

Walking to Buchenwald

By Tom Jacobson

Playwrights Ink
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Cast of Characters

(Five actors)

SCHILLER, 30s-40s, director of strategic planning for a natural history museum

ARJAY, 30s-40s, a painter and graphic designer

MILDRED, 70s, retired elementary school teacher, Schiller's mother

ROGER, 70s, retired theatre professor, Schiller's father

OTHERS (played by one actor)

MUSEUM GUIDE (London)

HOST (Bath)

VISITOR (Cornwall)

SERVER (Paris)

STUDENT (Berlin)

NUDE (Berlin)

MINNESOTAN (Weimar)

SCHLITZEN (Weimar)

BUS DRIVER (Buchenwald)

The play takes in place in various locations in England, France, and Germany.

It is the present.

SETTING: All locations should be delineated by lighting on a very simple set suggestive of stone. Five chairs and a table might suffice.

NOTE: SCHILLER, ARJAY, and the OTHERS may be male or female.

At rise: MILDRED isolated in light, seated facing out, with ROGER over her shoulder.

Say no.	ROGER	
No.	MILDRED	
		SCHILLER also isolated in light, seated facing out.
I just asked you to think about it.	SCHILLER	
We don't have to think about it.	ROGER	
(Overlapping.) We don't have to think about it.	MILDRED	
It's too expensive.	ROGER	
(Overlapping.) It's too expensive.	MILDRED	
What do you want? A party in the church basement? A quilt with squares by all your friends?	SCHILLER	
All I want is rhubarb pie.	ROGER	
Our friends don't quilt.	MILDRED	
ROGER Put that about the pie.		SCHILLER I'm not paying for a party in the church basement. They're so depressing! Don't you want this to be unique? It's once-in-a-lifetime!
MILDRED Stop dictating!		

You don't have to pay.

MILDRED

It's potluck!

ROGER AND MILDRED

I hate potluck! Somebody always brings a slimy rhubarb pie. Yours should be different.

SCHILLER

Strawberry rhubarb!

MILDRED

Very good.

ROGER

Just think about it.

SCHILLER

We don't speak any languages.

MILDRED

ROGER I speak German.		SCHILLER You don't have to! I know a little French, and nobody else cares.
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Oh, hardly.

MILDRED

We couldn't let you pay.

ROGER

(Overlapping.)
 It's too much for you to pay.

MILDRED

We'd have to chip in.

ROGER

Roger!

MILDRED

I'll pay your airfare. That's the biggest chunk. Would that work?

SCHILLER

You'd be with us the whole time?

ROGER

Roger, I'd never sleep!

MILDRED

Type!

ROGER

Your father wants to know would you be with us the whole time?

MILDRED

ROGER

(Overlapping.)
I've always wanted to see theatre in London.

You have not. You've never said
a word.

MILDRED

Of course—I wouldn't unleash you
on Europe without adult supervision.

SCHILLER

You could do genealogy in England and France. Last I heard my mother's cousin still
had family in Germany. Imagine meeting real European relatives, seeing where we come
from—!

ROGER

Would Arjay go?

MILDRED

(Brought up short.)
Arjay!

SCHILLER

Lights out instantly on SCHILLER,
MILDRED, and ROGER, and up
simultaneously on ARJAY on the telephone
isolated in light.

Where? When? *Your parents?!*

ARJAY

Lights up on SCHILLER on the telephone.

You don't have to, but I think they'd come if they knew you were going.

SCHILLER

What about Bolivia?

ARJAY

SCHILLER

Can't that wait till next year? I don't know enough Spanish yet.

ARJAY

They won't go if it's just you?

SCHILLER

You're a buffer.

ARJAY

Thanks, baby. I'm a buffer. You can't just *send* them?

SCHILLER

They don't speak any languages.

ARJAY

Send them to England.

SCHILLER

They can't even understand New Yorkers. This is an important anniversary. Imagine when we've been together that long.

ARJAY

Gross.

SCHILLER

This is the only time in their entire lives they'll have the chance to go to Europe. In a year or two they couldn't manage. I want to do something nice for them.

ARJAY

Even if they don't want it?

SCHILLER

They never want anything!

ARJAY

Three weeks? They'll drive you crazy whether I'm there or not. There's a reason you don't live in Oklahoma.

SCHILLER

This is a big deal. They'll dine out on it for the rest of their lives. Even if it's miserable.

ARJAY

What if *we're* miserable?

SCHILLER

It'll be a great time to tell them our news.

ARJAY

Can't we just tell them over the phone?

SCHILLER

I don't want it to be that casual. It's a big deal, too, and it might be a bit of a shock to them.

ARJAY

Whatever you want, baby.

SCHILLER

And next year—La Paz!

Lights out on ARJAY and up on MILDRED and ROGER. SCHILLER puts down the phone.

MILDRED

We've decided Roger will go with you.

SCHILLER

But this is your anniversary!

ROGER

You wouldn't sleep.

MILDRED

(Overlapping.)
I'd get insomnia.

SCHILLER

Dad, would that be okay coming without Mom?

ROGER

We agreed to it.

MILDRED

(Overlapping.)
Yes.

SCHILLER

You both have to go. It'll change your lives. You'll be different people.

MILDRED

We like who we are.

SCHILLER

Mom, this is just some sort of Midwestern nobody-in-our-family-ever-traveled-so-neither should-we sort of thing. You think you don't deserve to travel, that only rich people travel, but it's not that expensive. I used to think that, too, until I met Arjay. Treat yourself as if you mattered, for once!

MILDRED

We've just been insulted by our own child.

ROGER

No, just you. *I'm* going.

SCHILLER

Are you there? Are you typing a rebuttal or a dissertation?

MILDRED

(Overlapping with SCHILLER as she tries to change places with ROGER.)
Then you type.

ROGER

I can't! Mildred!

Lights out instantly on ROGER and MILDRED as the phone rings and SCHILLER picks it up.

SCHILLER

Hello?

Lights up instantly on ROGER on the phone.

ROGER

She wouldn't sleep. She's addicted to sleeping pills as it is, and they still don't work.

SCHILLER

Okay, okay, so if it's just you do you still want to go?

ROGER

I wouldn't mind seeing the Royal Shakespeare Company. They never come to Oklahoma.

SCHILLER

We could see them in London or Stratford—or both! And theatre's cheaper in London than New York—

ROGER

And haven't they restored the Old Globe?

SCHILLER

And the British Museum! The Tate Modern! Plus there's a new Darwin Centre at the Natural History Museum—I think I could get us a private tour—

Lights suddenly up on MILDRED on another phone.

MILDRED

I hate museums!

SCHILLER

Mother!

(A grim silence.)

I thought you weren't going.

MILDRED

If I were. I'm tired of museums.

SCHILLER

(Hand over the phone, hollering.)

Arjay, pick up the phone. My mother's trying to hijack our trip.

MILDRED

Roger, you can't walk too far. Too many museums and you'd be sweating—you'd have to sit down—Schiller, don't walk him all over the place. He's got an atrial fibrillation. He shouldn't even fly, much less go running all over Europe. Hello, Arjay, explain to Schiller why we can't go.

ARJAY

(Appearing, on the phone.)

What?

SCHILLER

Talk Mom into going. She's close.

ARJAY

Europe is wonderful, and everyone should go at least once. When I was teaching in Switzerland I'd take the train somewhere new every weekend—Paris, Munich, Nice—

MILDRED

But you speak the languages.

ARJAY
No, I don't. Not one.
Everybody speaks English,
or mostly.

SCHILLER
I speak French! A little.

ROGER
I speak German. A little.

MILDRED
What about what's going on politically?

ROGER
President Dickhead.

ARJAY
They've got body searches down to an art, especially in Europe.

ROGER
You might enjoy it, Mildred.

MILDRED
I've got nothing for them to grab.

ARJAY
If you don't go, you'll regret it forever. If you do, even if it's a terrible trip—

SCHILLER
(Overlapping.)
It won't be!

ARJAY
(Overlapping.)
—You'll have stories galore about rude Parisians, mean Germans, and uptight Brits.

MILDRED
Oh, it sounds just awful.

SCHILLER
Mother, you don't have to go.

MILDRED
I'm not!

Lights out instantly on everyone and up on a
breezy MUSEUM GUIDE.

MUSEUM GUIDE
(British accent.)

The Darwin Centre is our way of sharing more of our cultural patrimony with the public—and the world. More than one hundred people a day benefit from behind-the-scenes tours of laboratories and collection storage.

Lights up sequentially on SCHILLER, ARJAY, ROGER, and finally, after a pause, MILDRED, who looks annoyed to be there.

SCHILLER

Only one hundred?

MUSEUM GUIDE

Conservation reasons, really. Zoological specimens are sensitive to light, changes in temperature, even fluctuations in humidity caused by the presence of human beings.

SCHILLER

I know. I'm the VP of Strategic Planning for the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County—

MUSEUM GUIDE

Brilliant!

ROGER

Not really. I could show you some report cards—

MUSEUM GUIDE

Pardon?

SCHILLER

Dad!

MILDRED

We're Americans.

MUSEUM GUIDE

Yes, well, I assumed—

SCHILLER

We're in the process of planning a new facility as well, and open storage or at least visible storage is one thing we're considering, but doesn't it defeat the purpose if only a hundred people a day can tour? And the salaries of guides—

ARJAY

Not that we'd wish anybody out of a job—

SCHILLER

No, of course not, sorry—

MUSEUM GUIDE

No offense, truly.

SCHILLER

It just doesn't seem efficient. And with the economy the way it is—

MUSEUM GUIDE

Museums are much more heavily subsidized by the government here than in the States. You're at the mercy of the market, aren't you?

SCHILLER

We are, indeed.

ROGER

Scholarship actually has value in England.

MUSEUM GUIDE

Oh, I'm sure in the U.S.—

ROGER

I'm a college professor—or was until I retired—when was it Mildred—?

MILDRED

A long time ago.

ROGER

And I made less—

SCHILLER

Dad, don't—

ROGER

(Overlapping.)
—Than Schiller used to as a secretary—

SCHILLER

That was a *really* long time ago—

MILDRED

Mind you, we live in Oklahoma—

ROGER

Forty-fifth, was it, in the nation, for education funding—?

MILDRED

Forty eighth.

SCHILLER

About how many specimens in the zoology collections of the Darwin Centre?

MUSEUM GUIDE

Super question! There are more than 60 million precious specimens in the Life Sciences collections. For instance, these bats—

(SCHILLER, MILDRED, ROGER and ARJAY all lean in to look.)

—Are just a sample of the *Chiroptera* collections—

ROGER

That's Latin, Mildred. Amo, amas, amat.

MUSEUM GUIDE

But if you step this way, we can go directly into storage, where you can see where we keep the rest of the bats—

ROGER

You go on. I'll wait here.

SCHILLER

Dad, this is the behind-the-scenes part.

(To MUSEUM GUIDE.)

It's not long, is it?

MUSEUM GUIDE

We can breeze right through if you like. Just for a sampling.

ROGER

No, I'm fine to sit.

MILDRED

I think we're jet-lagging, Schiller.

