

# The Friend's Table

By Dennis Fisher

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## CHARACTERS

Frau Schmidt	German school secretary	50ish
Joan Richards	American school principal	40ish
Rudi Fuchs	German teacher and liaison	40ish
Gene Taylor	American maintenance man	40ish

The play takes place in August of 1985, on an American military base in rural Bavaria. The costumes, furniture, and visual references should acknowledge this.

*"What I like to drink most is wine that belongs to others."  
Diogenes*

## PRELUDE - AS AUDIENCE TAKE SEATS

Maintenance office in American military school in Bavaria. It contains a table that serves as a desk, a couple of chairs, shelves filled with supplies, tools, and clutter. The table has a phone, a tape recorder, a rolodex, and a glass topped box containing butterflies. The room has an entrance door and a door into a storage room, with a half boxed upright piano along the back wall of the room. There are German and American flags in back of room, along with an official framed photo of President Reagan. A German woman, FRAU SCHMIDT, in Bavarian dress, 50ish, bleached blonde, once attractive but carrying the stress of life on her face, walks into room. She sits at the piano. She plays a minor key piece of music as patrons are seated.

At certain time, FRAU SCHMIDT finishes the piano piece. She stands up and looks longingly at the piano. She touches the piano with both hands as if doing a religious laying of hands. She takes a deep breath, looks around the room and visually takes it in, as if monitoring the energy of the space. She shivers. Lights down.

## SCENE ONE

Lights up. Standing silently in corner of the Maintenance office is FRAU SCHMIDT. She seems agitated, tense. This is her normal state. We can hear rain in the background. JOAN, the school principal, walks into room, adjusting her belt after going to bathroom.

FRAU SCHMIDT

Frau Richards (she pronounces REE - KARDS in german accented English).

JOAN

(Joan is startled) Goddamnit Frau Schmidt! You want to give me a heart attack?

FRAU SCHMIDT

You should not leave the toilette until you have arranged your hosen. Especially in a school for kinder.

JOAN

It's summer. I thought I was alone. Jesus Christ! I know how to dress myself.

FRAU SCHMIDT

Where is that terrible Herr Fuchs? I must speak with him. His auto is in the parking lot with the engine running. He is here somewhere.

JOAN

He's at the officer's club. He should be here any time. Hey - I was just reminded once again that the toilets here are different than anywhere else in the world. Why do Germans have their crap sit on a ledge?

FRAU SCHMIDT

It is so you can examine your waste before you flush.

JOAN

Why would you want a turd to lay on a ledge so you can look at it?

FRAU SCHMIDT

It is a window into your health.

JOAN

No it's a window into your shit. Good god. Every time I take a crap in this country I've got to stare at a turd on a shelf in the toilet. It's disgusting.

(RUDI enters the office - FRAU SCHMIDT goes from zero to a hundred and lunges at Rudi getting in his face, waving a finger and yelling at him - he looks startled)

FRAU SCHMIDT

You have left your auto running - it is poisoning the air! You are destroying the atmosphere! The earth is doomed because of people like you! Go out there *now* and stop that engine!

RUDI

Gott in Himmel Frau Schmidt! I need to speak to Frau Richards.

FRAU SCHMIDT

No! You must go and turn the car off! Now. Schnell!

RUDI

(RUDI looks to JOAN)  
We will talk later.

RUDI leaves room in a rush.

FRAU SCHMIDT

What is he up to?

JOAN

Uh, he must want to discuss school business.

FRAU SCHMIDT

He only worries about his own business.

JOAN

Well, you certainly endeared yourself to him with that little episode.

FRAU SCHMIDT

I hate that man. He has a black aura - as black as coal. Herr Fuchs does not care that he will destroy the earth. He only cares about himself and money. I am not sure which he cares for most.

JOAN

Rudi is a well respected man on the base and in Bad Windsheim. He's done a lot for people in this community.

FRAU SCHMIDT

He is not respected, he is feared. He has done a lot for himself. Don't you see? His aura is black! The devil has a black aura.

JOAN

Well that's pretty harsh. Hey, what's the German word for Devil?

FRAU SCHMIDT

Teufel. (pronounced TOYful)

JOAN

Toy fell. Hard to get worse than the toy fell. My vocabulary word for the day. Die Teufel

FRAU SCHMIDT

Der Teufel. Masculine.

JOAN

At least the Devil is a male. Why the hell do Germans have to give a gender to every noun? It drives me crazy trying to learn this language.

FRAU SCHMIDT

We just do.

JOAN

Who could imagine Germans just following the rules without thinking? Can't see how that would lead to any unintended consequences. Aside from tormenting Rudi, why are you here? I thought you were getting ready for your visit to Hungary.

FRAU SCHMIDT

I needed to clean my food out of the Kühlschrank, I mean refrigerator. I didn't want my tofu and hummus to spoil while I was gone. Being wasteful is a sin against mother earth.

JOAN

How can you be a vegetarian living in this meat obsessed goddamn country? They don't just eat meat here, they worship it. They make you look at the face of whatever it is you're eating. I don't like having my food stare at me. That's why I am on a fairly strict schnitzel diet. No faces on a schnitzel.

FRAU SCHMIDT

But the face is there. I see it. That schnitzel was once a beautiful animal. One of the most intelligent creatures on earth. Schnitzel isn't just a reminder of the pig's death, it's a forewarning of your own death.

JOAN

Jesus you creep me out sometimes. A tenderloin forewarns my death. I'm afraid I have to take issue. I draw the line at demeaning bacon. (smiles)

FRAU SCHMIDT

Most of my countrymen would agree with you.

As they talk JOAN moves to refrigerator in room and removes a bottle of mineral water, closes the door and turns away. She doesn't see the fridge door swing back open as she moves from the fridge.

FRAU SCHMIDT

(screams) Close the door, close the door, close the door!

(JOAN is startled and freezes)

Frau Richards, the electricity! It is being wasted! You must not leave the door open, it destroys the ozone!

JOAN closes door with a bang.

JOAN

Goddammit Frau Schmidt, you scared the shit out of me again. The world isn't going to collapse if I leave the fridge door open for a couple of seconds.

FRAU SCHMIDT

(still agitated) This is why the air is poisoned, slips like this. You Americans should learn to eat fresh food and water that isn't freezing. Hot and cold food are bad for the earth and bad for you. It kills the earth to use big freezers. Why must you have ice in everything?

JOAN

Because we like it. Because it feels good.

FRAU SCHMIDT

This why you Americans are all constipated.

JOAN

Say what!?

FRAU SCHMIDT

Hot and cold food and drink shock the digestive system. It constricts the stomach and bowels. This is why Americans are all constipated. Everything is ice cold or steaming hot with you.

JOAN

You've done field studies on American bowels?

FRAU SCHMIDT

It is common knowledge. I only use the kuhlschrank to prevent spoiling, not to freeze things. Food should be no cooler than room temperature and no hotter than body temperature. We share an office. I know how long it takes you to use the toilette. You obviously struggle. It's all the hot and cold food.

JOAN

Good God. I have a bowel monitor . . .  
(She fixes her gaze intently on FRAU SCHMIDT)  
What about *my* aura?

FRAU SCHMIDT

What about it?

JOAN

What color is it?

FRAU SCHMIDT

Frau Richards, in spite of your many shortcomings I like you very much. You don't pretend to be something you are not. But, I am not comfortable answering that question.

JOAN

You've just told me that you know my bathroom habits but you won't tell me about my aura? This is ... unsettlingly Germanic.

FRAU SCHMIDT

You have much turmoil in you Frau Richards. You have so much anger. You are a cynic. You are sarcastic. All these things show in your aura. It is not imaginary. The nature of *your* aura depends on the time of day - and whether you have had contact with your soon to be ex-husband. Have you had contact with him?

JOAN

Fuck. Bingo. Oh - what a bunch of happy horseshit. Which fits with this shit obsessed country.

FRAU SCHMIDT

Believe as you wish. I see what I see. The forces of darkness are everywhere.

JOAN

You've met my shit for brains husband. You know darkness.

GENE walks into room with tools in his hand.

GENE

Frau Schmidt! I thought you were going to Hungary for the cure.

FRAU SCHMIDT

(brightens at sight of GENE) I am, Herr Taylor. I had tasks to complete before I leave.

JOAN

What color is Gene's aura?

FRAU SCHMIDT steps back, tilts her head and looks at GENE.

FRAU SCHMIDT

It is the most beautiful yellow. Geld. As always.

GENE

Aww.

JOAN

Like gold.

FRAU SCHMIDT

Like gold. Herr Taylor has a pure heart and it shows in his aura.

JOAN

What happy horse shit.

GENE

Joan, that's not nice.

JOAN

Come on. Auras?

GENE

Everybody sees the world different.

JOAN

That's easy for you to say. You've got a golden aura. Mine, apparently, is as black as the devil's.

FRAU SCHMIDT

I did not say your aura is black. Do not put words in my mouth. (she moves towards door) Make sure to contact the education offices in Weisbaden if you need help while I am gone.

JOAN

Why would I need help?

FRAU SCHMIDT

This is your first summer at the school, the first time you will be here and I won't be available to help.

JOAN

Sure. I'll ask for advice from the bureaucracy so screwed up it sent 13 expensive pianos to a tiny school that didn't ask for them. So much for Reagan getting rid of government waste. Hey. Before you go, you never told me what you're having done at that clinic.

FRAU SCHMIDT

This is personal.

JOAN

And keeping track of my bowels isn't?

FRAU SCHMIDT

The clinic is very helpful to me. This is all you need to know.

JOAN

If you say so. Uhh. I hope it goes well for you in Budapest.

FRAU SCHMIDT

Auras don't lie. They never lie. (her gaze seems to go over JOAN's entire body)  
Gross Gott.

JOAN AND GENE

Gross Gott.

FRAU SCHMIDT leaves.

JOAN

Why do Germans always invoke God when they're coming and going?

GENE

I don't know if all Germans do. Bavarians do though.

