

Letter From Eva Braun

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NAME	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	AGE	GENDER
Stefan Zweig	Austrian Jew, a famous writer	53	Male
Friderike Zweig	Austrian Jew, converted to Catholicism, her husband's secretary	52	Female
Eva Braun	German Christian	22	Female
Richard Strauss	German composer	68	Male
Charlotte Altman	Stefan's second wife	25	Female
The Captain	Austrian poet and army officer	28/40	Male

SETTING

Berlin, 1932. Stefan Zweig's study. There are projections of scenes that include a cafe, a concert hall, a church, a book store and other locations. It is best if there are several screens, perhaps integrated into the scenic design and some of them are very large.

NOTE

More than ten years ago, I picked up a book at a yard sale entitled, *The World Of Yesterday*, by Stefan Zweig. I realized when I thumbed through the introduction that this was the same author who had written two biographies that I had read, one about Mary Stuart and the other about Maria Antoinette. And then I found out the rest; Stefan Zweig was a Jew, a pacifist, a biographer, a poet, a playwright, a novelist, an essayist and a translator to many of the great European writers of his and previous generations.

This play is a work of fiction; however, it is inspired by his life and work and his relationships with his first and second wives, Friderike and Charlotte. Eva Braun is a real person in history and never met Stefan Zweig, although she was likely familiar with his books.

The play is set in Berlin in 1932; however the Zweigs did not live there then or at any other time. They were cosmopolitan people, however, and in addition to their villa in Salzburg they lived many weeks or months of the year in other countries, sometimes together, sometimes apart.

I referred to many books and online sources that I read as I researched this play including several of Stefan Zweig's biographies, novellas, short stories and poems, as well as his beautiful memoir, *The World Of Yesterday*. I read a biography of Eva Braun and watched videos of her posing for a film maker and viewed an archive of photographs she had taken of herself. I already had some familiarity with German history from World War I through World War II with an emphasis on Weimar Germany, during the period which this play is set.

Many of the events in this play are real. Stefan and Charlotte committed suicide together in Brazil in 1942. He did collaborate on an opera with Richard Strauss and was a friend to most the characters mentioned in the play.

I tried to evoke Stefan Zweig's personality as best I could, but in the end, he is my invention. The same can be said of all the characters, although I must say that Friderike Zweig's biography of her husband shed some well-needed light on their own relationship and his with Charlotte.

He did not actually meet Charlotte until 1938 when the Zweigs were living in Bath, England. Friderike hand-picked Charlotte as Stefan's secretary, having rejected a previous candidate on the grounds that she was too pretty. I did not know this when I wrote the first draft where she worries that Eva is too attractive to be safe with her husband. I thought that a bit of serendipity.

The backgrounds of Eva and Charlotte are based on characters from two of Zweig's stories, respectively, *Letter From An Unknown Woman*, and *The Post Office Girl*, respectively.. The Captain is an inspiration from the only finished and full-length novel Zweig ever wrote, *Beware Of Pity*. Early in the play Zweig reads a letter from Sigmund Freud who relates a case (that I invented) that is the supposedly the seed for his final and most brilliant novella, *The Royal Game*, posthumously published. Wherever possible I have tried to include bits of his stories as a way to celebrate and - in small part - help restore the well-deserved popularity he experienced in his lifetime.

Act 1

SCENE 1

AT RISE:

Projection: fragments of faces, people we will meet, others we will hear about. Book covers of Zweig's books with highlights from the following: *Letter From An Unknown Woman*, *The Post Office Girl*, *Beware Of Pity*, *The Royal Game*, *Marie Antoinette*, *Portrait of An Average Woman*, and *The World Of Yesterday*, also poster art from the opera *The Silent Woman*.

(Friderike Zweig addresses the audience.)

FRIDERIKE

It is now many years since I first conceived the idea of perpetuating my husband's extraordinary life with a book of my own but I feel it a duty to record some of our lives together and make better known the personality of a man whose gifts enriched the lives of millions of people. He was often asked - writers are always asked - where his stories came from. And he always answered the same, oh I don't know, they just come, who knows? He was a modest man above all. But he did know. A fragment of a story, an item in the newspaper. A profound insight into something that happened decades in the past. Fact or fiction, it didn't matter. What mattered was the truth of it. What mattered to him was to tell it. Stefan Zweig was the person I knew the best in my life. We did not have children together but created a life nonetheless whose richness I do not believe I deserved, but which has sustained me in our years apart. For that is how I think of our separation as if he is closeted in his study, working extra long and I will hear his voice soon, saying "Friderike, I cannot work out the plot here," or "Friderike, the letter!

Find me the letter from Dr. Freud from last April, I need his explanation of monomania." "Friderike..." I still hear him calling my name.

SCENE 2

Projection: Berlin, 1932.

(A writer's study. Books from floor to ceiling, framed and signed photographs of some of the most celebrated writers, poets and artists of the early twentieth century. A chess board and pieces on its own table and a game in progress. A typewriter on the writer's desk and a sheet in the typewriter plus neatly-stacked piles of manuscripts. And a spinet piano.)

(A short sharp sound of a doorbell.)

STEFAN

Friderike?

(He looks up.)

STEFAN (cont'd)

Friderike, is that the mail?

(Friderike enters with the mail.)

FRIDERIKE

Yes, here you go.

(She hands him the mail.)

FRIDERIKE (cont'd)

Why doesn't he just telephone?

STEFAN

Because that's not how we do it.

FRIDERIKE

Sometimes I want to tip over the whole business.

STEFAN

Excuse me?

(Gesturing to the chess board.)

FRIDERIKE

I said I want to tip over the whole business and then pick up the pieces, especially the queen and hurl them out the window.

STEFAN

What are you talking about?

FRIDERIKE

You and that infernal chess game, you're no good at it anyway.

STEFAN

That's not the point.

FRIDERIKE

I'm a better chess player than you are.

STEFAN

Have I upset you this morning?

FRIDERIKE

No, no why would you ask?

(He opens the letter.)

STEFAN

Well, that's interesting.

FRIDERIKE

It's a day like any other. I've picked up your night clothes, ordered your breakfast, tip toed around while you've had your two hours in the study, now I've brought you the mail. Shall I read it to you now or would you care for tea first?

STEFAN

He doesn't mention his next move.

FRIDERIKE

Well, what then?

STEFAN

I don't know. I haven't read it. Are you in one of your moods?

FRIDERIKE

One of my moods?

STEFAN

Now, what?

FRIDERIKE

Nothing, cooped up here in this apartment.

STEFAN

You know, I want to go back to Salzburg.

FRIDERIKE

I'm sorry.

STEFAN

I thought you liked it here.

FRIDERIKE

I do, except every time I walk into a room there you are.

STEFAN

Now you sound like me.

FRIDERIKE

Except you would tell me that when we lived in twenty rooms.

STEFAN

My dearest Friderike...

FRIDERIKE

Who says that? Who says dearest Friderike? I'm not your dearest, I'm your wife.

STEFAN

Yes, and I am so sorry. Please sit down here. Charlotte! Charlotte, I would like that tea, yes and so should you. Charlotte!

(Charlotte enters.)

STEFAN (cont'd)

Can you please bring us some tea?

FRIDERIKE

I don't drink tea.

STEFAN

I beg your pardon?

FRIDERIKE

I said I don't drink tea, I drink coffee.

STEFAN

I meant coffee. Charlotte, a pot of coffee.

(Charlotte exits.)

STEFAN (cont'd)

You look pale.

FRIDERIKE

I'm having a little trouble.

STEFAN

But Friderike, you must go to the doctor.

FRIDERIKE

He was here yesterday. You spoke to him about the Zuckmeyers.

STEFAN

Dr. Wolfe, oh yes, the play.

FRIDERIKE

They've gone to England.

STEFAN

Dr. Wolfe?

FRIDERIKE

The Zuckmeyers.

STEFAN

Right, that was last week.

FRIDERIKE

Last month.

STEFAN

But the doctor, that was last week.

FRIDERIKE

That was yesterday.

(Stefan scans the letter.)

STEFAN

But we spoke about Carl's play last week. I remember it well. I read it. You see, he always insists I read it before he gives it to the director, but the truth is that one cannot see a play on the page, it must be active, so I might say... this character, he seems wooden, but then you breathe life into him and it's quite another matter. I don't think anyone should read one's play except for actors, but then they are so narcissistic they really have no perspective. Best to let an audience decide.

FRIDERIKE

But you always say the audience knows nothing.

STEFAN

No, I say that the audience wants to be told what to think, hence theater reviewers.

FRIDERIKE

How is the play?

STEFAN

Characters are rather wooden. Well, that's interesting. Dr. Freud is telling me about one of his cases, a man he calls Igor, a monomaniac. He says that he was arrested and put in solitary confinement for six months and the only thing he had to read was a chess booklet and now he can't be in the same room as a chess board without coming completely undone. It appears he turned over the chess table on his first visit.

FRIDERIKE

So that's the end of that.

STEFAN

I guess he's quite the hand at chess though.

(Charlotte enters with a tray
and sets it down on a table.)

STEFAN (cont'd)

Thank you, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE

There's milk and sugar.

FRIDERIKE

I'll pour it.

(Charlotte begins to cough a
bit.)

CHARLOTTE

Frau Zweig?

FRIDERIKE

Yes what is it?

CHARLOTTE

I couldn't say.

FRIDERIKE

Charlotte, what?

CHARLOTTE

It's your dress.

(Friderike touches the back of her dress. It is soiled with blood.)

FRIDERIKE

You'll excuse me.

(Friderike exits. Stefan stands, unsure what to do.)

CHARLOTTE

Shall I pour your-

(She continues to cough and then the wheeze.)

STEFAN

Bring me some tea.

(Charlotte exits. Stefan picks up his mail and looks through it. He opens one letter and reads a bit. Then he looks at the envelope.)

STEFAN (cont'd)

Charlotte...

(Charlotte enters.)

CHARLOTTE

Yes, Herr Zweig?

STEFAN

Have you ever had an obsession?

CHARLOTTE

I beg your pardon?

STEFAN

Have you ever been preoccupied with something to the point of distraction?

CHARLOTTE

I'm not sure I have the mind for it, Herr Zweig.

STEFAN

You think it's a matter of intelligence then?

CHARLOTTE

At the very least great interest, but since I don't have any interests I cannot comment.

STEFAN

But you're a young woman. There must be something that captures your imagination.

CHARLOTTE

I think I wanted to be a dentist once.

STEFAN

A dentist?

CHARLOTTE

My mother had bad teeth and we couldn't afford care so I used to imagine that I had a license for dentistry.

STEFAN

Ah.

CHARLOTTE

Is there anything else?

STEFAN

No, thank you. Oh, look this letter doesn't have a stamp.

CHARLOTTE

Perhaps it fell off.

STEFAN

Was it in the box?

CHARLOTTE

All the mail was in the box.

STEFAN

Oh, then perhaps it did fall off.

CHARLOTTE

Is there anything else?

STEFAN

Just the tea.

(Charlotte exits. Stefan
continues to read the letter.)

STEFAN (cont'd)

That blasted story.

(He reads and he remembers a little. A series of stills: Images of a modest house and a bungalow behind it. Stefan in his twenties as he comes up the walk. A matron of about thirty five and her daughter, perhaps eleven or twelve. He nods curtly but not unkindly and they watch him with great interest as he continues into the little house.)

(Friderike enters. She has
changed her dress.)

STEFAN (cont'd)
Probably the plays of Shakespeare.

FRIDERIKE
I beg your pardon?

STEFAN
If I was placed in solitary confinement with only one thing
to read. I would chose the plays of Shakespeare.

FRIDERIKE
Not Goethe?

STEFAN
You know what Buchner said? "As for me, all of Shakespeare,
some of Goethe. The rest you can throw into the fire."

FRIDERIKE
Yes, but you hadn't been born when he said it and besides, he
was twenty-four and arrogant.

(Stephan reads the letter.)

FRIDERIKE (cont'd)
Who is that from?

STEFAN
I don't know. That is, I'm not sure.

FRIDERIKE
It's signed Eva Braun.