ROGER

Do you want to go back to the hotel, Mildred?

MILDRED

No, I'm all right for now.

ROGER

It's almost time for our nap.

SCHILLER

You'll never get over the jet lag if you sleep now—

ARJAY

Schiller—

ROGER

(To MUSEUM GUIDE.)
You have to remember, we're old.

MUSEUM GUIDE

Oh, now—

SCHILLER

I'm sorry. I think we'll have to cut this short.

ROGER

No, no, go on and we'll meet you here.

ARJAY

Don't you need your nap?

MILDRED

We can wait.

ROGER

As long as it's not too long. I'm sorry—I spent too much time with the Belgian Marbles—

MILDRED

Elgin, Roger.

ROGER

Wanted to see them before you have to give 'em back to Greece.

MUSEUM GUIDE

That's unlikely, actually.

SCHILLER

If you take a nap will you be able to go to the theatre later?

MILDRED

Oh, no. Just dinner will be fine.

ROGER

It's too expensive.

SCHILLER

Theatre here is *cheap*!

ROGER

It's enough just to *be* in London.
(To MUSEUM GUIDE.)
Ever been to America?

MUSEUM GUIDE

Canada, once.

SCHILLER

It's too late. I already bought tickets.

ROGER

I mean the United States.

MILDRED

Can't you exchange them?

MUSEUM GUIDE

I'm afraid not. But I'd love to see
the Grand Canyon.

SCHILLER

That's why we're here, so Dad can see
London theatre!

MILDRED

Where in Canada did you go?

MUSEUM GUIDE

Toronto. I was visiting relatives on holiday.

MILDRED

Roger, what's-their-names moved to
Toronto. From Sauk Centre.

ROGER

Who?

ROGER

Anhorns?

SCHILLER

I'm going even if you don't.

MILDRED

That's right. Merle and Shirley Anhorn.

MUSEUM GUIDE

How absolutely bizarre!

SCHILLER

Arjay, do we know anyone here?

MILDRED

Do you know them?

ARJAY

In London? Why?

MUSEUM GUIDE

They were my uncle's tenants. They
took a flat in his building. He's rather
spherical, isn't he? And she's got an
unusual—

SCHILLER

We have to do something with
these tickets.

MILDRED

Wig.

MUSEUM GUIDE

I was going to say hairstyle.

MILDRED

It's a wig. Hasn't changed in 30 years.

MUSEUM GUIDE

Amazing that you know them!

ROGER

Mildred can connect with anybody. Since you know the Anhorns, you're practically family. If you're ever in Oklahoma, we've got Schiller's old room—

SCHILLER

Dad!

Lights out on everyone but ROGER.

ROGER

The perfect theatre audience. We subscribe to the OCU theatre season and then Lyric in the summer—musicals only, but sometimes they're pretty good. For Oklahoma. Theatre audiences are graying all over the country—they all look like us. College educated, some with advanced degrees. Good old-fashioned liberal arts education that's fallen into disrepute as impractical. I heard of a poll—this was in the eighties—they asked students the same question they asked in the sixties and in the seventies: "Why do you go to college?" In the seventies the answer was, overwhelmingly, "To get an education, to learn." By the eighties it was "To get a better job." Remember who was President then. Knowledge for its own sake was suddenly tainted, suspect. You don't want to be too smart because that's, well, un-American. But that's who's going to the theatre—intelligent, educated people who remember what theatre's about. *Liberals*, God forbid!

Lights up on SCHILLER, ARJAY and
MILDRED with ROGER.

ARJAY

Mildred, did you like it?

MILDRED

Arjay, I don't know if I've told you this before, but I'm incapable of anticipation. I can't get excited about anything coming up, and I don't know why. Just habit, I suppose, trying prevent disappointment.

SCHILLER

That is so Minnesotan.

ARJAY

So you weren't excited about seeing the play?

MILDRED

No, not at all.

ROGER

She's never excited about seeing a play. Not even when I was directing.

SCHILLER

I'm sorry you didn't like it, Mom. *The Winter's Tale* isn't Shakespeare's best, but I thought this was an excellent production—

MILDRED

Oh, Schiller, it was just wonderful! I didn't know Shakespeare could be *good!*

ROGER

Hey!

MILDRED

I've only seen Shakespeare done by student actors.

ROGER

But they were *my* students!

MILDRED

I know, Roger, but they were students. These were *actors*.

SCHILLER

See! It was like pulling teeth to get you to go—

ROGER

Mildred, my shoe's untied.

MILDRED

(Kneeling to tie ROGER'S shoe.)
And I could *understand* them all!

SCHILLER

It helped that it was set in the American south. Mother, what are you doing?

ROGER

She is tying my shoe.

SCHILLER
 You can't tie your shoe?

ROGER
 I can. But.

MILDRED
 He gets out of breath bending over like that. It's just easier if I do it.

SCHILLER
 What's your doctor say about that?

ROGER
 Lose weight, exercise, same damn thing every doctor says. Are you gonna say it, too?

SCHILLER
 Heaven forbid. But still, tying your shoes—

ROGER
 Does your bathroom have a washcloth?

ARJAY
 How about some dinner?

ROGER AND MILDRED
 Ours doesn't.

ARJAY
 Indian food is great in London.

ROGER
 But it's got curry.

ARJAY
 The best curry outside of India.

SCHILLER
 What's wrong with curry?

ROGER
 It's—what's the word, Mildred—?

MILDRED

Cloying.

ROGER
That's right, it's cloying.

SCHILLER
Cloying?!

ARJAY
What's cloying?

ROGER
Sickly sweet.

MILDRED
Overly sweet.

SCHILLER
Like it's going bad.

SCHILLER
When have you had curry?

MILDRED
The Burralls made it for us. And they lived in India when Elmer was a missionary.

ROGER
And it was—

EVERYBODY
Cloying!

Lights out on everyone and simultaneously
up on the HOST of a bed and breakfast.

HOST
Now the weir is quite interesting. It's a double weir, very rare, and you can't miss it as
you cross the bridge.

Lights up on MILDRED, ARJAY and
SCHILLER.

MILDRED AND ARJAY
What's a weir?

SCHILLER
A fish trap, isn't it?

HOST
Or a dam. It's actually quite dangerous.

MILDRED
We don't have those in the States. But Roger loves to fish. Schiller, too.

ARJAY

You're kidding.

SCHILLER

Not since I was a kid.

MILDRED

One time when Schiller was three, they were catching sunfish after sunfish, none of the usual waiting around slapping mosquitoes. They just kept coming without a break. Finally Schiller threw down the pole and announced, "Me all done fittin'!"

SCHILLER

Ma!

MILDRED

Schiller is easily embarrassed. You should just accept that we're your parents and we're going to be embarrassing.

SCHILLER

I'm not embarrassed, but not everybody wants to hear about—

HOST

Oh, no! I love hearing about peoples' lives, especially Americans. That's why we started a bed and breakfast. Where are you from?

MILDRED

Roger taught theatre at Oklahoma City University, and I taught gradeschool until I couldn't stand it any more—discipline was all it was—and then I managed a shop in a science museum.

HOST

Were you there for the bombing?

SCHILLER

They felt it!

MILDRED

It shook the house. We live near the railroad, so we thought a tanker had exploded.

HOST

Did you...know anyone...?

MILDRED

No.

SCHILLER

A girl I went to school with. But I didn't really know her.

MILDRED

I don't believe in capital punishment, but—

SCHILLER

Oh, our whole justice system sucks. Three strikes—overcrowded prisons—

MILDRED

Don't get me started!

ARJAY

The memorial is beautiful.

SCHILLER

Only decent design in the entire state.

MILDRED

It's a very conservative state. We're the only Democrats we know.

SCHILLER

We don't live there. Arjay teaches at Art Center College of Design in Pasadena—

HOST

How interesting! I really do love Americans. Only been to New York and Washington, and Florida. Never to Los Angeles or Oklahoma—

SCHILLER

Not much to see.

MILDRED

Roger and I are from Minnesota, but we couldn't take the cold. And Oklahomans are nice, even if they all belong to the John Birch Society.

HOST

All Americans are nice. Except New Yorkers. We had this Jewish couple stay here and they complained about everything—

SCHILLER

New Yorkers always complain—it doesn't matter who—

HOST

The bed was too soft, the toast was cold. I moved them to the haunted room.

ARJAY

There's a haunted room?

SCHILLER

That is so cool! How does it—manifest?

HOST

Sometimes there's a woman who sits on the bed.

MILDRED

Ish, I got a chill!

ARJAY

Have you seen her?

SCHILLER

What period are her clothes?

HOST

My daughter saw her. I think she's from the eighteenth century. That's when most of Bath was built, but this house is a little bit older. She seems friendly.

ARJAY

So what else should we see other than the weird?

SCHILLER

Weir.

ARJAY

Other than the dam fish trap.

SCHILLER

We need to see the Abbey Church, the Royal Crescent, and of course the Roman baths.

ARJAY

Can we go in?

HOST

Oh, no! Absolutely teeming with bacteria. Once you see it you won't *want* to go in!

SCHILLER

Don't worry. I've got it all planned out to minimize walking.

ARJAY

Schiller plans.

SCHILLER

Somebody has to! Arjay's been all over the world without a plan.

ARJAY

I never had a problem.

SCHILLER

That's because the universe takes care of you. It's amazing—you don't speak anything, and yet people always help you—

ARJAY

Schiller planned this whole trip, in case you can't guess.

SCHILLER

I'm part of the universe that takes care of you.

MILDRED

And you've done a wonderful job—I can hardly believe it!

ARJAY

What's that Italian saying?

SCHILLER

Uomo propono, Dio dispo.

MILDRED

What's that mean?

ARJAY

Man plans—

SCHILLER

Man proposes, God disposes. But people like you need people like me. I'm the kind of person who gets things done.

ARJAY

You're the kind of person who makes the trains run on time.

MILDRED

Oh, the trains here are amazing! We only have Amtrak at home and it always seems to be falling apart.

HOST

Isn't the whole country falling apart?

MILDRED

What?

SCHILLER

What do you mean?

HOST

Not to be rude, but your president is a real DH.

ARJAY
DH?

HOST
A real dickhead!

MILDRED
That's what Roger calls him! Roger!

ROGER
(Off.)
Just a minute, Mildred! I'm eating!

HOST
He's got no notion whatsoever of foreign policy.

ROGER
(Comes in, wiping his mouth.)
What am I missing in here?

MILDRED
We're talking politics. *American* politics!
(To HOST.)
I hardly watch any television, but I never miss *Washington Week in Review*. I don't care about movies, music, sports—and Roger can hardly drag me to a play, but I love politics! You don't know how isolated we feel in Oklahoma. They all think the president is wonderful.

ROGER
President Dickhead.

MILDRED
See!

HOST
DH was my attempt at politesse.

ROGER
He's crazy. A real DH!

SCHILLER
How was breakfast?

ROGER
Just wonderful! I ate your bacon for you.

SCHILLER

(To HOST.)

It was very good, but if we're not careful these English breakfasts can really add up.

ROGER

Are you implying—?