JOAN

Why Bavarians?

GENE

I don't know.

JOAN

Mr. Curiosity. Jesus, she's full of shit with that aura stuff. She gives me the willies when she looks me up and down.

GENE

She's quirky but she a good soul.

JOAN

*I know.*

GENE

I gotta get back to the toilets. We've had so much rain the sewers are causin' problems. The history around here is great but two hundred year old sewers can be a problem. If Bad Windsheim would've got bombed in the war we would have new sewers like Nurnburg.

JOAN

You really bring history alive Gene. You've lived in Germany for so long your insights have a shit based theme, just like any good German. And isn't Nurnburg lucky to have been bombed off the face of the fucking earth so they could get new sewers? I can just imagine the conversation - "well mommy and daddy are dead, but our shit flows more efficiently to the sewage plant now so it wasn't a total loss."

GENE

Joan, come on.

JOAN

I'm sorry. I'm wound a little tight.

GENE

More divorce trouble?

JOAN

There was another hearing. He's going after my pension. It's not enough that he got my car, he got half of my savings, and I somehow have to pay him alifuckingmony, he's going after my future. I thought men were supposed to get screwed in divorces.

GENE

I'm sorry.

JOAN

It never occurred to me he could get my pension. I'm so worried about money it's making me crazy.

GENE

I don't know about that, but it's sure making you cuss a lot.

JOAN

Do you know what he said when I told him I wanted him out of my life?

GENE

Nope.

JOAN

He said he always knew I was a dyke. Because any woman that didn't want to hop in bed with him *right now* had to be a lesbian, don't you see?

The male ego at work. Trace any human heartache back to the source and you'll find a male fucking ego.

GENE

Why in the world did you marry that man in the first place?

JOAN

Ask me something easy like is there life after death. A better question is, is there life after marriage? A team of psychologists working around the clock would probably draw a blank on why I married that man. I ponder that question on a daily basis. Der Teufel. My new vocabulary word to describe that jobless bastard.

GENE

So he's the devil. (chuckles) You sure don't hold back, do you? It'll all work out Joan. I went to hell and back and now I'm as happy as I've ever been.

JOAN

Explain.

GENE

Just know that things can work out even when life seems darkest.

JOAN

Don't drop something like that on me and then get all new agey.

GENE

Awful stuff happened in Vietnam. I found Berta and now it's better.

JOAN

If you're suggesting a man is going to give my life meaning you're fucking delusional. What happened in Vietnam?

GENE

No. You might look at me different.

JOAN

Of course not.

GENE

I, ah, did something terrible. Someone died.

JOAN

That's war isn't it? Awful things happen in wars. So?

GENE

I can't really talk about it. But the point is that things can get better even when it seems like they can't.

JOAN

If you can rework your life *and* keep your goddamn golden aura, I guess it does give me some hope. And I haven't killed anybody yet. Oh. I'm sorry.

GENE

You ain't gonna do stupid stuff like that. You're too smart.

(GENE grabs tools and leaves room - JOAN is lost in thought. She opens her purse, pulls out a pint bottle, takes a swig, puts in back in purse - she speaks to herself)

A golden aura.

(she looks at butterfly case, still lost in thought. Opens the case and picks up a butterfly with golden wings and stares at it)

Geld. Geld. Geld. That's the problem isn't it? (She tilts her head in thought)  
Geld-*ing*? There's a satisfying thought.

END OF SCENE

## SCENE TWO

Lights up. School Maintenance office, one hour later. JOAN is at table that serves as a desk. She clicks on a tape player.

## TAPE PLAYER

(tape player voice - refined German speaker)

Sehen.

JOAN turns off tape player -says words haltingly.

JOAN

Ich sehe, du siehst, er sieht, wir sehen, ihr seht, Sie sehen.

JOAN

Conjugating fucking verbs in a language that sounds like a band saw on sheet metal. It'd be more satisfying to slam my hand in a car door. Shiiiiit!

RUDI appears at door. JOAN does not see him enter.

RUDI

Scheisse. Gross Gott. The german word for shit is Scheisse.

JOAN

Smart ass. I *know*. Fuck. Don't sneak up on me like that.

RUDI

I didn't see Frau Schmidt's bicycle. *Please* tell me she has gone.

JOAN

She's gone.

RUDI

That woman drives me to distraction. How is the instruction going?

JOAN

This goddamn language. Nouns aren't bad, because you can picture them in your head, but trying to get verbs right has me sounding like a slow witted 3 year old. It's killing me.

RUDI

You will survive German verbs. You can work on an American base and never have to know more than how to order a beer and a schnitzel when you are on the economy. That and "Wo ist die Toilette" and you are in business.

JOAN

I'm a goddamn illiterate in German. I hate it. I'm a stupid head, a Dumbkopf.

RUDI

A word of advice. Don't ever use the word Dumbkopf around Germans. It invokes memories of the Nazis forty years after the fact. People still walk the streets that did terrible things. There is a group of older men who meet each week around a table at the Rotes Ross restaurant - friends who discuss how misunderstood is their proud Nazi past.

As RUDI speaks, JOAN reaches down and closes her purse.

JOAN

I can't believe there are still Nazis wandering around.

RUDI

Believe it. Just order a beer and a wurst on the economy. Inquire about the toilette. Otherwise use sign language. No need to make a decrepit Nazi spray beer out of his nose. (chuckles) Why are you in here instead of the principal's office?

JOAN

If I come back here I don't get interrupted. The military pisses money like a perpetual fire hose but they won't pay for me to have a substitute secretary. We have clinics here. Why Frau Schmidt has to go to Hungary escapes me.

RUDI

Frau Schmidt has gone to Hungary for two weeks each summer for many years. She can find no clinic in Bayern that will put her into a coma.

JOAN

A coma? Say what?

RUDI

Frau Schmidt gave you no details of her clinic visit?

JOAN

No.

RUDI

Your secretary had some terrible war experiences as a child. She's tried every bit of, er, quackery - what an evocative word - Deutsch is so bereft in comparison - anyway, she's tried to ease her troubled mind with every kind of quackery, which in the East is quite considerable. There is a clinic in Budapest she has visited the past many summers that puts her in a chemically induced coma for two weeks.

JOAN

A chemically induced coma? Damn. That's insane. That sounds dangerous.

RUDI

Spectacularly so. But imagine her without these treatments.

JOAN

How do you know this? She wouldn't have told you this. She can't stand you.

RUDI

Knowledge is power. And she doesn't like most people.

JOAN

She says you have a coal black aura. I don't think she means it as a compliment.

RUDI

I wonder what our auras would look like without her annual coma. (chuckles)

JOAN

You Europeans are so odd. Elective comas. Shit. Scheisse. (shakes her head.)

RUDI

About the pianos.

JOAN stands up quickly, puts a finger to her lips, walks to door, looks out, then closes it.

RUDI

Don't worry Joan. Gene's crap Peugeot is not in the parking lot. The school is janitor free at the moment.

JOAN

It's just that I've never done anything quite this, oh, grand before, if you'll forgive the pun.

RUDI

(Smiles) Clever.

JOAN

And you are clever enough to get a pun in your second language.

RUDI

Third. I learned Russian before my family escaped from the East. Dobroye utro.

JOAN

What would a pun sound like in Russian?

RUDI

They don't do puns in the east. Puns are more, ah, give me a second, more whimsical than eastern humor. Whimsical. (He tilts his head and smiles to himself) They go for cynical humor, like: Why are there no bank robbers in East Germany? Answer: They have to wait fifteen years to buy a getaway car!

JOAN

(Smiles) Their money is so worthless there's no point in robbing a bank. The coins are made out of fucking aluminum. When my tour group visited East Berlin, I went in a bathroom and there was an attendant, of all things. I tipped her and she started bowing and saying danke, danke, over and over. I'd given her a West German Deutschmark instead of one of those aluminum commie Deutschmarks. She was shitting herself with joy because I gave her 30 cents.

RUDI

A huge tip by East German standards.

JOAN

Why the hell does the socialist showcase have a bathroom goddamned attendant who has an orgasm over 30 cents? Worker's paradise my ass.

RUDI

You begin to see why I am driven towards materialistic goals. Standing in line for hours to buy an occasional turnip or can of beets tends to focus the mind on acquiring things in a less soul crushing manner.

JOAN

We were followed by the secret police the entire time we were there. We were doing sinister stuff like eating shitty east German bratwursts. They have video cameras on all of the buildings so they can watch what people are doing at all times. You know this. They don't trust their own people. That shit ain't happening in America. The guide told us the Stasi spy on their own families.

RUDI

You don't say. Have you listened to Armed Forces Radio in the past hour?

JOAN

No.

RUDI

So you don't know?

JOAN

Don't know what?

RUDI

Rhein Main airbase was bombed. Two Americans are dead and many more injured. The Baider Meinhof terrorists snuck onto the base and set off a car bomb. Making the world a better place for people by killing people. The imbeciles.

JOAN

My God. That's awful. That's terrible.

RUDI

Yes. Terrible. But more pertinent to *our* situation is that I spoke with my friend Colonel West just a half hour ago and he said security on all American bases is being ramped up.

Getting a large truck filled with very expensive pianos off of the base is about to get much more difficult than I envisioned. Terrorism is bad for business. We've got to adapt the plan and do this project now. This afternoon.

JOAN

Aw shit. Goddammit. They're killing people like us. Wait wait wait.

JOAN paces the room.

RUDI

Waiting is not an option. We can adapt.

JOAN

But this is terrorism. And what about Gene? He's the most honest goofball I've ever known. He won't go along with this. The man doesn't even cuss for goddamn sake.

RUDI

The invisible hand of the marketplace can work wonders when it is your hand that is invisible. Everyone has points of leverage. Even our virtuous friend Gene.

JOAN

But the plan was to wait until Frau Schmidt was gone and Gene took his vacation next week. If we do it today he'll know about it and there is no way he'll go along. And the rain. No goddamn way. We were supposed to wait until next week. Shit. I *need* this money. Fucking terrorists. For the love of God!

