHAEL

He lives in the past.

GISELA

He's 76 years old and can hardly walk, you expect him to live for the future?

MICHAEL

How about the present? He sits here reciting Kiddush and drinking cheap wine while crowds just outside the window are ready to march to Paris.

GISELA

What do you think they're like? The French.

MICHAEL

Lazy and effete. They're good for painting pictures of waterlilies and making pastries. And the Russians smell bad.

GISELA

How many Russians have you smelled?

MICHAEL

It's a known fact. Too much hair and sweat.

She shoves him. He kisses her ear.

GISELA

This is not a joke. You're going to war.

MICHAEL

I hope so. The enlistment officer said if we move as quickly as he thinks, only the first units may see battle.

GISELA

Will you be ready?

MICHAEL

(he stiffens his back)

What do you think.

She looks him over. Stands, assumes a drill sergeant pose.

GISELA

Stand at attention, soldier!

(Michael does so)

Name and rank.

MICHAEL

Private Michael Weis, 42nd company, fusilier guards.

GISELA

You'll address me as sir.

MICHAEL

Yes, ma'am, yes sir!

Turns to him sharply but lets it pass.

GISELA

Uniform inspection.

He puffs out his chest, she looks at his uniform carefully, starting at the top: collar, shoulder straps, etc.

GISELA

Well groomed, soldier, you dress yourself?

MICHAEL

Yes, sir!

She's now down to his belt buckle.

GISELA

No help?

MICHAEL

No sir, I dress myself!

She unfastens his belt buckle.

GISELA

Impressive, soldier.

Michael shifts slightly and looks at her hands on him.

GISELA

Did I tell you to stand down?

MICHAEL

(voice more serious)

No.

He goes back to Attention. She toys with the buckle again. He tries to kiss her again.

GISELA

Are you going to disobey an order?

He shakes his head. But then she lets him kiss her, passionately this time. His hands are on her hips. She starts to undo his belt buckle.

Michael stops suddenly. Pulls himself free of her.

MICHAEL

We can't. We'll be married after the war. We can't do this now.

GISELA

(interrupts, embarrassed)

I know, I understand.

Gisela rises and begins straightening up the room, folding clothes.

Michael conceals himself behind a screen and changes, carefully folding his uniform as he takes it off.

MICHAEL

You'll care for him?

GISELA

Of course.

MICHAEL

He'll be difficult.

GISELA

I don't mind.

MICHAEL

He'll lecture you.

GISELA

He's a rabbi, of course he will.

MICHAEL

He's not any more.

Out behind the screen now, he finishes dressing.

GISELA

I'll serve the tea at his pacifist tea parties.

MICHAEL

(looking up sharply)

Not in my house.

GISELA

Oh, what will they do, two retired professors and the little Swiss patent clerk? You think they'll start a revolution in your parlor?

MICHAEL

Gisela, how far do you think I'll go in the army if it's discovered my father is organizing opposition meetings from my house?

GISELA

No one will know.

MICHAEL

(gesturing across the hall)

Mrs. Reinbach sees everything. You think she wouldn't tell? You think she wouldn't love to report a traitorous Jew?

GISELA

He's not a traitor.

MICHAEL

(interrupts her)

That's what they'll say. You need to make him understand, he listens to you.

GISELA

You'll talk to him first?

MICHAEL

I'll leave him a letter.

GISELA

You're ready to face enemy fire but you're too afraid to have a conversation with your father?

MICHAEL

(this stings)

I'm not afraid. It's just pointless. He doesn't listen.

GISELA

Just be patient and don't get him excited.

ERICH

(grudgingly accepting)

Yes. Like talking with a mule.

Gisela picks up his folded uniform,
puts it neatly in a box and hands it to
Michael.

GISELA
You have your orders, soldier.

Michael rolls his eyes in exasperation.

SCENE 5: WEIS'S HOUSE, BERLIN - EVENING

Michael's father Weis sits in a
wheelchair in the living room of his
home. Michael enters, carrying a
garment bag.

MICHAEL
Father.

Weis nods, not looking away from the
window. Michael picks up a small
blanket, puts it over his father's
legs.

MICHAEL
Michael starts making Weis tea. It may
smell bad.

MICHAEL
Father.

WEIS
Yes.

MICHAEL
I have to speak with you.

WEIS
You are speaking with me.

MICHAEL
It's important.

WEIS
Yes, it's very important.

MICHAEL
Don't make fun of me father, this is--

WEIS

I wouldn't argue that it's not important when my only son goes off to war.

(beat)

Why are you going to this war?

MICHAEL

I can't explain it to you if you don't know.

WEIS

Try.

MICHAEL

It's my duty.

WEIS

That's not a reason.

MICHAEL

Duty to the Fatherland isn't a reason?

WEIS

No, it's a slogan, not a reason.

MICHAEL

France and Russia have signed a pact against us. No man with any honor can avoid fighting.

(Stops himself)

No young man--

WEIS

I won't dishonor you then if I don't come with you?

MICHAEL

(smiling)

No.

The tea is ready. Michael brings it to Weis.

MICHAEL

I don't know how you can drink this.

WEIS

It tastes worse than it smells. Doctor is trying to kill me.
(beat)

You know how many Jews there are in France and Russia?

MICHAEL

Father, that doesn't matter--

WEIS

If you kill them, if they kill you, will that matter?

MICHAEL

It matters, but right now we're Germans first. Jews,
Christians second. God of whatever faith will honor us in
battle.

WEIS

"Whatever faith?" There is no such thing as whatever faith.
Du bist a Yid un bay zey vestu shtendik zayn a Yid" [You are
a Jew and to them you will always be a Jew.]

MICHAEL

Tata, herr oyf [Father, stop] I know what I am.

WEIS

Yes, but we mustn't speak our own language.

(a beat)

Deny everything, get yourself baptized like Karl.

MICHAEL

I wouldn't-

WEIS

What, no ambition? They won't take an order from a Jew--

MICHAEL

That may change--

WEIS

(intently)

Bay zay zenen mir nisht mentshn? Farshtayst?

[They don't think we're human. You understand?] We're not
human to them.

MICHAEL

But we are, we're needed. The Kaiser said: "The sword has been thrust in our hands." We don't have a choice.

WEIS

Of course there's a choice! To get that uniform is a choice, to take a rifle and point it at another Jew--

MICHAEL

Father--

WEIS

And it is a choice to object.

MICHAEL

Father, even the synagogue is urging us to unite--

WEIS

(overlapping)

Why, tell me why?

MICHAEL

(overlapping)

Because after the war, there will be no more boundaries. We will all be Germans. God knows our side is right.

WEIS

(again sharply)

God will not choose sides in a war!

(muttering)

Insanity. It is all insanity.

(beat)

I'm sorry. You want to go to war, you will go to war. I'll pray for you. If I'm not here when you come back, I want you to do something for me.

Weis reaches into his pocket, pulls out a small box.

MICHAEL

You'll be here.

WEIS

Give your mother's ring to Gisela.

Weis hands the box to Michael, who
nods.

MICHAEL

I'll be back in a matter of weeks. We'll celebrate together.
We'll all celebrate together.

SCENE 6: MICHAEL'S CANOPY TENT - NIGHT

October, 1914.

A makeshift tent on a road in Belgium.
BOSCH sits across from MICHAEL, who is
cleaning his rifle.

BOSCH

How can you work? I've never been so tired.

MICHAEL

If I can't sleep I'll do this.

BOSCH

Why do we have to move so fast?

(Michael shrugs)

Every day more miles on these packed roads like we're
animals... And now with less rations.

Bosch watches Michael load his weapon.

BOSCH

The lance-corporal said you can load your weapon faster than
any recruit he's ever seen.

MICHAEL

I make a game of it. Do it ten times to a stopwatch. Then do
it ten more, always be faster the next time.

BOSCH

I slip.

MICHAEL

(gesturing to Bosch's rifle)

Keep trying.

Bosch picks up his rifle idly, doesn't make any effort to load it.

BOSCH

What did you see on patrol?

MICHAEL

I told you.

BOSCH

You said we did bad things, you didn't say what or who.

MICHAEL

Men were taking the Belgiun's food, stealing things.

BOSCH

I heard they were taking women. Did you?

MICHAEL

No.

BOSCH

But you saw others take women.

MICHAEL

I saw other men behave dishonorably.

Beat.

BOSCH

You never seem scared.

MICHAEL

There's no point in being scared. You need to remember why we're here... Do you have a girl at home?

Bosch winces, says nothing. Michael smiles.

MICHAEL

What? Is that a yes?

BOSCH

(shaking his head)

There is a girl, but--

MICHAEL

(laughing)

If there's a girl there's a girl. Has she seen you in uniform?

Bosch shakes his head. Silence.

BOSCH

She doesn't know I'm here.

MICHAEL

Why not?

(Bosch's face reddens)

What is it?

BOSCH

I don't want to see her. I don't want to go back to her.

MICHAEL

So, there are other girls.

(Bosch shakes his head)

BOSCH

She's-- she's going to have a child.

Michael looks at Bosch and stands.

MICHAEL

Your child?

(Bosch nods)

You dishonored this girl and went off to war?

Bosch nods, puts his hands on his head.

MICHAEL

Have you spoken to the family?

(Bosch shakes his head)

Get out a pen.