SCHILLER

Nothing, Dad, nothing! I just don't want to eat too much. We've got a lot of ground to cover today.

MILDRED

Not too much ground. We hardly ever walk at home.

HOST

Bath is quite compact. You can see most of it on foot.

SCHILLER

So I won't have to drive at all!

ROGER

And a good thing, too! When we first rented the car—

SCHILLER

Gimme a break! It's the first time I ever drove on the left!

ROGER

—Schiller drove too close to the curb and all of a sudden the sideview mirror was in Arjay's lap!

MILDRED

We never did see what we hit.

SCHILLER

They don't give you any instructions at the rental place. No rules of the road, no tips about driving on the left.

ARJAY

I just popped the mirror back on.

ROGER

You almost killed us on that first roundabout!

SCHILLER

Dad!

HOST

How many days is your trip?

Lights out on everyone but SCHILLER and ARJAY, who are isolated in light together.

ARJAY

They're not so bad.

SCHILLER

They're not *your* parents.

ARJAY

They hardly complain at all, and they're so grateful. It could have been so much worse.

SCHILLER

They're too goddam friendly! The British are reserved!

ARJAY

You're too easily embarrassed.

SCHILLER

It's hard enough being an American in Europe right now, but they make me feel like a resentful teenager again—like magic!

ARJAY

If I haven't said so before, I think it's really nice you're doing this for them.

SCHILLER

I'm a good kid?

ARJAY

You're a good kid.
(Kissing SCHILLER.)

SCHILLER

You realize that's the first time we've kissed this whole trip?

ARJAY

(Shrugs.)
That's what happens around parents. I'm sure you'll be very happy you did this—

ARJAY AND SCHILLER

—When it's over.

They sit down in two chairs next to each other.

SCHILLER

This is definitely the most exciting thing they've ever done in their lives. They're not exactly accomplished.

ARJAY

But it *is* amazing how much breakfast your father can put away. That's an accomplishment!

SCHILLER

And he starts asking about lunch by ten a.m.!

Lights up on MILDRED and ROGER seated directly behind SCHILLER and ARJAY. SCHILLER is driving.

ROGER

I think your mother's getting a little hungry.

SCHILLER

We just ate.

ROGER

She's borderline hypoglycemic.

MILDRED

Hush, Roger. I'm not hungry. But if there's a turn-off soon, I need to go to the bathroom.

ROGER

(To ARJAY.)

Mildred is always hungry, thirsty, or has to go to the bathroom.

SCHILLER

Whereas Dad is always hungry.

ROGER

Enough to eat curry.

ARJAY

And you liked it!

ROGER

It was surprisingly good. Not—

EVERYONE

—Cloying!

SCHILLER

That's what's good about travel—you end up trying things you never thought you'd like.

MILDRED

How far away are we from the Crossett site?

ARJAY

Is that a stone circle?

SCHILLER

It's a genealogical site. The Crossetts were—

MILDRED

My father's mother's family. Sherm and Caryl saw some Crossett graves in Cornwall. Near here, is that right, Schiller?

SCHILLER

Kinda.

ARJAY

Are you having a good time, Mildred?

MILDRED

Oh, yes, Arjay, it's just wonderful.

ARJAY

Aren't you glad I talked you into coming?

(Pause.)

You weren't going to until I talked to you.

ROGER

(Starting to tear up.)

That's not exactly—

MILDRED

Roger, hush.

ROGER

She has a real reason.

SCHILLER

What?

ARJAY

Roger, what's wrong?

MILDRED
 (Quickly.)
 Thank you, Arjay.

ROGER
 Nothing. A bug flew in my eye.
 Close the window.

MILDRED
 Thanks for talking me into it.

ROGER
 It'd be no fun without Mildred.

MILDRED
 I just had to find my reason.

ARJAY
 Genealogy? Finding out who you are?

MILDRED
 That's part of it.

ARJAY
 What else?

SCHILLER
 We don't have time to go to--!

MILDRED
 Look out, here's another circle-round!

SCHILLER
 Roundabout, Mother, roundabout!

MILDRED
 Careful—I have to pee!

They all lean the same direction for a fast turn. Lights out on them and up on VISITOR drinking from a paper cup. In the dark, the chairs are rearranged. VISITOR sits. Lights up on SCHILLER, ARJAY, MILDRED and ROGER, seated, eating some form of prepackaged convenience food. ROGER eats enthusiastically.

SCHILLER

The Eden Project is a perfect model for museums of the future. Its message is everywhere—sustainability *is* possible. See? The seating is recycled tires, everything we're eating is grown locally and organically.

ROGER

Right here in Devon?

SCHILLER

Cornwall, Dad. We passed through Devon on the way here.

ROGER

A long scary drive on the left side.

SCHILLER

American museums are too old-fashioned, passive. These displays are thoughtful, integrated, with action items outlined—Americans have the largest ecological footprint of any people in the world, but if we—

MILDRED sees the VISITOR and pauses in her eating. SCHILLER sees where she is looking.

SCHILLER

Mother, no.

MILDRED

Eating alone is so awful.

SCHILLER

No. Please.

MILDRED

It's a wasted day unless you talk to the local people. I don't know what I'll do in France and Germany since I don't speak the language.

SCHILLER

These are very reserved people—

MILDRED

Would you like to join us?

(VISITOR reacts with surprise.)

Would you? I hate eating alone, don't you?

VISITOR

(Joining them.)

I don't want to intrude.

MILDRED

Not at all. Please sit down. I'm Mildred and this is my husband, Roger.

VISITOR

Hello.

ROGER

Hi there.

SCHILLER

I'm Schiller.

MILDRED

And this is Schiller's friend, Arjay.

ARJAY

How do you do?

VISITOR

I'm Beverly.

ROGER AND MILDRED

We're Americans.

SCHILLER

As if you couldn't guess.

VISITOR

You can always tell Americans on holiday. They look like giant six year-olds in short pants.

MILDRED

Beverly's such a British name. Do people call you Bev?

VISITOR

No, Beverly. Don't get so many Americans as we used to.

MILDRED

This is our first time to England.

ROGER

To Europe!

ARJAY AND SCHILLER

We've been before.

ROGER

Bet you've seen a real drop-off in tourism since—

VISITOR

It's about to get worse.

MILDRED

What do you mean?

ROGER

Did something happen? Our dickhead president—

VISITOR

Your hotel room doesn't have telly?

SCHILLER

It's a bed and breakfast, and both TVs only showed cartoons. Plus my phone coverage is spotty here.

ARJAY

Your batteries are for shit.

ROGER

And no washcloth! Again! Must be some kind of regulation.

MILDRED

What happened?

VISITOR

Your president—

MILDRED AND ROGER

Not *our!*

ROGER, ARJAY AND SCHILLER

We didn't vote for him!

VISITOR

Well, he's your president, just the same, isn't he?

MILDRED

What are we supposed to do, assassinate him?

SCHILLER

ROGER

Mother!

Mildred!

MILDRED

Well, we voted. What good did it do? What's an average person supposed to do?

ROGER

I think we have to trust the system. It's the best system of government in the world. I came of age between wars, so I never fought for it, but I would have, maybe not for Vietnam, but—

VISITOR

But it's breaking down, isn't it?

ROGER

At least we were never an empire like England or France—

SCHILLER

Dad, calm down.

VISITOR

All republics degenerate into empires eventually.

ARJAY

What do you mean breaking down?

VISITOR

Your election process—

ROGER

Just wait till the next one.

ARJAY

The pendulum will swing.

VISITOR

And now, with this tactical alert—

MILDRED

Tactical alert?

SCHILLER

What's that mean?

ARJAY

Why?

VISITOR

On account of the plot to blow up the airport in Los Angeles.

SCHILLER

What?

LAX?

ARJAY

VISITOR

They caught them, or so they said.

SCHILLER

That's at least the third time--

MILDRED

But what does tactical alert mean?

ARJAY

Should we go home?

SCHILLER

Home? And fly right into the target?

VISITOR

Ambassadors recalled. Again. Americans evacuated—

ROGER

Don't worry—checks and balances—

VISITOR

Pretty unchecked at this point.

MILDRED

I wonder if there really was a plot. It might just be an excuse.

ROGER

Like I said, we're hardly dashing to become the next evil empire.

VISITOR

That usually happens slowly—more like a walk. But it's getting brisker, isn't it?

ROGER

We're not Germany!

VISITOR

Germany took a long time to become Germany. Hitler was just exploiting the German character.

ROGER

The German character? You're still not over the War, are you? You're prejudiced against Germans. I'm part German.

MILDRED

In fact, if you counted the English, Welsh, Irish, and Scottish as separate groups, Germans are the largest ancestral group in America.

VISITOR

I'm not suggesting panic. But we've seen a lot of this before, haven't we?

ROGER

(Sighs, defeated.)
Mildred's right—what can one person do?

MILDRED

Remember that old moral question that we used to fantasize about? If you could go back in time and assassinate Hitler would you?

Of course!

ROGER

SCHILLER
You used to fantasize
about that?

ARJAY
In a minute.

VISITOR

Right.

MILDRED

What if in the future people are saying that about our president—and we were the ones who had the opportunity to kill him, but didn't?

ROGER

Mildred, don't talk like that!

SCHILLER

I think they can arrest you for even saying that, Mother.

VISITOR

But you're not in America, are you?

MILDRED

Exactly! Roger, imagine that! I actually feel freer here than in America.

(Loudly.)

Assassinate the president!

Mother, hush!

SCHILLER

ROGER
Mildred!

ARJAY
Jesus!

MILDRED

Oh, I'll be quiet. But think about it.

SCHILLER

When we get home you can go to a demonstration.

MILDRED

I'm too old to go marching. My hips would protest louder than I can.

ARJAY

Rosa Parks changed everything by just sitting down.

MILDRED

I have to carry a board with me to sit on—

(Shows it.)

SCHILLER

Oh, Mom, don't—

ROGER

We call it her butt board.

MILDRED

I got osteoporosis which led to sciatica, so after I had a bone spur removed they gave me estrogen, but of course in those days they didn't know how much to give so apparently I overdosed because in a few years I had to have a mastectomy—

SCHILLER

Mom, I'm sure—

MILDRED

And then five years later, I lost the *other* breast—

SCHILLER

(To VISITOR.)

You don't want to hear this, do you—?

VISITOR

It's all right.

MILDRED

And then five years after that—

(Digs in her purse.)

—I had to have a hysterectomy—

SCHILLER

Mom, no—!

MILDRED

(Pulling a Polaroid from her purse.)

You want to see a picture of my cyst?

SCHILLER

Mom, put that away.

VISITOR

(Looking at the Polaroid.)

It looks like a deflated beach ball.

ROGER

As big as a cantaloupe.

SCHILLER

A grapefruit.

MILDRED AND ROGER

A cantaloupe!

ARJAY

(To SCHILLER.)
Thank God they don't speak French.

Lights out on everyone except SCHILLER.

SCHILLER

The whole concept of museums started in the eighteenth century with cabinets of curiosities, usually brought back from voyages overseas. Natural specimens, cultural objects, all displayed as if—"isn't this weird? Aren't you glad we're not like that?" The British pioneered this kind of display, exploiting public fascination with oddities and deformities. This museum was founded by a taxidermist. Can you tell?