RUDI

For the love of *money* Joan. You are the most vulgar educator I have ever known. A woman no less.

JOAN

I think that's a sexist comment.

RUDI

Forgive me. But you have a remarkable vocabulary. German educators are usually quite academic. Bookish. What's the American saying - "do you kiss your mother with that mouth?"

JOAN

My dad was a pipefitter. Cussing is normal. Cussing is not bad. (RUDI looks skeptical). Forgive me for not measuring up to your standards of womanhood. I'm sorry if I offend your delicate communist sensibilities.

RUDI

Call me anything, but don't call me a communist. I have no faith in central planning. I have Faith in the marketplace. Listen. Gate security is being increased. Soon. Do you wish to waste this remarkable opportunity because Gene is an honest man?

JOAN

(She paces) If we do this after he goes home from work we don't have to involve him do we?

RUDI

Waiting will make the timing precarious. So. Perhaps we can make it work.

JOAN

Dammit. I hate to change the plan. I'm nervous enough about this whole thing. What if the pianos get wet? They aren't worth anything wet.

RUDI

I know we Germans aren't as advanced as Americans (smirks), but I think we can get pianos on a truck without ruining them. Kein problem, as we are given to saying here in Bavaria. We will time the pickup for after Gene goes home for the day and hope the new security is not fully in place by then.

JOAN

OK. OK.

RUDI

Oh. Before I forget, I just got the two new teachers you referred to me places to live. I am reminded of the time, before you came here, when I managed to get a teacher to move into a dwelling that was a converted barn. It smelled so much of hay and shit that no locals would rent it. The landlord was terribly appreciative of my efforts.

JOAN

Who was the landlord?

RUDI

Me. (laughs - holds up an envelope) One thousand Deutschmarks. Your portion of the landord's, ah (clears throat and smiles) tribute for getting guaranteed rent payments for the next two years.

JOAN

I don't know about this.

RUDI

Come now Joan. Don't be coy. We are already in business together with the pianos.

A crash of lightning , thunder. JOAN jumps against RUDI. They look at each other - she moves away.

JOAN

Goddamn! This storm has me stressed out.

RUDI holds out envelope - JOAN takes it.

RUDI

This thunder is unusual here. No matter. Our concern is business, not the heavens. (looks at watch) It's almost 1PM. If Gene is true to form he will be back from his midday meal with his Schnucki-putzi in 15 minutes. An honest man is entirely predictable. I will make a call and have my friends in Nurnburg bring the truck to the base at, oh, 6 PM to give us some wiggle room with Gene. (pauses and seems to think) Wiggle room. Such lyricism. (JOAN rolls her eyes) By 8 PM at the latest they will have the pianos loaded and out the gate, which, if our talkative colonel is correct, may still have civilian guards on duty, all of whom I have a relationship with. By this time tomorrow the pianos will have been delivered, the money will have changed hands, and you and I will be having a tax and husband free windfall.

JOAN

My cut is fifty thousand Deutschmarks right? Fifteen thousand dollars?

RUDI

More like sixteen thousand dollars, friend. Fifty thousand deutschmarks for you, fifty for me, and ten thousand for the truck, the driver, a laborer, and other fairy dust I must sprinkle to make sure it all goes smoothly. As the saying goes, you must spend money to make money. If there is any of the ten thousand marks left we will split it evenly.

JOAN

Good, good, good. Goddamn. You're sure this is going to work out? It seems so fucking complicated. I've got a lot to lose if this blows up.

RUDI

What we have to lose is the profit on thirteen spectacularly expensive pianos if we don't take advantage of our great fortune to work in a system that can somehow lose track of such things. Once this is done your troubles will be water under the bridge (he giggles).

JOAN

I'm thrilled that you are having a moment with your lexicon while I'm shitting myself.

RUDI

(Laughs) Very good. Funny. I will be back later. I need to stop by the officer's club again and follow up on how quickly this bombing in Frankfurt is affecting our little base. I will stop back later. I want to confirm that Gene leaves when he should at 4 PM. His habits are as predictable as the timing of a Swiss watch, but today has been full of surprises. Best to confirm that he is gone. Any other questions my American friend?

JOAN

(obviously nervous) Just be careful.

RUDI

Of course.

(he looks at the box with pinned butterflies)

Gene is a sensitive soul in spite of his terrible experience with warfare. An uneducated janitor who collects and studies butterflies.

JOAN

You know about his experiences in Vietnam?

RUDI

They all had bad experiences in Vietnam. Does he work on this collection (points to butterflies) on company time? That would be dishonest.

END OF SCENE



## SCENE THREE.

JOAN is at desk in school maintenance office, 3PM.  
GENE enters.

JOAN

(JOAN holds up coffee cup) This German coffee is like jet fuel. Damn.

GENE

It makes me jittery. It ain't good for my heart palpitations.

JOAN

Hey, I was listening to a German music station earlier and the chorus of the song kept saying "Eek Leeba Deek" over and over. Does that mean what I think it means?

GENE

I love you.

JOAN

That's what I thought. Love's supposed to be a beautiful thing, though you couldn't prove it by me. Eek Leeba Deek sounds like somebody trying to clear a glob of phlegm out of their throat. Leave it to Germans to make "I love you" sound like somebody clearing their sinuses.

GENE

(chuckles) You sure gotta weird way of looking at the world Joan.

JOAN

I'm just curious. Always have been. Here's another thing I've been thinking about lately. I love baseball. I'm a White Sox fan. South sider. There isn't any baseball in this god forsaken country so I tried going to a soccer game. Most popular game on planet earth. As I was watching I realized why it is the most stupid fucking game ever invented. Soccer's denies players the use of the most amazing physical attribute in the fucking universe, the human hand. It's like a bunch of giraffes got together and created a game and one dumb ass giraffe says ok, but we can't use our necks and everybody goes - great idea!

GENE

Like I said, you got a weird way of lookin' at the world.

JOAN

Or a game for birds and they can't use their wings. Do you trust Rudi?

GENE

Boy you're jumpin' around a lot.

JOAN

Must be this goddamn coffee. Do you trust Rudi?

GENE

I guess so.

JOAN

You guess? He's been really helpful to me since I came here this summer.

GENE

I don't not trust him. I'm wary of him.

JOAN

Why?

GENE

You hear stories.

JOAN

What kind of stories?

GENE

Could you say that again?

JOAN

(Louder) What kind of stories have you heard?

GENE

I don't repeat stuff I ain't seen with my own eyes.

JOAN

Come on.

GENE

Nope. But I wouldn't go into business with him.

JOAN

Why would you say that?

GENE

Like I said. I've heard stories.

JOAN

He grew up in East Berlin. It's a pretty Darwinian place. He's a survivor, like Frau Schmidt. They saw awful things when they were young but they built good lives for themselves, like you. I had a pretty easy life and I've managed to fuck it up.

GENE

Don't say that.

JOAN

I *have* fucked it up. Listen . . . about Vietnam. It's bugging me that you won't tell me what happened. I got a thing about secrets. I'm kind of OC. I'd *really* like to know what you experienced there. I'm thinking it might help me get past this awful fucking divorce, to hear what you dealt with. If you overcame Vietnam and found happiness surely I can overcome a shithead husband.

GENE

So seein' people butchered in Vietnam is like getting a divorce?

JOAN

You know what I mean.

GENE

I don't think I do. I think you're just nosy.

JOAN

The man is trying to destroy me.

GENE

Vietnam *really* destroyed people. Divorce don't compare to Vietnam. No comparison. None. You'll be ok.

JOAN

You're ok enough to obsess over butterflies. Maybe I should look at butterflies and check my aura and have the tooth fairy fix my problems (she takes butterfly out of display case and holds it up as if looking at it with interest). (Smiling) Tell me about Vietnam or I'll pull it's wings off.

GENE

(Agitated) Don't make fun. This ain't funny

JOAN

I will. (she pretends to pull wings off of butterfly - GENE stares intently)

GENE

That's one of my favorites Joan.

JOAN

Come on Goddammit. (she drops butterfly to table) What's so precious about Vietnam? Troubles are troubles.

GENE

You don't get it. Sometimes your sense of humor has a mean streak. What are you after?

JOAN

You don't care if I get better.

GENE

(Gently puts butterfly back in display case) Well. You asked for it . . . There was this one day .... There was eleven of us. I was just a kid.(his throat catches, he stops for a moment) You really want this?

JOAN

Yes.

GENE

(Shakes his head)We got dropped off in a field and walked down a jungle trail to a village. We asked to speak to the elders, and two older men and a woman took us to a shack to talk. (takes a deep breath) Our interpreter asked if they had contact with the Viet Cong. They looked us right in the eye and said no. Said it only led to trouble. We thanked 'em, gave 'em some trinkets and some money like we always did, and we left.

Half way down the trail to the copters, it just exploded. I saw my best friend's head explode just in front of me. (Joan gasps) He had a head, then he didn't have a head. His brains sprayed on me. My man just to the left made this horrible grunting sound and his guts were hanging out of this hole in his stomach. We ran. Seven of us made it back to the choppers. Up and away we went with bullets hittin' the sides. I have this weird memory of smelling adrenaline and blood. It was kind of a metal smell. I remember looking down at myself and thinking, "how odd that Gene is experiencing this". We got back to base, unloaded the wounded, and real quick went back to the village with more men. All four of my guys were dead, of course. We bagged up their bodies and sent 'em off in a chopper. The rest of us marched to the village keeping an eye out for Cong, but they were long gone. We found the elders quick. We marched 'em down the path to the helicopters. Up we went. It was so loud so I had to scream. I would scream and the translator would scream the translation. I kept yelling "why did you lie" and they just stared at me with hate on their faces. I screamed "how could you kill my friends" and the translator translated it. She shouted back with this horrible look on her face. The translator looked at me and shouted "Fuck your American friends". (Joan gasps again. She has never heard Gene curse and it seems particularly vulgar) Something in me snapped. I pushed her next to the open door, we were maybe 500 feet up, and before I could think, I raised my gun, put to her forehead, and she said the same thing again. "Fuck your American friends". I pulled the trigger.