(Bosch doesn't move. Eric paces.)

Get out a pen and paper!

(Bosch does so, confused.)

You'll write her a letter. Announce your intention to marry her when you return.

BOSCH

I don't want to marry her.

MICHAEL

You don't have a choice.

(beat, more softly)

How did you let this happen?

BOSCH

She would come to my father's bakery, smiling at me when I took her order. One day I walked her home. We stopped by the stream and I gave her an apple bun. I told her that I look forward to her coming to the bakery. She blushed and I began touching her and she said to stop but her hands were on me too. I kept thinking we would stop and we didn't. And when we were done she asked me if I loved her and I said yes. And she smiled and said we would be so happy together.

(beat)

The next day when she came in I said nothing to her. She thought I was playing a game and she smiled. But I didn't smile back. And each day I kept asking her order the same way as if I'd never seen her before. Finally she stopped coming. Her friend would come for her and she gave me dirty looks but I didn't mind. Just not to see her face anymore.

A long silence.

MICHAEL

You'll marry her. Write her that you'll marry her.

Bosch shakes his head.

BOSCH

I don't know what to say.

MICHAEL

You've grown up, you're sorry for how you behaved. You'll come home and marry her on your next leave and your child won't be -- you'll be a proper family.

(beat)

Until then you have a friend that will keep you safe.

Bosch shakes his head and writes.

SCENE 7: WEIS'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Weis sits at his chair, drinking wine.
Gisela is doing laundry by hand. The
pile she hasn't started yet is in a bin
next to Weis. He sniffs the clothing.

WEIS

I'm sorry about the smell.

GISELA

It doesn't smell.

WEIS

It's an awful smell. I know it is.

GISELA

It's laundry.

WEIS

You sit in a room by yourself silently and the only thing you
accomplish is to create an odor.

GISELA

(shaking her head)

You accomplish plenty. Too much. I see you writing all the
time--

WEIS

Yes, my manifestos to no one--

GISELA

No one? You have your group--

WEIS

Yes, we sit and lament war while we play bridge for dried
noodles. So what will you do?

GISELA

I'll sort the mail.

WEIS

They have women as mail clerks now?

GISELA

The mail needs to be sorted. Anyway, I heard it should only be a few more weeks.

WEIS

Yes, the biggest armies ever assembled will resolve the matter in a few weeks.

GISELA

You and your pessimists.

WEIS

We're realists surrounded by lunatics. Have some wine.

He pours Gisela a glass of wine.

GISELA

It's early.

WEIS

Wine after lunch is good for the digestion. This may be my last bottle this year. Why do they need to ration wine?

GISELA

Maybe they want us to stay sharp.

WEIS

Who is us?

GISELA

All of us. Berliners, Germans, workers. The factories are working 24 hours. We all need to do our part.

She shakes her head as she goes back to her laundry.

WEIS

It's my wedding day today.

GISELA

Is it?

WEIS

37 years.

She takes the wine and sits down. They toast.

WEIS/GISELA

L'chaim.

GISELA

You should be careful.

WEIS

What, our meetings? You've said yourself that it's harmless.

GISELA

I heard the clerk talking about a petition. You shouldn't use your name.

WEIS

He's not a clerk anymore. He's associate professor of physics at the university.

GISELA

Maybe not for long if he signs a petition.

(beat)

You understand anything we do to protest the war is seen as unpatriotic.

WEIS

Who is we? The Jews? A Jewish pacifist is a traitor?

GISELA

It could make things hard for Michael.

WEIS

How will a petition harm my son's military service?

GISELA

They make lists. Lists of people they think could be a threat. What you do could put Michael on such a list.

WEIS

How do you know this? About lists and what the government does?

GISELA

(shrugs)

I just know.

WEIS

What does your mother think about you working?

GISELA

(smiling)

She hates it but she holds her tongue. We don't have a choice. With my brother gone I have to.

Weis looks up at her.

WEIS

If you need money you tell me.

She sips at her wine.

GISELA

We'll manage.

WEIS

If you two were married you could live here.

GISELA

(she shrugs)

After he comes back.

WEIS

If he comes back.

GISELA

Don't.

She goes back to cleaning.

GISELA

Anyway, he may not want to marry me.

WEIS

What? You're all he thinks about.

GISELA

Things can change.

WEIS

If he comes back in one piece he'll still want to marry you.

GISELA

That last night. Before he left. We-- I think he believes I acted dishonorably.

WEIS

(he dismisses this)

I doubt it. Anyway my son talks too much about honor, he doesn't even know what it means.

(beat)

Is there a -- problem?

GISELA

No! Nothing like that.

WEIS

Good.

Again a pause.

WEIS

Is he a prude, my son?

GISELA

What?

WEIS

I've never talked with him about such things. I always assumed his friends did.

She is blushing.

WEIS

I'm embarrassing you now. We'll stop this.

A beat.

WEIS

Tell your mother to come by and we can discuss it.

Gisela looks horrified. Weis shakes his head and laughs. She gulps the rest of her wine.

SCENE 8: CUTTNER'S TENT - NIGHT

A well-appointed tent near the front in southern Belgium.

Cuttner sits at a desk with a detailed map of Belgium and France behind him, writing a letter.

CUTTNER

...and while I have confidence that my regiment will gain enough ground to reach the outskirts of Liege in 4 days, based on the reports I'm getting our support from the east will not be in position for more than 10 days. As each day passes the enemy is better positioned to defend its border.

(beat)

You know my feelings on Moltke's changes to the troop levels. It now seems clear that these changes are endangering the offensive. Majesty, simply put, the Plan is at risk. I hope and pray the coming two weeks proves me wrong. I remain your humble servant.

As Cuttner seals the letter, Schickfuss enters, terrified. He salutes Cuttner.

SCHICKFUSS

You wanted to see me sir.

CUTTNER

I did. Sit.

Schickfuss sits uncomfortably as Cuttner brings out a small file.

CUTTNER

The corporal tells me you're the worst soldier in my regiment.

SCHICKFUSS

Yes sir.

CUTTNER

They say you're smart and loyal but you can barely hold up a rifle and you wet yourself any time you hear artillery.

SCHICKFUSS

Yes sir.

CUTTNER

You must have to change a lot.

SCHICKFUSS

They put me on laundry detail.

Cuttner reads from his file.

CUTTNER

Well, sometimes we can't do anything with truly poor soldiers but promote them. I need an assistant. Can you type?

SCHICKFUSS

Yes sir.

CUTTNER

You type, you do laundry, if you can cook I might marry you.

(looks up from file)

Would you be able to control your bladder if you met the Kaiser?

SCHICKFUSS

The Kaiser?

CUTTNER

Yes, you'll meet important people if you work with me, I can't be worried about your continence.

SCHICKFUSS

No, sir. The Kaiser, sir?

CUTTNER

I was Von Schlieffen's assistant before he died. The Kaiser has asked me to report to him on whether the plan is being executed as the General intended.

(he gestures to the letter)

I write him a report three times a week.

Schickfuss stares at the letter, maybe trying to peak at the seal. Cuttner smiles, hands it to him.

SCHICKFUSS

What, if I can ask sir, what have you told him?

Cuttner looks at Schickfuss.

CUTTNER

I would fight the war differently. With luck you'll see how someday.

(gestures to the desk without
looking)

For now there's some mail on the desk to be sorted.

Schickfuss hesitates.

SCHICKFUSS

So I'm to start now?

CUTTNER

Do you have other offers?

SCHICKFUSS

No sir. Thank you sir.

CUTTNER

Good, I'm going to lunch. Have them done when I'm back.

Schickfuss goes to the desk and starts
sorting the mail, grinning.

SCENE 9: GENERAL STAFF HEADQUARTERS, BERLIN: MESS HALL

November, 1914.

Gisela is sitting by herself, reading a
book while eating. Cuttner enters,
stops in front of her.

CUTTNER

Since when do they let women into the officer's mess hall?

GISELA

I don't know. I was told by my supervisor this is where I
should take my dinner.

CUTTNER

Who's your supervisor?

GISELA

Guttman.

CUTTNER

Never heard of him. What is he?

GISELA

He's the director of military postal operations.

CUTTNER

So he's a mailman.

GISELA

Supervisor to mailmen, yes. It's an important position.

CUTTNER

A mailman in wartime. His family must be very proud.

He sits down.

CUTTNER

May I?

She shrugs.

GISELA

It's necessary.

CUTTNER

So is latrine cleaning, doesn't mean it's a position of honor.

GISELA

It is. I believe it is.

CUTTNER

So then you're a mail woman?

GISELA

I'm Guttman's assistant. I do whatever is needed.

CUTTNER

Sort mail?

GISELA

Review its contents before it passes through.

CUTTNER

So you're a censor?

(she nods)

They give such jobs to Jewesses?

She stops, looks at Cuttner.

GISELA

I'm the best worker in my office.

CUTTNER

What's to say you won't pass on secrets to the enemy?

GISELA

Why should a Jew be more likely to pass secrets?

CUTTNER

(overlapping)

Than a true German?

GISELA

(overlapping)

I am a true German.

CUTTNER

(overlapping)

No. I'm a German. The Kaiser is a German. You're a Jew who lives in Germany.