Lights up on ARJAY, MILDRED and
ROGER with SCHILLER, peering at a
display.

ROGER

A goat with seven legs.

MILDRED

Poor little thing. It didn't live very long, did it?

ROGER

Growing up on the farm, I saw one or two stillborn calves with extra legs.

ARJAY

Oh, wow, look at this.

They move on to another display.

ROGER

Guinea pigs playing cricket.

MILDRED

It's cute, but creepy.

ARJAY

(Looking at another display.)
Oh, no. This is worse.

SCHILLER
Kittens serving tea.

ARJAY
Oh, my God, look.

ROGER
(Reading a label.)
“These kittens were not killed for this display.”

MILDRED
Oh, ish.

SCHILLER
Right.

ARJAY
Never mind that they’re all the exact same kind of kittens at exactly the same age.

SCHILLER
I bet farmers knew he liked kittens and brought bags of them freshly drowned.

ROGER
That’s what you do in the country. If animals are no use, you get rid of ‘em.

MILDRED
Schiller, we’ve been to a lot of museums on this trip—

ARJAY
This one barely qualifies—

MILDRED
Aren’t we close to the Crossett site, that church—?

SCHILLER
It’s kinda out of the way, Mom.

ARJAY
I’m sick of museums, too. When are we going to see stone circles?

SCHILLER
The Hurlers are out on Bodmin Moor, just a few miles south. I figured we could see them after lunch.

ROGER
Your mother and I have to have our nap after lunch.

SCHILLER

Then Arjay and I will have to see the Hurlers without you. Trethevy Quoit is there, too.

ARJAY

What's that?

SCHILLER

They're not sure. Might be part of a prehistoric barrow tomb. Or maybe a mini Stonehenge.

MILDRED

So the Crossett site is too far away?

SCHILLER

I think so, Mom. We're only here for a day and you have to have your nap.

MILDRED

I need an acetaminophen before I can sleep.

ROGER

What are the Hurlers?

ARJAY

A stone circle.

SCHILLER

Three of them actually.

MILDRED

Oh, I wanted to see those.

SCHILLER

Do you want to nap in the car on the way?

MILDRED

No, I have to lie down. Don't worry about the Crossett site. Caryl and Sherm have pictures, I'm sure.

SCHILLER

And we don't know exactly where it is. We'd spend the whole afternoon on a wild goose chase. Our time is limited.

ROGER

How soon is lunch?

SCHILLER
Soon, Dad!

ARJAY
Now, if you're hungry.

SCHILLER
He's always hungry.

ROGER
Yes, and then I will be sleepy. That's what it's like to be seventy-damn-something years old!

MILDRED
Roger, your blood sugar is low.

SCHILLER
We'll eat right away. There's a pub next door.

ROGER
And then I want a nap.

MILDRED
Oh, I looked in that pub. I'd rather not.

ARJAY
Are you tired of pub food?

MILDRED
I don't mind pubs, but this one smelled worse than usual.

ROGER
Well, we have to eat.

ARJAY
Soon.

SCHILLER
Okay, okay! We'll eat as soon as we can find the exact right kind of restaurant that doesn't smell, even if it means driving through one-way lanes for miles! And then we'll come all the way back here so you can have your nap and then we'll drive some more so we can see the fucking stone circles and I'm sorry but we're not going to wander all over Cornwall looking for dead relatives!

MILDRED
All right, we can eat at the pub.

ARJAY
Could we get room service?

ROGER
That's too expensive! And I bet the hotel doesn't even have room service.

ROGER

Last night I dreamed about a washcloth. Don't they have them in England at all?

Lights out. French music begins, possibly *La Marseillaise*. The lights come back up with a beautiful stained-glass window effect. MILDRED, ROGER and ARJAY stand transfixed. After a moment, MILDRED reads from a brochure.

MILDRED

Saint Chapelle was the private chapel of Louis—what is that?—the ninth, I think—and was built to house the relics of the crown of thorns and a piece of the True Cross. Louis the ninth—later St. Louis—paid more for the relics than he did for the entire chapel.

ROGER

This is the most beautiful church I've ever been in. Just look at those windows!

ARJAY

And the afternoon sun is hitting them just right.

SCHILLER

(Appearing with phone)

I planned it that way. I really wanted you to see this.

MILDRED

Schiller, it's wonderful!

ROGER

Just magnificent!

ROGER

Is there a book? I want to buy a book.

SCHILLER

(Taking a picture.)

Hold still—I'll take your picture.

ROGER

I still want a book.

SCHILLER

Okay, we'll get a book. There's a shop downstairs. Shall we go?

ARJAY

We just got here!

ROGER

I want to sit and look.

MILDRED

I really need to sit, Roger.

SCHILLER

But not too long if we're going to make it to the Pompidou before it closes.

ARJAY

Schiller, we just got to Paris.

MILDRED

We've already seen Notre Dame,
the Seine—

ARJAY

Your poor parents...!

ROGER

Had lunch! It was very good.

MILDRED

But we haven't had our nap.

SCHILLER

You napped in the Chunnel!

ARJAY

Shhh! This *is* a chapel...

ROGER

I slept right through it!

MILDRED

I didn't sleep.

ARJAY

Don't be a travel Nazi.

SCHILLER

All right, we can skip the Pompidou.

ROGER

Your mother's exhausted and her hips hurt. Come sit with me, Mildred, and be my honey.

MILDRED

Don't blame it all on me, Roger. You're the one with the atrial fibrillation.

ROGER and MILDRED sit, apart from
ARJAY and SCHILLER. Gradually, the
lights go out on ROGER and MILDRED.

ARJAY

They're really doing very well. Overall.

SCHILLER

Surprisingly well. I know. There's just so much I want them to see. It's not like you and I are seeing anything new. This trip is for them.

ARJAY

Which is why we should see it at their pace.

SCHILLER

Walking that slowly feels like I'm stuck in tar.

ARJAY

You've done a great job of planning the whole trip. I haven't had to do a thing.

SCHILLER

And you got to see your stupid stone circles. Took a million photographs.

ARJAY

Thank you, baby. They fit perfectly into my *Ozymandias* series.

SCHILLER

Do you think we should tell them tonight?

ARJAY

I don't know why you're avoiding it.

SCHILLER

I'm not avoiding—

ARJAY

You keep putting it off.

SCHILLER

I just want it to be the right moment. I don't know how they'll react.

ARJAY

Tonight's that restaurant in Montmartre, with the Japanese owner—?

SCHILLER

He's not Japanese, he's a Japanophile. He dates a Japanese woman and has a Japanese chef—

ARJAY

—Who makes the best foie gras—

SCHILLER

You're right—they're bound to be in a good mood—they'll be eating the best meal of their lives.

ARJAY

Do they know what foie gras is?

ROGER

(In the dark.)
What *is* this?

Lights up on ROGER and MILDRED seated at a table. SCHILLER and ARJAY join them.

SCHILLER, ARJAY AND MILDRED

It's foie gras!

ROGER

It looks like a baby liver.

ARJAY

It's goose liver.

SCHILLER

They force-feed the goose to make the liver especially rich—

MILDRED

What do they do with the rest of the goose?

ARJAY

Somebody eats it, I'm sure.

MILDRED

I'd just hate to think the poor goose goes through all that—could you imagine—your whole life and you turn out to be nothing but an appetizer!

ROGER

Little goose, little goose, give me your liver!

(In a goose voice.)

Oh, no, I'm not! Not even a sliver!

SCHILLER

Dad!

ROGER

Too late little goose!

(Pops the entire foie gras in his mouth.)

ARJAY

Oh, no!

SCHILLER

Dad, gross!

MILDRED

Roger!

ROGER

(His mouth full.)

What? You want me to spit it out?

ARJAY

That is so wrong.

SCHILLER

It's an exquisite delicacy. You're supposed to savor it—on toast points!

ROGER

It *was* good. Gone now, though.

ARJAY

At least Mildred can enjoy it slowly.

MILDRED

I don't think I can enjoy it at all. It makes me too sad.

WAITER

(Appearing.)

Did Monsieur enjoy the foie gras?

ROGER

Excellent!

WAITER

Would you like another?

ROGER

No, thank you. Apparently my wife doesn't want hers. Mildred?

MILDRED

Go ahead, Roger.

SCHILLER

Ma, you *have* to eat it! It's the best dish in the whole world!

WAITER

Merci beaucoup.

SCHILLER

C'est vrai. But I haven't tried it yet.

ROGER

Too late!

(Pops the whole foie gras in his mouth.)

SCHILLER glares at ROGER.

ARJAY

This our third time to Paris together and our third time here.

WAITER

Tres bien.

SCHILLER

We met the owner last time. What is his name—Marcel?

WAITER

No, no, that is the old owner. How you say—previous?

SCHILLER

He sold the restaurant?

WAITER

Oui. Two years almost.

SCHILLER

No!

ARJAY

And the Japanese chef?

WAITER

(Shrugs.)

How can Japanese cook French?

ARJAY

He was very good.

SCHILLER

You fired him?

WAITER

I am not owner.

ARJAY

You have a French chef now?

WAITER

Oui. Non. Algerian.

SCHILLER

Algerian!?

WAITER

Excusez-moi.

(Disappears.)

ARJAY

Schiller—

(Looking around.)

I think *everyone* here is Algerian.

ROGER

And you said that really loud.

SCHILLER

You're the loud ones!

MILDRED

Are they all looking, or am I paranoid?

ROGER

Algerians are Arabs, aren't they?

SCHILLER

Algeria is in Africa.

ARJAY

But Islamic I think is what your father means.

MILDRED

(Brightly.)
So tomorrow will we go to the Giradelle graveyard? An actual headstone!

SCHILLER

(Overlapping.)
Only if you want to give up three other things. It's outside Paris, so it'll take most of the day—

ARJAY

What's scheduled?

SCHILLER

And you'd miss your nap.

ARJAY

Is tomorrow the Muse De Orsay?

SCHILLER

It's the Musee d'Orsay, but yes. I planned on lunch there—they've got a great buffet—then—God smiles on his pious children—the Louvre is open late.

MILDRED

So I won't be doing *any* genealogy on this trip?

SCHILLER

Ancestors aren't us, Ma. They don't have anything to do with us.

MILDRED

I think they do in a way.

ROGER

We can do genealogy in Germany.

MILDRED

That's your side of the family, Roger. What about mine?

SCHILLER

You can't expect the dead to tell you who you are.

MILDRED

You're right. It's fine. It's not like I'm the DAR. It really isn't important in the grand scheme.

SCHILLER

(After a pause.)
Ma, I'm sorry. It's just—we don't have time—

MILDRED

In a hundred years we'll all be dead and none of this will matter.

ARJAY

(To SCHILLER.)

You better do a better apology than that.

SCHILLER

Okay, Ma, I know it's important to you, so maybe we can skip the Louvre—

ROGER

Skip the Louvre!?

SCHILLER

Dad!

ARJAY

Shhhh!

WAITER arrives, silently drops off the check, and starts to leave.