JOAN

Oh no! (she puts her knuckles in her mouth) That's enough.

GENE

(Doesn't appear to be listening. He is in a daze) There was a red mist behind her, like her life leaving her body. I had this odd thought that it was kind of pretty against the blue sky. I saw this look of surprise on her face, she fell backwards into space and I watched her fall. It was like a movie. She seemed to be fallin' in slow motion. I saw her hit the ground with a puff. I swear I could see her expression all the way to the ground. Everyone went into a panic. We ended up back on the ground. We yelled at the other elders to get off the chopper and away we went. (He starts to sob again and fights it back) Somehow I never got in trouble. It was just business. Just American business. (looks JOAN straight in the eye) So you see Joan, that was my Vietnam experience. I killed an old woman in anger. Young Gene Taylor killed her. So now you know why I stare at butterflies. It doesn't just make me think about my wife. They help me stop thinking about Vietnam.

It makes the image of that old woman fallin' go out of my mind for a while. I started collecting butterflies to put beautiful things in my head instead of the awful stuff that's in there. I know it sounds weird, but it helps.

JOAN

(softly) I'm so sorry I asked you to relive that. I had no idea. I had no idea.

GENE

Now you know why old Gene is such an oddball.

JOAN

No. No. You are a wonderful man. Frau Schmidt says you have a golden aura. She said it just today.

GENE

(laughs wistfully) Well she's a little odd too. She's gotta see that there is a lot of darkness in there. But I do my best. I do my best.

(JOAN gives Gene a hug. He responds clumsily)

JOAN

You sure do. I feel like an ass for feeling sorry for myself. I feel like an ass for making you relive that. Why don't you take the rest of the day off? Please?

GENE

Life goes on. You'll get past this. Divorce seems bad, but it ain't Vietnam. You won't need to look at butterflies to forget this mess. Anyway, I got work to do. The water table is coming up. If it gets into the storage room we got a big problem with the pianos. Keep the faith. (Leaves room with his tools)

END OF SCENE

## SCENE THREE.

JOAN is at desk in school maintenance office, 3PM.  
GENE enters. JOAN holds up coffee cup.

JOAN

This German coffee is like jet fuel. Damn.

GENE

It makes me jittery. It ain't good for my heart palpitations.

JOAN

Hey, I was listening to a German music station earlier and the chorus of the song kept saying "Eek Leeba Deek" over and over. Does that mean what I think it means?

GENE

I love you.

JOAN

That's what I thought. Love's supposed to be a beautiful thing, though you couldn't prove it by me. Eek Leeba Deek sounds like somebody trying to clear a glob of phlegm out of their throat. Leave it to Germans to make "I love you" sound like somebody clearing their sinuses.

GENE

(chuckles) You sure gotta weird way of looking at the world Joan.

JOAN

I'm just curious. Always have been. Here's another thing I've been thinking about lately. I love baseball. I'm a White Sox fan. South sider. There isn't any baseball in this god forsaken country so I tried going to a soccer game. Most popular game on planet earth. As I was watching I realized why it is the most stupid fucking game ever invented. Soccer's denies players the use of the most amazing physical attribute in the fucking universe, the human hand. It's like a bunch of giraffes got together and created a game and one dumb ass giraffe says ok, but we can't use our necks and everybody goes - great idea!

GENE

Like I said, you got a weird way of lookin' at the world.

JOAN

Or a game for birds and they can't use their wings. Do you trust Rudi?

GENE

Boy you're jumpin' around a lot.

JOAN

Must be this goddamn coffee. Do you trust Rudi?

GENE

I guess so.

JOAN

You guess? He's been really helpful to me since I came here this summer.

GENE

I don't not trust him. I'm wary of him.

JOAN

Why?

GENE

You hear stories.

JOAN

What kind of stories?

GENE

Could you say that again?

JOAN

(Louder) What kind of stories have you heard?

GENE

I don't repeat stuff I ain't seen with my own eyes.

JOAN

Come on.

GENE

Nope. But I wouldn't go into business with him.

JOAN

Why would you say that?

GENE

Like I said. I've heard stories.

JOAN

He grew up in East Berlin. It's a pretty Darwinian place. He's a survivor, like Frau Schmidt. They saw awful things when they were young but they built good lives for themselves, like you. I had a pretty easy life and I've managed to fuck it up.

GENE

Don't say that.

JOAN

I *have* fucked it up. Listen . . . about Vietnam. It's bugging me that you won't tell me what happened. I got a thing about secrets. I'm kind of OC. I'd *really* like to know what you experienced there. I'm thinking it might help me get past this awful fucking divorce, to hear what you dealt with. If you overcame Vietnam and still have a goddamned golden aura surely I can overcome a shithead husband.

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(Agitated) Don't make fun. This ain't funny

JOAN

I will.

JOAN pretends to pull wings off of butterfly -  
GENE stares intently.

GENE

That's one of my favorites Joan.

JOAN

Come on Goddammit. (drops butterfly to table) What's so precious about Vietnam? Troubles are troubles.

GENE

You don't get it. Sometimes your sense of humor has a mean streak. What are you after?

JOAN

You don't care if I get better.

GENE

(Gently puts butterfly back in display case) Well. You asked for it . . . There was this one day .... There was eleven of us. I was just a kid.(his throat catches, he stops for a moment) You really want this?

JOAN

Yes.

GENE

(Shakes his head) Choppers dropped us off in a field and we walked down a jungle trail to a village. We asked to speak to the elders, and two older men and a woman took us to a shack to talk. (takes a deep breath) Our interpreter asked if they had contact with the Viet Cong.

They looked us right in the eye and said no. Said it only led to trouble. We thanked 'em, gave 'em some trinkets and some money like we always did, and we left. Half way down the trail to the copters, it just exploded. I saw my best friend's head explode just in front of me. (Joan gasps) He had a head, then he didn't have a head. His brains sprayed on me. My man just to the left made this horrible grunting sound and his guts were hanging out of this hole in his stomach. We ran. Seven of us made it back to the choppers. Up and away we went with bullets hittin' the sides. I have this weird memory of smelling adrenaline and blood. It was kind of a metal smell. I remember looking down at myself and thinking, "how odd that Gene is experiencing this". We got back to base, unloaded the wounded, and real quick went back to the village with more men. All four of my guys were dead, of course. We bagged up their bodies and sent 'em off in a chopper. The rest of us marched to the village keeping an eye out for Cong, but they were long gone. We found the elders quick. We marched 'em down the path to the helicopters. Up we went. It was so loud so I had to scream. I would scream and the translator would scream the translation. I kept yelling "why did you lie" and they just stared at me with hate on their faces. I screamed "how could you kill my friends" and the translator translated it. The old woman shouted back with this horrible look on her face. The translator looked at me and shouted "She said fuck your American friends". (Joan gasps again. She has never heard Gene curse and it seems particularly vulgar) Something in me snapped. I pushed the woman next to the open door, we were maybe 500 feet up, and before I could think, I raised my gun, put to her forehead, and she said the same thing again. "Fuck your American friends". I pulled the trigger.

JOAN

Oh no! (she puts her knuckles in her mouth) That's enough.

GENE

(Doesn't appear to be listening. He is in a daze) There was a red mist behind her, like her life leaving her body. I had this odd thought that it was kind of pretty against the blue sky. I saw this look of surprise on her face, she fell backwards into space and I watched her fall. It was like a movie. She seemed to be fallin' in slow motion. I saw her hit the ground with a puff. I swear I could see her expression all the way to the ground. Everyone went into a panic. We ended up back on the ground. We yelled at the other elders to get off the chopper and away we went. (He starts to sob again and fights it back) Somehow I never got in trouble. It was just business. Just American business. (looks JOAN straight in the eye) So you see Joan, that was my Vietnam experience. I killed an old woman in anger. Young Gene Taylor killed her.

So now you know why I stare at butterflies. It doesn't just make me think about my wife. They help me stop thinking about Vietnam. It makes the image of that old woman fallin' go out of my mind for a while. I started collecting butterflies to put beautiful things in my head instead of the awful stuff that's in there. I know it sounds weird, but it helps.

JOAN

(softly) I'm so sorry I asked you to relive that. I had no idea. I had no idea.

GENE

Divorce ain't war Joan. It ain't people gettin' their heads mutilated. Now you know why old Gene is such an oddball.

JOAN

No. No. You are a wonderful man. Frau Schmidt says you have a golden aura. She said it just today.

GENE

(laughs wistfully) Well she's a little odd too. She's gotta see that there is a lot of darkness in there. But I do my best. I do my best.

(JOAN gives Gene a hug. He responds clumsily)

JOAN

You sure do. I feel like an ass for feeling sorry for myself. I feel like an ass for making you relive that. Why don't you take the rest of the day off? Please?

GENE

Life goes on Joan. You'll get past this. Divorce seems bad, but it ain't Vietnam. You won't need to look at butterflies to forget this mess. Anyway, I got work to do. The water table is coming up. If it gets into the storage room we got a big problem with the pianos. Keep the faith. (Leaves room with his tools)

END OF SCENE

## SCENE FOUR

Almost 4 PM. GENE is in his work room as RUDI enters. Sound of rain in background.

RUDI

Gross Gott Herr Taylor. Is Joan here?

GENE

Gross Gott. She went to the bank. I guess the exchange rate is going down tomorrow because of the bombing and she wanted to trade some money. Hey Rudi, have you heard anything about when they're gonna pick up the pianos? I need the space in the storage room.

RUDI

Yes. That is being taken care of. (looks at box on table filled with butterflies) An army veteran and janitor who collects butterflies. This has long intrigued me.

GENE

What?

RUDI

Your collection seems out of character.

GENE

They're beautiful.

RUDI

There are many beautiful things in the world. Why butterflies?