GISELA

Then why am I here, why is my fiancé at the front--

CUTTNER

-- yes, and the rabbis talk of a united front, we're all Germans. Nonsense. You are not us. It's not an insult, it's a fact.

GISELA

The Kaiser himself said "I see no more parties, only Germans."

CUTTNER

I know his feelings on the matter, I can tell you he sees a difference between Germans and Jews. He approved the Census.

GISELA

What census?

CUTTNER

They will count the Jews. Find out how many are serving in the army, how many are profiteering, how many are suspected of treason. A count.

GISELA

Why?

CUTTNER

So that we know. And if the threat is clear as suspected we can take whatever actions necessary to prevent losing the war to those from the inside.

GISELA

What kind of actions?

CUTTNER

I don't know. Restricting access for Jews to sensitive information. Like mail.

Gisela says nothing. Cuttner smiles.

CUTTNER

I suppose you think I'm rude.

(extends his hand)

I'm Cuttner.

She shakes his hand quickly.

GISELA

The Colonel.

CUTTNER

You've heard of me?

(she shrugs)

What have you heard?

GISELA

That you're young to have such a high rank.

CUTTNER

What else?

GISELA

You've risen quickly, you came to Central Command just before the war, no one knows how you reached your rank or what you do.

CUTTNER

So I'm a mystery?

GISELA

(she shrugs)

Why aren't you at the front?

CUTTNER

The Kaiser wanted to speak with me about the offensive.

GISELA

The Kaiser asked for you?

CUTTNER

Is that hard for you to believe?

GISELA

Yes.

CUTTNER

So you think I'm lying?

GISELA

Either way you're not at the front.

CUTTNER

I'm on my way back... How do you know what to censor?

GISELA

We're given guidelines.

CUTTNER

Such as?

GISELA

No names, no locations, no references to battles, mention of injuries--

CUTTNER

They can't talk about injuries?

GISELA

No.

CUTTNER

Why?

GISELA

Say a young man complains in a letter to his mother that his feet are sore from marching and pine tree needles stick through the holes in his boots. When it gets home his Communist brother passes it on to the enemy who can infer from the terrain that we are moving troops through the Northwest territories of Belgium.

CUTTNER

Good. You enjoy your work?

GISELA

It's necessary. Even if it's not a position of honor.

He smiles. Silence. They eat.

CUTTNER

Your clothes are plain. Are you poor or humble?

GISELA

Both.

CUTTNER

I don't believe it. You're too pretty to be humble.

GISELA

So tell me really. How are you here?

(he smiles)

You have a rich uncle who got you a safe desk job?

CUTTNER

I have no uncles and I'll be leading an attack in Liege in 48 hours.

(he rises)

What's your name?

GISELA

Troyer. Gisela Troyer.

CUTTNER

I'll send you a letter from the front Miss Troyer. You may censor it as you wish.

SCENE 10: A FORTRESS IN LIEGE, BELGIUM - NIGHT

November, 1914.

MICHAEL is in a cramped room in an old fortress that has been used as a hotel. His uniform and hair are filthy. He sits with a pen and some scraps of paper on the floor, drafting a letter.

MICHAEL

Father, I won't die here. I won't die in a broken down hotel in Liege.

(looking around him)

It's an old fortress which they made into a hotel and now it's a fortress again. A good one. It's about a half-mile off the road behind some deep woods. So when the lance-corporal gave the signal we couldn't see it. We ran and the soldier with me-

(beat, softly)

The one I'd written you about. He was so scared he was stumbling. I picked him up just as we came to the corner of the brush and there it was. All stone, surrounded by its moat with the little drawbridge. From a storybook.

(smiling)

But of course as soon as we could see it they could see us. The boy fell instantly, I thought he'd stumbled again, but realized the others were all falling as well. I didn't stop for him. I just ran and kept running and couldn't believe I was still standing until I was in the water.

(deep breath)

I went down quickly. My pack felt full of bricks under water. I got it off and grabbed onto an iron grate, which I climbed rung by rung. There was barbed wire at the top and my leg got caught. I felt no pain but the water turned red around me as I ripped it free. When I found air I was below a sewage drain. I gathered myself up and climbed in.

I won't be rude with my language but the smell...

(he looks down at the pieces of
paper in front of him)

If you ever get this letter I'm afraid you might get a sense
of it.

A long pause.

MICHAEL

I said I would protect him. I had him write to his girl. Her
child will be... Can you imagine a worse thing?

Beat. He looks up at the door to the
room.

MICHAEL

A guard passes by this room every ten minutes. Every exit is
covered, I have no weapon, and I've lost a lot of blood in my
leg. But if I surrender, father, I'll find my way back to my
company once I'm healed. I won't be a prisoner.

SCENE 11: FORTRESS IN LIEGE, BELGIUM - NIGHT

November 1914

The tower of the Liege fortress. Three
French soldiers in a small room with
one narrow window.

LYON and FABRICE are helping and
injured soldier, HOULLEBEC, walk across
the room.

There are two rifles up against a wall.

LYON

Can you put weight on it?

HOULLEBEC

Yes, let me walk.

LYON

No, rest now.

He helps Houllebec down, gingerly. So
Lyon may be kneeling.

LYON
(to Fabrice)
Get him some water.

Fabrice starts to walk away from them
to get water.

MICHAEL enters. He spits the word out.

MICHAEL
Surrender.

LYON
(overlapping)
Who is it?

FABRICE
(overlapping, a gasp of fear)
Shit.

MICHAEL
(annoyed)
Uh, capitule. You understand?

Lyon is closest to Michael. He glances
at the rifles, which are on Michael's
side of the room.

Michael moves up to Lyon's face.

MICHAEL
Capitule!

LYON looks at Fabrice and nods his
head.

LYON
Capitule (Surrender).

MICHAEL stares, at first confused. But
then quickly gathers the weapons,
gestures to Fabrice to move.

MICHAEL
Move. Move to the others, you understand?

FABRICE
(very slight French accent)
Yes, I understand.

He gets up slowly and moves towards the others.

MICHAEL

(gesturing to Houllebec)

Can he move?

FABRICE

A little. We're waiting for a medic.

Michael takes Houllebec's rifle. He puts all the rifles but one behind him.

LYON

(to FABRICE)

Demande-lui ous sont ses troupes. [Ask him where his troops are.]

FABRICE

He wants to know where is rest of your company.

MICHAEL

They're downstairs. Tell him to be quiet.

MICHAEL moves to the downstage position where Fabrice started the scene. He takes out a flashlight and begins making signals out the window.

FABRICE

What are you doing? If you have troops downstairs why do you need to signal?

MICHAEL doesn't answer.

FABRICE

(to Lyon)

Il envoie un signal. Je ne pense pas qu'il a des troupes avec lui. [He's sending a signal. I don't think he has troops with him.]

MICHAEL

(overlapping)

My troops are downstairs. No more French.

LYON

(in French, overlapping)

Demande-lui ous sont ses troupes! [Ask him where his troops are!]

MICHAEL aims his rifle at Lyon but speaks to Fabrice.

MICHAEL

No more French! Tell him that his men will be treated well as prisoners but I will shoot any man who moves from his position and if he continues speaking I will shoot him first.

FABRICE

(in French)

Il dit de ferme la bouche ou il va tirer. [He says shut up or he'll shoot.]

MICHAEL looks at him, as if questioning the shortness of the translation.

He lowers the weapon and sits back down, looking out the window.

MICHAEL

Your German is good.

FABRICE

I'm from near Alsace, it can't be avoided.

(Fabrice looks at the blood on
MICHAEL's leg)

Is it bad? Your leg?

No response. Michael rubs down the rifle with his handkerchief.

MICHAEL

Your rifles are heavy.

FABRICE

And they jam frequently.

MICHAEL

Your people should stick to making cheese.

FABRICE

That gun killed many of your friends.

MICHAEL flinches slightly at this.

FABRICE

Looks like you've lost a lot of blood.

MICHAEL again looks out the window.
Fabrice looks that way as well.

LYON

(mutters to himself in French)

J'ai recu douze hommes. J'ai dit que j'avais besoin de plus
pour proteger le sud. [I get twelve men. I said I needed more
to protect the south.]

MICHAEL

Tell him to be quiet.

FABRICE

You're the one who fell in the water. I thought you would be
dead.

LYON

Que dis-tu? [What are you saying?]

MICHAEL

Tell him to be quiet.

FABRICE

You came here to surrender to us. That's what you meant.

(to Lyon)

Il n'a pas de soldats avec lui, tu le cul. Il est seul. [He
has no troops with him, you ass. He's alone.]

MICHAEL turns to Fabrice.

MICHAEL

Shut up.

FABRICE

You're watching outside hoping for another company.

MICHAEL raises his weapon.

MICHAEL

I said shut up.

Silence. Fabrice speaks more quietly,
almost confidentially.

FABRICE

The medic will be here soon, along with our replacements.
You think you can hold this position by yourself?

MICHAEL stares out the window.

FABRICE

You see anything out there?

MICHAEL nods off, quickly wakes himself
up. Lyon sees this.

LYON

Dormait-il? [Was he sleeping?]

FABRICE

(in French, overlapping)

S'il est seul, nous trois pouvons le désarmer. Sois pret.
[He's alone, there's no one with him. And he's injured.]

Lyon quietly rouses Houllebec.