SCHILLER

Wait a minute, what's this?

WAITER

(Icy.)

Pardonnez-moi?

SCHILLER

What's this? It looks like the check.

WAITER

Quoi? Qu'est-ce que c'est "check?"

SCHILLER

L'addition.

WAITER

Oui.

SCHILLER

We've only had the appetizer. We're here for dinner.

WAITER

Je ne comprends.

SCHILLER

We ordered entrees.

ARJAY

The foie gras was great.

WAITER

Je ne parle Anglais.

SCHILLER

You spoke it just fine a minute ago. OK, je parle un petit Francais—

WAITER laughs and leaves.

ROGER

(After a moment.)

I don't think we're gonna get served.

SCHILLER

Yes, we are. I'll just have to use my French, which I don't really have.

ARJAY

I suspect we'll be actively ignored until we leave.

SCHILLER

Then we won't leave. We'll just wait until we're waited on.

MILDRED

Oh, no, Schiller, let's not do that.

ROGER

If we're not being treated well, we can go somewhere else.

SCHILLER

This is a special place and it's a special evening and we're going to stay here till it gets special again.

ARJAY

It's not *that* special.

SCHILLER

That's true. The foie gras—

(Louder.)

—Wasn't nearly as good as it used to be!

ARJAY

Jesus, Schiller!

ROGER

Shhhhhh!

MILDRED

Sweetie, relax!

ARJAY

You're being a very ugly American at the moment. Stop it!

ROGER

If we have this much trouble with the French, imagine the Germans!

SCHILLER

Fine. I'll be quiet. But we're going to wait.

MILDRED

(After a few tense moments.)

How long?

SCHILLER

(After a few more tense moments.)

Arjay and I have some news we've been saving—

ARJAY

Oh, Schiller, not now!

SCHILLER

No, this is the perfect time. This is when we planned to tell them. And we have—

(Looking around.)

—Nothing else to do just now—

ARJAY

You'll taint the moment.

SCHILLER

The moment's *been* tainted.

(ARJAY gestures "go ahead then.")

Arjay and I are getting married.

ROGER

(After a moment.)

In a church?

SCHILLER

In *my* church. The minister's retiring and we want him to perform the ceremony before he goes.

MILDRED

But isn't Arjay kind of an atheist?

ARJAY

I worship all 128 Egyptian gods.

SCHILLER

You always say that, but you take communion at Christmas and Easter.

ARJAY

And the wine boils and the host flies across the room.

SCHILLER

But.

ARJAY

But it's important to Schiller to do it in a Lutheran church.

SCHILLER

So—some good news.

(After a moment of silence.)

What do you think?

MILDRED

Schiller, are you sure? Why ruin what you've got?

ROGER

You've been together eight years—

SCHILLER

Ruin?

SCHILLER

You're trying to talk us out of it?

MILDRED

No, no, of course not. I've just seen so many couples—cohabitate—then when they get married, they break up within a few months.

ARJAY

We're together together. No quickie divorce after a couple of months.

ROGER

(Toasting.)

Well, congratulations.

(Nudging MILDRED.)

To the happy couple!

ARJAY

(As they clink glasses.)

I've been dying to tell you for weeks.

MILDRED

When?

ARJAY

We've known for, well, months, actually—

MILDRED

No, no. When is the actual ceremony? What date?

SCHILLER

Not for another nine to ten months.

MILDRED

That won't work.

SCHILLER

We have to have time to plan.

MILDRED

No, that's too long.

ARJAY

What do you mean?

MILDRED

Assuming you want me to come.

SCHILLER

Ma, what do you mean? Of course you're invited.

MILDRED

What was that Italian saying? About God and plans?

SCHILLER

Uomo propono, Dio dispo.

MILDRED

God is disposing—of me.

SCHILLER

(After a moment.)

What...do you mean?

ROGER

Your mother has cancer again, Schiller.

SCHILLER

What...kind?

MILDRED

Colon. Just like Ma and Pa had.

SCHILLER

But treatments have improved since then. They'd still be with us today—
Chances are—

MILDRED

It's an operation and then chemo. I'm not going through that again.

SCHILLER

You're...not...

MILDRED

No.

SCHILLER

You'd rather...

MILDRED

Yes.

SCHILLER stares at MILDRED a moment,
forces back tears, then hugs MILDRED very
tightly.

MILDRED

(While comforting SCHILLER.)
So your wedding sounds wonderful. Roger and I would love to come. Just sooner than
later please, sooner than later.

End of Act One

Act Two

ARJAY isolated in light.

ARJAY

Three years ago, we saw a lot more Americans at the Hiroshima memorial than at Nagasaki. Which is probably a good thing, because the Nagasaki museum is very—I dunno—forthright about the bombing. Maybe it's because Hiroshima got all the postwar aid, but in Nagasaki they make it quite clear that Japan was ready to surrender before the U.S. dropped either bomb, and that there was an *absolute* lack of necessity to bomb Nagasaki. The only reason they didn't hit a purely military target—like a ship at sea—was to terrify the Soviets and let the world know America not only had the bomb, but was willing to use it on civilians. We're still the only country to actually make a nuclear strike—and we've done it *twice*. The exhibits were very moving, frightening, and exceptionally well designed.

Lights up on SCHILLER, MILDRED and ROGER riding the subway.

ROGER

I couldn't do it.

SCHILLER

The Hiroshima museum was too graphic—wax dummies of people with their arms melting off.

ROGER

No, see, I couldn't. Memorials, museums—I know it's important to pay respects, to remember, but sometimes it just seems like a form of entertainment, indulging in emotions, even painful ones—and vaguely, well, immoral.

SCHILLER

Museums are immoral? Catharsis is self-indulgent?

MILDRED

It's learning, isn't it? Knowledge isn't immoral.

ROGER

The Greeks never showed violence in their plays—they'd reveal the bodies afterward and let you imagine how they died. But the characters on stage were clearly responsible, culpable in those deaths. It doesn't work if it's too literal. I heard about a production of *Medea* where they made lifelike dummies of the children that concealed breakable containers of red liquid. When Medea had her revenge on Jason, she just picked up the kids and slammed them face-first into a wall. The audience rioted and the production had to stop.

ARJAY

Are you gonna be all right in the German—how do you say it?

SCHILLER

Deutsche Historische Museum.

ARJAY

We can skip the Holocaust part.

MILDRED

No, no. We have to see it. That's why we're here, isn't it?

ROGER

I think we're kind of obligated. To be there at least. I spose I can look away if it's too disturbing. I've seen death camp liberation film footage, but it's not the same as actually being here in Berlin. I keep expecting a swastika around every corner.

ARJAY

Talk about effective design—the swastika's the world's most recognizable political logo. And the Nazis totally *owned* the colors red and black.

MILDRED

(Looking around.)
They look so sad.

SCHILLER

Who?

MILDRED

All the people on this train. Like they're about to cry.

SCHILLER

Maybe you would, too, if you had World War Two on your conscience.

ROGER

I am a doughnut.

SCHILLER

Dad, we just had breakfast.

ROGER

I don't want a doughnut. I am a doughnut.

SCHILLER

(After a moment.)
Why are you a doughnut, Dad?

ROGER

I'm quoting JFK. When he came here and said, "Ich bin ein Berliner," he was actually saying "I'm a jelly doughnut."

ARJAY

You're kidding.

ROGER

He meant to say, "Ich bin Berliner"—I am a Berliner. But the article "ein" made it into the local name for a raspberry filled doughnut.

MILDRED

He did very well for a pastry.

ROGER

I always wonder what the rest of his presidency would have been like, if he'd gotten a chance—

SCHILLER

Mom, you weren't hanging around the Texas Book Depository in 1963, were you?

MILDRED

I'm never going to live that down, am I?

ROGER AND SCHILLER

No.

MILDRED

Do you remember that story told by one of the Nazi guards in the Nuremberg trials about the woman slipping and falling on her way into the gas chamber?

SCHILLER AND ARJAY

No.

ROGER

I never heard of that story.

MILDRED

The guard was trying to explain what it felt like to be a part of that horrible machine, how numbed he felt, like he wasn't actually there, only watching, and then he saw that woman fall. Naked, completely vulnerable, no dignity remaining, and she tripped and fell, right at the door to the shower. His instinct was to help her up, but that wasn't his job, and he realized he'd be helping her to her death. In that instant of his hesitation, another woman, just as naked, reached down and helped the fallen woman to her feet. She knew both women were going to die, and that her gift of a moment's dignity to the other woman was noble only for its, well, futility. But she wanted her last act to be a kindness.

ARJAY

He could see all that in her eyes?

MILDRED

He saw it in his heart. At least I like to think he did.

SCHILLER

I think there's a model of Auschwitz in the Deutsche Historische Museum.

(Slowly lights isolate SCHILLER, who stands.)

I hope it's not too crowded there. In Nagasaki there weren't many tourists, so I got to look at the models and the artifacts pretty much by myself. Arjay and I stayed away from each other through some unspoken rule. You kinda want to be alone with something that devastating, with the guilt of something that happened before you were born but you know it's still somehow your fault. It's embarrassing to share with other people. Those are some of my best moments in museums.

Lights up more fully. SCHILLER is looking at an exhibit. A rather scruffy looking STUDENT approaches SCHILLER.

STUDENT

Sprechen-zie Deutsche?

SCHILLER

Nein, English, sorry.
(Steps away a bit.)

STUDENT

(Following. German accent.)
What do you think of this?

SCHILLER

I can't imagine anything worse.

STUDENT

Do you think it could happen again?

SCHILLER

Not exactly this way, but yes, I'm afraid it could.

STUDENT

Why is that?

SCHILLER

I'm sorry, I wanted to—

STUDENT

I don't mean to disturb you, but I'm curious. Why do you think it could happen again?

SCHILLER

People haven't changed. Not enough, anyway. That's why we should never forget.

STUDENT

So it is human nature?

SCHILLER

I guess.

STUDENT

Could it be something else?

SCHILLER

(Trying to concentrate on the exhibit.)
I suppose.

STUDENT

Could it be money?

SCHILLER

Money?

STUDENT

Economic exploitation.

SCHILLER

I think this was ethnic hatred, racism—

STUDENT

The Jews had the money. Hitler wanted it.

SCHILLER

It's more complicated than that—

STUDENT

Capitalism is complicated, but if you can see through it—

SCHILLER

Excuse me.

(Leaves.)

STUDENT

(Calling after SCHILLER.)

You're American, aren't you?

Lights fade on the STUDENT and come up
on ARJAY and ROGER.

ROGER

I don't know why she'd want to see that.

ARJAY

Morbid curiosity?

ROGER

But...right now? It's strange to me.

ARJAY

But if she wants to—

ROGER

I want her to do whatever she wants to do—

SCHILLER

(Entering.)

What does she want to do?

ROGER

Where were you? Buying Nazi souvenirs in the gift shop?

SCHILLER

I got accosted by a Communist.

ARJAY

There are still Communists?

SCHILLER

It was like talking to someone from another time. A complete anachronism. What's she want to do?

ROGER

Your mother's been seeing ads for an exhibition—

ARJAY

You've seen them, on buses—

ROGER

Corperwelten. It means *Body Worlds*.