STEFAN
But I don't know her. I don't think.

FRIDERIKE
You don't think?

STEFAN

She says that I once rented a flat from her parents and I have a vague memory...

FRIDERIKE

Of the flat.

STEFAN

No no, I recall the flat, it was quite comfortable. My desk was in front of the window and I enjoyed the morning sun.

FRIDERIKE

What does she want?

STEFAN

Well, I was just... let's see, she wants a job.

FRIDERIKE

What kind of job?

STEFAN

Secretary, she writes that she is a typist but she also takes photographs.

FRIDERIKE

How old is she?

STEFAN

I haven't the faintest idea.

FRIDERIKE

Secretary who takes photographs.

STEFAN

Not a very good typist. I've found three errors.

FRIDERIKE

Let me see.

(Friderike takes the letter.)

FRIDERIKE (cont'd)

She plays the piano, too. She sounds very sweet. Why don't you interview her?

STEFAN

Whatever for?

FRIDERIKE

For the job of secretary.

STEFAN

But I don't need a secretary.

FRIDERIKE

Yes, you do because I quit.

STEFAN

You... you what?

FRIDERIKE

I quit. I'm done. I'm going in hospital next week for an operation. Remember I saw Dr. Wolfe ?

STEFAN

You didn't say anything.

FRIDERIKE

You didn't ask.

STEFAN

Friderike, I would have asked if you had told me there was something out of the ordinary. I'm working, I'm trying to finish the libretto and the biography. All you have to do was make some kind of announcement and I don't want to interview some stranger and the operation-

FRIDERIKE

I'll be fine, the recuperation is... I'll be home in two weeks.

STEFAN

Two weeks?

FRIDERIKE

So please write back to Fraulein Braun.

STEFAN

But I don't want someone I don't know.

FRIDERIKE

She says she does know you.

STEFAN

Perhaps Charlotte can help.

FRIDERIKE

Charlotte coughs all day long, it would drive you insane. Besides, she can't do research, she doesn't type, and Fraulein Braun possibly can read Herr Strauss's deplorable handwriting, not to mention decipher his musical essays. Just interview her, Stefan, she can take copies of your pages home if you don't want her in the house.

STEFAN

Take them home?

FRIDERIKE

All right, then she can use my study and I'll go over them afterwards.

STEFAN

And you'll be gone two weeks?

FRIDERIKE

Two weeks.

STEFAN

Two weeks.

FRIDERIKE

I'll feel better knowing there is someone here. Charlotte might enjoy a companion, it's like a tomb.

STEFAN

I don't know about this Fraulein Braun.

FRIDERIKE

Surely she has references. You'll like her, I'm sure of it.

STEFAN

I'm not sure of anything.

FRIDERIKE

She's read your books.

STEFAN

So she says.

(He opens another letter.)

FRIDERIKE

She finds them fascinating. I suppose she means she finds you fascinating.

STEFAN

Hm...

FRIDERIKE

Women do.

STEFAN

What is that, Friderike?

FRIDERIKE

Find you fascinating. It's all those beautiful words you write.

STEFAN

Let's just go back to Salzburg. Your doctor's there and besides I don't have all my books.

FRIDERIKE

I'm not going back before the operation, I can't.

STEFAN

I'll just tell Dr. Strauss we'll finish the opera together by post.

FRIDERIKE

I said I can't, I can't travel.

STEFAN

You can't travel?

FRIDERIKE

No, and I've waited a bit too long as it is.

STEFAN

Then we'll go in two weeks when you're better.

FRIDERIKE

I said I'd be home in two weeks. I'll be convalescing for several more.

STEFAN

All right, all right I'm sorry.

FRIDERIKE

I'm going to church tonight .Charlotte will make you supper. She's wheezing today, make sure she drinks some coffee tonight, that usually helps.

STEFAN

I will.

FRIDERIKE

We should never have hired her.

STEFAN

I felt sorry for her.

FRIDERIKE

I'll be sick for awhile. It will get better it'll be as before. Don't get worked up.

STEFAN

It's this damned weather or something.

FRIDERIKE

The sun is shining brightly.

STEFAN

Yes, ominous isn't it? I'm sorry if I spoke sharply.

FRIDERIKE

What will you do tonight?

STEFAN

I'll probably just work. I promised Leonard the final edits in ten days.

(He digs a pamphlet out of his pocket. Friderike reads it quickly.)

FRIDERIKE

Where did you get this?

STEFAN

On the counter at the smoke shop.

FRIDERIKE

You mustn't read this.

STEFAN

It's not the words, I read the words in 1929, it's the cartoons.

FRIDERIKE

They are thugs. Let them release their pamphlets and turn over tables in the beer halls. For every piece of propaganda they produce there are ten parties writing ten more.

STEFAN

This Fraulein Braun...

FRIDERIKE

Yes?

STEFAN

I think I remember her mother, a hypersensitive woman. There was some confusion at the time, she had me confused...

FRIDERIKE

What kind of confusion?

STEFAN

She felt somehow I had insulted her. I was asked to leave and it was very disturbing, the whole affair. There was a letter, some sort of recrimination. I think she accused me of making indiscreet comments about the family and the strange thing was that I didn't really even know who she was. I had only met her the day I signed the lease and then I only conversed with her husband.

FRIDERIKE

And then what?

STEFAN

Then I left I packed my bags and moved to a hotel.

FRIDERIKE

You must have some idea what you had done.

STEFAN

Done? Done? I hadn't done anything. There was some fuss over the publication of my novella, so a few people knocked on the door for autographs.

FRIDERIKE

Perhaps that disturbed them, the notoriety.

STEFAN

Notoriety?

FRIDERIKE

That's the wrong word. Popularity, they wanted their privacy.

STEFAN

I'd rather not see the girl.

FRIDERIKE

I think you've over-imagined everything.

STEFAN

Well, I don't know. There was something... I don't know. Perhaps if you saw her first. I don't want anyone who speaks very much and she's got to be quite intelligent.

FRIDERIKE

Yes, the silent woman.

STEFAN

That's the best type and you might bring up her mother, ask about her family, see what she says. I was asked to leave. Do we know anyone else?

FRIDERIKE

We don't know any secretaries.

STEFAN

I've counted three errors.

FRIDERIKE

I'm sure you'll have a chance to point them out.

STEFAN

Perhaps you're right. I mean about the popularity. It could have been misunderstood at the time. Many of the readers were women, of course, and some were very enthusiastic. I don't know how they knew where I lived, although it wouldn't have been too difficult to ascertain. I walked everywhere, my picture was in the newspapers. I'm sorry about... um...

FRIDERIKE

Yes, Stefan?

STEFAN

Are you in pain?

FRIDERIKE

No just a little tired.

STEFAN

When I finish the libretto we'll go to Italy for a few months.

FRIDERIKE

I thought we were going back to Salzburg.

STEFAN

You love Italy. I don't know what I was thinking lately. I've been well, glum. You know how I get. Feels somehow pointless.

FRIDERIKE

It's me. I drag you down with this silly illness-

STEFAN

Please don't start with that-

FRIDERIKE

I'm getting old Stefan.

STEFAN

You're younger than I am.

FRIDERIKE

Yes, but your immortal words.

(This is a joke between them.)

FRIDERIKE (cont'd)

Don't worry, one day I'll write your biography.

STEFAN

What dull stuff. Better to let people imagine the worst. You do know you're my best friend. I couldn't manage a day without you.

FRIDERIKE

Well that's why we must interview this Fraulein Braun.

(She looks at the letter from
Eva Braun.)

FRIDERIKE (cont'd)

I need to know that you will be all right. Perhaps she can
come as soon as tomorrow.

STEFAN

Well, if you really think so.

FRIDERIKE

I really think so. And she can type up the notes from the
Zionist Convention.

(He smiles.)

STEFAN

So that's what this is about!

(pause)

Perhaps it's not the same Eva Braun. I did rent other flats
over the years. I could be mixed up.

FRIDERIKE

You obviously have made a good impression.

STEFAN

It's that infernal story. I sometimes wish I had never
written it. Hard to take oneself seriously when you receive
fan mail from thirteen year olds. I dare say I have ruined
the prospects of romance for many a decent lad.

FRIDERIKE

Now you're taking yourself too seriously.

STEFAN

Why is it that women are attracted to the worst types?

FRIDERIKE

Someone has to love them.

STEFAN

Friderike, would you mind? Are you up to playing for me? There is a verse, it's just hovering there. If you wouldn't mind, are you up to it?

FRIDERIKE

Of course.

(Friderike sits at the piano.
Stefan finds the place he
wants her to play.)

STEFAN

That part there as I said it's... it's hovering.

Projection: Friderike kneels before the altar at church. A stained glass window is behind her. Stefan's face emerges from the pattern.

SCENE 3

(Eva Braun sits alone in Stefan's study. She stares at the chess board intently. She is vivacious, full of nervous energy, dressed fashionably but conservatively with a scarf around her neck. She is very pretty.)

(Charlotte enters; she hums How Deep Is The Ocean very faintly.)

CHARLOTTE

I am to ask you if you would like some tea.

EVA
Tea?

CHARLOTTE
Or coffee.

EVA
Tea sounds lovely.

CHARLOTTE
I like your dress.

EVA
Thank you, it's new. It's the first time I've worn it.

CHARLOTTE
It's very pretty. Herr Zweig will be just another minute .

(Charlotte considers Eva.)

CHARLOTTE (cont'd)
You are a secretary.

EVA
Yes.

CHARLOTTE
You don't look like a secretary.

EVA
I like to be bright. Don't you like to be bright?

CHARLOTTE
They've already quarrelled about you this morning. He's not in favor of hiring anyone but she's going into hospital. You'll have to play the piano.

EVA
He's working on an opera.

CHARLOTTE
How did you guess?

EVA

Herr Zweig wouldn't write for a cabaret.

(Stefan enters.)

STEFAN

Fraulein Braun!

EVA

Herr Zweig, I am so honored to meet you.

STEFAN

Please sit back down. Charlotte, would you take Fraulein Braun's scarf?

EVA

Oh no, please, I've had a cold recently, I'm fine now but I prefer to keep a little bundled.

STEFAN

You're sure you're comfortable?

EVA

Perfectly.

STEFAN

How about some tea?

EVA

I wouldn't want you to bother.

STEFAN

It's no bother, I'll join you. Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE

Right away.

(Charlotte exits.)

STEFAN

So I understand from your letter that you know how to type?

EVA

I can type fifty words a minute.

STEFAN

That will hardly be necessary. Powers of encryption are more to the point.

EVA

Encryption?

STEFAN

I am working on a libretto and I need someone who has a curious talent not only to repeat musical phrases on the piano, but to put up with me while I sort out the words and also someone who can decipher my handwriting.

EVA

I can read handwriting very well, Herr Zweig.

STEFAN

Simultaneously I'm working on another manuscript, a biography. And I usually have a translation or two in progress. It's funny, as I get older I find that some days I work well and others not, When I was young, on the other hand, indefatigable, But now I get a little... I get tired.

EVA

What biography?

STEFAN

Maria Antoinette.

EVA

We studied the French Revolution in school. She so unfairly accused. What was she guilty of, an accident of birth, of enjoying the life she was born to live.

STEFAN

Her indictment was her character, Fraulein. One is always creating trajectories for people based on their actions.

EVA

Creating what?

STEFAN

Paths, forecasting events, looking for evidence that we are correct. Guessing what a person will do next. It makes for a bloody lot of miscommunication and that was Maria-Antoinette's fate and her tragedy. She did what everybody expected of her for so long that there was no generosity when she did the unexpected.

EVA

Well, it was still very tragic.

STEFAN

And now you want to be a secretary?

EVA

When I met your wife at the doctor's office-

STEFAN

You met my wife?

EVA

Oh yes, didn't she mention?

STEFAN

No, we just received or I just received your letter.

EVA

Is it all right?

STEFAN

Please continue.

EVA

I've said something wrong.

STEFAN

No you haven't. I see now that my wife has once again tried to manipulate events to help me. It's called marriage.