GENE

It's personal. Why do people want to know my personal stuff?

RUDI

Come now. We are friends.

GENE

If you gotta know I saw a butterfly the first time I met Berta. It landed on her shoulder. They remind me of her. Some days it helps. It ain't a secret, I got issues from Vietnam.

RUDI

So. Butterflies. All this time I thought your brain only focused on asking people to repeat themselves, and on your Schnucki-putzi.

GENE

That's a weird thing to say.

RUDI

You spend every lunch with your wife, do you not? This is an indicator of great affection.

GENE

Berta is the best thing that ever happened to me.

RUDI

Shouldn't you be going home soon?

GENE

We're startin' to get water coming up through the floor tiles.

RUDI

Scheisse.

GENE

The rain's caused the water table to build up pressure under the foundation slab.

RUDI

Fluid under pressure causing bad things to happen? The Gods of Metaphor are working overtime.

GENE

Anyway the water is looking for the path of least resistance and it's seepin' up through the tiles.

RUDI

The path of least resistance. A popular path.

GENE

Can you say that again?

RUDI

Case in point. Your hearing fails and you aren't doing anything about it.

GENE

The military hospital in Nurnburg says it ain't service related.

RUDI

Is it service related?

GENE

It was the helicopters in Vietnam that did it.

RUDI

You need to threaten them with consequences to get the hearing aids.

GENE

Threatenin' people ain't no way to go through life.

RUDI

Neither is being deaf. It is your choice.

GENE

We'll just have to agree to disagree.

RUDI

You wouldn't know if I agreed with you. You can't hear me. Get the hearing aids. What are you doing about the water in the building?

GENE

I'm running pumps. The problem is that they only run for 2 hours and they need more gas, so I gotta stay here until the rain stops.

RUDI

But you go home at 4. Now.

GENE

Not tonight.

RUDI

(Exasperated. Takes deep breath) School headquarters in Weisbaden has sent a large truck to the school tonight to pick up the pianos.

GENE

That don't make any sense. Why would they come on a Friday night?

RUDI

Yes. It is unusual. But they have sent a truck.

GENE

I'm responsible for those pianos, even if they were sent by mistake. I'll call Weisbaden. (He reaches for the phone - RUDI puts his hand over GENE's hand)

RUDI

How much are the hearing aids?

GENE

Why would you ask that?

RUDI

How much?

GENE

About 600 dollars each.

RUDI

I will pay for your hearing aids if you stay away from the men loading the truck, tend to the pumps, and don't ask questions.

GENE

Where are the pianos goin'?

RUDI

That is a question. Accept the money for the hearing aids and simply get busy elsewhere when the truck arrives.

GENE

You know I can't do that.

RUDI

Diogenes looked his whole life for an honest man with no success. Yet somehow I find him.

GENE

Who?

RUDI

In the unlikely event that some soul dead bureaucrat asks about the pianos, we just shrug our shoulders and say "what pianos? Why would this tiny school have 13 pianos?"

GENE

But we *do* have 13 pianos.

RUDI

I grew up in East Berlin where reality is what someone says it is. I say we never had 13 pianos.

GENE

You can't take the pianos. They belong to the government.

RUDI

Details. I am a big picture guy. Will you take \$1200 in exchange for looking the other way?

GENE

Of course not.

RUDI

The record shows that I am enamored of American idiomatic language. Here is a favorite: It is time to shit or get off the pot. Poetry. The pianos will be sold with or without your financial gain. If you do not accept my generous offer, I will use other means of persuasion. Your choice. To be made *now*.

GENE

I ain't goin' to do anything immoral.

RUDI

How interesting that you chose that way to express your righteousness. How was lunch today with your schnucki-putzi?

GENE

Don't use that word. It's private.

RUDI

Was she as affectionate and loving as the look on your face would suggest when you return from your lunch date?

GENE

That's none of your business.

RUDI

If I may, if it's not too personal, is your schnucki-putzi as loving and affectionate in the bedroom? I bet she is.

GENE

You're way out of line Rudi.

RUDI

I am fascinated by your relationship with your wife. Quite attractive, and much younger than you. You are a lucky man, Herr Taylor.

GENE

She's my angel.

RUDI

But how does an ex GI who works as a janitor have such luck?

GENE

That's enough.

RUDI

I'm just curious. Curious enough to utilize skills from my previous life. Her parents don't know do they?

GENE

Know what?

RUDI

How odd that you don't have children. You seem like the kind of people that would cherish kinder.

GENE

I gotta get back to work.

RUDI

Given what I know of her past, your relationship almost certainly began as commerce. Ah, the free market. You became infatuated. She is of the lower classes, with few prospects, and the thought of a new life with a nice ...

GENE

Stop.

RUDI

... a new life with a nice, simple American who has a modest pension must have invoked some pragmatic sensibility within her. Still, because of your passion for following a righteous path, I am wondering how you justified this *immoral* behavior. Was it just a product of fluids under pressure?

GENE

We love each other.

RUDI

So you married a prostitute. Was she part of a legal house or was she a freelancer who took GIs behind a discotech for blowjobs?

GENE

You bastard!

RUDI

I believe that is the first curse word I have ever heard leave your lips. But now you have insulted my mother. If you don't look the other way when the movers show up, I will see that *her* mother discovers how you met her beloved daughter.

GENE

No. (Gulps for breath.)

RUDI

What would mama and papa think if they knew their daughter couldn't have children because of a disease she got from a "client"?

GENE

Have some humanity.

RUDI

I will gladly forget about your schnucki-putzi's past if you monitor the pumps and allow me to perform my business this evening. The hearing aids are off the table, *friend*.

GENE

I can't do that. It ain't right.

RUDI

It's a terrible shame her parents will find out you met their beautiful daughter exchanging money for a blow job in an alley. Again the language. Why is it not called a suck job? There is no blowing. English is so puzzling at times. Did you pay her before or after the butterfly landed on her shoulder?

GENE lunges at RUDI, who sidesteps him. GENE continues to lunge. RUDI puts chairs between them as he avoids GENE, who is breathing heavily, obviously in distress.

GENE

What kind of person are you!?

RUDI

I am a businessman. This is not personal. It is business.

GENE

You'd destroy the woman I love for a little bit of money?

RUDI

No. For a lot of money. There is a distinction. *Geschäft ist Geschäft*.

GENE's face is twisted with anguish. He lunges at RUDI again. GENE stops, sits, groans, slumps to the table, lifeless.

RUDI

(RUDI is in shock.) Herr Taylor. Gene.

He touches GENE, puts ear to GENE's mouth.

Gott in Himmel. Scheisse! Such an emotional man . . .

He paces, then sits down in chair. He puts hand to his forehead. He is shaken. He thinks for a moment, picks up phone.

Hallo. This is the clinic? I am calling from der schule. I've walked into the maintenance room and found Herr Taylor, the school maintenance man, slumped over a table. I am afraid he is gone (Listens). He was already dead. I am not a miracle worker. (Listens) Yes, I will wait here.

Hangs up phone. Picks up framed photo of Berta from table.

She did such a lovely job of turning her life around (puts picture face down - slaps his thighs) . . . So.

END OF SCENE.

## SCENE FIVE

School Maintenance room. 5 PM. RUDI and JOAN are standing next to desk. GENE's body has been removed.

JOAN

I can't believe this. How can this be? This day is going to give me a nervous breakdown.

RUDI

It *has* been a stressful day. It has not been good for my spirit to come in the room and discover Herr Taylor like that. He was a good and decent man. Life is not fair.

JOAN

I've never seen a dead body outside of a funeral home . . . I'm not sure what I would have done if I had found him.

RUDI

If you do find someone in this terrible state, be aware of an unfortunate reality. As I waited for the ambulance to pick Herr Taylor up, his body, as bodies do following death, expelled it's, uh, waste. It is an unpleasant and inescapable part of the process of dying.

JOAN

This is something you need to share Rudi? You goddamned Germans can't have a conversation without bringing up shit can you?

RUDI

I just don't want you to be surprised if you find yourself in this position.

JOAN

(Obviously distraught - shakes her head) *Sure*. I can't think straight. Let's just call this off. The signs are everywhere to call it all off.

RUDI

The signs? You've been spending too much time listening to Frau Schmidt. This must happen tonight or it will not happen. I've told you this. Those imbecile "revolutionaries" who blew up Rhein Main have assured it is tonight or never.

JOAN

Gene just died.

RUDI

It is tragic. He was a good man, but he obviously was not well. Do you need the money or not?

JOAN

I feel like I'm selling my soul.

RUDI

That presumes we have a soul.

JOAN

Speak for yourself . . . I'm just overwhelmed by all this.

(RUDI puts his arms around JOAN. They hug. The hug turns into a kiss on the lips. The embrace ends clumsily and RUDI speaks.)

RUDI

My. This has been an ... interesting day. Our task can still be completed. I know you need the money. Do not deceive yourself. I pride myself on being a problem solver, like my friend Gene. Water is coming into the building and Gene has pumps set up to defeat it. If our beautiful little school building gets damaged it will be good for none of us.

JOAN

We've got to call this off. Wait. What 's this about pumps?

RUDI

The pumps run out of gas every few hours and must be periodically refilled throughout the evening. Gene was going to do it, but obviously he isn't now. You must take care of it. We can't have anyone else here.

JOAN

You say Gene was . . . gone when you found him?

RUDI

Of course.

JOAN

I'm in shock. This is too much.

RUDI

You have the strength to do this. You curse like a dock worker. A sign of fortitude.

JOAN

I just wanted to be a teacher and raise a family.

RUDI

If you want to make God laugh tell him your plans.

JOAN

I thought you East Germans were all atheists.

RUDI

It's just a saying about the uncertainty of life. It's an old Russian Yiddish proverb.

JOAN

Great. An atheist German quoting Jewish theology. I've hitched my wagon to a fucking irony festival. This is not going to turn out well.