SCHILLER

She doesn't want to see *that*, does she?

ARJAY

Evidently.

SCHILLER

Does she know what it is?

Lights up slowly on MILDRED gazing at a NUDE. At first it seems like merely a sculpture, but as the lights rise, it is revealed to be an actual person in a strong pose, with one portion of the body opened up so that the muscles or organs are on view.

ROGER

I think so.

ARJAY

Is it really dead bodies?

SCHILLER

You remember—it came to LA again last year. This doctor talked a bunch of people into willing him their bodies, then he plastinated 'em and put 'em on display.

ROGER

Plastinated?

SCHILLER

It's some chemical process that infuses the bodies with enough plastic to completely prevent deterioration. He says it's educational, like medical students studying cadavers, but I think it's pure exploitation. He's even got a pregnant woman and her fetus.

ROGER

He got her permission?

SCHILLER

Only a German would think of something like that. At Natural History we've got a policy against the display of human remains. And Mom wants to see it?

ROGER

That's what she said.

ARJAY

I wouldn't mind. From an anatomical point of view.

SCHILLER

She's not going to like it.

ROGER

Are you going to tell her no?

Lights out on ARJAY and SCHILLER as
ROGER joins MILDRED, who is looking at
the NUDE. ROGER avoids looking at it.

ROGER

Mildred, I think I'll wait for you outside. I'm a little—you know how I am with blood—and this is much—

MILDRED

I won't be long.

ROGER

They're not even in cases. Right out where you could touch 'em if you wanted to—

MILDRED

You go. I understand.

ROGER

There must be fifty of them. I don't get why people would let someone do this to them, put them on display—it's funny, but the horse bothers me the most.

MILDRED

You should get some air.

ROGER

I will. But are you all right?

I'm fine. MILDRED

How can you even stand to look—? ROGER

They're talking to me, Roger. MILDRED

What? ROGER

Even dead, frozen like this, they have something to say. MILDRED

Bury me? ROGER

Oh, Roger, be serious. MILDRED

You be serious. ROGER

They talk. If you watch closely, they talk. MILDRED

ROGER finally brings himself to look at the NUDE. He forces himself to scrutinize it. While he is staring, MILDRED leaves. After a moment, the NUDE moves.

(German accent.) NUDE
You want to know what it's like, don't you?

What...what's like? ROGER

I hear you're going to Buchenwald. NUDE

Did Mildred tell you that? ROGER

NUDE

I went there as a child. They make us.

ROGER

I don't want to go, but I feel it's my responsibility.

NUDE

As an American?

ROGER

As a human being.

NUDE

You are frightened.

ROGER

Some things you just have to do. You can't shrink.

NUDE

Mildred doesn't seem frightened.

ROGER

She's resigned.

NUDE

But still frightened, in secret. Hold her hand.

ROGER

I will.

NUDE

And she'll hold yours.

ROGER

What did you...die of?

NUDE

Cancer. Can't you see? That's why they opened me up.
(Points.)

ROGER

(Peering.)

Oh, that's awful. Did it hurt much?

NUDE

Ja. But they gave me opium at the end. Which was nice.
(ROGER just stares.)

You want to touch, don't you?

ROGER

No!

NUDE

You want to touch.

The NUDE reaches for ROGER, who faints.
Lights up on MILDRED and ARJAY staring
into the distance.

MILDRED

Oh, ish. Are they—?

ARJAY

I think so.

MILDRED

—Americans?

ARJAY

They look like American *Lutherans*.

MILDRED

It's not nice to stereotype.

ARJAY

Look at them: pale, confused—

MILDRED

Fat.

ARJAY

I wasn't going to say that.

MILDRED

But it's true. Americans look fat out of context. Everyone in Europe is so trim.

ARJAY

Too much dairy.

MILDRED

Do we look like that?

ARJAY

We're dressed better. And we're not all huddled on a bus with others of our kind.

MILDRED

Oh, no—do you think—?

ARJAY

(Quickly hands her a guidebook.)
Here, pretend to read.
(Consults phone.)

MINNESOTAN

(Appearing, wearing shorts and looking like a giant six year-old.)
Hello! Sprechen-zie Englisch?
(They try not to notice, but MILDRED can't help a polite smile.)
You must speak English. Your book is English.

MILDRED

Oh, hello.

ARJAY

Sorry, were you talking to us?

MINNESOTAN

Oh, great, you're Americans!

ARJAY

Um...yes.

MINNESOTAN

Where are you from?

ARJAY

Los Angeles.

MILDRED

Oklahoma.

MINNESOTAN

That's my group over there. We're on a pilgrimage, sorta, all the way from Mankato, Minnesota.

ARJAY

Ding, ding, ding!

MINNESOTAN

Excuse me?

MILDRED

Is it a Lutheran pilgrimage?

MINNESOTAN

You bet. We spent two days in Wittenborg, saw the Schlosskirche where Luther posted the 95 Theses, Melancthonhaus, Lutherhaus, of course, and now we're in Weimar—the heart, the soul of Germany—to see Goethehaus, Liszthaus, the Bauhaus, Schillerhaus—

ARJAY

Schillerhaus? What's that?

MINNESOTAN

Schiller was a playwright, nineteenth century, I think.

(Shows guidebook, the same as ARJAY'S.)

Been reading, but it all runs together in my head. Uffda!

ARJAY

I didn't know that. About Schiller.

MINNESOTAN

Say, have you been keeping up with the news?

MILDRED

I managed to find CNN two days ago for about half an hour.

MINNESOTAN

So you don't know the latest?

ARJAY

We've only got one phone with terrible reception and battery life.

MILDRED

What?

MINNESOTAN

I'm trying to find out. Something about the possibility of martial law in the US.

MILDRED AND ARJAY

Martial law!?

MILDRED

I knew it—he'll declare martial law so he can hold onto the presidency.

MINNESOTAN

And I'm guessing the international situation's worse, cause the Germans seem a little less friendly every day. Have you noticed that?

MILDRED

Maybe a little.

MINNESOTAN

I feel so isolated traveling like this. I'm not used to it. Every morning at home I sit down to the newspaper and a cup of Tang tea. I don't know what's going on and it kinda bugs me.

MILDRED

Last I heard it was worse, yes. New UN resolutions, sanctions—

MINNESOTAN

We're sposed to fly out of Frankfurt in two days. Hope we can get home.

ARJAY

Not really a good time to be traveling.

MINNESOTAN AND MILDRED

But it's cheap!

MINNESOTAN laughs. MILDRED is embarrassed.

MINNESOTAN

You don't think anything really serious is going to happen, do you?

MILDRED

I'm sure not. It's all threats and posturing.

ARJAY

Saber-rattling. Mine's bigger than yours.

MINNESOTAN

Sure.

MILDRED

(After a moment.)
Well, have a wonderful trip back.

MINNESOTAN

Thanks. It's nice to see Americans—other than our group, I mean.

ARJAY

Especially if the Germans are being mean.

MINNESOTAN

You bet. We gotta stick together!

(Pause.)

Well...auf weidersehen.

MILDRED

Good-bye.

ARJAY

Take care.

MINNESOTAN leaves, reluctantly.

ARJAY

(After a moment.)

Why didn't you say—?

MILDRED

I just didn't feel like it.

ARJAY

Schiller never told me—you never told me—

MILDRED

Told you what?

ARJAY

Is Schiller named for the playwright?

MILDRED

It was Roger's idea. At first he wanted Goethe, but imagine *that* on the playground.

ARJAY

What didn't you feel like saying?

MILDRED

It's amazing how just a few weeks away makes me not want to be an American. Oh, I don't mean that exactly, but I don't want to be associated with America right here, right now. Normally I would have said I was from Minnesota. But I just didn't feel like it. And I went to Mankato State!

ARJAY

I've seen you make that geography connection with strangers more than once.

MILDRED

My mother did it, too. She said if you ask enough questions, everybody's your cousin. Funny how right now I want to feel disconnected. Oh, that sounds awful.

ARJAY

No, it's okay. You feel free. Or at least freer.

MILDRED

Maybe that's it.

ARJAY

(After a moment.)

It wasn't me that persuaded you to come on this trip, was it?

(MILDRED just smiles.)

Was it finding out you were sick?

MILDRED

Schiller's always telling us our time is limited.

ARJAY

Schiller is almost always right.

MILDRED

They say when you travel you learn more about yourself than any place you visit.

ARJAY

For most people it's the last thing we want to know.

(Pause.)

So—who are you?

MILDRED

I'm not finished yet. But I do know I'm not nearly as afraid as I used to be.

(After a moment.)

Arjay, can you do us a favor?

ARJAY

I guess.

MILDRED

Roger and I are somewhat ambivalent about marriage—

ARJAY

I kinda got that.

MILDRED

Truth be told, we almost gave up on it ourselves a few years ago—

ARJAY

Schiller never told me—

MILDRED

Just seemed like a bad habit we were too lazy to break. Which must be true 'cause here we still are. But I don't regret that.

ARJAY

Now.

MILDRED

Now.

(After a moment.)

Can you—not now, but someday—tell Schiller Roger and I almost split?

ARJAY

You mean you didn't—?

MILDRED

Sometimes it's hard to tell Schiller things.

(ARJAY just laughs.)

So you will? Someday?

ARJAY

Someday.

MILDRED

Roger and I are very happy you're marrying Schiller.

ARJAY

I know.

MILDRED

Of course, you do—

ARJAY

But that you can say so is even better.

MILDRED

(After a moment.)

Cause you should've seen what else Schiller's drug home!

(Bursts out laughing.)

ARJAY

(Laughing.)

You ruint it! You ruint it!

MILDRED

One spring break—oh, I’m glad Schiller’s not here—one spring Schiller showed up on our doorstep with this perfectly nice—*person*—and we were all nervous and trying to be polite when suddenly while I was going on about—geography, I guess—doing my geographic connection thing—now that I know I have a *thing*—in the middle of me trying desperately to make this connection—Jamie—I think that was the name, Jamie—perfectly nice—suddenly pooted out, well, no, actually *blasted* out a nervous fart like you wouldn’t believe. And I here I was, Mrs. Gracious, Calm and Motherly, and I couldn’t possibly even *acknowledge* this unfortunate explosion so I knew I had to keep talking but I had no idea what I’d been saying and just said the first words that came into my head—cat, dog, sigmoidoscopy, I don’t remember what they were, but I know it didn’t make any sense whatsoever! I just had to keep going or Schiller would be embarrassed and Roger and I would be embarrassed and Jamie the Poot Monster would shrivel and die and the whole mortified world would blow itself up!

ARJAY

Mildred, that was *me*. I pooted when I met you.

MILDRED gasps. Then she and ARJAY both burst out laughing, practically shrieking. SCHILLER and ROGER arrive at a trot.

SCHILLER

Mom, what’s wrong?!

ROGER

Mildred, are you all right?

MILDRED

(Laughing.)
Nothing, yes, fine!

SCHILLER

Arjay, what’s going on?

ARJAY

Nothing, just—remembrance of things passed.

ARJAY and MILDRED shriek again.