EVA

It was quite by accident. I was seeing the doctor about my cold and she was there. I heard her name called and I wondered. Zweig is not so common, so I inquired when she sat back down if by any chance... You see, I am a big fan of yours.

STEFAN

I understand I was your mother's tenant.

EVA

That's how I came to read your books. I remember that you were writing and shortly afterwards Letter From An Unknown Woman was published. No one believed me when I told them you had lived in our cottage and that it was there that you wrote that beautiful story. I wonder what must have inspired you.

STEFAN

Stories come, that is all really.

EVA

But you must have some notion?

STEFAN

Writer's superstition. Never look a story too squarely in the face, it might spit on you. And you are a photographer?

EVA

Well yes, I take pictures. I used to work in a photographic shop.

STEFAN

What do you take pictures of?

EVA

Why... myself.

(Charlotte enters with the tea.)

STEFAN

Charlotte, thank you.

CHARLOTTE

I brought some biscuits in case you were hungry.

(The doorbell rings.)

EVA

Thank you.

CHARLOTTE

Shall I pour?

STEFAN

We'll manage.

(Charlotte exits.)

STEFAN (cont'd)

You see, Fraulein, I'm a very private person it's important to me to have quiet.

EVA

I'm very quiet.

STEFAN

My wife has learned to live with me and I...

EVA

Yes?

STEFAN

You do seem quite steady.

EVA

Would you like to see an example of my typing skills? Just to be sure?

STEFAN

Well then, please yourself.

(Eva sits at the desk and begins to type. She finishes and Stefan reads the page.)

STEFAN (cont'd)

About sixty codfish eggs will make a quarter pound of very fizzy jelly.

EVA

It's called a pangram.

STEFAN

A pangram?

EVA

A sentence that contains all the letters of the alphabet.

STEFAN

Pangram. It's a delightful word. Latin of course. But I'm still a little stuck on the image of the fizzy jelly.

EVA

It's supposed to be memorable.

STEFAN

You've taught me a new word. That doesn't happen every day.

EVA

If you had studied typing.

STEFAN

Now, that is what I have said for years. All that infernal memorizing of dates and events with only the goal of one day regurgitating it for, not to mention esoteric subjects useful to virtually no one.

EVA

Esoteric?

STEFAN

Secret knowledge,

EVA

I don't have any of that.

(Friderike enters; she is a bit pale, perhaps she has been crying.)

FRIDERIKE

I am so sorry to keep you waiting,

(Friderike looks at Eva and is taken aback.)

STEFAN

Not at all. We were having a wonderful conversation.

EVA

Most esoteric in fact.

FRIDERIKE

Really?

STEFAN

And now I have learned that you met at the doctor's office.

FRIDERIKE

Yes, Doctor Wolfe. Didn't I mention that?

STEFAN

No.

EVA

It is my sister who works for Doctor Wolfe so naturally I visit him when I am ill.

FRIDERIKE

What have you covered so far in your fascinating conversation?

STEFAN

Look at this.

(He shows her the typed page.)

STEFAN (cont'd)

It's a pangram.

FRIDERIKE

Pangram.

STEFAN

She has covered the alphabet in one full swoop. There it is. An outstanding example of how a typewriter can be put to good use.

FRIDERIKE

And Fraulein Braun played the piano? I didn't hear any music.

STEFAN

We can get to that another time. More important is whether Fraulein Braun can decipher my handwriting. Look here, see if that makes any sense.

(He hands her a page. She reads
to herself a moment.)

EVA

"Dear Sigmund, just received your letter and am able to answer it immediately..."

STEFAN

That was a week ago. I haven't written another word.

EVA

Your handwriting looks most satisfactory, Herr Zweig.

STEFAN

This is where I need help. I'll make a list every day of what needs to be accomplished, letters I need to write, that sort of thing, and first thing in the morning we'll go through it and after lunch I'll work on the libretto. How does that sound?

EVA

What about the biography of Maria Antoinette?

STEFAN

I work on that before bedtime. It helps me relax.

FRIDERIKE

That sounds fine until you have a temper and throw her out of the study. I'm sorry. I simply don't think it will work she's not quite... I don't believe-

STEFAN

Please play the piano, Fraulein.

FRIDERIKE

I don't want to hear Fraulein Braun play the piano, I want her to go.

STEFAN

That's unfortunate because I want her to stay. Fraulein, if you don't mind.

(A stand off. Eva sits at the piano. She plays a few bars and bursts into tears. She gets up and finds her purse.)

EVA

If you'll excuse me, my parents are expecting me for lunch and you have a most beautiful home. Thank you.

FRIDERIKE

Charlotte!

(A pause. Stefan is embarrassed
and silent.)

FRIDERIKE (cont'd)

Charlotte will get your coat.

(Eva puts her hand to her
scarf. Charlotte appears with
Eva's coat.)

EVA

Good morning and thank you for your hospitality.

FRIDERIKE

My regards to your sister.

(Eva hurries out. Stefan sits
at this desk in some misery.)

FRIDERIKE (cont'd)

It had to be done.

STEFAN

What had to be done?

FRIDERIKE

That girl that is not the girl I met at Doctor Wolfe's office.

STEFAN

What are you saying?

FRIDERIKE

I'm saying that the girl I met was a little mouse who knew
how to type and had read your books. This girl is, I would
have to say, an adventuress.

STEFAN

An adventuress.

FRIDERIKE

That dress cost eighty marks.

STEFAN

So?

FRIDERIKE

So secretaries do not spend eighty marks on a dress. However single girls with rich married boyfriends-

STEFAN

Oh come on, she put on her best dress. She is intelligent-

FRIDERIKE

Intelligent, "sixty codfish eggs will make a quarter pound of very fizzy jelly".

STEFAN

That's a pogrom, a pangram, dear god, I've never known you to be rude like that.

(Eva stands outside their house with her back to the wall. Her eyes are closed and on her face is a sort of dreamy ecstasy.)

FRIDERIKE

Only when I'm protecting you. I'm sorry, I really am. I will write her a letter. It was my fault for bringing her here, I simply don't know how I could have misjudged her.

STEFAN

If she weren't so pretty, Friderike?

FRIDERIKE

Do you imagine that I am jealous of a girl?

STEFAN

I suppose not.

(She sweeps her hand at the walls of framed, signed photographs and books.)

FRIDERIKE

This is my competition. Your world of yesterday and all the men who have lived in it, whom you have spent your life adoring and translating and supporting.

STEFAN

It's a world worth living in, Friderike. I know of no other.

(Friderike sees Eva's purse in a corner and picks it up.)

FRIDERIKE

Well, well, well.

STEFAN

Who was that at the door?

FRIDERIKE

Nobody. A beggar. Filthy young man.

STEFAN

How filthy?

FRIDERIKE

Filthy dirty, what do you mean, how filthy?

STEFAN

Was he Polish?

FRIDERIKE

I wouldn't know. He was something like that. Good god, Stefan, now what?

STEFAN

What did you say to him?

FRIDERIKE

I didn't say anything. I said, please go away. He was incredibly rude.

STEFAN

Rude? That was Mayer Lefkowitz! That young filthy man was invited here! Anytime, I told him!

FRIDERIKE

Of course, a poet.

(Stefan runs out of the room and then out the front door. Friderike is left with her thoughts.)

SCENE 4

(In Stefan's study: Charlotte studies Eva with her camera. Eva has unbuttoned her blouse to show her cleavage and hiked up her skirt a bit. She is a lovely model. During the shoot she moves around the room, draping herself here and there. Then she becomes more serious. She sits at Stefan's desk and puts on a pair of glasses.)

EVA

I could be a writer if I wanted. I could do anything that I wanted.

CHARLOTTE

Then why don't you?

EVA

Well, I am. I am doing what I want. I'm here working for a famous man.

CHARLOTTE

Yes.

EVA

It's important what I do. I help him. Have you ever loved anyone?

CHARLOTTE

I don't know about in love. I had a sweetheart once.

EVA

Schätzchen.

CHARLOTTE

Why are you making fun of me?

EVA

Have you ever loved a real man?

CHARLOTTE

What is that, a real man?

EVA

It's different that's all.

CHARLOTTE

Yes, they smell. Are we done?

EVA

Her, let me take a few of you.

CHARLOTTE

Oh. I don't know. I didn't wear lipstick.

EVA

It won't matter a bit. Just wet your lips. You have pretty coloring.

CHARLOTTE

I do?

EVA

And pinch your cheeks like this.

(Eva pinches Charlotte's
cheeks.)

CHARLOTTE

Ow!

EVA

Small price to pay now. Here sit there... cross your legs
so... and smile... that's not a smile.

CHARLOTTE

I'm smiling the way I do.

EVA

Your eyes have to smile, too, otherwise it's just your mouth
and you look like... well, you look like you want to take a
bite of something.

CHARLOTTE

I can't just smile, that's the trouble with picture taking.
What is there to smile about?

EVA

Think about your schätzchen.

CHARLOTTE

I just feel so... I don't sit like this.

EVA

Well how do you sit?

(Charlotte sits primly.)

EVA (cont'd)

Who would want to look at that?

CHARLOTTE

Now I don't know what to do.

EVA

All right then, get up and move around a bit. I'll snap you when you're not thinking.

CHARLOTTE

Where do I go?

EVA

Just move, for heaven's sake. Don't think. Can you dance a bit?

CHARLOTTE

Dance?

EVA

Twirl, do something dramatic. Oh you're so stupid really. It's not that difficult.

(Charlotte bumps the chess board and some of the pieces spill.)

CHARLOTTE

Oh no!

EVA

Stupid.

CHARLOTTE

What do we do?

EVA

I don't know, you bumped it.

CHARLOTTE

You told me to twirl.

EVA

Look, we'll just put them back there.

CHARLOTTE

But he's been playing with Dr. Freud for weeks now we can't-

EVA

Well, then why weren't you more careful?

CHARLOTTE

It was an accident. But... but perhaps we have a picture. Do you think we have a picture?

EVA

Now you've said something intelligent. I'll develop these. I can do it myself, you know.

CHARLOTTE

You can?

EVA

Of course. I worked for a photographer. He's rather famous, at least his customers are famous. Some of them.

CHARLOTTE

You mean like singers?

EVA

Singers! Well, there are a few of those, too. No, I mean important people. Powerful people.

CHARLOTTE

I think this... this bishop was on this spot right here.

EVA

Do you know any powerful people?

CHARLOTTE

I know Herr Zweig and I have met some of his friends.

EVA

And you think they are powerful?

CHARLOTTE

They're rich and can buy anything and they are kind.

EVA

Probably they're all Jews. It's all right. I was like you once except I was never as poor as you. But I didn't understand the ways of the world. It's men who control everything and so the best we can do as women is to be ready when they need us and they do need us. They can't live without us, really. That's how god intended it to be and since that is our role, our duty, we must use our talent and never waste it. We can shine too, Charlotte, we can shine brightly. I want to show you something.

(Eva removes her scarf.)

CHARLOTTE

What happened?

EVA

It's too wonderful to talk about.

CHARLOTTE

But it's... when did this happen?

EVA

Go on you can touch it.

CHARLOTTE

I don't want to touch it.

EVA

I shot myself. I intended to kill myself and the gun misfired.

CHARLOTTE

I don't believe you.

EVA

But it's true. That's how I met Frau Zweig at my brother in law's office. He was checking the stitches and she sat next to me.

CHARLOTTE

But... why?

EVA

I promised my parents I wouldn't see him for two months. He's devastated, of course, and I can't tell you how much it hurts me to know that, but dying for him, that would be the ultimate honor. The only thing better would be to die beside him. I asked you if you knew any powerful men. Well, I am telling you that the most powerful man in Germany loves me.

CHARLOTTE

But did you want to die?

EVA

You don't understand anything. I'm alive, aren't? I'm here. That's how I know that god has ordained us to be together. I tempted god himself and he answered.

CHARLOTTE

You held a gun?

EVA

His gun. It's a difficult time just now. He must focus all his attention on the German people. You don't believe me.

CHARLOTTE

I wouldn't die for anyone but myself.

EVA

That's not what I mean.