RUDI

(laughs) That's the sarcastic spirit I enjoy when I am around you Joan. This is going to turn out just as I conceived when these (points toward storage area) exceedingly fine and expensive pianos showed up at our doorsteps like gifts from the Gods.

(At this moment FRAU SCHMIDT burst through the door and begins speaking in a frantic, emotional voice. She embraces JOAN)

FRAU SCHMIDT

Meine Gott, meine Gott, meine Gott. Frau Richards! Herr Taylor in gone. He is gone!

JOAN

It's horrifying isn't it? We're in shock. How did you know?

FRAU SCHMIDT

(She looks at JOAN quizzically as if she is somehow aware of the embrace that just took place)

JOAN

What? *What?*

FRAU SCHMIDT

(Maintains look of suspicion on her face)

My friend from the clinic called. She knew Herr Taylor and I worked together for many years.

RUDI

We thought you were on the train to Budapest.

FRAU SCHMIDT

(looks at RUDI with contempt)

This is more important than grieving the loss of Herr Taylor?

RUDI

I know how vital your visit to the Klinik is Frau Schmidt.

FRAU SCHMIDT

Herr Taylor was a wonderful man. He has died much too soon.

RUDI

Yes, but life must go on.

FRAU SCHMIDT

There are later trains. If you will excuse us *Mein Herren* I would like a moment with Frau Richards to mourn, something you seem incapable of.

RUDI

I liked the man very much. I am sorry if my emotional response does not measure up to your standards Frau Schmidt. Joan, I will wait for you in your office to finish our conversation.

(Rudi leaves)

FRAU SCHMIDT

Why does he call you Joan? You are his supervisor (JOAN shrugs) - This is so terrible. What happened?

JOAN

Rudi came into the office and found Gene slumped over his desk. It was almost certainly a heart attack. Gene mentioned that he had heart palpitations. It's just tragic. His wife will be crushed. They were so close.

FRAU SCHMIDT

That Herr Fuchs had something to do with it I'm sure. His aura was especially dark just now.

JOAN

Frau Schmidt, Rudi is many things but he is incapable of what you seem to be suggesting. It was just Gene's time.

FRAU SCHMIDT

Don't be so sure. This is terrible. So. What are you talking to that man about?

JOAN

We were talking about how water is coming up through the tiles. Gene was running pumps in the crawl space to keep the water out. It looks like I'll have to stay and keep the pumps fueled tonight or the building will be damaged.

FRAU SCHMIDT

You are talking to Herr Fuchs about this? What does the German culture teacher have to do with maintenance of the building?

JOAN

He is just trying to help out in a terrible crisis.

FRAU SCHMIDT

Herr Fuchs never does anything unless there is something in it for him.

JOAN

The school is at risk. He is showing his true colors in this awful moment of need.

FRAU SCHMIDT

I just saw his aura. I know his true colors.

JOAN

Rudi is right about one thing. You must not change your plans. Gene wouldn't want you to miss something so important to you. And won't you lose a lot of money if you cancel at the last minute?

FRAU SCHMIDT

Money is not an important thing.

JOAN

It's pretty important if you are losing it. I'm worried sick about money.

FRAU SCHMIDT

I had no money at all after the war and I survived. Money is no answer to life's questions.

JOAN

This divorce and worrying about money is driving me over the edge. Divorce is like war. How did you get through the war without money?

FRAU SCHMIDT

Divorce is like war? You've led a sheltered life Frau Richards. You Americans are too open about your lives. Europeans are much more reserved.

JOAN

You talk about bathroom habits for God's sake.. Tell me what happened to you in the War. Help me out here. I'm a mess.

FRAU SCHMIDT

No, you are a Wichtigtuer, a busybody. (Pauses) My parents were not enthusiastic enough for the Nazi party. They took me away and put me in a convent run by nuns sympathetic to the Reich. The nuns would commune with God each day, taking breaks to make us scrub the stone floors and abuse us. My back and knees still ache in the cold and damp. But those long hours scrubbing allowed me time to attune myself to energies outside the nun's hateful little world of certainties. I never saw my parents again. It took me years to discover they died in a camp for degenerates. Genug. Enough. This is all you need to know.

JOAN

I'm so sorry Frau Schmidt.

FRAU SCHMIDT

You must be mindful when you pry into people's lives, when you intertwine your life with theirs. You might discover things you don't want to know. Other people's pain will not make yours go away. Their energies can consume yours.

JOAN

Yes.

FRAU SCHMIDT

May I have a moment alone in Herr Taylor's office? I want to absorb his lingering energy one last time.

JOAN

Oh, sure. I know that you . . . I know . . . I'll be in my office.

FRAU SCHMIDT

Thank you. I will leave from here. I don't care to see that awful Her Fuchs. I will see you in two weeks. (look of relief crosses JOAN's face).

JOAN

We will have a memorial for Gene when the rest of the staff returns from summer holiday.

FRAU SCHMIDT

Yes. Gut. Sehr Gut.

JOAN hugs FRAU SCHMIDT who responds weakly. Joan steps back. FRAU SCHMIDT looks up and down at her from head to toe as if examining her aura.

JOAN

What?

FRAU SCHMIDT does not respond. JOAN lowers her head and walks out door. FRAU SCHMIDT looks around, taking in the energy of the room. She sits at table, looks at the heavens, then lowers her head to the table and begins to cry.

END OF SCENE



## SCENE SIX

School Maintenance room. 6 PM. RUDI walks into room and looks around. He sits at table and makes a phone call.

RUDI

Hallo. Sind sie auf dem Weg? Gut. Eine Stunde. Wunderschön. Auf Wiederhören mein Freund.

RUDI puts phone down and smiles ever so slightly. Behind him we see FRAU SCHMIDT come out of the storage room and stare towards RUDI, tilting her head as if looking at something the rest of us can't see. She then walks to piano against wall, quietly sits down and begins to play. At the first note, RUDI sits upright in chair and spins around, surprised. He gathers himself and just listens to her play. After a few measures FRAU SCHMIDT stops. She turns on the bench and faces him.

RUDI

For heaven's sake Frau Schmidt. Are you never leaving for Hungary? You will miss the train.

FRAU SCHMIDT

After the Nazis took me from my parents and sent me to the convent the nuns were monsters. Yet they sang and played music beautifully at the end of each day. The nuns terrorized children during the day, and taught us how to make beautiful sounds come out of the piano at night. Our species is surely broken. (RUDI stares blankly at her).

So a dear friend of yours will be here in an hour? How fortunate for you.

RUDI

A man with many friends is truly blessed.

FRAU SCHMIDT

What was it like working for the Stasi? Betraying family and friends must have been lucrative in the East. What a set of skills you must have acquired.

RUDI

I'm not sure what you are talking about.

FRAU SCHMIDT

Come now Herr Fuchs. How exactly did you come from the east to the west? Most died trying to make that crossing. Did you grow wings and fly over the Wall? Did you develop claws and burrow under it? Or did you get some official help and just walk through Check Point Charlie? Perhaps you still work for them.

RUDI

I don't have time for this. I learned many important things as a young man. We all have experiences on our resume that don't flatter us.

FRAU SCHMIDT

Not me.

RUDI

You are an unusual case.

FRAU SCHMIDT

I am not certain of the details of your plan Herr Fuchs, but I am sure you have examined all of the possibilities. I don't typically listen to the propaganda of the news media, so I just learned about the bombing in Frankfurt. Curious timing. Opportunism is a great strength of the pathological mind.

RUDI

I am a business man.

FRAU SCHMIDT

If I am to believe the movies so was Al Capone. I assume that you have a contingency plan if someone like me might try to make those in authority aware of your criminal lapses.

RUDI

(smiles) You are a simple case. You see ghosts, you ask to be put in a coma, doctors shake their heads when you leave a room. No. I don't worry about compromising you Frau Schmidt. You have done so quite nicely yourself. You see things that aren't there. Who would believe a person whose brain is so tortured by ghosts that she willfully allows herself to be drugged into oblivion? You are no problem.

FRAU SCHMIDT

Your arrogance will be your undoing Herr Fuchs. I just checked on the many boxes containing beautiful pianos. Such a waste that expensive pianos are unused in a storage room in Bayern. Such a waste that children don't get to use them, to learn the spirit liberating nature of music.

FRAU SCHMIDT is circling the room, coming to where RUDI is standing.

FRAU SCHMIDT

Made all the more heartbreaking that they will never be played by anyone at all. I just checked on them. Did you note that the storage room is lower than the rest of the building? (RUDI gets a worried expression on his face). The moving crates should have been set upright. The water has risen and the pianos are all ruined.

RUDI

Nein!

RUDI runs in a panic past FRAU SCHMIDT into storage room. FRAU SCHMIDT has a Mona Lisa smile. After a moment we hear RUDI shout from storage room.

RUDI

Scheisse!

RUDI comes back into the office and glares at FRAU SCHMIDT.

FRAU SCHMIDT

I'm so sorry Herr Fuchs. I misspoke. I am not as precise with language as you. I meant to say that water has *not* risen and ruined the pianos.

RUDI

(sarcastically) So funny. Such a funny woman.

FRAU SCHMIDT

You are evil, this is a given. I did not think you were capable of murder, yet my dear friend with the golden aura is gone. If you are responsible, the earthly authorities might not get you but it gives me great comfort to know you will not escape the Prince of Darkness. How much will you get for your soul?

RUDI

He died of a heart attack. I swear to you.

FRAU SCHMIDT

But it is convenient that Herr Taylor is no longer here to report on your friend's activities when he arrives. (RUDI looks down at the floor). So you are making an illegal and immoral profit on these beautiful pianos. Playing a piano makes one's spirit soar. The pianos seem to have a different effect on your spirit Herr Fuchs. I wonder how that will work out for you in the next life?

FRAU SCHMIDT steps back and gazes at RUDI from head to toe.

RUDI

Why must you do that? (FRAU SCHMIDT begins to cry hysterically. RUDI looks uncomfortable at first, then irritated as she continues to cry)  
Was, was, was?