MICHAEL

(overlapping)

I'm not alone, don't tell him that.

HOULLEBEC

Qu'oi? Qu'est-ce qui se passe? [What, what
is it?

Lyon shushes him.

LYON

Un Allemand, regarde. [A German.]

MICHAEL raises his weapon.

MICHAEL

Tell him to shut up.

FABRICE

(overlapping)

We don't think anyone is coming for you.

LYON

S'il est seul, nous trois pouvons le désarmer. En garde.

[If he's alone, the three of us can disarm him. Be ready.]

FABRICE

Pourquoi nous embetons? Trop de risque. Nous devons attendre.

Il va s'évanouir. [Why bother? Too much risk, we should wait.

He'll pass out.]

MICHAEL

(to Fabrice, overlapping)

Tell him the first man that moves will be shot. Tell him,
tell him now.

LYON

(overlapping)

Saisis-lui. Saisis-lui maintenant! [Take him, overtake him
now!]

Lyon stands and rushes towards MICHAEL,
Houllébec follows, limping badly.
Michael quickly fires two shots in
succession, immediately killing
Houllébec. Lyon grabs at his neck,
howls in pain.

Fabrice stares at him, horrified, but
doesn't move. MICHAEL sits back in his
chair at the window. Lyon writhes on
the floor silently now, his upper body
soaked in blood.

MICHAEL

You didn't move.

FABRICE

You told me not to.

MICHAEL

You take orders from an enemy soldier instead of your
commanding officer?

FABRICE

I take orders from whoever is holding a gun at me.

MICHAEL

This is why your side will lose.

Lyon has rolled over close to MICHAEL. He grabs his leg with his hand tightly, as if trying to say something.

MICHAEL shoots him in the chest. Lyon slumps down. Fabrice stares at Lyon's body. He turns to MICHAEL.

FABRICE

You can't hold this position, it's not possible.

MICHAEL shrugs and again aims his flashlight outside at the window.

Lights down on the rest of the scene. Michael remains at the downstage position, staring out the window. He might drift off to sleep at points.

Lights up on Gisela at another part of the stage.

SCENE 12: GISELA'S ROOM - NIGHT

GISELA

Colonel Cuttner. I received your letter. I would not bother to censor such a letter going back home, I would simply destroy it. As I have done with yours. You talk of your meetings with the Kaiser, I wonder how he would think to know his senior officers write indecent poems for Jewesses. It made me laugh despite myself. I don't want to know how you learned of my mother's fondness for anisette cookies and my father's favorite brand of pipe tobacco. Both were appreciated but don't do it again. I haven't earned them and have nothing to offer in return.

(beat)

I didn't realize you commanded 42nd company. My fiancée is under your command. You mention an offensive.

Of course you can't tell me details, but we haven't received a letter from him this week. If there's anything you can find out, anything you can do, I would be in your debt.

Lights down on Gisela. MICHAEL remains on stage.

SCENE 13: CUTTNER'S QUARTER'S, BELGIUM - NIGHT

Schickfuss next to Cuttner's bed, tentatively trying to wake him.

SCHICKFUSS

(whisper)

Sir.

(louder whisper)

Sir, request permission to wake you up.

Beat.

CUTTNER

Denied.

SCHICKFUSS

Sir. It's urgent.

Cuttner rolls over and sits up, bare chested.

CUTTNER

What.

SCHICKFUSS

42nd company has an opportunity to gain ground.

CUTTNER

I ordered the 42nd to retreat.

SCHICKFUSS

They started to, but one of the soldiers penetrated the Arreps fortress just west of Liege.

CUTTNER

One?

SCHICKFUSS

Yes. He's sending light signals saying he has control of the tower there.

CUTTNER

That's one of the strongest defensive positions in the quadrant, it couldn't be held by one soldier.

He rises, puts a shirt on.

SCHICKFUSS

The lance-corporal wants permission to move forward to control the fortress.

CUTTNER

Denied. 42nd comes back here. But update the map showing they made it to Arreps.

(glancing back at his map)

Means we penetrated further than any regiment in our quadrant.

SCHICKFUSS

With respect sir, what difference does it make if we're retreating?

CUTTNER

It means I covered more ground with fewer men than any Colonel on the western front.

Cuttner motions to his boots, which Schickfuss puts on Cuttner's feet.

SCHICKFUSS

What about the soldier?

CUTTNER

What?

SCHICKFUSS

There's a soldier just a few miles west in enemy territory, waiting for our signal. What should he be told?

CUTTNER

Nothing.

SCHICKFUSS

We leave him then?

CUTTNER

Should I send back a message outlining the timing of my pullback? Give information to the enemy to save one soldier?

SCHICKFUSS

(beat)

I don't know.

CUTTNER

That's why you're not in combat. The soldier stays. 42nd comes back.

Lights down on Cuttner and Schickfuss.
Lights up on MICHAEL, awake now.

He is dressing himself in one of the French soldier's uniforms.

MICHAEL

Father. I'm hungry and cold and more tired than I have ever been. I want you to come here and give me a cup of milk and put me on your shoulders and take me up to bed... They must have seen my signals but they retreated anyway. So now I will put on a uniform of a dead Frenchman and hope to find my way out. This isn't what I thought, father. This isn't what any of us thought.

He checks his uniform (which may not fit properly). He holds his weapon warily and turns to make his way out of the fortress turret.

Blackout.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

SCENE 1: CUTTNER'S QUARTERS, BERLIN - NIGHT

April 1917. Three years later.

Cuttner is now a General, his quarters are more lavish.

Cuttner is sitting up in his bed, bare chested. He's reading a letter, and has another one next to him. Gisela is at the foot of the bed, with another letter. Her face has hardened.

Cuttner shakes his head as he looks at the letter he's reading.

CUTTNER

Hear how he grovels: "Excellency. Of course I wish I could bring you victory more quickly, but we must wait until we are in a position of strength..." Yes, wait until the blockade starves our army completely. "Morale remains high."

(he laughs)

For traitors, Jews and spies, maybe.

(Gisela looks up)

No offense to present company, my dear.

GISELA

None taken. Are you finished?

CUTTNER

No, I haven't even looked at the one to his wife.

GISELA

Why do you need to, it's personal.

CUTTNER

Exactly. Much more likely he'll say something honest.

Cuttner opens the letter.

GISELA

You cannot say or do anything that could show you read a private letter.

CUTTNER

(already reading, maybe
annoyed)

I won't....He dares to talk of surrender.

GISELA

You can't say anything about that. He'll know someone stole his mail if you do.

As she's speaking he starts writing notes, apparently copying from the letter.

CUTTNER

I won't. The Commander of forces is thinking about surrender. This is close to treason, you understand?

Gisela isn't listening, engrossed in the letter from Michael.

GISELA

Oh my God.

CUTTNER

From Michael?

(she nods)

Is he not well?

GISELA

I think he's losing his mind.

CUTTNER

He's been in combat three years, it wouldn't be surprising.

Cuttner moves down the bed, close to her. He touches her hair, then abruptly snatches the letter from her hand and stands. She jumps up.

GISELA

Give it back.

CUTTNER

How can I help him if I don't know what's wrong with him?

He walks away, reading she follows him and tries to get it back. He avoids her.

GISELA

You have no right.

CUTTNER

"What we almost did."

(to Gisela)

Almost?

(smiling now)

Oh the poor boy.

(looking at Gisela)

You'll bring me these.

GISELA

What?

CUTTNER

His letters. You asked for help, this is what I need from you. Read this one now.

GISELA

No.

CUTTNER

It's not a request. Read.

Gisela reads the letter outloud.

GISELA

I killed 200 men last night. At least.

As she reads, lights up on Michael,
drafting a letter from a trench.

GISELA

The raid was pathetic. Yesterday, four or five gunners kept firing at a soldier who had died slumped against a wire fence. They shot until he was headless, his body a folded mass of bullets.

GISELA/MICHAEL

The commanders just watched.

MICHAEL

The night before my first patrol I told a soldier about you. About what we almost did the night before I left.

Michael starts reading the letter
himself.

MICHAEL

I thought he would be shocked, but he laughed and laughed. He said the next time we were at billets he would take me to a brothel so I wouldn't die still a child. I said I wouldn't and he told me I didn't have a choice. I couldn't sleep that night, not because of my first patrol but because of his promise. The next morning a half hour after we ate our breakfast together I watched as a piece of shrapnel from a shell tore through his neck. I was relieved.

(a whisper)

I think about you. In-- indecent ways. I don't know why these things come into my head. I write them in letters to you that I'll never post.

Lights down on Michael, back up on
Gisela and Cuttner. Cuttner is now
close behind her.

CUTTNER

What types of indecent ways do you think he thinks about you?

Cuttner touches Gisela at the waist or
shoulders.

CUTTNER

If he only knew.

SCENE 2: WEIS'S HOUSE - DAY

September 1917.

Weis is at his desk, which is cluttered now with documents and copies of a pamphlet.

Gisela enters with a bag of groceries. She sees him, shakes her head.

GISELA

I told you it has to stop.

WEIS

You did.

GISELA

So you're ignoring me.

WEIS

No, I'm openly defying you.

GISELA

They will come here and take you away.

WEIS

The army has bigger problems.

GISELA

I'm telling you they will. I know.