ROGER

When you've finished—

(They try to stop but can't entirely.)

When you're over your seizures, I have some good news.

SCHILLER

We have a rendezvous in a graveyard.

ARJAY AND MILDRED

What?

SCHILLER

Finally some genealogy for Mom.

ROGER

My mother's cousin's daughter is sending one of her children to meet us at—

(Looks at a scrap of paper.)

—The Elephant, which I guess is a hotel—and then we'll all go to this cemetery to see the grave of Cousin Franz.

MILDRED

And who—

(Wiping away a tear.)

—Sorry—what is your mother's cousin's daughter's child's name?

ROGER

(Checks paper again.)

Schlitzzen.

ARJAY AND MILDRED

What?

ROGER

Schlitzzen!

Lights come up isolating SCHLITZEN, a tough customer, possibly a skinhead.

MILDRED

Your mother's cousin's daughter's child is a reindeer?

SCHLITZEN

I am Schlitzzen.

Lighting changes so they are all in the same area. It is a bar of an old hotel.

SCHLITZEN

Willkommen to the Elephant.

ROGER

Schlitzen, I'm Roger. This is my wife, Mildred—

MILDRED

Very nice to meet you.

ARJAY

I'm Arjay.

SCHILLER

And I'm Schiller.

SCHLITZEN

Funny name.

ARJAY

After the playwright!

(SCHILLER looks at ARJAY in surprise.)

SCHLITZEN

So you want to know my grandfather?

ROGER

Your whole family, really.

SCHLITZEN

Grossvater Franz came to this hotel for drinking. It is most famous.

MILDRED

Famous for what?

SCHLITZEN

Was Hitler's favorite.

SCHILLER

Really!

ROGER

I'm not surprised.

ARJAY

Jesus!

SCHLITZEN

You know Grossvater was Nazi.

SCHILLER

Everybody was.

ARJAY

No kidding!

ROGER

I'm not surprised.

SCHLITZEN

You are not shocked to have the Nazi relation?

ROGER

Was he a true believer?

(SCHLITZEN looks confused.)

Or did he just go along for the ride?

SCHILLER

Dad, that's pretty colloquial.

SCHLITZEN

He joined for job, I think. In office, no killing. He did nothing. Too old to fight, so he made it safe through war.

ROGER

Did he have any hobbies?

SCHLITZEN

What are hobbies?

SCHILLER

Colloquial.

ROGER

What did he do for fun?

SCHLITZEN

For fun? He did nothing. No, I am wrong. He enjoyed the theatre but hated the film. Before the war he went to Berlin to see Brecht. He enjoyed to watch.

ROGER

How funny! I teach theatre. I used to.

MILDRED

What do you do?

SCHLITZEN

For job?

MILDRED

Yes. Or are you in school?

SCHLITZEN

Dropped out. I live with Mutter.

ROGER

Have you been to Buchenwald?

SCHLITZEN

Ja. Not for long time, but does not change.

ROGER

Is it...well...I'm concerned I might not be able to take it. I passed out in that *Corperwelten* exhibition in Berlin.

SCHLITZEN

(Shrugs.)

You have seen the pictures.

ROGER

I don't think I want to go.

SCHILLER

Dad!

MILDRED

Roger, you said yourself it's important.

SCHILLER

You can't come all the way to Germany and not go to a concentration camp. It's like visiting LA and not going to Disneyland.

SCHLITZEN

That is very funny.

(Gets up.)

I give directions now.

MILDRED

You're not going with us?

ROGER

There's so much we want to ask you! The family, politics—!

SCHLITZEN

Politics?

SCHILLER

The international—you know—situation—kinda scary for us, traveling and all—

ROGER

The German position vis-à-vis our American perspective—

SCHLITZEN

There is no German position. There is the government, and there are real people. Government say "peace in our time," but we hear that before, don't we? German government so pure and holy because they have no choice. They cannot talk war. When

everyone forget Hitler, maybe then. But the world forget the moon and sun before they forget Hitler.

ROGER

No, I don't think anyone will forget.

SCHLITZEN

I did not know Hitler. Yet I am one without the job. My hands—
(Shows them.)
—Clean—no blood. The Jews are safe from me.

MILDRED

Are you feeling safer now?

SCHLITZEN

Safe? Now?

MILDRED

With the Soviets out of Germany, I mean.

SCHLITZEN

Safe from what? At the least Russians are predictable—we don't know what you'll do—

ROGER

Not us!

MILDRED

We're not our government either.

SCHLITZEN

I am sorry. I go now.

ROGER

Wait! Can you tell us any more about Franz, about anything...? Were you born before he—

SCHLITZEN

I knew him. Is nothing to tell. No, I am wrong once more. He died in theatre.

MILDRED

An accident?

Lights out on everyone but SCHLITZEN.

SCHLITZEN

No. Sitting in seat. Watching.

Lights out on SCHLITZEN and up on SCHILLER, ARJAY, MILDRED and ROGER sitting on a bus.

ROGER

Of all the narrative arts, theatre is superior.

ARJAY

How's that?

ROGER

It's the real thing. A book is just ink on pulp. Film is just light. Insubstantial. With theatre you get real actors right in front of you.

ARJAY

What about dance and opera?

ROGER

They're like theatre. *Gesamtkunstwerk* incorporating all the arts. Live.

SCHILLER

Exhibitions are narratives, too. With real objects, usually.

ROGER

But you don't have to follow a particular narrative. Nothing prevents you from jumping from display to display or even seeing the whole thing backward.

MILDRED

You can skip to the end of a book just as easily.

ROGER

Most people don't, Mildred. There's a fairly rigid expectation that books are read front to back. And not a word of a novel changes once it's published. Same for movies—

(Waving off SCHILLER'S objection.)

—Once they're released they don't change, arguments between the director and the studio notwithstanding. But theatre changes every night, from performance to performance, from production to production, with different actors, different designers, different direction, different audiences—it's so much more alive!

MILDRED

Please stop talking in circles on public transportation. I'm getting sick.

SCHILLER

When did you come up with all this?

ROGER

(Shrugs.)
I'm retired. I finally get to think.

MILDRED

You can imagine what it's like for me. I keep signing him up for volunteer work.
(Looking out the window.)
Roger, are you sure this is the right bus? We're in the middle of the woods.

ROGER

It's supposed to be a country graveyard.

MILDRED

Could you ask the driver?

ROGER

I'm sure this is right.

SCHILLER

(Starts to get up.)
I can ask.

ROGER

You don't speak German.

SCHILLER

Most everybody speaks some English. And if you're too nervous—

ROGER

(Stands.)
I'm not nervous!
(Leaves.)

MILDRED

(Watching him go.)
Dad doesn't really speak German, you know. He can read it, I think. But when he can't be completely articulate, he gets shy.

ARJAY

After this cemetery, can we see the Bauhaus?

SCHILLER

Sure, it's close to the Hilton.
(On phone)
Dammit, I'm almost out of juice!

MILDRED

When are we going to Buchenwald?

SCHILLER

I think we've got some lobbying to do with Dad first.

ARJAY

He got so squeamish all of a sudden.

SCHILLER

I can't believe he fainted in Berlin. Is he all right?

MILDRED

An atrial fibrillation isn't trivial, Schiller.

ARJAY

Shhh!

ROGER

(Returning.)

I don't know what happened.

MILDRED

It's the wrong bus.

ROGER

No, it's the right bus. But it's the wrong schedule or something. The driver—it's so frustrating—I've forgotten so much German!—I think the driver said there are alternate schedules—

SCHILLER

Then we have to get off at the next stop.

MILDRED

How soon will that be?

ROGER

I don't know.

SCHILLER

Look, we're okay, I downloaded a map before my phone died, and I remember--

MILDRED

It died?

ARJAY
We're stopping.

SCHILLER
Good, okay, everybody get out.

ROGER
(As they stand.)
I'm sorry, Schiller.

SCHILLER
It's okay, Dad. Hurry, before the bus takes us all the way to Poland!

Lighting change. SCHILLER, ARJAY,
MILDRED, and ROGER are standing by the
road in dappled sunlight.

ARJAY
Why did we get off the bus?

SCHILLER
We were going the wrong way. A bus going back the way we came should be by any
minute. Or—!

MILDRED
What?

SCHILLER
We could—no, never mind.

ROGER
Never mind what?

SCHILLER
I was gonna say we could walk.

ROGER
Back to Weimar?!

SCHILLER
No, of course not. But there's another place we could catch a bus sooner just down—
(Points.)
—That road.

ROGER
How far?

MILDRED
Oh, Roger, you can't go hiking!

SCHILLER
It looks like two kilometers.

ROGER
What's that in miles?

SCHILLER
A little more than one.

ROGER
I can do that. If we don't rush.

MILDRED
Roger, no—

ARJAY
Don't they have Uber in Germany?

SCHILLER
My phone's dead! If a bus comes along we can wave it down.

ARJAY
And it will stop because...we look so pathetic?

SCHILLER
We're not pathetic. It'll be a nice walk in the shade, sunlight filtered through the trees.

MILDRED
It is pretty. Reminds me of Minnesota.

SCHILLER
And if it gets to be too much I can just run ahead and call a taxi to drive out from Weimar.

MILDRED
Oh, no.

ROGER
That's too expensive.

SCHILLER
Should we walk then?

ROGER
(When they all look at him.)
Yes, dammit, let's walk!

They walk. Lighting change reveals a sign in Cyrillic. ROGER is looking sweaty and tired. They all look out over the audience.

SCHILLER

Wow. Anybody read Cyrillic?

MILDRED

What's that? Is it Russian?

ROGER

Whatever it is, they didn't make it easy to find.

ARJAY

You could barely see it from the road.

MILDRED

It looks like a memorial.

ARJAY

It's Soviet design.

SCHILLER

Kinda scary.

ARJAY gets close enough to the sign to read the panel underneath it.

ROGER

What does the map say it is?

SCHILLER

This wasn't on the map.

ARJAY

This part's not in Russian.

ROGER

Is it in German? If it is, I'll come read it. If not, I'm not taking another step.

ARJAY

I think it's German.

ROGER

(Going to the sign.)
Let me see.

MILDRED
Look, there are names of countries.

SCHILLER
Where?

MILDRED
Around the top of the wall.

SCHILLER
Oh, yeah. Auf Deutsche and in Russian.

MILDRED
Austria, Belgium, Czechoslovakia—

MILDRED AND SCHILLER
—Denmark, France, Germany, Greece,
Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg,
the Netherlands, Norway, Poland,
Romania—

ROGER
(Reading.)
Denkmal... Todt...

ROGER
Schiller!

SCHILLER
What, Dad?

ROGER
I told you I didn't want to come here!

ARJAY
What is it?

MILDRED
This is Buchenwald?

SCHILLER
No, it's not. I've seen pictures. Buchenwald's nothing but old foundations—

ARJAY
Just like Manzanar in California—

SCHILLER

That's right—buildings built in the thirties and razed in the forties or fifties. It really does look exactly like Manzanar.

ARJAY

They're both concentration camps.

ROGER

America didn't have concentration camps.

MILDRED

If it's not Buchenwald, what is it?