FRAU SCHMIDT

(Hysterically) Herr Taylor's energy is this room was so beautiful and now it's filled with your sick, horrible energy. You find out things about people so you can (she spits the next word out) *collect* them, and play with them for you own profit. You think you are so smart! You are clever this moment Herr Fuchs, (she screams) but Judgment Day will come and cleverness counts for nothing! ....  
*Nothing!*

RUDI

Stop this.

FRAU SCHMIDT

Your aura Herr Fuchs. It is not healthy. Not healthy at all. It is a darker shade of black than I've ever seen. Have you had a checkup lately? Does your arm tingle at all? Does your jaw ache? Does your black, black heart throb? You will pay for this! You will pay for eternity! Sie sind der Tuefel!

FRAU SCHMIDT walks out of the room shaking with anguish and anger. RUDI stretches his left arm and makes a fist, then stretches his jaw. He goes to the piano, bangs the keyboard with his fist in anger, creating a discordant sound.

VOICE OFF STAGE COMING  
THROUGH OPEN DOOR

Hallo. Hallo. Herr Fuchs? Wir sind hier für die Klaviere.

RUDI looks to the door and smiles.

RUDI

Ya. Ya. Komm meine Freunde. Gruss Gott.

FADE TO BLACK

END OF SCENE

## SCENE SEVEN

Evening. JOAN is sitting on the floor with a hole in the tile. Hoses come out of the hole. The scene is dimly lit by construction lamps. The hoses are connected to two pumps and snake out of sight, presumably outdoors. A gas container is on the floor. The pump motors are running noisily. JOAN looks distressed. We hear rain and thunder in background.

One of the pumps sputters and stops. JOAN is startled. She quickly opens the gas container and begins to pour gas into small tank on the pump. As she is pouring the other pump stops. She is rattled. She finishes filling up the first pump and has trouble putting cap back on tank. She hurries to fill the second tank and has the same difficulty. She tries to start the pump by pulling on the pull rope, which works like a lawn mower. She pulls and nothing happens. She pulls again, and again nothing happens. She tries the other pump with the same results. She begins to panic.

JOAN

Why didn't I fill them up before they stopped? Goddammit!

Looking around she sees that tiny spurts of water are coming up out of the floor tiles, like miniature fountains. She gasps, and tries again to pull the start cords to no effect.

Please let him have those pianos out of the building.

She frantically examines motors, looking for any kind of clue how to start them. She leans over and tries with difficulty to read something on the side of the pump.

Adjust the choke? What the fuck is a choke? Choking? Is this goddamn machine mocking me?

She reads directions on side of motor, adjusts a switch, presses a button to prime the engine and then pulls on the cord. It starts on the second pull. She jumps up and shouts.

Yes! Yes!

She repeats the process for the second pump and it starts on the first pull. We can see pure joy on her face. The water leaks shrink and disappear. RUDI appears from the darkness. JOAN does not see him.

RUDI

Joan.

JOAN

(Startled) Dammit Rudi, if I wasn't so exhausted I'd jump up and kick your ass. Do you really have to sneak up on me like that? I'm starting to understand the German compulsion for invading Poland.

RUDI

(Exasperated) Would you have preferred me to stick my head out of the hole? I didn't have any choice but to come this way. (cocks his head) My, but you look more lovely than usual this evening.

JOAN

I look like shit.

RUDI

Oh no. No. Did I ever tell you how geschmeckt your bottom is?

JOAN

Delicious?

RUDI

Yah. Delicious.

JOAN

Something must be lost in the translation here. You might want to get out the German-English dictionary.

Frau Schmidt told me that you never do anything unless there is something in it for you, I should have listened to her. Hear me. I'm spent. This is the longest day of my life. You'd better be bringing good news.

RUDI

(Big smile) I have very good news indeed. The pianos were loaded, and I just received a phone call that they made it off of the base and are beginning the drive to Nurnburg.

JOAN

(About to cry). Thank God. Thank God. Thank God.

RUDI

Well you could thank me as well. I negotiated many challenges this day. I can't recall any other business initiative with as many obstacles to overcome. I am quite proud of myself.

JOAN

I forgot that its all about you ... I would enjoy it a lot more if Gene were alive.

RUDI

Gene's health was a ticking time bomb. This was unavoidable.

JOAN

I feel guilty being excited about the money knowing what Berta is going through.

RUDI

She will land on her feet. (Pauses) Where else would she land? Another one of those curious American sayings (chuckles).

JOAN

You and your goddamn sayings. When does the money change hands?

RUDI

Tomorrow we will be rolling in the dough (giggles to himself).

JOAN

You're easily amused Rudi.

RUDI

I just had an image of a person covered in flour, rolling in bread dough. To think that is a metaphor for having a lot of money. Isn't that funny?

JOAN

Funny is not something I'm interested in right now. I'm exhausted from stress. Could you watch the pumps the rest of the night so I can go get some sleep?

RUDI

I can not do that. I must participate in my Stammtisch.

JOAN

Stammtisch?

RUDI

You have not heard of Stammtisch?

JOAN

No.

RUDI

It is a German tradition. Men get together once a week at a tavern, sit at a table, drink beer, tell stories, discuss the world, have some laughs. Stammtisch. *Friend's table.*

JOAN

So you won't help me out because you want to go bullshit with your pals?

RUDI

Joan, my group has met weekly for almost 20 years. I must go. Long friendships are essential. We are honor bound to maintain friendships.

JOAN

Honor? A strange word coming out of *your* mouth.

RUDI

That is hurtful, Joan. Hurtful.

JOAN

Do you do business with these Stammtisch friends?

RUDI

It has happened.

JOAN

(Firmly) Don't tell them about today's business.

RUDI

Of course not. It would not be to my advantage to share this exercise.

JOAN

Good.

RUDI

Maintaining advantage is a centerpiece of good business practice.

JOAN

Does everything have to be a fucking philosophy lesson with you?

RUDI

I like to think of myself as a mentor.

JOAN

*Sure Rudi.* You said *men* get together. Do women do the Stammtisch? It seems like another goddammed way that women get left out of sharing in the spoils.

RUDI

Female Stammtisch does not exist so much in smaller communities. In the cities, a little bit. You should start one in Bad Windsheim. The community would be abuzz.

JOAN

Wait a minute. I've heard of this. You told me about old Nazi's that meet each week to talk about the good old days. Is that a Stammtisch?

RUDI

I guess so.

JOAN

You guess so. Where is that certainty you're known for? This is great. Just great. You know, I don't see a female Stammtisch happening. We'd have to take a break from waiting on men hand and foot

RUDI

It is your loss.

JOAN

My loss . . . Go have fun while I stay here and do all the work - like women have since the beginning of time.

RUDI

I was thinking I could show up a little late to the Stammtisch if you wanted to go visit the nurses office and say, try out the cot to celebrate our success as partners.

JOAN

You're quite the romantic Rudi. What woman wouldn't be transported by the thought of an interlude in a bed sick children have coated with germs. I've had some time to think, listening to these goddamn pumps all night. I'm in the process of getting rid of the dead weight of a useless husband and in spite of the appeal of just feeling some pleasure for a change, I think I've demeaned myself enough for one day. We are partners - in crime. That's as far as business goes - friend.

RUDI

Goodness. She is woman, hear her roar. I will bring the dough to the school first thing tomorrow (He laughs to himself). Dough!

He leans over to kiss her on the lips. She pulls away. He shrugs and walks off, continuing to chuckle. She watches him, shakes her head, looks at the pumps, takes off gas cap to see how much is left in tank. Sound of thunder.

JOAN

(To herself). This storm has stressed me out. Stressed. Me. Out.

Lights fade to black as sound of pumps slowly fades to silence.

END OF SCENE



## SCENE EIGHT

Next day. JOAN is sitting at table in Maintenance room. The piano is missing from the back of the room. Pumps and hoses are resting where the piano was. She presses play on tape recorder.

TAPE RECORDER

Bitte.

JOAN

Please, thank you, and you're welcome.

TAPE RECORDER

Verstehen Sie?

JOAN

No. I don't understand. I don't fucking understand.

TAPE RECORDER

Wo sind die Polizei?

JOAN

(her shoulder slump) Where are the police? Fuuuck. Vo sind Rudi?  
(we hear a voice outside of the door.)

RUDI

Hallo! (RUDI comes into office. JOAN turns of tape player and stands) Gruss  
Gott my dear friend.

RUDI moves in to hug her, she steps away.

JOAN

It's almost 4 in the afternoon. I've been trying to call your house all day. Where  
the fuck have you been?

RUDI

Taking care of business. I had many loose ends to tie up. I had to stop by the  
officer's club as well.

JOAN

Where the fuck is the money!?

RUDI

You Americans are always in a rush, eating lunch at your desk while Europeans take two hour lunches and enjoy life. What is wrong with discussing our lives before we gallop into business talk? How did the rest of the evening go with the pumps?

JOAN

For fuck's sake. (a deep sigh) The rain stopped around two in the morning, and I didn't need the pumps after 5 or so.

RUDI

So you bravely saved our beloved school from being damaged by flooding. You should be very proud.

JOAN

Proud? I don't think so. But it didn't flood. So I won't lose my job for that. (voice softens) All I could think about all night was Gene.

RUDI

(looks at watch)

Yes, this is truly sad.

JOAN

I didn't go home. I couldn't sleep anyway. I thought you would be here early. I've spent the day running countless scenarios in my head, all of which ended with me in handcuffs.

RUDI

No. No. My process is much too refined for that. I have leveraged many relationships to eliminate risk.

JOAN

You can't eliminate risk. Economics 101.

RUDI

I took economics 101 on the streets of East Berlin. I have a more worldly approach to mitigating risk.

JOAN

Such a scholar. What if someone comes looking for the pianos Rudi? You say it won't happen, but what if?