CHARLOTTE

So where is your powerful friend?

EVA

Sometimes people have to be apart. Sometimes we have to sacrifice. I was selfish. I was self centered. I had to be taught a lesson and that's why I'm here. So what is a month, two months apart when the universe has conspired a great destiny? Yes, it requires a deep feeling. Herr Zweig understands this. It's like he is the heart of my lover, the heart that is hidden from me. His books, so lovely, the chance meeting with Frau Zweig.

It was god bringing him back into my life. I mean, I would never have recognized him after all these years, he is so changed. He rented a flat from my mother. My parents had divorced temporarily or we would never have rented but I was twelve and he was the most handsome-

CHARLOTTE

Herr Zweig?

EVA

Yes, yes and the women who came to see him every day. He brought home roses and every day he would hand one to me. I was always waiting, looking and I would find some pretext to cross the path at that moment, Now I suppose he must have known I planned it all, but at the time I thought I was very clever. But I was in love with him, not real love, but all the same, it was breathtaking and the women, the beautiful women and their dresses! I would memorize each detail of their clothes and then scour the shops until I found exactly those dresses, the hats, the shoes, the purses, even the perfume.

CHARLOTTE

Herr Zweig knew women like that?

EVA

And then one day he was gone. My mother had a quarrel with him. I heard them or rather her. He would never have raised his voice to a woman. He was perfect in that way. I watched in agony as the porter carried his cases down the path, and do you know he gave me one last flower as he so kindly and finally walked out of my life? Not that I gave up. I spent every possible moment haunting the shops, thinking stupidly, I suppose, that he might appear with one of those golden women to buy them a string of pearls or a fur coat.

CHARLOTTE

And you never saw him again?

EVA

Not until the day I came here for the interview. But when I read the book, of course, I knew it had to be him.

CHARLOTTE

What book?

(Eva takes a book from the shelf and hands it to Charlotte.)

EVA

It's about me.

CHARLOTTE

This book is about you?

EVA

Read it.

CHARLOTTE

Frau Zweig told me not to touch his books.

(She returns it to the shelf.)

EVA

Frau Zweig is in hospital.

CHARLOTTE

But she'll know you touched it. She knows everything.

EVA

I doubt that.

(Eva smiles.)

EVA (cont'd)

It's all right. I have several copies. I'll give you one as a present.

CHARLOTTE

I don't read much.

EVA

You aren't even curious?

CHARLOTTE

Not really and I don't believe it anyway. Herr Zweig would never bring women home like that.

EVA

Don't you know anything about human nature?

CHARLOTTE

I know people fall in love and get married and have terrible times and then life is good and it goes back and forth like that. I don't know anyone who would shoot themselves in the neck.

EVA

Well, now you do.

CHARLOTTE

I think I'll put some wood on the fire. It's cold for May.

(Charlotte leaves the room. Eva takes the book back off the shelf. She sits down and turns to the first page and reads aloud.)

EVA

"When you read this, I will have been dead for twelve hours. You are my love, the only man I have ever loved, the man whose image I have carried since I was twelve years old. It was a hot and dusty summer when you came to live in the apartment upstairs over my home, and the I remember the sight of you and your clear blue eyes. I should like you to know my every thought and be assured that they have only been of you. If I have achieved anything in my life it is that I have kept my silence, yes, I have been silent, a silent woman who may have taken my secret with me to the grave. Except that now I make my confession. My love, always my love, if only you had known. But now, at last, as I prepare to draw the covers down on the bed that will be my first grave, now you shall know. "

SCENE 5

(Stefan's study opens to a music room. Richard Strauss sits at the piano, plays and sings. Stefan and Friderike sit and listen.)

RICHARD

Well!

STEFAN

Exquisite.

FRIDERIKE

Lovely, bravo!

RICHARD

At least I think that's how it goes. I've misplaced the sheet music. Let me... Can you hand me my notebook, Frau Zweig?

(And she does.)

RICHARD (cont'd)

I've been through this before. Once when I was touring in America with Elizabeth Schumann, have you heard her sing?

STEFAN

Yes, yes, of course.

(We hear a Soprano sing *Morgen!*)

RICHARD

Like a violin! Her voice is like a violin. Anyway, the trunk didn't arrive and there we were in Baltimore or was it Boston... something with a B- Indianapolis that's it. The trunk didn't arrive and all the music in it and we were in the middle of All mein Gedanken and I didn't have the slightest idea of what came next and she's singing, you see, and I'm accompanying her, so I just kept going and she looked at me out of the corner of her eye and well, I had the tempo at least, if not the melody, and she knew the words and you know I quite liked it better than the original.

I don't believe there was anyone who sang my songs better or for whom I had a deeper understanding.

STEFAN

And did you keep it?

RICHARD

Keep what?

STEFAN

The melody.

RICHARD

Couldn't recall it later. I tried and tried. It was one of those rare experiences one has when desperation and inspiration meet.

FRIDERIKE

I am impressed with your score.

RICHARD

It's thanks to your husband's libretto. Usually the melody comes first, this time it's the words. I can't keep up with him and then to make matters worse, he rewrites.

FRIDERIKE

Dr. Strauss, he reduced a thousand pages to a mere one hundred in his essay on Dostoyevsky.

RICHARD

Wasn't it Dostoyevsky who said, I don't believe in god, I believe in Russia? Now, you're working on something, Friderike?

FRIDERIKE

I'm working on my husband; he is a work in progress.

RICHARD

Louis Pasteur, isn't it?

FRIDERIKE

Oh, that was ages ago. I am so flattered you remember.

RICHARD

It's done, is it?

FRIDERIKE

Just a few chapters. Really, Dr. Strauss, that was in 1920 when you stayed with us in Salzburg.

RICHARD

Are you sure?

FRIDERIKE

For our wedding.

RICHARD

So what happened to the book?

FRIDERIKE

I'm waiting for the children to grow up.

STEFAN

She means me. The girls have been married for years.

(Charlotte enters with tea. She keeps her head down.)

FRIDERIKE

Ah, Charlotte, thank you. Dr. Strauss, do you take milk?

RICHARD

No black, thank you.

(He looks at Charlotte.)

RICHARD (cont'd)

I say, Fraulein...

FRIDERIKE

Altmann.

RICHARD
Fraulein Altmann, have we met?

(Charlotte freezes.)

FRIDERIKE
Answer Dr. Strauss.

CHARLOTTE
Oh no, of course not.

RICHARD
I haven't been here before, have?

STEFAN
Your first visit.

RICHARD
It's extraordinary. You look, simply look just like a young lady that I met on holiday.

FRIDERIKE
Really?

RICHARD
Let me look at you.

FRIDERIKE
Charlotte, put your head up for heaven's sake.

RICHARD
And just as pretty.

FRIDERIKE
Thank you, Charlotte, you may-

RICHARD
And a mole just there on your cheek, although...

(Charlotte puts her hand to her cheek.)

RICHARD (cont'd)

Sorry. It's just that this young lady- what the devil was her name now, and that pretty hair you have shines just so under the light. I'll be damned.

FRIDERIKE

Well well, people do appear to resemble others.

RICHARD

It's because I've lived so long, I suppose, seen so much. Can you smile, Charlotte?

(Charlotte looks at him helplessly.)

RICHARD (cont'd)

I'm embarrassing you. Shame on me. Bring me my coat in fifteen minutes, will you? My dear, there now, you won't have to find a way to politely get rid of me.

FRIDERIKE

Dr. Strauss-

(Charlotte escapes.)

STEFAN

You say you were on holiday?

RICHARD

Yes, in one of those god awful hotels where the water is supposed to be restorative. I mean, the landscape was splendid but the same dull people. Except for this girl. Now what was her name? Anna. She was with her aunt and uncle. Hard to believe they were actually related.

STEFAN

Why was that?

RICHARD

Oh, you know, her aunt was American, for one thing. At least she had lived in America for decades and you know how that turns out. No, the niece was a study in sweetness. And then there was poor General Hofflander, do you know him?

STEFAN

Can't say that I-

RICHARD

Fell head over heels. Embarrassing, but you had to feel for him.

FRIDERIKE

You mean the girl had an *affaire de coeur*?

RICHARD

Oh, not with him. Some young scoundrel. Her aunt and uncle packed her off one morning before breakfast.

STEFAN

Surely young people are allowed to fall in love on holiday.

RICHARD

No, there was more to it than that. She was revealed to be a peasant, of all things, dressed up like a lady and using an assumed name. A regular pygmalion story. Still, she was ever so charming.

FRIDERIKE

Deceit is never charming.

RICHARD

I'd swear that was her.

FRIDERIKE

About the opera, Dr. Strauss.

RICHARD

What? Oh, it's not done, it's not done. Still, a good start.

FRIDERIKE

And so funny.

RICHARD

Yes, well, improbable in the way that opera is improbable.

FRIDERIKE

We can blame Ben Jonson for that.

RICHARD

The German people need to laugh. I think it will be a hit.

FRIDERIKE

Of course it will be a hit, the music.

RICHARD

Yes, but your husband's wit.

FRIDERIKE

And who's conducting?

RICHARD

Karl Bohm, if I have my way. Otherwise I'll do it myself but it's a bit early to worry about such matters. There's the plot to iron out.

STEFAN

What, we're changing it?

RICHARD

A bit, a bit. I think the part of Timidia should definitely be played by a woman. Not sure having two men get married on the stage is prudent.

STEFAN

But it's a farce.

RICHARD

Oh, I know.

STEFAN

Shakespeare.

RICHARD

Yes, those English are inordinately fond of men dressing up as women and all that goes with it. Beg pardon, Frau Zweig.

STEFAN

We're talking about Jonson's play.

RICHARD

It's a small change but the idea is the same. What are your words? "A rare delight it is to find a silent, beautiful girl, but it is more delightful when she belongs to another man." I think the joke is enough without having Morosus marry a woman who turns out to be a man.

STEFAN

Well, it's your opera.

RICHARD

And Jonson's play, I know, still he isn't here to complain.

STEFAN

So why should I?

FRIDERIKE

It's just that Stefan has translated so many works, Dr. Strauss, and he takes it as a point of honor to maintain the integrity-

RICHARD

As I said the current climate. You know, if this was five years ago-

STEFAN

I know. All right, so we'll make the changes.

RICHARD

I knew you'd understand. So, that's settled.

STEFAN

It's just, I was also hoping to have this finished.

FRIDERIKE

We're going back to Salzburg as soon as possible.

RICHARD

Oh, I hadn't realized.

FRIDERIKE

We haven't said anything to anyone but-

RICHARD

I know, I know, the election coming up. It's a bloody mess; there are more political parties than breeds of cats.

STEFAN

The Nationals Socialists are bound to have a majority.

RICHARD

Fiddlesticks. The Social Democrats and Central Party will mend fences and the whole hysteria will blow over. Where's your optimism?

STEFAN

If the Nazis win in November-

RICHARD

Impossible. This man Hitler, what, he didn't even graduate high school, never mind go to college and no one knows what else he's done. You can make a lot of noise but it's another thing altogether to be heard. No, the Communists and Social Democrats will make greater gains, paddle these brown shirts and put them to bed.

(Eva enters. Her dress is much plainer. She has taken pains to please Friderike.)

EVA

Excuse me, Herr Zweig.

STEFAN

Oh Eva, yes please.

FRIDERIKE

What is it?

STEFAN

May I introduce Dr. Strauss, Fraulein Braun?

RICHARD

With much pleasure.

EVA

I'm honored. I just...

(Friderike is not pleased.)

EVA (cont'd)

I just wanted you to have the notes. I typed them up.

RICHARD

Notes about what?

STEFAN

I'm finishing my biography of Marie Antoinette.

EVA

I meant the notes about the Zionist convention.

STEFAN

I get invited to lunch with Hans Friedenthal and he talks me into acting as secretary. That was last month and I still haven't recovered.

RICHARD

Why did you agree?

STEFAN

Have you met Hans? I'd still be eating lunch, he wouldn't take no for an answer. You're a writer, he kept blasting at me. Yes, and leave me alone to write, I begged him, but it did no good.