ROGER

This is some kind of Soviet memorial to the people who died at Buchenwald, so the camp itself—

ARJAY

Must be close by.

MILDRED

Schiller, is that where you're taking us?

SCHILLER, for once, has nothing to say.

ARJAY

Guilty! Look at that Lutheran guilt!

ROGER

I am very irritated.

SCHILLER

I didn't plan it, I swear. But when I saw where the bus dropped us off, I thought we'd have a nice walk in the woods—

ROGER

I'm about to keel over!

ARJAY

And then—?

SCHILLER

We wouldn't have time to get nervous, we'd just be there all of a sudden. And if we'd taken the bus, we wouldn't have seen this whatever-it-is, since they seem to be trying to hide it.

MILDRED

(Pointing.)

What are those three depressions?

ROGER

Mass graves, according to that panel. The bodies are *right there*.

They gaze silently at the graves for a moment. ROGER massages his chest.

MILDRED

I will never, ever understand it.

ARJAY

Did the local people know this was happening in the woods just outside town?

SCHILLER

They say they didn't. But someone had to do business with the camp, make deliveries. There was even a zoo.

MILDRED

A zoo!

SCHILLER

For the entertainment of the guards' families.

ROGER

I have to sit down.

ROGER sits on the ground. The others continue to stare at the site.

SCHILLER

The bear pits still exist. You'll see when we get there.

MILDRED

It's not like an American memorial. So massive. Almost brutal.

ARJAY

Definitely Soviet design.

ROGER

Mildred...

MILDRED

(Going to him.)
Roger, what—?

My chest is bothering me a little.

ROGER

Your chest!

MILDRED

Dad, what hurts?

SCHILLER

Are you breathing OK?

ARJAY

How about your arm?

SCHILLER

My arm, too.

ROGER

Sound of a bus approaching.

Does it hurt a lot?

SCHILLER

Not a lot, but it's uncomfortable.

ROGER

Schiller, there's a bus. Make it stop!

MILDRED

Oh, right!

SCHILLER

No, it's not that bad....

ROGER

Hey, there! Stop! Halt!

SCHILLER

(Taking a few steps toward the bus.)

Help! Please!

ARJAY

(Waving.)

The bus does not stop.

Emergency! Stop! Please!

ARJAY

(Chasing the bus for a bit.)

The bus roars off into the distance.

I'm sorry.

SCHILLER

ARJAY

I think we'll have to throw ourselves in front of the next one.

ROGER

It's okay. Maybe a car will come by.

MILDRED

It's not okay, Roger. You're having a heart attack. Schiller, you have to try harder.

SCHILLER

Mom—I will—

ROGER

I'm not having a heart attack. Just—out of breath from the walk.

MILDRED

We shouldn't have been walking.

SCHILLER

We'll stop the next one, Mom. Don't worry. Or I can run the rest of the way to Buchenwald. There'll be phones, taxis, buses, maybe even emergency services—

MILDRED

You can't leave. You're the only one who knows where we are.

SCHILLER

It will take me less than fifteen minutes—

ARJAY

Here comes another bus!

Sound of a bus approaching.

MILDRED

Schiller, please, jump in front of it if you have to!

ROGER

Now, Schiller, don't get yourself killed!

ARJAY

(Waving wildly.)
 Hey, stop! Help! Heart attack!
 (To ROGER.)
 How do you say "heart attack" in German?

Hertz something.

ROGER

Both SCHILLER and ARJAY wave.

ARJAY
Hertz! Halt! Hertz!

SCHILLER
Hello, please stop!

Suddenly MILDRED dashes past them out of sight and into the path of the bus.

SCHILLER
Mother, no!

ARJAY
Look out!

ROGER
Mildred, stop!

Sound of the bus screeching to a halt.

SCHILLER
Oh, for God's sake, Mother!
(Dashes off.)

SCHILLER

BUS DRIVER

(Off.)
Verrücktes Huhn, geh mir ans dem Weg! [Crazy lady, get out of the way!]

MILDRED
(Off.)
You have to give us a ride! My husband's sick.

SCHILLER
(Off.)
He's having a heart attack. Come, please!

BUS DRIVER

(Off.)
Wissen Sie nicht was passiert ist? Drese Leute möchten nach Hause. Sie müssen auf der Stelle nach Hause! Und überhaupt—wes machs Du hie dranssen im Wald? [Don't you know what's happening? These people want to get home! They need to get home right away! What are you doing out here in the woods, anyway?]

SCHILLER
(Leading MILDRED and BUS DRIVER to ROGER.)
Sprechen-zie Englisch?

BUS DRIVER
Nein.

SCHILLER
Dad, you'll have to translate.

Americans?
BUS DRIVER

Ja.
ROGER
SCHILLER
Ja! Ja! Ich bin ein American.

Mein hertz—
ROGER

Ihr habt sie fallen lassen! [You dropped it!]
BUS DRIVER

Was?
ROGER

Ihr habt die Bombe fallen lassen! [You dropped the bomb!]
BUS DRIVER

I did not! Nein! Nein!
ROGER

Es ham im Radio—habt ihr's nicht
gehört? [It's on the radio! Haven't
you heard?]
BUS DRIVER
MILDRED
What's he saying? Tell him about
your heart!

Mein hertz, bitte—
ROGER

Eine Atomwaffe! Ihr arroganten Schweine! Eine stadt ist ausgelösch! Millionen von
Monschen. Die ganze Welt ist jetzt gegen Euch! [A tactical nuclear device! You
arrogant bastards. A city is gone! Millions of people. The whole world is against you
now!]
BUS DRIVER

Take us to Weimar! Weimar! Hospital!
SCHILLER
(Accosting the BUS DRIVER.)
ROGER
Oh, my God. We didn't!

Rühr mich nicht an! Du bist ummöglich.
[Don't touch me! You are despicable.]
BUS DRIVER
(Pushing SCHILLER violently away.)
ARJAY
Hey, what are you—?

MILDRED

Schiller!

(Getting in the BUS DRIVER'S face.)

My husband needs your help. Roger, how do you say "help"?

ROGER

Helfen...helfen....

MILDRED

Helfen! Bitte!

ROGER collapses. MILDRED and
SCHILLER rush to him.

MILDRED

Roger, no!

SCHILLER

Dad, hang on!

BUS DRIVER

Nun seid ihr allein! Ihr Idioten! [You are on your own! Idiots!]
(Leaves.)

ARJAY

No, you can't leave us here!

(Follows BUS DRIVER off.)

That man might be dying! Helfen! Helfen, bitte!

ROGER

I'm all right.

SCHILLER

You just collapsed!

ROGER

I can't believe it.

MILDRED

Roger, what's going on? Why
wouldn't—it's obvious we need
help—even if you can't understand
English—

ARJAY

(Off.)

Don't go! Bitte!

Sound of the bus driving away.

SCHILLER

Oh, no!

ARJAY

You goddam Nazi!

I can't believe we did it.

ROGER

What did we do?

MILDRED

We didn't do anything! We just wanted help.

SCHILLER

ARJAY

(Returning.)
Roger, hang in there, I'll run to the camp. Okay? Schiller can stay and I'll run for help.

ROGER

It doesn't hurt so much right now. Maybe it was just gas. I had ice cream.

SCHILLER

What was all that about?

ROGER

Nothing.

SCHILLER

Nothing? I think I twisted my ankle!

ROGER

My German isn't perfect, you know—

MILDRED

But you understood something—

ROGER

Apparently—
(Fighting back tears.)
—Oh, it can't be true. I'm not even going to tell you.

SCHILLER

MILDRED

What? Please, Roger.

ROGER

I must have heard it wrong.

SCHILLER

What did you hear?

ROGER

It sounded like America just detonated a tactical nuclear weapon.

ARJAY

Jesus!

MILDRED

Oh, my heavens.

ROGER

The bus driver heard it on the radio.

SCHILLER

Against civilians?

ROGER

A city. I didn't hear which one, but—

MILDRED

We can guess.

They are all silent for a moment, stunned.

SCHILLER

Goddammit, Dad!

MILDRED

Our stupid, stupid president!

ARJAY

We elected him.

MILDRED AND ROGER

We did not!

SCHILLER

I'm sure you heard it wrong.

ROGER

That's what I said.

MILDRED

We should have been paying more attention.

ARJAY

We wouldn't just—

SCHILLER

You're right. It doesn't make sense—a pre-emptive strike—

MILDRED

This isn't the first time we've dropped the Bomb.

ROGER

Mildred, I'm sure I was mistaken. Or the bus driver was confused—

ARJAY

We wouldn't *do* that!

MILDRED

We've done it twice before.

ROGER

Those were very different.

SCHILLER

Very!

MILDRED

Strike three.

ARJAY

True or not, we'll have to go back right away.

MILDRED

I don't want to go back.

ROGER

The only other place we speak the language is England, and they don't believe in washcloths.

(Starts to get up.)

SCHILLER

No, Dad, don't! Sit!

ROGER

I'm feeling better.

ROGER

SCHILLER

It hardly hurts at all now.

Just sit! Please! The best thing you can do is sit.

MILDRED

But rest for a bit anyway. It still hurts some, doesn't it?

ROGER

A little. But I can walk, I think.

SCHILLER

No!

ROGER

Schiller, stop telling me what to do! I know what I can do!

SCHILLER

You can die of a coronary is what you could do!

ROGER

I can't just sit. Let's go to Buchenwald. We can take it slow and I'll be fine. Then a taxi to Weimar, to the hospital, and I can get this checked out.

MILDRED

If they'll admit an American.

SCHILLER

Mom, it's not true, okay?

ROGER

I'll be fine.

ARJAY

No, I'm sure it's not.

MILDRED

Schiller, sometimes the worst thing is absolutely true. The worst thing! And you just have to accept it.

ROGER

Not in this case.

ARJAY

No.

SCHILLER

Of course not.

MILDRED

Let's not argue.

(Smiles.)

SCHILLER

(After a moment, motioning ARJAY aside.)

Arjay.

SCHILLER and ARJAY step aside as MILDRED silently attends to ROGER, wiping at his face with a tissue from her purse.

SCHILLER

(Quietly to ARJAY.)

He's really stubborn—

ARJAY

He can't walk that far—

SCHILLER

Who knows—he might. But arguing with him's only going to make it worse. Maybe on the way we can flag down a passing car—

ARJAY

Do you think your dad's going a little—you know—?

SCHILLER

No, but his German sucks.

ARJAY

Oh, look—

They watch silently as MILDRED helps ROGER to his feet.

ARJAY

Us in thirty years, baby.

ROGER

(Disengaging himself from MILDRED.)

I can walk, Mildred, really.

MILDRED

Roger, are you sure?

ROGER

Schiller, let's march!

SCHILLER

We shouldn't if you have any pain at all.

ROGER

Then I don't.

SCHILLER

None?

ROGER

That's correct.

SCHILLER

Okay.

(They start to walk.)

But very, very slowly.

ARJAY

You're the one who's always rushing.

MILDRED

Please don't argue. Please.

ROGER

We'll get there soon enough, Schiller. We're practically there already.

They walk off as the lights fade.

The End