RUDI

American workers *won't* think about these things. They want to do as little as possible at jobs they hate and then rush home, watch a mindless TV show, and sedate themselves from the richness of life. They don't care about the pianos! But if we must play this game - in spite of your valiant efforts that saved the school, water rose in the storage area and ruined all of the pianos. It was heartbreaking but they were destroyed and we had to dispose of them.

JOAN

(looks at RUDI, incredulous) You frighten me.

RUDI

I will take that as a complement.

JOAN

Enough. So your connection in Nurnburg has paid us for his new inventory, allowing me to compromise myself for sixteen thousand dollars?

RUDI

I don't see it that way. As an honorary American, I prefer to frame it as I have succeeded in business.

JOAN

We have succeeded in business.

RUDI

Yes. About that.

JOAN

About what?

RUDI

The enhanced security was in place by the time the truck arrived.

JOAN

I thought you had one of your contingencies in place for that?

RUDI

I certainly did.

JOAN

So the pianos are in Nurnburg and you got the money. What's the problem?

RUDI

You asked me to wait until Gene left and this delay allowed the change to military guards at the gate to occur. We should not have waited.

JOAN

Rudi you're scaring me.

RUDI

I have done business with Colonel West in the past. If you spent time at the officer's club you would quickly learn that everyone kisses the Colonels bottom. That kind of power is not healthy. You begin to think you are infallible, Godlike.

JOAN

Why are you telling me this? I've met him. Colonel West's kids go here. His wife is president of the PTA. I know he's an asshole.

RUDI

Did you know that Colonel West has an enthusiastic passion for our legal houses of prostitution?

JOAN

Prostitution is legal in Germany? (She seems surprised) Somehow I didn't know that. Shit. I bet my husband is spending *my* money getting legally laid by a hooker right now. I've brought the bastard to heaven and financed the trip.

RUDI

My business association with the Colonel began soon after I discovered that this man child enjoys regular visits to such a house to indulge in some sexual whimsy. His carnal interests are a source of wonder among members of the oldest profession in Bad Windsheim.

JOAN

How do you know this? And what does it have to do with us?

RUDI

It is my business to know these things.

JOAN

Again. Why are you telling me this? (her anxiety is obvious).

RUDI

He's actually kind of enjoyable to have a beer with once you get past the fact that you loathe him. It didn't hurt that he has his eyes on a new Mercedes coupe.

JOAN

Cut to the chase Rudi.

RUDI

Cut to the chase. Again .. (Joan cuts him off)

JOAN

No orgasms over English right now Rudi! What are you getting at?

RUDI

The only way to get through security was to involve the Colonel.

JOAN

That's why you went back and forth to the Officer's club all day yesterday. You already knew you had to involve that bastard!

RUDI

When we had to wait first for Gene to leave, then deal with the rain, then all the activity around removing his body - well, I had no choice. Our indiscreet Colonel told me in the morning that the Rhein Mein bombing might affect security at the gate. I thought I could bypass him but it didn't work out that way.

JOAN

(almost shrieking) What's the bottom line Rudi? What did you have to pay him? That's why you were at the club just now. Did you pay him out of the contingency fund?

RUDI

The Colonel is an important man with much to lose. He took a much greater risk than you.

JOAN

My ass! How much did you pay him?

RUDI

Fifty thousand marks.

JOAN

No!

RUDI

I'm sorry Joan, I had no choice.

JOAN

So you and I split fifty thousand?

RUDI

(he laughs) Oh no. No, no, no, no, no.

JOAN

We had a deal to split it fifty fifty.

RUDI

That's not how I remember it at all.

JOAN

You worthless sonofabitch.

RUDI

Again, my mother is slandered. This is not nice.

JOAN

(almost hyperventilating) So what is my cut Rudi?

RUDI

Well, after my fifty thousand and the Colonel's fifty thousand, and seven thousand marks for the driver and laborer, we are left with three thousand Deutschmarks for you. Almost a thousand dollars. Not bad pay for hanging around the school for a day.

JOAN

(in shock) Less than a thousand when I was promised sixteen thousand. I am the dumbest fucking person on earth. I should have seen this coming. You planned this all along.

RUDI

Joan, until everything starting spiraling out of control yesterday, I was going to give you fifty thousand. My earnings were always going to be fifty. I helmed this operation and when costs had to be shifted, well, it wasn't coming out of my earnings. I am terribly sorry. God as my witness.

JOAN

Fuck you. You don't believe in God you commie prick. This was your plan.

RUDI

You must believe what you must believe. But this is not true. And I am the furthest thing from a commie.

JOAN

Fuck you.

RUDI

Joan this is not a helpful attitude. We will have many more opportunities to make money.

He sits down at table and leans toward JOAN.

RUDI

You will make it all up, I assure you. Here is your three thousand.

He tries to hand her an envelope. She won't take it.  
He puts it on the table.

JOAN

That is not going to happen.

JOAN grabs phone and dials, speaks into phone.

JOAN

Could you connect me to the base security office please?

RUDI reaches over her hand and cancels the call.

RUDI

Joan, you are not going to do that.

JOAN

You bet your ass I am going to do that.

RUDI

No. (he smiles)

JOAN

Wipe that fucking smile off your face you dumbkopf, schweinehundt bastard!

RUDI

That pains me Joan. I'm not a Nazi, or a commie. I prefer to think of myself as a capitalist. A *job creator*. I've studied Wall Street.

JOAN tries to dial again. This time RUDI grabs the phone and slams it down

RUDI

You've forgotten something Joan. Sie haben etwas vergessen.

JOAN

I haven't taken the three thousand marks Rudi. You have Vergessened that. This is all you and the Colonel's criminal bullshit.

RUDI

For the record Joan, your attempts at Deutsch rarely flatter you. I could imagine you asking for a bathroom and being directed to a bakery. But you *have* forgotten something. Remember the one thousand Deutschmarks you so eagerly took for the apartments yesterday? You are already compromised, as you put it. We are *already* in business together.

JOAN

Fuck no.

RUDI

Oh fuck yes. Have you not been paying attention? My business model is based on knowledge of other people's hedonist foibles. Now there is a great English word. Foible. The German equivalent is not as pleasant coming off of the lips. Makel. Foible. Makel. Foible. Foible. Lovely.

JOAN puts her head on table.

JOAN

I'm ruined.

RUDI

No worries Joan. This is the start of a beautiful business relationship. Business!  
Gruss Gott my friend.

RUDI leaves envelope on the table, smiles broadly, stands up and leaves the room with a spring in his step.

JOAN

*Friend. .... friend.*

(She is lost in thought - as she speaks she emphasizes each syllable) Frau Schmidt is in a chem-i-cal-ly in-duced com-a. Oh, I how envy her. (pause) Men. Men. Men.

JOAN opens her purse, takes out bottle, looks at it, starts to take a drink, stops, puts it in trash. She picks up envelope with money, and drops it into trash. She presses tape recorder button. As she listens and responds to the tape recorder a light source underneath her face softly casts light upward. It alternates between a golden tint and dark shadows on her face. Gold to dark, gold to dark, it flickers, gold to dark.

TAPE RECORDER

Woher kommen Sie?

JOAN

I come from Chicago.

TAPE RECORDER

Geschäft ist Geschäft

JOAN

Business is business.

Warum?  
 TAPE RECORDER

Why, why, why?  
 JOAN

JOAN opens up the butterfly case and picks up a butterfly.

Ich habe ihn geliebt.  
 TAPE RECORDER

JOAN pulls a wing off of the butterfly and drops it on the table.

Ich liebe ihn nicht.  
 TAPE RECORDER

JOAN grabs another butterfly and pulls wings off.

Ich habe ihn geliebt.  
 TAPE RECORDER

Ich liebe ihn nicht.  
 JOAN

JOAN looks at next butterfly, starts to pull off wings, stops, gently puts it back in case. Stares into middle distance.

JOAN  
 I will never again let a man have control of my destiny. Never. Again.

Nie Wieder.  
 TAPE RECORDER

JOAN turns off tape record, sits upright.

JOAN

Nie Wieder. Never again.

Light on JOAN's face is golden as lights fade to black.

## SCENE NINE - CODA

Two weeks later. FRAU SCHMIDT enters schools maintenance office and takes in it's energy. She seems wobbly, unsteady on her feet. She looks in the storage room and sees that the pianos are gone. She sits at table, takes a deep breath, looks up a number on rolodex, picks up the phone and dials. JOAN quietly enters room and sits at desk as FRAU SCHMIDT speaks into phone.

## FRAU SCHMIDT

Hallo. Das Rotes Ross? I would like to know what I need to do to reserve a table for a weekly Stammtisch .... No, it will be for a group of women, a German/American gathering. I see. Wunderbar. Your first female stammtisch? Is that not lovely? Danke. Thank you so very much. I am honored. Meine name ist Schmidt. I will come in later today to make the complete arrangements. Auf Wiederhoren.

She hangs up, looks up another number on rolodex, and dials again.

Hello. Mrs. West? This is Frau Schmidt at der schule. I'm doing well, danke. And you? This is wonderful. And how are Colonel West and the children? Sehr gut. (pause) No, this is not about the Parent Teachers Association. I just finished speaking with Principal Richards about what I missed while I was in Hungary on holiday (FRAU SCHMIDT AND JOAN look at each other) and suddenly I had a revelation. I am going to start a Friend's Table, a Stammtisch, *for women*. After Frau Richards you were the first person I thought of when the idea came to me. It will be the first female Stammtisch in Bad Windsheim. Would you like to participate? . . . You will? Oh how exciting! This is such good news. Women need to look out for each other, don't you agree? I have a funny story I want to share with you about one of your husband's hobbies. He and Herr Fuchs have been naughty boys. You will get a kick out of it, as you Americans say. (pause) No, not right now. We'll save it for the Friend's Table. Yes, let's save it for the Friend's Table.

FRAU RICHARDS puts phone down and stares straight ahead. A wisp of a smile crosses her lips. A golden light illuminates her face.

She looks around the room and breathes deeply.  
She looks to the heavens. Lights fade to black.

END OF PLAY