EVA

I couldn't find any carbon paper. If you would like, I can type them up again so you'll have another copy.

STEFAN

I don't need a copy, I just want to get him off my back.

EVA

Dr. Strauss, I admire your music very much.

RICHARD

Thank you, I don't believe you, but thank you. What else do you admire?

EVA

Well, I like American jazz.

RICHARD

So do I.

EVA

Do you really?

RICHARD

Do you know this?

(He plays *Swanee*. Eva is delighted.)

RICHARD (cont'd)

Of course, one must look for inspiration everywhere. It makes one want to take off one's clothes. Did I say that? It's my old age. Suddenly I go off like that. My wife is generally horrified; she feels it's best we don't go out together.

EVA

Oh!

FRIDERIKE

Dr. Strauss is making a joke.

EVA

Did you know that Hollywood wants to make a movie of Herr Zweig's novella?

RICHARD

Well, I didn't know that.

EVA

A beautiful story called "Letter From An Unknown Woman."

RICHARD

A movie?

STEFAN

Oh, it's nothing. Every now and then the Americans come rooting around Europe for stories.

FRIDERIKE

It's not something we are talking about, Eva.

EVA

But it's so exciting! Have you read it, Dr. Strauss?

RICHARD

I am embarrassed to say I have not.

EVA

Because it concerns a woman who is so devoted to a man that she kills herself for him.

RICHARD

Really?

EVA

It's the ultimate sacrifice.

RICHARD

I should say. Stefan, where do you come up with these ideas?

FRIDERIKE

He was very young when he wrote it. Still, I'm not sure I would call it a beautiful story but of course the writing... is.

RICHARD

You'll have to go to America, then?

FRIDERIKE

He's not fond of America.

RICHARD

You mean Americans. They're better than the English.

STEFAN

Film makers and entrepreneurs.

(Charlotte enters with
Strauss's coat. She keeps her
head down again.)

RICHARD

Charlotte, you're from-

CHARLOTTE

Marburg.

RICHARD

By any chance do you know any Webers?

CHARLOTTE

I'm not sure.

RICHARD

Rapunzel's tower is in Amonau, right near there. It's the tower that inspired the drawing by the Brothers Grimm, your most famous residents. You might say you're from the seat of German folklore and nearby let's see... in Schwalm the little girls wear red riding hoods. You see the connection? Still can't get over the resemblance.

(Her eyes implore him. He notices.)

RICHARD (cont'd)

Then again, I believe she was stouter than you and had a mole on her cheek.

STEFAN

Perhaps you are only wishing to see her again.

RICHARD

Hah! Don't tell my wife. There are always the sopranos. A difficult lot but if I close my eyes and simply listen, life is heaven.

(Eva eyes Charlotte carefully.)

EVA

Oh, do play something else.

RICHARD

Well, let me see.

EVA

Do you know How Deep is the Ocean?

RICHARD

How does it go?

EVA

*How much do I love you
I'll tell you no lie
How deep is the ocean
How high is the sky*

(Charlotte makes a sobbing sound and escapes again.)

RICHARD

My dear girl!

FRIDERIKE

That's enough music for one afternoon.

RICHARD

Well, I must be off. I'm conducting Fidelio tonight and I have to eat first. Would you like tickets? I'll tell the house manager.

STEFAN

I'm attending a poetry reading later.

FRIDERIKE

My husband is championing a young poet. Mayer Lefkowitz, do you know him?

RICHARD

What, Polish is he?

FRIDERIKE

And starving, by all accounts.

RICHARD

Yes, I understand hunger is a necessary ingredient for inspiration. That and the opium pipe. Hope the Nazis don't make a nuisance of themselves tonight. Practically tore the house down last week, stormed in during the second act.

EVA

Did they?

RICHARD

Never saw anything like it. They were in and out of there on the blow of a whistle. I heard the first piercing sound and then the mob tearing at the people in the aisles, terrorizing the violin section and then the second whistle and they were gone like they vaporized into thin air. I daresay that was choreographed and rehearsed a hundred times. We've had the shutzpolezei in the lobby since. God. I'll be glad when it closes. Simply because the first violinist is a Jew.

(Stefan begins to rise and
stumbles a bit.)

RICHARD (cont'd)

You all right?

STEFAN

Blood rushed to my head.

RICHARD

It's all that sitting at the desk, writing twelve hours a day. If I didn't conduct I'd turn into a turnip myself.

FRIDERIKE

My husband is hardly a turnip.

EVA

Dr. Strauss is making a joke, Herr Zweig.

FRIDERIKE

Thank you, Eva. You may go.

(Eva gets up and curtsies a little to Richard.)

EVA

I am grateful to have met you.

RICHARD

Likewise.

(Eva exits.)

RICHARD (cont'd)

You are pale though and thin. Better get some exercise.

STEFAN

You could mind your own business.

RICHARD

Quite right.

FRIDERIKE

Dr. Strauss, I have a recording I should like to give your wife. Stefan, why don't you get ready for the reading. I'll see Dr. Strauss out.

STEFAN

I'll have dinner in town, then.

RICHARD

Bravo, Stefan. We'll bring down the house when it opens.

(Stefan exits.)

FRIDERIKE

I am so sorry-

RICHARD

Don't mention it. He's right. I'm worse than a woman. There I go again.

(Friderike starts to cry,
deeply and quietly.)

RICHARD (cont'd)

Friderike...

(He takes out his handkerchief
and gives it to her.)

FRIDERIKE

I found a recording of the Rachmaninoff concert we all attended at Lake Lucerne last summer.

RICHARD

Ah, yes.

FRIDERIKE

He doesn't mean to be so abrupt. You are a dear friend. We know so many people, but you are a dear friend. And for him to speak to you like that in our home.

RICHARD

I know. You think I don't know? I've known him longer than you have.

FRIDERIKE

We fell in love through our letters. Three years of letter writing. He writes the most beautiful letters. We met in New York, did I ever tell you that? Unexpectedly, inexplicably. We had been corresponding and by chance we both were going to be there but then we ran into each other on Madison Avenue. Felix was still at the hotel. I had gone out for some air. Seven million people in New York and we found each other. How could I not take that as a sign? And then when he's been unforgiveable, he still writes to me, and there is always a refrain that recalls those perfect, agonizing years when we couldn't be together. I have my faith, of course. Felix and I were traveling in France with the girls when Susanna got terribly ill. We took her to a Catholic hospital in the middle of the night and no one could find the doctor. The nuns prayed over her for sixteen hours. There was a picture of Jesus over her bed and it seemed to me that his eyes followed me everywhere. I can't tell you how much peace He gave me. I didn't believe Susanna would live through the crisis. I simply knew that I would. Perhaps that is why Susanna was saved. So that I would have the strength for anything.

RICHARD

There is nothing that is going to happen. The other shoe has already dropped.

FRIDERIKE

I hope you're right.

(He takes her hand.)

RICHARD

Good afternoon, dear Friderike.

FRIDERIKE

Oh, let me get the recording.

RICHARD

Bring it to dinner. In two weeks from tomorrow.

FRIDERIKE

All right.

(Eva enters.)

EVA

I beg your pardon, I thought you had gone.

RICHARD

And now I have.

(He kisses Friderike.)

RICHARD (cont'd)

I want to see a smile on your pretty face.

(He exits.)

EVA

I forgot the notes.

(She picks them up from
Stefan's desk.)

EVA (cont'd)

Curious about Dr. Strauss and Charlotte.

FRIDERIKE

Nothing curious about it. She merely looks like someone.
People do sometimes look like someone else.

EVA

She's most distinctive. I would say her voice, as well. I've
never known anyone like her.

FRIDERIKE

And who have you known?

EVA

I know some people. Is there anything I can do for you, Frau Zweig?

FRIDERIKE

Yes, there is. You can keep your mouth closed about things that concern us. What do you mean telling Dr. Strauss about an offer from America?

EVA

I only thought it would be interesting. I apologize.

FRIDERIKE

What goes on in this house stays here, do I make myself clear?

EVA

Of course. I am so, so sorry. I never in my life would have intended-

FRIDERIKE

You are too familiar, Fraulein Braun. In this house you have a place.

(Eva gets up.)

EVA

I am giving my notice.

FRIDERIKE

All right.

EVA

Not because of you. I'm getting married.

FRIDERIKE

Congratulations.

EVA

I just want you to know you don't bother me. You don't like me, that's clear.

FRIDERIKE

I don't trust you.

EVA

It doesn't matter. I have done my job here and I've done it well. Herr Zweig has no complaints.

FRIDERIKE

He's a man. He's not immune to flattery. When will you be gone?

EVA

Two weeks. Maybe less. I'm almost finished.

FRIDERIKE

What does that mean?

EVA

Herr Zweig's biography of Marie Antoinette. I want to see it through. I'll see you tomorrow.

FRIDERIKE

Congratulations on your marriage, Eva.

EVA

Thank you.

FRIDERIKE

If I've been harsh it's because I'm protective. That's all.

EVA

I would be the same. I intend to be the same.

FRIDERIKE

Does your family approve of your marriage?

EVA

There are differences in our backgrounds but I think in time none of it will matter.

(Eva starts to exit but
reconsiders.)

EVA (cont'd)

Did your family mind that you married a Jew?

FRIDERIKE

What?

EVA

Herr Zweig is a Jew and you are a Catholic. Did your family
mind?

FRIDERIKE

I'm a Jew by birth, Fraulein.

EVA

Oh.

(Stefan enters.)

FRIDERIKE

I thought you had left.

STEFAN

I just need the notes for Hans.

EVA

Oh, they're here. I just wanted to make sure I numbered them
properly.

(She looks through them
quickly.)

EVA (cont'd)

Yes, they're fine. I'll put them in an envelope.

STEFAN

No trouble, I have one here.

FRIDERIKE

Eva just gave her notice.

STEFAN

Gave your notice?

FRIDERIKE

She's getting married.

STEFAN

But when?

EVA

I'll be here for another two weeks, if that's all right. I do want to finish my work for you.

STEFAN

Two weeks?

FRIDERIKE

If it's more convenient for you to leave sooner, I'm practically as good as new.

EVA

Why don't we let Herr Zweig decide?

(Friderike is so angry she has
to sit down.)

FRIDERIKE

Please go home.

EVA

I need to tidy up my desk and then-

FRIDERIKE

I said go home!

EVA

Good evening.

(Eva exits.)

STEFAN

I'm on a deadline, Friderike.

FRIDERIKE

You're always on a deadline. You were born on a deadline. One hundred thousand pages you're written so far in your life and that doesn't count the hundreds of thousands you're tossed away and what are you doing discussing your work with Eva?

STEFAN

She is my secretary. I needed one and I need someone that can make me smile once in a while. Someone vivacious, unlike you turned down at the mouth and needling me night and day. I happen to enjoy her company. She may not have your mental powers but frankly, I get a little weary of having to explain myself, justify every movement I make. Do you know I haven't slept a single night through in the last year since I started this book?

FRIDERIKE

Yes, and I was in the study translating Marie Antoinette's letters from prison for you, hunting down Bourbon descendents, cross referencing details that would send a lesser person to the madhouse-

STEFAN

It was your job and you took it and in exchange I raised your empty headed daughters and put up with their endless distractions to my work and my piece of mind. Why do you think I bought the estate in Salzburg? Why do you think I spend six months a year in Paris? So that I don't have to look at them or you.

FRIDERIKE

I might have died, Stefan.

STEFAN

And bloody well done.

(They freeze.)

(Lights on stage shift. Eva enters;

while Stefan and Friderike are still suspended in time, she picks up the notes and photographs them. Then she sees Goethe's pen. She takes it and exits.)

(Stefan and Friderike unfreeze.)

STEFAN (cont'd)

Friderike-

FRIDERIKE

I'm all right, it's all right,,,

STEFAN

No, it's not. I warned you, remember I warned you in the beginning. I'm afraid. I'm sorry.

FRIDERIKE

I know you don't mean it.

STEFAN

Friderike, there's this darkness.

FRIDERIKE

You don't think I feel it, too?