WEIS

How do you know?

Silence. Gisela won't say more. She starts to put away the groceries. Weis begins to straighten his desk.

WEIS

How is Leah?

GISELA

Her husband is dead, how would she be?

WEIS
(nods absently)

Yes, right.

GISELA
You forgot my sister's husband died?

WEIS
No, no, Joshua. You told me.

GISELA
The wine is taking your memory.

Gisela takes a bottle of wine from the groceries and puts it on his desk. He looks at it, shakes his head.

WEIS
How do you do it? My friends are waiting hours for stale bread.

GISELA
(she shrugs)
She's one of those now, the widows.

WEIS
Who's one of what?

GISELA
My sister, she looks down on me. They all do. The wives of the dead and the injured.

WEIS
They look down on you?

GISELA
That's how it feels.

WEIS
That's insane. He's lucky, we hope he stays lucky.

GISELA
I know. But when he keeps surviving, with so many others are dying around him, it makes me feel like a witch.

WEIS

And this is why you don't return his letters.

GISELA

I'd say the wrong thing.

WEIS

What wrong thing?

GISELA

If he knew all the things I've thought and done since he's been gone it would kill him.

WEIS

Why would you do that? I was married 28 years, you think I told my wife everything I thought and did?

GISELA

You kept things from her?

WEIS

(first word in Yiddish)

Avade (of course!)

(back to English)

Did I keep things. Who doesn't? I'm sure she kept things from me. Did I want to hear every bad thing in her head? You write him a letter. Tell him how bad his father smells. He'll appreciate that.

She's finished with the groceries, sits across from him and touches his arm gently.

GISELA

They're taking your friends away.

WEIS

What?

GISELA

The petition signers, they'll be charged with treason.

WEIS

But not me?

She shakes her head.

GISELA

But you must stop, you mustn't try to keep printing.

WEIS

You're protecting me somehow.

GISELA

It doesn't matter.

WEIS

It does. How can you keep me safe? The same way you've been able to bring me wine and cured meats the stores haven't had in two years?

Long beat. Weis considers this, looks at the bottle of wine.

WEIS

Don't bring it anymore. You're always welcome, but I don't want that here.

He pushes the bottle of wine towards her. She takes it, holds it tightly.

SCENE 3: A TRENCH - NIGHT

September, 1917.

MICHAEL is asleep, his body twisted in an unnatural position. His shirt is soaked in blood by his shoulder. VILPON, a French soldier, has a rifle at his side. He stares at MICHAEL as he stirs. There is a plate with sausage and bread between them.

MICHAEL wakes up, looks at his surroundings briefly, barely registers the presence of Vilpon before looking at his shoulder. He wordlessly takes off his uniform, not grimacing but clearly in great pain. He begins to make a tourniquet.

NOTE: Vilpon speaks with a heavy accent when he's not speaking French.

VILPON

Il a cessé de saigner il ya quelques minutes.
[It stopped bleeding a few minutes ago.]

MICHAEL looks at Vilpon, back at the wound, continues making the tourniquet.

VILPON

Vous n'etes pas a la maison, vous comprenez? [You're not home. You understand?]

(Silence. Vilpon gestures to the trench they're in.)

France.

MICHAEL

(looking around him)

Yes, France. A weak trench. Any artillery hit would have brought this down.

VILPON

Vous voulez savoir ce qui c'est passé dans la bataille? [You want to know what happened in the battle?]

MICHAEL

Battle? I'm a prisoner in your trench, I can guess what happened in the battle.

VILPON

Prisonnier?

(beat)

No. No prisonnier.

Michael shrugs, silence.

VILPON

D'autres hommes tombent. Vous ne tomberiez pas. [Other men fall. You would not fall.] You would not fall.

(beat)

Vous ne tomberiez pas, comment pourriez-vous rester? Il a semblé que nos balles sont allés travers de vous.
[You wouldn't fall, how could you stay up? It seemed like our bullets went through you.] The bullets went through you.

Michael shrugs.

Vilpon mimes a gun that won't fire.

VILPON

Trois fusils de ce genre. [Three guns like this.]

(points to a place just in
front of the trench)

Finalement [finally], I shoot, you fall.

(beat, slight smile)

Je vous ai salué. [I bowed to you.]

He bows to Michael.

MICHAEL

You bowed to me?

VILPON

Oui. Bowed.

He gestures to another part of the
trench further down the line.

VILPON

Mes amis, ils ont ri. [My friends, they all laughed]

MICHAEL

I'm glad it was so entertaining for you.

VILPON

Vous ne vous arreteriez pas, meme alors. Vous avez rampé.
[You would not stop, even then. You crawled.]

He mimes crawling.

MICHAEL

That's what I'm supposed to do.

VILPON

Vous etes un fantome. [You are... a ghost]

MICHAEL

Fantome? A ghost.

VILPON

(nodding)

A ghost.

(long beat)

Si vous restiez a terre, vous vivriez. [If you stayed down
you would live.]

(beat, he mimes staying down,
head covered)

Vous vivez. [You live.]

MICHAEL

I'm not living now?

VILPON

(shaking his head)

I take no prisoner. You understand?

(he holds onto his weapon)

Only, first. One question.

MICHAEL

May I have your sausage?

VILPON

(impatient)

Je ne prends aucun prisonnier. [I take no prisoner.]

MICHAEL

No prisoner, I understand, I still want your sausage.

VILPON

(miming dragging MICHAEL)

Je vous ai pris ici pour répondre à ma question. [I took you
here to answer my question.]

MICHAEL

What's your question?

VILPON

(beat)

Pourquoi? Pourquoi n'avez-vous pas arrêté? [Why? Why didn't
you stop?]

MICHAEL

Let me have your sausage then I'll tell you.

VILPON

Comment pouvez vous manger si vous savez que vous allez mourir? [How can you eat if you know you're going to die?]

Vilpon again grabs at his weapon on the word "mourir", gesturing to MICHAEL.

MICHAEL takes the sausage and begins eating. Vilpon doesn't stop him.

MICHAEL

If you kill me it doesn't make a difference whether I've eaten. If you don't then I won't be so hungry.

Vilpon mimes bullets passing through a body.

VILPON

Les balles passant par vous, les armes grippant. Je n'ai jamais vu telle chance. [Bullets going through you, weapons jamming. I've never seen such luck.]

MICHAEL

Chance?

(beat)

You're saying I was lucky?

VILPON

Lucky.

MICHAEL

I don't believe in luck. There's a reason.

VILPON

Reason?

MICHAEL

A reason, there's a purpose. I'm still alive for a reason.

VILPON

Quelle raison? [What reason?]

MICHAEL

(gestures to the sky)

God wouldn't let this all be without a reason.

VILPON

God? Dieu? Dieu a une raison? [God has a reason?]

(gesturing around him)

Pour tout ceci, une raison? [For all this, a reason?]

(gesturing out to the battle
field)

Il permet mon meilleur ami d'exploser, pas dix pieds de moi.

[He'll let my best friend be blown in half, 10 feet from me.]

(staring at MICHAEL)

My only friend. What reason?

MICHAEL

I don't know. But this has happened to me before. You understand? Many times.

VILPON

Qu'est ce que tu veux dire? [What do you mean?]

MICHAEL

When our army moved through Belgium--

VILPON

(overlapping)

Violo la Belgique [Violated Belgium.]

MICHAEL

I gained control of a fortress and held it by myself for 36 hours.

(in French)

Thirty six hours. Tout seul. (Thirty six hours. By myself.)

(beat)

When I came back I found out my entire company was killed except me. 61 men.

(in French)

Sixty one.

(back to English)

It's been this way ever since. I survive.

VILPON

C'est quoi..."came back?" [What is came back?]

MICHAEL

What?

VILPON

You win a fortress, you say?

MICHAEL

Yes.

VILPON

Que c'est il passe? Apres 36 heures. [What happened to it? After this 36 hours.]

Beat.

MICHAEL

Nothing. They never got my signals to advance. My company pulled back. I saw the retreat from the fortress--
(he cuts off)

VILPON

Et puis? Qu'est ce que tu as fait? [So what? What did you do?]

MICHAEL

I left.

(murmurs)

I left the way I came in.

VILPON

Donc tu es retourner a travers tout les corps de tes soldats, qui ont mourrit pour rien. What reason? [So you went back over the bodies of your fellow soldiers, who died for nothing. What reason?]

MICHAEL

They died for their country.

VILPON

61 die. You live?

(MICHAEL nods. Silence. A fierce whisper.)

Vous etes maudit. [You are cursed.]

MICHAEL

Maudit?

VILPON
(gestures to the sky, then
points to MICHAEL)
Dieu vous a maudi. [God has cursed you.]

MICHAEL
Cursed.

VILPON
Oui. Cursed. Pour voir ceci. [To see this.]

MICHAEL narrows his eyes, taking in the
possibility. He shakes his head.

MICHAEL
There's a purpose.

Vilpon takes out his rifle.

VILPON
Il n'y a aucun dessein. Aucun. [There is no purpose. None.]

He's shaking with rage, puts the rifle
to MICHAEL's temple.

VILPON
No purpose. Dites-le! [Say it!]

MICHAEL watches him, calm.

MICHAEL
For you, no. There is no purpose.