STEFAN

But for me it has always been there and nothing really relieves it. Nothing that is except this monstrous explosion, always at your expense and there is no way I can make up to you... certain things. I think it's the guilt most of all.

FRIDERIKE

You're right about one thing. I took this job. It just so happens that I love you and every day, every hour has been worth it, to be at your side, to work with you.

STEFAN

You could divorce me.

FRIDERIKE

I'm not one of the heroines in your novels. So much the worse for me.

(Friderike touches the crucifix
around her neck. Stefan sits
down.)

FRIDERIKE (cont'd)

I have... you know I have my comfort, Stefan. Will you be coming home tonight?

STEFAN

I'm not sure.

Projection - Mayer Lefkowitz, an
incredibly handsome man in tattered
clothes. He reads his poetry to a small
group of people. Among them is Stefan
Zweig. For a moment, their eyes meet.
Hold on the image as...

END OF ACT 1

Act 2

SCENE 1

Projection: A book shop in Berlin. We see various titles in the window including the recently published biography of *Marie Antoinette* by Stefan Zweig.

On the cover is the face of the queen: superimposed is Eva Braun dressed as the queen. She moves coquettishly for a camera as Stefan speaks.

STEFAN

"In this matter, as in most, the truth lies somewhere in the middle. She was neither a great saint or a sinner and had no actual inclination to do evil. To you or me she was an average woman of yesterday, today and tomorrow, uninspired by heroism and therefore unlikely to be the heroine of a tragedy. But history can construct a most moving drama even when its characters are undramatic and ordinary by comparison. A person out of the ordinary seeks a fate out of the ordinary, and it is the maelstrom that ordinary people find themselves inside. Thus, in the last analysis geniuses are always responsible for their own fates; mediocrity is always an unwilling drowned dove, but precisely because of this reluctance to aspire to greatness we are all the more moved by the tragedy of those forced into the spotlight and from that glare to falling headlong into disaster. The everyman or everywoman does not have the spiritual salvation of being able to transform their suffering into work and give it lasting form."

(Late afternoon. Charlotte enters the study and begins to close the blinds. Noticing the chess board, she sits and contemplates for several moments; she becomes very engrossed. Stefan enters.)

CHARLOTTE

I am so sorry.

STEFAN

No, it's quite all right, I do the same thing.

CHARLOTTE

I didn't touch-

STEFAN

With similar results.

(Charlotte relaxes.)

STEFAN (cont'd)

Do you play?

CHARLOTTE

Oh no, no. But I had a friend once who did so I know the fundamentals. He spoke about it quite passionately at times.

STEFAN

I also had a friend, well, an acquaintance, actually. We were introduced at a dinner; quite an ordinary fellow, rough really. Czech, I believe. He was the reigning chess champion, had appeared out of nowhere and taken down the top men in the game. It was unaccountable, except of course, nothing is really unaccountable. But he was so dull, so unimposing, except for this peculiar gift.

CHARLOTTE

Well, I have no gift. I just like looking at the pieces.

STEFAN

This one was once in progress with Dr. Freud but he lost his taste for it.

(They sit on either side of the chess table.)

CHARLOTTE

Well, I don't know-

STEFAN

Please, just to humor me. Every which way I look the queen is in jeopardy.

CHARLOTTE

Hm. I think you'll just have to lose the queen.

STEFAN

Oh, I'd rather not.

CHARLOTTE

Well, then there's nothing else to do. Look, if you move the knight here... the king is exposed but then look, he'll have to move his bishop.

STEFAN

You are very, very bright, you know.

CHARLOTTE

I try to listen. I learn more that way, but if I am to offer advice it would be to move the knight and lose your queen. But on the other hand it would take Dr. Freud three moves to take your king. He would expect you to do the obvious which is to go after his queen, which you would never do.

STEFAN

Why not?

CHARLOTTE

Because I have warned you not to.

STEFAN

May I ask you a question?

CHARLOTTE

Yes.

STEFAN

Do you type?

CHARLOTTE

Type?

STEFAN

I'm wondering if you type.

CHARLOTTE

I took a class once.

STEFAN

Well, I was just thinking that...

CHARLOTTE

Yes?

STEFAN

Nothing. Is the guest room made up? I've invited a friend to stay for a few days.

CHARLOTTE

And he's coming?

STEFAN

Tonight.

(Stefan exits. Eva enters immediately. She takes a letter out of her pocket.)

EVA

Charlotte, I'm leaving today.

CHARLOTTE

Leaving?

EVA

It's my last day.

CHARLOTTE

Oh, I didn't know. No one told me.

EVA

It's all very sudden. I'm getting married.

CHARLOTTE

Congratulations.

EVA

Yes, I'm very happy.

CHARLOTTE

Then I'm happy for you.

EVA

I was afraid I wouldn't see you. I have a letter that might interest you.

CHARLOTTE

Why?

EVA

Dr. Strauss was so sure he knew you so I thought I would inquire. My mother's family is from near Marburg. No Altmanns, certainly no Charlotte Altmann.

CHARLOTTE

We moved away when I was quite young.

EVA

But you'll see they do recall an Anna Weber.

CHARLOTTE

Who?

EVA

That's your name, isn't it. Anna Weber.

CHARLOTTE

No, no.

EVA

And you're a thief. It's all here in this letter. Even the mole on your face. Now you have only a mark there.

CHARLOTTE

That was a small accident when I was a child, a fall.

EVA

It was big news in that part of the country. Hardly would have been an echo here in Berlin. I do think this was a good move for you but really didn't you expect eventually to be found out.

CHARLOTTE

You don't know anything about me, about my life.

EVA

I know that you are a criminal and living under a false name and I know that you should go to jail .

CHARLOTTE

What do you want?

EVA

I want to hear you say you're guilty, that's what I want.

CHARLOTTE

Why?

EVA

Because it would please me very much.

CHARLOTTE

All right, I'm guilty.

EVA

And you should be punished.

CHARLOTTE

I should be punished and I have been punished, living every day wondering when someone would recognize me.

EVA

Well, now it's happened.

CHARLOTTE

It was five years ago. I was twenty.

EVA

Did you cut the mole off your face?

CHARLOTTE

Yes, what are you going to do?

EVA

What would you like me to do?

CHARLOTTE

Don't play this game. You know what I want. I want to be left alone.

EVA

And after Herr Zweig leaves?

CHARLOTTE

He has found me another housekeeping job. He's kind like that.

EVA

He is kind. Yes, you're right. Why don't we leave it in his hands then?

(Eva takes out another letter.)

EVA (cont'd)

Always a good idea to put one's resignation in writing, don't you think?

CHARLOTTE

Please.

EVA

It's the proper way to do things, sort of tying up loose ends.

CHARLOTTE

You don't have to tell him.

EVA

Who should I tell, the police?

(Charlotte stares at her.)

EVA (cont'd)

All that money. Where did it go? That's what I really want to know.

CHARLOTTE

I don't have it.

EVA

I don't believe you.

CHARLOTTE

It was stolen. It was stolen, every bit of it.

EVA

He's coming.

(Stefan enters.)

STEFAN

Ah, Eva, I'm so embarrassed. It seems I never cashed the check. If you'll leave me a forwarding address I'll send you a cashier's check by post. Frau Zweig usually takes care of these things.

EVA

I'll leave my parents address.

STEFAN

Charlotte, you'll remind me. Now, if you could type. What was the sentence, Eva?

EVA

"About sixty codfish eggs will make a quarter pound of very fizzy jelly."

STEFAN

That's it. Lotte, you might practice that and in no time you'll make a fine typist.

EVA

Lotte has many hidden talents.

STEFAN

I hope you'll be happy.

EVA

I'm sure I will and here...

(She hands him a letter.)

EVA (cont'd)

Read it later perhaps tonight or tomorrow. My way of thanking you.

(Eva exits.)

(Stefan looks out the window.
He sees a car.)

STEFAN

Who is that?

CHARLOTTE

Herr Zweig?

STEFAN

Yes, Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE

I must talk to you.

(Stefan looks out the window.)

STEFAN

I believe... oh. I thought it was Mayer Lefkowitz. Did you make up the guest room?

CHARLOTTE

Yes, but-

STEFAN

Leave some towels. He'll want a bath. He'll be too shy to ask but if you leave out the towels and just go ahead and draw it-

(A loud knock at the door. Charlotte opens it. The Captain stands there. But not in Austrian uniform. He is dressed in an impeccable suit.)

Projection: An image of Mayer Lefkowitz. He turns his head to look at us. We see more and more of his body and his tattered suit. Now it freezes into a still photograph and slowly dissolves until he is little more than a skeleton wearing striped concentration camp clothes.

(The Captain's blonde hair is short and perfectly in place. He enters holding a bouquet of flowers.)

CAPTAIN

Is Fraulein Braun here?

(Charlotte gasps; her knees buckle.)

STEFAN

Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE

I... I don't know...

CAPTAIN

Please, allow me.

The Captain guides Charlotte to a chair.

CHARLOTTE

Please... no... you mustn't think...

CAPTAIN

Mustn't think what?

(He takes her chin in his hand.)

CAPTAIN (cont'd)

What mustn't I think?

(The Captain holds Charlotte's hand. He strokes it a little.)

CHARLOTTE

Please, if you'll just let me... I'll get her.

(Charlotte runs from the room.)

STEFAN

I don't know what has come over her. She was fine a few moments ago.

CAPTAIN

I believe the Fraulein and I are acquainted.

STEFAN

Really?

CAPTAIN

A few years ago on holiday. In Zurich.

STEFAN

Charlotte?

CAPTAIN

Or perhaps I've just seen a ghost. You think she'll be all right?

STEFAN

I certainly hope so.

CAPTAIN

I beg your pardon? Oh, no. I'm simply a messenger.

(Eva enters. She is excitedly putting on her coat. The Captain bows and hands her the flowers.)

CAPTAIN (cont'd)

Fraulein Braun. These are for you.

STEFAN

So you are here to take away our Eva!

EVA

Yes, Fritz, is he-

CAPTAIN

I'm afraid he is delayed, I am to tell you-

EVA

Delayed? Why, delayed? What do you mean, what- Is he in the car? Where-

CAPTAIN

No, he is in Munich. We expected him last night and just got word-

EVA

Can't you take me to him?

CAPTAIN

He sent express orders that you are to wait-

EVA

Wait? I've waited all my life! Tell him to go to hell! Tell him I've had enough, do you hear me? I never want to see him or hear of him again!

(Eva is wild eyed. She holds a hand over her mouth as if she will scream and runs from the room.)

CAPTAIN

I seem to have a deleterious effect on the women in this house.

STEFAN

I daresay.

The Captain tips his hat and turns to go.

CAPTAIN

My regards to your wife. Oh, and how is she feeling?

STEFAN

I beg your pardon?

CAPTAIN

The operation.

(A long pause while Stefan takes this question in.)

STEFAN

She's much improved, thank you.

CAPTAIN

We are so glad. Well. Good bye. Oh, I almost forgot. There was a young man on the street looking for your house. Dangerous type, I thought. One of my associates gave him a ride back to the town.

(He takes a pamphlet out of his pocket.)

CAPTAIN (cont'd)

Since I'm here. Save me the trouble of a postage stamp.

(Stefan reads for a moment but not for long. He has already read this many times in various forms.)

(There is a terrible crash offstage. The Captain exits.)

CHARLOTTE (OFF STAGE)

Oh no, no, no, no, no-

(We hear the sounds of Charlotte struggling and then the sound of a heavy thud. The commotion is alarming - would be alarming under different circumstances - but he is beyond caring.)

(Charlotte enters, her hair wild, her dress torn at the shoulder.)

CHARLOTTE (cont'd)

She tried to hang herself.

STEFAN

Oh.

CHARLOTTE

The Captain cut her down.

STEFAN

Yes.

CHARLOTTE

What do we do?

STEFAN

I don't know.

(Friderike enters in her
nightgown.)

FRIDERIKE

What on earth is going on?

STEFAN

Eva tried to hang herself but it appears she's all right.

FRIDERIKE

She hanged herself?

(Friderike runs out of the
room.)

STEFAN

What did she use?

CHARLOTTE

A belt. She had gotten on the counter where the skillets are
hanging.

STEFAN

Ah good choice. I imagine she had that worked out ahead of
time. Always good to have a suicide plan handy.

CHARLOTTE

She had tried once before. She told me right before she came
here. It was with a gun, though apparently she missed.

(Stefan begins to laugh.)

STEFAN

None of this is funny.

(Charlotte's breathing becomes
a bit labored. Friderike
enters.)

FRIDERIKE

What has happened?

STEFAN

"The lowest blackest and farthest from Heaven, well I do know the way..." Dr. Strauss told me that he's had threats not to open the opera if my name is on the program. The brown shirts said they would burn the theater down and everyone in it.

(Stefan looks at the packed book shelves.)

STEFAN (cont'd)

I miss my books.

FRIDERIKE

Your books are there.

(Stefan makes a wild gesture at the hundreds of books on the shelves.)

STEFAN

Not all of them.

FRIDERIKE

Calm down.

STEFAN

Have you seen them, seen the thugs in the streets? Only they don't look like thugs. They're dressed in shining boots and gleaming guns. Even their clubs look expensive. The difference between the rabble rousers of ten years ago and now is money. There's lots of it coming from god knows where. America maybe, maybe England.

(Stefan stumbles as he tries to sit down. He opens a drawer and roots around in it.)

STEFAN (cont'd)

Where is my pen?

FRIDERIKE

What pen?

STEFAN

Goethe's pen, it was in this drawer, it was always in this drawer!

FRIDERIKE

It's all right, we'll find it.

STEFAN

No, we won't, we never will. It's gone. I should have had it under lock and key. I should have... I'm lost, Friderike. I just feel it all slipping away. It's not the facts, it's the feeling and even still the work I've done the work, I've prevented you from doing, All these words for heaven's sake. I realize I've been trying to preserve a quality of life that I held precious and all the while there were wolves at the door and the only way to not hear them was to work harder and faster. Do you realize while I'm tearing through manuscripts and looking up references in a book, the foundation of my world is slipping into the sand and no one cares. No one really actually notices. Burn down the opera house, raise the flags, line the streets with corpses! We'll do it all over again in some other century and hope it turns out better. Meanwhile there's a girl in our kitchen with a belt burn around her neck who'd rather die than face another hour without a man who wants to bring down western civilization. In our own home Friderike, the wolves have been here since the beginning! I may as well have written repeatedly about codfish eggs for all the impact I've made... Nothing is enough, not Shakespeare, Goethe, Rilke, Rodin, Ahkmatova, Rolland, who else needs to be born to combat this insanity and do you know what's worse? It hasn't even happened yet and they've won.

(Charlotte enters. She is
having trouble breathing.)

FRIDERIKE

Stefan, the nebulizer.

STEFAN

What?

FRIDERIKE

THE NEBULIZER IN HER ROOM NEXT TO HER BED RIGHT NOW!

(A frightened Stefan exits.)

CHARLOTTE

I'm sorry I can't.

FRIDERIKE

It's all right, look at me look in my eyes, dear.

CHARLOTTE

I can't-

FRIDERIKE

Yes you can, breathe with me slowly, calmly.

CHARLOTTE

I would if I just could...

STEFAN (OFF STAGE)

WHERE IS THE BLOODY THING!

CHARLOTTE

Frau Zweig, I must tell you-

FRIDERIKE

Quiet now, just look in my eyes, we'll get through this.
We've been through worse.

CHARLOTTE

I am not-

FRIDERIKE

STEFAN!

STEFAN (OFF STAGE)

AARGH!

(He crashes back into the room.
In the midst of this, the
telephone rings.)

STEFAN (cont'd)

IT ISN'T THERE! IT BLOODY ISN'T!

(Friderike rushes out of the
room. Charlotte is breathing
for her life. Stefan takes her
in his arms.)

STEFAN (cont'd)

My dear child-

CHARLOTTE

I'm not-

(He doesn't know what else to
do. He cradles her, almost
crushing her and he cries.
The sound of Charlotte's
struggle stops.)

(Friderike enters with the
nebulizer. She looks at Stefan
and Charlotte. Charlotte
raises her head.)

CHARLOTTE (cont'd)

I'm fine, I'm all right.

(She looks up at Stefan.)

CHARLOTTE (cont'd)

You saved my life.

(There is a knock at the front
door.)

It opens slowly on its own.
 Eva enters. She is a grotesque
 clown - it is a nightmare
 version of the woman, Eva
 Braun.)

(She faces Stefan, Friderike
 and Stefan and holds out a
 letter.)

EVA

I understand you are looking for a secretary.

(Eva walks toward them as the
 room seems to catch fire.)

SCENE 2

Projection: Nazis burning books in a
 bonfire and the sound of Stefan reading
 excerpts.

STEFAN

It is a central irony that he who would write about action
 and pleasure must fable and he who would live it cannot write
 about it. For no one can do both and do them justice. Writers
 seldom have nor do they desire experiences worth writing
 about and so it goes the greatest tragedy for a writer is to
 be burdened by any upheaval that would interfere with the
 singular pursuit of setting pen to paper. For within the
 imaginal lies all peace and satisfaction and through the
 reflection of the imaginal all great problems are solved and
 all heroics are distilled. The embodiment of this sensitivity
 is in the person of Rainier Maria Rilke who avoided all
 noise, even his own fame. He sought only to bind verse to
 verse, every line saturated with music, flaming with color,
 glowing with images.

And now we see only the flames as it
 consumes, yes everything - even Rilke's
 and we see his name consumed.

Again and again, however we know the landscape of love
and the little churchyard there, with its sorrowing names,
and the frighteningly silent abyss into which the others
fall: again and again the two of us walk out together
under the ancient trees, lie down again and again
among the flowers, face to face with the sky.

And the name of Erich Maria Remarque
and his book *All Quiet on the Western
Front* - burning.

But now, for the first time, I see you are a man like me. I
thought of your hand-grenades, of your bayonet, of your
rifle; now I see your wife and your face and our fellowship.
Forgive me, comrade. We always see it too late. Why do they
never tell us that you are poor devils like us, that your
mothers are just as anxious as ours, and that we have the
same fear of death, and the same dying and the same agony --
Forgive me, comrade; how could you be my enemy?

And we see Bertolt Brecht's collected
works burning and then dissolve to
images of the rest of the names of the
writers whose books were burned is
superimposed over archival footage of
the Nazis during the 1930s - as we hear
Stefan read Marina Tsvetaeva's poem,
(projection of the title and author), *I
Know The Truth*.

STEFAN (cont'd)

"I know the truth - forget all other truths!
No need for anyone on earth to struggle.
Look - it is evening, look, it is nearly night:
what will you say, poets, lovers, generals?"

The wind is level now, the earth is wet with dew,
the storm of stars in the sky will turn to quiet.
And soon all of us will sleep beneath the earth, we
who never let each other sleep above it."

And the names we see on the screen
during the reading of the poem are:

Alfred Adler
August Bebel, J
Johannes R. Becher
Walter Benjamin
Ernst Bloch
Hermann Broch
Max Brod
John Dos Passos
Friedrich Engels
Albert Einstein
Lion Feuchtwanger
Marieluise Fleißer
Friedrich Wilhelm Foerster
Leonhard Frank
Bruno Frank
Anna Freud
Sigmund Freud
André Gide
Maxim Gorky
George Grosz
Jaroslav Hašek
Werner Hegemann
Heinrich Heine
Ernest Hemingway
Magnus Hirschfeld
Ödön von Horvath
Heinrich Eduard Jacob
Franz Kafka
Erich Kästner
Karl Kautsky
Helen Keller
Alfred Kerr
Egon Erwin Kisch
Karl Kraus
Vladimir Lenin
Karl Liebknecht
Jack London

Rosa Luxemburg
Andre Malraux
Heinrich Mann
Klaus Mann
Thomas Mann
Ludwig Marcuse
Karl Marx
Robert Musil
Ernst Erich Noth
Carl von Ossietzky
Ernst Ottwalt
Erwin Piscator
Alfred Polgar
Marcel Proust
Wilhelm Reich
Eugen Relgis
Erich Maria Remarque
Ludwig Renn
Joachim Ringelnatz
Joseph Roth
Nelly Sachs
Felix Salten
Anna Seghers
Arthur Schnitzler
Rudolf Steiner
Carl Sternheim
Bertha von Suttner
Ernst Toller
Leon Trotsky
Kurt Tucholsky
Jakob Wassermann
Frank Wedekind
Grete Weiskopf
H.G. Wells
Arnold Zweig

And dissolve to the final name on the
list -

Stefan Zweig

SCENE 3

(Stefan and Friderike are packing up Stefan's study. Friderike handles a framed poem by Rilke.)

STEFAN

Be careful with that.

FRIDERIKE

You think I don't know? I schlepped this all over Europe one summer

STEFAN

It's in Rilke's own hand.

FRIDERIKE

I can see that.

STEFAN

You have enough to do. I'll finish here.

FRIDERIKE

If I'm alone to be responsible for unpacking when I get home, I'd rather know what boxes to look in. I don't want to be blamed for anything missing.

STEFAN

Missing?

FRIDERIKE

Nothing is going to be missing,

STEFAN

What would be missing?

FRIDERIKE

I just said nothing. Stefan, you are going to drive me out of my mind.

STEFAN

You know I like the books alphabetical and no mixing up in the boxes.

FRIDERIKE

God help us if the a-s and the b-s meet each other unexpectedly. They do all right on the shelves together.

STEFAN

I can do this by myself. You don't have to always look after me you know.

FRIDERIKE

Since when?

STEFAN

Since... I don't know it just feels wrong somehow. I'm going to be six months without you, I'd better start getting used to it.

FRIDERIKE

It's not for the first time.

STEFAN

I know but things being as they are...

FRIDERIKE

Stop that now. We're going to be together by Christmas. I'd go with you, you know.

STEFAN

I know.

FRIDERIKE

My grandchildren are not growing as fast as all that.

STEFAN

I think the separation will be good. You'll get the house back in order. I hate it when it's been closed up. I will miss you making sure I eat properly.

FRIDERIKE

I hear the food is good in France.

STEFAN

Friderike...

FRIDERIKE

What darling?

STEFAN

I will miss you so.

(This is a tender moment between them. But there is something more - something in the air. It feels like a permanent goodbye.)

STEFAN (cont'd)

And I hope never to come back here.

FRIDERIKE

Next season will be the opening of The Silent Woman. Of course we'll come back here.

STEFAN

You know I hate comedies.

FRIDERIKE

That's the mail.

(She exits. Stefan returns to packing his books. He pauses with confusion. Something is missing.)

(Friderike enters. She stands silently.)

STEFAN

What is it?

FRIDERIKE

A letter from Eva Braun.

STEFAN

I don't want to read it. Tear it up.

FRIDERIKE

I'd rather read it. It's addressed to me.

(He continues packing books.
After a moment, Friderike
opens the letter and reads it.
She makes a gasp.)

STEFAN

For god's sake.

FRIDERIKE

I told you. I told you when she came that it wasn't the same girl.

STEFAN

What do you mean?

FRIDERIKE

This letter. It's from Eva Braun. Eva Braun, do you know how common a name that is? She says that she hasn't been well or she would have written sooner. She wonders if you still are in need of a secretary.

STEFAN

I don't understand.

FRIDERIKE

She must have been there. In the waiting room. Listening to us talk. Hovering. Like a virus, an infection, I brought her home with me. She was so pretty and so gay. But I knew. Always, I knew. And yet I couldn't do anything to stop her.

STEFAN

Why us? Why did she come to us? I'm just a writer. I'm just...

(He sits down, defeated.)

STEFAN (cont'd)

I'm not sure I have anything else in me, Friderike. No more stories. I'm getting old.

(They look at the books, the boxes and the half empty shelves.)

FRIDERIKE

Come now, you've already started notes on a new novel. I know, I read them.

STEFAN

It's rubbish.

FRIDERIKE

Beware Of Pity.

STEFAN

What?