MICHAEL gently pushes the rifle away
from his head, then takes it from
Vilpon's hands. He picks up several
rounds of ammunition lying next to him.
Vilpon stares at MICHAEL wordlessly,
breathing heavily. MICHAEL exits.
Blackout.

SCENE 4: CUTTNER'S QUARTERS - NIGHT

October, 1917.

Cuttner is dictating a letter,
Schickfuss scribbles furiously.

CUTTNER

Majesty, to speak plainly the men have no faith in General
Von Moltke's leadership. And he has lost faith in them.

Cuttner pulls out an opened letter. The
envelope has a German insignia on it.

CUTTNER

I've been given a letter Von Moltke posted to his wife after
the last failed offensive at Somme.

(to Schickfuss)

Begin quote.

Cuttner reads aloud from the letter,
savoring the words.

Darling.

(mocking grin to Schickfuss)

Another division of Americans have landed. My officers report
with envy that they appear fresh, well-fed while ours are
like sickly dogs. I can only think about the end, the terms
of surrender, what will be my role? The Kaiser is not
prepared to speak of it." End quote.

He puts down the letter, smiling.

CUTTNER

It's difficult for me to share these words with you.

(beat)

But I reject his thesis. We're at a turning point. With one
bold action we can recapture the momentum: Recreate
Schlieffen's plan. Gather all our forces in the north and
create a wedge to give us access to the sea.

(beat)

Von Moltke shows no faith. No faith in his men, in your
authority, in God's will. His time is past, sir, our time is
still to come.

Cuttner lets his words hang in the air,
enjoying them. Schickfuss finishes
copying, looks up, eyes full of fear.

SCHICKFUSS

How can we send this?

CUTTNER

You place a seal over it and send it. Then it will be sent.

SCHICKFUSS

Where did you get Von Moltke's letter?

CUTTNER

I'm on good terms with my postman.

SCHICKFUSS

What if Von Moltke saw this?

CUTTNER

He'd have me shot. You too just for good measure.

Long pause. Schickfuss is speechless.

SCHICKFUSS

So do you really think it will work?

CUTTNER

Yes. When the Kaiser hears what Von Moltke has said he will never trust him again.

SCHICKFUSS

I mean recreating Schlieffen's plan now. Can it work?

CUTTNER

That's not the point right now.

SCHICKFUSS

When will it be the point?

Cuttner turns to look at Schickfuss.

CUTTNER

When I'm in command of the army. Do you have something to say about my proposal to the Kaiser?

SCHICKFUSS

(stammering)

It's -- It's difficult to imagine, given the state of our army, getting that number of troops to the north and sustaining an offensive.

CUTTNER

Correct. Near impossible. But to win the war I need supplies. You may have noticed my army is starving. Our best chance is to open shipping lanes with an attack to the north.

SCHICKFUSS

The Schlieffen Plan didn't extend to the sea, it went to Paris.

CUTTNER

Schlieffen is dead and this is not his plan. This would be a rather desperate effort at regaining momentum for an army on the brink of collapse. But if it's just the same to you that's not how I'll characterize it to the Kaiser.

(Schickfuss nods)

Any more questions.

SCHICKFUSS

No sir.

CUTTNER

Good. Then post the letter.

Schickfuss nods, starts to exit.

Cuttner is folding Von Moltke's letter and putting it away, raises his hand.

CUTTNER

Wait. Send it through a runner. It should be hand-delivered and the runner should wait for a reply.

(beat)

Don't send anything from me through the post anymore.

Schickfuss frowns, exits.

SCENE 5: ARMY HOSPITAL BARRACKS - DAY

October, 1917.

MICHAEL is in an army hospital, writing a letter.

MICHAEL

Father. They blacked out most of your letter. So you're still saying interesting things. I'll do my best to be worthy of censoring as well.

(beat)

It's this dream I keep having.

I'm at the front of the battlefield. I've broken through the enemy lines and they've vanished. It's just me with the company I enlisted with, alive again. They're weak and feeble but they stay with me as we push forward, over a steep trail. We come to a swollen mountain stream where we see an enemy company is bathing. But instead of shooting, we take off our tattered uniforms, broken boots and lice-ridden underwear and join them. It's impossibly cold, but we throw each other around in it like children, we're energized somehow. I realize we have been baptized. I'm sorry to use that word but that's how it feels.

(beat)

We have clarity, this perfect clarity now. Standing with these men who could just as easily be our friends, we see the insanity of slaughtering one another. And we know the only thing that matters is that we make sure it never happens again. So we rise up out of the water and walk home together. Not a march, we have no heavy backpacks, no crippling fear of death. Just this bounding excitement that we have another chance. We all do.

Again a long pause. He struggles to speak.

MICHAEL

But when we come home, we're struck dumb by the real world. I see you, I see Gisela, we see all the ones we love, and we reach out and try to tell you what we know, this knowledge we have straight from God. But the words aren't there. And no one sees us. And of course we realize it's because we don't exist to them. We're ghosts now.

(Michael repeats the word in Yiddish)

Gayst. (Ghosts).

(beat)

So we live in the rooms of our childhood, looking out our windows as the world goes on without us, ready to make the same mistakes.

SCENE 6: WEIS'S HOUSE - NIGHT

October, 1917.

Weis sitting alone in his living room writing a letter.

WEIS

Michael. Your letter came through untouched. Apparently the censors aren't interested in religious dreams.

(beat)

It saddened me to hear you talk this way. Not that you have dreams of becoming a Jewish John the Baptist. It sounds like you have lost hope. Whatever you do, you must have hope. I believe it's your hope that's kept you safe. You'll come home to me. And Gisela will have your children and you'll help make a place for our People after I'm gone. You all say I'm a pessimist but I believe things will get better for us. The war will end and things will be hard, but we will have a place here.

(beat)

Now forget all this business of dreams and God and Jews. Gisela sends you her love. I know it's painful she won't write and I don't understand it but she is here and she will be here for you when you return.

SCENE 7: A TRENCH - NIGHT

Michael and two other soldiers in a trench, preparing for a raid. Michael is their leader. He is gesturing to a map.

MICHAEL

We'll walk along the perimeter, it's about 2 and half miles, it will be slow and muddy. You'll stay within a meter at all times. You see the places where the line juts out to the east here?

SOLDIER 2:

(gesturing to a spot)

This?

MICHAEL

Yes, we'll need to stay low to the ground in those. Memorize where they are.

SOLDIER 1:

How will we know where we are when we're out there?

MICHAEL
(gesturing the map)
It shows the number of fenceposts, you count them off.

SOLDIER 1:
I'll never remember all that.

SOLDIER 2:
You'll try.

SOLDIER 1:
(to Michael)
Will there be gas?

SOLDIER 2:
How would he know what there will be?

MICHAEL
We'll expect gas, make sure your mask fits tightly.

Beat.

SOLDIER 1:
Do you need one?

MICHAEL
What?

SOLDIER 1:
A mask. I heard on the last patrol you went through gas
without a mask.

Soldier 2 gives Soldier 1 a small
shove.

MICHAEL
No. I had a mask. It fell off.

SOLDIER 1:
And you survived without it?

MICHAEL
(sighs, relenting)
When we were hit by artillery I landed in a deep pool of
water with two men on top of me. I had to stay there under
the bodies till morning. The smell was so bad that I put a
handkerchief over my nose. I fell asleep with my head in the
wet ditch. They tell me now the only way to survive this type
of gas is to breathe through a wet cloth.

SOLDIER 1:
So you lived because your platoon mates were rotting on top
of you.

Michael doesn't respond.

SOLDIER 1:
How do you do it?

MICHAEL
(shrugs)
I follow my orders.

SOLDIER 1:
But why, though, why do you think it is that you always survive? Do you know?

MICHAEL
Do I know why I'm alive?

SOLDIER 1:
(overlapping)
Yes.

MICHAEL
(overlapping)
Why are any of us alive? Why are we born? How would I know?

A long beat.

SOLDIER 1:
(hushed)
I'm going to die tomorrow. You'll live and we'll both die. Right?

SOLDIER 2:
How could he know that?

Michael stares at him.

MICHAEL
If you want to live, study your map.

SCENE 8: A TRENCH - NIGHT

August, 1918.

MICHAEL writing a letter to Gisela.

MICHAEL
I told you I write you letters I would never post. I'm sending you one of them now. If you read it, you'll start to understand what's happened to me. Or maybe you already know.

You know and that's why you don't answer.

(beat)

I don't remember your face. But sometimes, when I close my eyes just before sleep I remember your smell. And I feel human again.

He looks down and starts to read from one of the letters.

SCENE 9: CHIEF OF STAFF'S HEADQUARTERS - NIGHT

Gisela sitting in a chair across from Cuttner, who is holding a letter.

We are now in the Chief of Staff's Headquarters, same office as the first scene of the play.

MICHAEL

I see myself outside your room, watching you. You don't know I'm standing there, you think I'm far away.

CUTTNER/MICHAEL

I put my gas mask on to obscure my face.

CUTTNER

Cuttner now reads from the letter.

CUTTNER

If you know it's me the dream will end. So I'm an intruder. I put my gas mask on to obscure my face. If you know it's me the dream will end. So I'm an intruder. And I come into your room with the mask on. I try to breathe you in but only smell my mask. You scream and I try to smile beneath my mask, a gentle smile, but it must contort my face because you shake your head in fear. I move closer to you. You are so afraid but when I touch you, you do nothing.

Cuttner rises, goes to Gisela and hands her the letter.

CUTTNER

You read it.

GISELA

It's not decent.

CUTTNER

I know. Read.

He kneels by her feet.

GISELA

"You let me peel your nightshirt off. You say no but help me with my belt, and you straddle yourself around me, careful not to touch my mask. But as I enter you you do touch the **mask**, at first gingerly, then eagerly. You bring it to your mouth and I try to smell your breath but none of it comes through. I come into you in a headlong rush, sooner than I want, with no control--"

Cuttner reaches up her skirt.

GISELA

Stop, stop, stop. Not here.

She pushes his hands away and stands abruptly.

CUTTNER

Why not?

GISELA

(putting away the letter)

It's not right. You know it's not right.

He rises. Wipes the dust off of his pants and goes back to his desk. He goes through papers as they talk.

GISELA

What will you do with him?

(he doesn't respond)

You said you would help.

CUTTNER

By taking one of my best soldiers out of combat? We're planning an attack.

GISELA

I don't understand why, you said yourself the war is lost.

CUTTNER

The war is not lost! And Jews who don't support their country should watch their mouths.

He stops himself. No apology, but he softens.

CUTTNER

He'll distribute new battle plans to my commanders in Rheims next week.

GISELA

And then?

CUTTNER

Then he'll come back. Out of combat. Maybe I'll have him work for me, I could use his luck.

GISELA

Good.

He leans down towards her.

CUTTNER

Read.

Gisela sighs, takes out the letter.

GISELA

I am what they call an innocent. Not yet a man. I always thought the men paying for women so weak and crass, living only for their animal desires. It consumed my thoughts but I waited and I survived. My innocence survived. So this dream is the closest I have come. When I learn I am an animal like everyone else, like you, like all the women, all the men.

GISELA/MICHAEL

And so I hold onto you.

MICHAEL

Hold you so tight, writhing with you until our bodies are wrapped against one another like strands of barbed wire. Coming apart feels impossible.

Cuttner is kneeling again, his hand going up Gisela's thigh.

Blackout.

MICHAEL'S BARRACKS

Michael reading a letter. He holds a satchel in his arm.

MICHAEL

General Cuttner's office asked for me by name. They know me now. The soldier that won't die. They gave me a pistol, like an officer.

(beat)

I'm not disappointed to leave the corps. It can hardly be called an army now. My fellow soldiers are old or injured or insane....I'm to carry new orders to the field commanders at the front, orders they say could change the direction of the war. But they've said this many times before.

(he grasps the satchel tightly)

I've been waiting so long for something, Father. Some reason why I've survived all this time. And -- this may be it.

(beat)

I've just-- I've forgotten why it's important. That our side win. It meant so much to me before. Something to do with our faith in God. Or God's faith in us. I don't remember any more. How can that be?

SCENE 10: A TRAIN IN BERLIN - DAY

August, 1918.

MICHAEL writing a letter. He holds a satchel tightly around his arm. There's another soldier's gear is on the seat next to him. A toilet flushes. Helmut enters.

HELMUT

The bathroom is too small to sit in.

He moves his gear and takes his seat.

HELMUT

How long is the trip?

MICHAEL

22 hours.

HELMUT

We'll be close friends by the end of it. Do you know what's in the orders?

(MICHAEL shakes his head)
It must be very important.

(MICHAEL nods.)
Plans to surrender?

MICHAEL
Don't say that word.
(beat)
I believe it's an attack plan.

HELMUT
An attack now? The army can't even feed us.
(indifferently)
I think it's a plan for surrender.

MICHAEL
Orders for surrender would be simple. And they wouldn't need
to go to each commander.
(he picks up the satchel)
This is a plan for an attack.

HELMUT
Can we open it?

MICHAEL
Do you want to be shot?

HELMUT
I don't mean unseal the documents, just open the satchel.

MICHAEL
I was given direct orders not to look at the contents.

Helmut leans over and grabs the
satchel, as if seeing how much it
weighs. MICHAEL takes out his pistol
and aims it at Helmut's head. Helmut
backs away, terrified.

HELMUT
I only wanted to see how much it weighs.

MICHAEL
I said no. It's important that you listen to what I say. Now
sleep. It's a long way.

MICHAEL puts the pistol away, tries to sleep. Helmut stares at the satchel idly. MICHAEL sees this, shifts in his seat. After a few beats he sits upright.

MICHAEL

What?

HELMUT

What?

MICHAEL

I can't sleep with you there staring and wondering.

Beat.

HELMUT

How long have you been in the army?

MICHAEL

Since the beginning of the war.

HELMUT

You've seen a lot of combat?

(MICHAEL nods)

MICHAEL

You?

HELMUT

Two months.

MICHAEL

Why?

HELMUT

I was in the hospital.

MICHAEL looks at Helmut, then down at the satchel.

MICHAEL

We'll open it only to see the contents from the top. We won't look at anything more closely than that.

HELMUT
(eagerly)

Yes.

Helmut sits very close as MICHAEL slowly opens the satchel. Helmut peers over his shoulder. MICHAEL gestures to something inside.

MICHAEL
These are orders for an attack.

HELMUT
How can you tell?

MICHAEL
The size of the binder and the type of paper.
(gesturing to the satchel)
But the other one--

MICHAEL looks at one of the books curiously, adjusts the satchel to see the cover of a document.

MICHAEL
This is dated from the before the war.

He now has one hand on it, pulling it out gingerly with two fingers. He takes it out completely, it's the leather-bound version of the Schlieffen Plan that MICHAEL showed to Schickfuss in the first scene.

MICHAEL
This is the original battle plan. Von Schlieffen's plan. From before the war.

HELMUT
Why would they include an old battle plan?

MICHAEL
I don't know.

MICHAEL begins to read it.

HELMUT

I don't see how that could be important.

(gesturing to the other
document in the satchel)

That's what we should read.

MICHAEL

Those are current military orders.

(holding the Schlieffen Plan)

This is a historical document, there's no harm in reading
this now.

HELMUT

No point either.

MICHAEL

These were my orders.

HELMUT

Over four years ago.

(gesturing to the satchel)

Those are our orders now. And if this is a battle plan like
you say --

MICHAEL

What?

HELMUT

We can't win now, you understand? Men are already deserting,
why should I die now?

(gesturing to the satchel)

If we see this we would know. And then decide.

MICHAEL

They're sealed. If we open them we'll be shot. Then it won't
matter what the orders are.

Helmut shakes his head and rolls over
to sleep. MICHAEL keeps reading.
Blackout.

SCENE 11: GISELA'S KITCHEN - DAY

August, 1918.

MICHAEL in Gisela's kitchen drinking a cup of tea. His body is slumped over it as if he's trying to warm himself.

Next to the cup of tea is the opened satchel, with the Schlieffen Plan and the smaller pamphlet, now unsealed.

MICHAEL's uniform is muddy. There is a change of clothes folded for him on the table. Shirt, sweater, pants, socks. Orderly.

We hear Gisela's voice.

GISELA (O.S.)

Mother? Why's the door open?

(no answer)

Mother you left the door open.

Gisela enters. Sees MICHAEL. Long beat.

GISELA

Mother let you in?

(MICHAEL nods)

She left you by yourself?

MICHAEL

She made me tea. Said she needed food for dinner.

GISELA

You're not supposed to be here.

MICHAEL

Should I leave?

GISELA

You have an important mission.

MICHAEL

How do you know?

GISELA

(looking down at the documents
on the table)

I can see, aren't those your orders?

(MICHAEL nods)

Unsealed? Won't you get in trouble?

MICHAEL

I don't want to talk about my orders.

GISELA

You said in your last letter you had a mission.

MICHAEL

You haven't answered one of my letters in three and a half years.

GISELA

I didn't know what I could say. That wouldn't hurt you.

MICHAEL

What were you so afraid to say? I told you what I was thinking in my letters, how much worse could it be?

GISELA

You thought about things, I did things.

MICHAEL

I killed men. Who'd never done me any harm.

GISELA

You did what you were supposed to do.

There's a long pause. She moves close to him. Goes to touch his face. He shrinks away.

A long beat. He burrows his hands into his pockets. He speaks quietly, with no emotion. As if about the weather.

MICHAEL

Do you still love me?

GISELA

I don't know if I loved you before.

(MICHAEL nods)

But I do now. I know I do now.

MICHAEL

My aunt is selling my house. I'll have no home.

GISELA

I'm sorry.

MICHAEL

I arrived to find men moving things out. Mrs. Reinbach looked so please.

Gisela touches MICHAEL's hand.

GISELA

It was quiet. He just went to sleep.

He pulls out the box with the ring his father gave him, puts it in front of her.

MICHAEL

He wanted you to have this.

Gisela looks down at it and shakes her head.

GISELA

I can't.

MICHAEL

I don't understand you.

Gisela looks at his clothes and the clothes that are laid out for him.

GISELA

She gave you my brother-in-law's clothes.

(MICHAEL nods)

They won't fit.

MICHAEL

No.

GISELA

Do you want to clean yourself up?

MICHAEL doesn't respond. She goes and kneels in front of him. She begins to unbutton his uniform.