FRIDERIKE

I think that would be a good title for the novel. About a man who pities a girl so he marries her. Did you pity me, Stefan?

STEFAN

Why in the world do you ask that?

FRIDERIKE

I don't know. In your way you are very, very...

STEFAN

Pitiable.

(They laugh.)

FRIDERIKE

Who knows what draws people together. Two paths collide and there is this shake up. The earth moves and all that. And then their paths may converge, but who knows for how long?

STEFAN

You made the mistake of reading my books.

FRIDERIKE

You made the mistake of writing them.

STEFAN

There is really nothing else I have ever wanted to do.

FRIDERIKE

Yes, I know. I'll leave you to your books. Call me if you need anything.

(She kisses him and exits.
Charlotte enters. She
carries a book.)

CHARLOTTE

I borrowed this. I'm sorry, I should have asked.

STEFAN

Sooner or later every girl reads about Marie Antoinette.

CHARLOTTE

Oh, I already have read about her. Just not your book. It was very sweet.

STEFAN

Sweet?

CHARLOTTE

I've been reading one or two a week, actually. You tell very good stories.

STEFAN

Probably I've spent as much time or more translating other writers' work than creating something original.

Writers by nature are selfish people. We must be in order to get anything done. And it's easy to be proud of oneself, the reviews, the autograph seekers, of which I am the most notorious, by the way. And then you read the masterworks. It's only a word, masterworks, until you actually read one and I have read, I believe, most of them, There is a certain transmutation that takes place when you undertake the task of recreating words from one language into another. You actually need to look into the poet's soul because otherwise you are in danger of creating an adaptation instead of a translation, something less pure of the poet's spirit.

CHARLOTTE

And what do you see when you look into these poets' souls?

STEFAN

Security. Balance. Order. I told you writers are selfish people.

CHARLOTTE

I have heard it said that the translator's gift must be as refined as the original.

STEFAN

A self-serving lie. I may have been the one who said it.

CHARLOTTE

I don't believe you.

STEFAN

You're not afraid of me, Lotte.

CHARLOTTE

Not anymore. I was. I was afraid of you and everything probably since the day I was born. I was told my mother had no milk and I almost starved before they bothered to find a wet nurse here.

(She holds out a letter.)

STEFAN

What is it?

CHARLOTTE

The letter from Eva Braun. I stole it the day she left.

STEFAN

I had forgotten it.

CHARLOTTE

It's about me.

STEFAN

About you?

CHARLOTTE

And I don't care. Dr. Strauss was right. He did know me. He did meet me at the hotel. It was six years ago now and I still can't believe he recognized me.

(She prepares herself.)

CHARLOTTE (cont'd)

That week in Switzerland, I was the guest of my aunt Elise who had long ago moved to America and married a banker. The holiday was intended for my mother but she was sick. You see, she was always sick. My father had died in the war and we lived on a small pension and what I earned at the post office so when the telegram came with the invitation my mother insisted I go even though every week was thought to be her last, and I who had never been anywhere didn't even have the sense to realize what was in store, how out of place I would be, how utterly, utterly provincial I looked with my homemade skirt and tattered case. I didn't know what wealth was but when the train brought me to the station and a man in livery carried me to the hotel I, believed there had to be some mistake for the hotel was a castle in the sky. It rose up a mile and peeked its turrets above the clouds. During the day I could almost push them around like soft pillows and at night the stars sparkled like diamonds on a empress's gown.

(She thinks of that for a moment.)

CHARLOTTE (cont'd)

My aunt in her fur cape and silk dress found me lurking in the lobby. I could see from her face the horror. She was as shocked as me only differently, you understand, because I was in her charge. Once she took hold of me, she begged me not to say a word lest I screech like a monkey and she proceeded to drag me to her room where she locked the door and stripped off my clothes and sent for a maid. Fortunately we were similar in size and so she dressed me well enough to get me back out of the hotel and into the town where she bought me some clothes, clothes like I had never seen, never mind worn. Dresses with matching shoes and hats, a cloth coat trimmed with mink such as a movie star would wear, and pots of cream for my face and lipstick and powder and then came the hairdresser! I who had only ever washed my hair with rough soap now had the most luxurious scented shampoo massaged into my scalp. My aunt insisted I not look until my hair was cut and curled and combed and when I looked in the mirror, well I screamed. I thought it was all a horrible joke. Who was this girl, this lovely, lovely girl and how would I ever be able to put her together again?

STEFAN

And for this you need redemption?

CHARLOTTE

I have not told you the whole story.

(She pauses again.)

CHARLOTTE (cont'd)

My aunt must have seen me as a kind of pet. She spoiled me. She gave me the idea that this was real, that I was a princess. I even changed my name to match hers since her husband was respectable and I for the first time in my life I fell in love with a young lieutenant whose adoptive father owned an estate in Scotland and by the end of the week I was sure he would ask me to marry him. I had a scheme worked out so that he would never, never know. I concocted a story that my mother died suddenly and the town had been subsequently ravaged by fire. The pain was too great to ever return and so that would explain my lack of connections.

It was mad, I know, but I was in a sort of frenzy, obsessed with my new found allure and yes, my beauty, beauty I never knew I possessed. But then a letter came. A letter from the butcher in my town. My mother had taken a turn for the worst and it was addressed to me with my real name, not the name I had adopted and certainly not the name I gave to you. The hotel clerk called out to me in the lobby and they knew, everyone knew that I was a liar and twelve hours later I was back on a train going home, back to my mother who was by now a corpse and to my job at the post office where I had worked for six years and was doomed to remain until, by the grace of god, I might die young at my station.

STEFAN

But you're here, Charlotte, there's no shame. The odds of anyone recognizing you again or caring even-

CHARLOTTE

There's more.

(She gains courage here.)

CHARLOTTE (cont'd)

I met a man. I went Munich one day. I simply had to go somewhere and I met a man more miserable than myself and that is what bound us together. I cannot say we fell in love; that would be a laugh. But we found some solace together in a dingy hotel room and that little bit of happiness gave us the audacity to hope for more. He became determined to find a job that paid well enough so that we could live together, but after several months he admitted defeat and I who lived for the few hours we spent in those weekends felt the same. So we made a pact to kill ourselves and I have to tell you it was the greatest relief of my life, finally to be done with it. Done with hoping, done with planning, done with believing there might be a god who would smile at me again. He came to my town. We had decided to accomplish the task there in the woods. He had a gun and four bullets in case we couldn't do the job with only two. He met me at the post office. I was just getting the deposit together, the monthly deposit and when he saw the money-

STEFAN

You stole it.

CHARLOTTE

Not then. A month later. It would be enough to get us to America and see us through for some months. I was devastated. Even though I knew it could work because really by then I had truly had enough, the theft was easy. No one had reason to suspect that I would be capable of such an act. That is how little they thought of me. And so the day came and we fled first to Westbaden then we made our way along the Belgian border to Amsterdam and purchased tickets to America.

(She sits down now and gulps a cup of tea - Stefan's tea.)

STEFAN

For god's sake what happened!

CHARLOTTE

He left me there. He said there was only one ticket left in steerage and he would send for me. He gave me enough money to live for a few months. I begged him to wait for another ship but I could see he was already losing control. Better to let him go than to risk creating a scene that would result in our arrests.

STEFAN

So he left you there?

CHARLOTTE

He was robbed before he set sail. That night he jumped off a bridge.

STEFAN

My dear Lotte!

CHARLOTTE

I had new papers, some of the money had gone to that. My name was changed and god knows when I looked in the mirror I was changed, too. So that's what you will find in the letter from Eva Braun, and I don't care.

I wish you would call the police. I am sure they have not given up looking for me in Marburg. It would be a relief

STEFAN

Why would I call the police?

CHARLOTTE

Because you would be doing me a favor. I don't have the courage for it or I would do it myself. Can you imagine that I was once a young lady, appealing enough to seduce an heir to a Scottish estate and now look at me?

(She coughs now.)

CHARLOTTE (cont'd)

This condition began the night that Paul - that was his name - died. I woke up in the middle of the night and felt like I was drowning. I couldn't breathe. I almost died myself. Then I heard about him in the morning.

(She struggles to breathe.
Stefan puts his arms around
her like before until she
quiets down.)

STEFAN

Sturnstunden.

CHARLOTTE

What?

STEFAN

Star hours of destiny. Decisions that create momentous and everlasting changes in our lives.

CHARLOTTE

What, the decision to become a thief?

STEFAN

No, the decision to take control of one's destiny. You are not ordinary, Lotte.

Most people attach themselves to other people or more often want nothing, wish for nothing. You are brave, Charlotte, you are a queen.

(He kisses her, a soft but lingering kiss. Friderike enters and sees. Stefan and Charlotte pull apart. After a moment, the three of them simply begin to pack the books together.)

Projection: The words, *Last Songs: At Sunset*, text by Joseph von Eichendorff, music by Richard Strauss, with subtitles. We see the Soprano with the orchestra. And a much older Richard Strauss conducts.

SOPRANO

*Wir sind durch Not und Freude
gegangen Hand in Hand;
vom Wandern ruhen wir
nun überm stillen Land.*

*Rings sich die Täler neigen,
es dunkelt schon die Luft.
Zwei Lerchen nur noch steigen
nachträumend in den Duft.*

*Tritt her und laß sie schwirren,
bald ist es Schlafenszeit.
Daß wir uns nicht verirren
in dieser Einsamkeit.*

*O weiter, stiller Friede!
So tief im Abendrot.
Wie sind wir wandermüde--
Ist dies etwa der Tod?*

(in English subtitles)

*We have gone through sorrow and joy
hand in hand;
Now we can rest from our wandering
above the quiet land.*

*Around us, the valleys bow;
the air is growing darker.
Just two skylarks soar upwards
dreamily into the fragrant air.*

*Come close to me, and let them flutter.
Soon it will be time for sleep.
Let us not lose our way
in this solitude.
O vast, tranquil peace,
so deep at sunset!
How weary we are of wandering---
Is this perhaps death?*

SCENE 4

Projection: International Stefan Zweig Society, Vienna, 1957. Images of Stefan Zweig at various times in his life, also pictures of Stefan and Friderike as a couple and finally images of Stefan and Charlotte as a couple.

*(Friderike, much older, enters
and stands before the
audience.)*

FRIDERIKE

Twenty years ago my husband began his life again in the country of Brazil with his second wife, Charlotte Altman. It is there that he ended it, as well.

In the years since our separation and divorce, we maintained a close correspondence, not to mention an enduring friendship. Charlotte, too, became a dear friend and I am grateful now that he had the gift of her youth and love in those final difficult years in exile. He has been criticized for ending his life, the favorite of favorites, for making the sudden and pivotal decision from which there is no retreat. And for Lotte's life, too, he is held accountable but I must say that since her health had deteriorated so much that I can understand how this decision must have seemed inevitable under the circumstances.

(She searches the audience for a sympathetic face and finds one.)

FRIDERIKE (cont'd)

I still believe that his ability to reinvent himself in a world gone mad, not for the first but for the second time in his middle age, was more than his powers of endurance or curiosity could bear. In his posthumously published memoir, *The World Of Yesterday*, he says that in his lifetime he witnessed almost constant seismic upheavals on the European continent. And that each one of us, from the grand schemers to the most innocent, has had their futures changed forever. And if there is any solace, these futures are unwritten, he says, and hopes that stronger and better visionaries will emerge to create them.

Projections of Stefan, Friderike and Charlotte end. The screens are blank.

FRIDERIKE (cont'd)

In his lifetime he was the most translated author in the world. At the end of his life his words were forbidden most of the countries who had revered him. But borders have been lost and made since 1945 and again it is possible to read his work virtually anywhere in the world. As a pacifist he chose to leave rather than to politic so as to be able to continue the work for which he was born and that sustained him through many trials.

(Video cameras are on the audience now; they see themselves in the projections.)

FRIDERIKE (cont'd)

What can we gain and what can we give when our own star hours of destiny arrive - for each of us, according to our mettle and our talents - may be called. He would ask that we choose bravely.

(Lights go down slowly and off on Friderike.)

End of play.