GISELA

Your clothes are dirty.

MICHAEL nods. She smiles.

GISELA

We'll give you a bath.

She has his uniform top off. She takes off his undershirt. He lets her, compliant like a child.

She looks at his chest, riddled with scars.

GISELA

How many bullets have passed through you?

MICHAEL

I don't know.

Gisela examines him closely, almost clinically. Chest, ribs, shoulders, back.

GISELA

How does it feel?

MICHAEL

Being shot? Sometimes painful. Sometimes just wet.

She nods.

GISELA

Why aren't you in Rheims?

She's stroking his chest now. His eyes are closed. It's difficult for him to speak.

MICHAEL

There's something I need to know. I need to speak with someone. Ask someone a question.

GISELA

Who?

MICHAEL

It doesn't matter.

She nods.

MICHAEL

Before I left, we--

(he stops himself, laughs)

I've done everything wrong, everything.

GISELA

No.

MICHAEL

We were so sure of ourselves. Do you remember that?

GISELA

Yes.

MICHAEL

I mocked my father.

Gisela strokes his hair. He looks back at her, desperately.

MICHAEL

It was all lies.

(in Yiddish)

In gantsn lign. (All lies)

She nods and touches his face, calming him. They're still. She touches his chest, his arms. She puts his arms on her shoulders.

He closes his eyes and rubs her shoulders awkwardly. Moves up and down her arms, looks at her face. She kisses him, at first tenderly, then aggressively. He is passive, letting her lead him. Blackout.

SCENE 12: CHIEF OF STAFF HEADQUARTERS - NIGHT

August, 1918.

Back to the setting of the first scene.
MICHAEL is now asleep in a chair.
Schickfuss is at his desk, staring at
him. Long pause. Schickfuss slowly
begins to get up out of his chair.

The door opens, Cuttner breezes in.
Schickfuss sits back down abruptly.
MICHAEL wakes up.

CUTTNER

Have my guards deserted me now?

Cuttner sees MICHAEL. Stares at him.

CUTTNER

What's this?

SCHICKFUSS

He's the soldier.

CUTTNER

I can see he's a soldier.

SCHICKFUSS

The one who doesn't die.

Cuttner's smile fades, he stares at
MICHAEL. MICHAEL, awake now, stares
back.

CUTTNER

Weis. What's he doing here?

SCHICKFUSS

He wouldn't say, he wants to speak with you.

CUTTNER

(to Michael)

You're meant to be 300 miles away delivering a message to my
field generals.

(beat)

What are you doing here?

MICHAEL

I need to speak with you.

CUTTNER

(staring at Michael)

Schickfuss, find my guards and place him under arrest.

Schickfuss doesn't move. Cuttner looks at MICHAEL's coat.

CUTTNER

Whose blood?

(no response)

Do you know what's happened to my guards?

(MICHAEL nods)

What do you want?

MICHAEL

I want to speak with you alone.

CUTTNER

I hide nothing from Schickfuss. Let's all sit.

Cuttner sits in one of the chairs as MICHAEL stares down at him. Schickfuss looks at the other chair, then back at MICHAEL.

MICHAEL

Alone.

CUTTNER

(to Schickfuss)

Go wait outside.

Schickfuss looks at MICHAEL.

MICHAEL

No.

CUTTNER

He can't stay and he can't go? What should he do?

Michael picks up his pistol. Cuttner stands

Stop!

CUTTNER

Simultaneously (as Cuttner says "Stop"), Michael shoots Schickfuss in the face. He falls, immediately dead. Cuttner kneels down to Schickfuss, maybe closes his eyes.

CUTTNER
You're here for me, what did he do to deserve that?

Michael looks genuinely confused.

MICHAEL
What did any of them do?

He reloads his pistol, puts it to his side and sits across from Cuttner. Michael stares at Cuttner.

CUTTNER
What-what do you want to know?

MICHAEL picks up the Schlieffen Plan.

MICHAEL
This.

CUTTNER
Yes.

MICHAEL
What is it?

CUTTNER
It's the original battle plan drafted by Schlieffen.

MICHAEL
And you included it with your new orders. Why?

CUTTNER
I don't know, I'm sentimental. I helped him write it.

MICHAEL
Then explain this to me.

MICHAEL reads quickly from the Plan, sometimes looking up at Cuttner, having clearly memorized parts of it. The volume and urgency of the words "See Appendix D" rises on each passage.

MICHAEL

Page 13: 2nd division fusiliers will need to coordinate closely with 3rd division to pass through the roads leading to Liege within schedule. See Appendix D.

(turns pages)

Page 23: By week four, 3rd division will be in position just north of Brussels. Train schedules will need to be adjusted as needed. See Appendix D.

(again flips pages)

Page 25: This triggers a massive assault south in a sweeping motion, as the right wing folds down towards Paris. Supply chains to these units must be expanded as each division advances. See Appendix D.

He stares at Cuttner, out of breath from the effort.

MICHAEL

I'm here to see Appendix D.

Cuttner stares back at Michael.

CUTTNER

You've come here to see appending documents to a seven-year old battle plan?

MICHAEL

I was part of the 2nd division attack on Liege, it was chaos, how did he think another division would come through, I want to know.

Michael nods. Cuttner moves towards his desk, picks up a smaller pamphlet with the same embossed insignia on the cover.

CUTTNER

Appendix D. It's just details.

Michael takes it and begins to review it.

MICHAEL

Where's the 2nd division's attack on Liege?

CUTTNER

I don't know. It's been four years.

Michael threatens him with the gun,
Cuttner flips through pages. Stops at a
section.

CUTTNER

I think it's here, this section.

Michael reads.

MICHAEL

The ability of 2nd division to provide material support to
the 3rd division is dependent on free and clear access on the
roads west of Liege.

(to Cuttner as he scans the
page, maybe turns it)

This is it? There's nothing. More of the same.

CUTTNER

(overlapping)

Von Moltke didn't move quickly enough.

MICHAEL

(overlapping)

He knew it wasn't possible to get another division in place.
You knew. How could you deliver something you knew couldn't
work?

CUTTNER

I was a cadet in officer training school. The Commander of
the General Staff took me in to work for him. You think I
could question his strategy?

MICHAEL

I saw you speak before the war. I heard you talk about a
perfect war plan. You knew it was a lie.

CUTTNER

Is that it? That I lied. That I lied? What did you think a
war was?

Michael puts his gun up to Cuttner's
face.

MICHAEL

Did you ever think about the men who were dying on your
orders?

No response. Michael shoves his gun forward, knocking Cuttner.

MICHAEL

Did you think about us?

CUTTNER

I read your letters.

MICHAEL

(this confuses Michael)

You read letters, what does that mean? You think you understand how it was for us by reading letters from the Front?

CUTTNER

I said I read your letters.

Michael lowers the gun, confused.

CUTTNER

She would read them to me.

MICHAEL

Who.

CUTTNER

How you'd been through Liege, Marne, Verdun. Always you would live. This amazing Jewish hero who could not die. In my battalion.

MICHAEL

Who read them to you?

CUTTNER

Gisela.

MICHAEL

What? How?

CUTTNER

She was mine. And I made her read your letters, it was part of our arrangement.

He sees Michael, visibly shaken by this.

CUTTNER

She did write back to you. Every time. I watched her. She didn't send them because she didn't think she was worthy of you.

(beat)

She was right, she's not. She's worth very little, I can tell you.

Michael raises the gun again.

CUTTNER

Do you think it was because of her? That you couldn't die?

Michael shoots Cuttner in the chest.

Michael stares down at him. Slowly
turns away. Blackout.

SCENE 13: SCHLIEEFFEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Schlieffen appears on stage, sitting in
his armchair.

SCHLIEEFFEN

At night I dream of the war. Of course I am dead before it
begins. A spirit. I fly through the battles. I see the
armies take turns climbing out of deep holes and being shot,
hundreds at a time. These young men, boys really, fall down,
cursing and praying, and come over to my side, one by one. An
army of spirits, rising out of these deep trenches that carve
a path through the heart of Europe. It is the end of the
world. A dull, grey Apocalypse. This is the vision that
haunts me. That this is God's plan. He doesn't choose sides,
He just winds us up and watches us fall. Like a spoiled child
breaking his toys.

SCENE 14: GISELA'S KITCHEN - DAY

Gisela in her kitchen, writing Michael
a letter. There are baby clothes and
cloth diapers on the kitchen table. She
wears a wedding ring.

GISELA

It has not gotten better here. The men who returned are like
children. Many women have had to keep their jobs because
there are so few healthy men. I have not.

(beat)

They still just say "missing." That's all they tell me. I go
to the records office twice a week and the nice woman there
tells me there's no word, still just missing. There are
others there, other women looking for word about their
husbands and sons. She tells them the same thing, just
missing. But there's a different look on her face when she
says it to me.

A beat. She looks down at the baby clothes.

GISELA

Mother wouldn't look at him when I brought him home. She was so ashamed. She still gives her opinions. He has your nose and your coloring but he has mother's eyes. She loves him for that. He's changed everything. He has no knowledge of what he is, of the time he was born into.

(beat)

You told me you had a question for someone. I hope you got to ask it. I feel like you did. I don't know if there was an answer, but I hope you got to ask your question.

Blackout. End of play.