

IRON WILLED

A Screenplay by Lauren Ennis

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IRON WILLED

EXT HELM HOUSE NIGHT

Outskirts of Potsdam, Germany, 1945. The camera follows a black Mercedes as it pulls into the driveway of a large house off of a dirt road. The house is designed in a turn-of the century style and is well maintained. The car stops in the driveway and two Gestapo officers and an S. S. Officer exit the vehicle. They approach the front door of the house and knock. After only waiting a few seconds for an answer, one of the Gestapo Officers signals to another who proceeds to kick the door in. The men enter the house.

INT THE HELM HOUSE ENTRYWAY NIGHT

The men enter the entryway of the house and proceed up a large staircase. The entryway contains old but extravagant furniture, an ornate staircase, and various paintings on the walls. As they proceed up the staircase, Natalia appears at the top of the stairs in her bathrobe. She is in her early twenties. She looks at the men in confusion, half awake.

S. S. OFFICER

Fraulein Helm?

Natalia nods and rubs her eyes.

NATALIA

What's happened?

S. S. OFFICER

Obersturmfuhrer Schlemmer was killed at his home in what appears to have been a robbery.

Natalia tightens her bathrobe and looks confused. The S. S. Officer clears his throat.

S. S. OFFICER

We have reason to believe that the killers are here.

NATALIA

But there's no one here but my mother and I; we would have heard-

Natalia's mother, Frau Helm, enters at the top of the staircase from the upstairs hallway. She is in her fifties and walks with a cane as a result of contracting polio years earlier.

FRAU HELM

We wouldn't have heard much over the racket you made breaking my door down.

NATALIA

Mama, please, they're with the police.

FRAU HELM

Police? (To the S. S. Officer) In that case, you ought to be ashamed of yourselves, breaking in on loyal citizens when there are dangerous criminals out and about!

The S. S. Officer sighs in exasperation.

S. S. OFFICER

Catching dangerous criminals is precisely why we are here. Now, if you'll excuse me.

He pushes past Frau Helm, causing her to lose her balance. Natalia grabs Frau Helm's arm to steady her. The S. S. Officer signals to one of his men and points down the stairs.

S. S. OFFICER

You, take the downstairs.

The man exits down the stairs. He gestures down the hall.

S. S. OFFICER

You, take that wing.

The other man exits down the hallway. Natalia starts to help Frau Helm back to her bedroom down the hall.

S. S. OFFICER

And you two...

NATALIA

My mother needs to rest.

S. S. OFFICER

Follow me. Both of you.

NATALIA

The doctor said she can't strain—

S. S. OFFICER

That was not a request, Fraulein!

Natalia glares and starts to say something, but stops when Frau Helm squeezes her wrist. They follow the S. S. officer down the hall into the library.

INT HELM HOUSE LIBRARY NIGHT

The S. S. officer enters the library with Natalia and Frau Helm following behind him. The library is a large room furnished with several large chairs, a desk, and numerous decorative pieces on the walls and desk. There are several bookshelves lining the walls. He starts searching the library and carelessly tossing various books and decorative pieces aside.

S. S. OFFICER

I regret the disturbance, ladies, but—

FRAU HELM

You do have your duty.

S.S. OFFICER

Exactly. Of course, even loyal citizens tend to forget that under these circumstances.

He starts searching a bookcase in the corner of the room, feeling the shelves and backing for an opening. Natalia and Frau Helm exchange panicked glances as he begins knocking on the bookcase and wall.

NATALIA

I...I imagine that you must work with some very dangerous people in your position.

He shrugs and continues searching without looking at her.

S. S. OFFICER

Some more than others.

Natalia starts to walk toward him.

NATALIA

That must be so exciting, to know that you're serving your country against such...undesirables.

He nods without looking at her and continues searching.

NATALIA

Why, without men like you-

A whistle is heard blowing downstairs. The S. S. Officer rushes out of the library as Natalia and Frau Helm follow after him.

INT HELM HOUSE ENTRYWAY NIGHT

The S.S. Officer enters at the top of the stairs as his subordinates wait at the front door.

GESTAPO 1

We heard a noise outside.

Natalia and Frau Helm enter at the top of the stairs.

GESTAPO 2

I looked out the back door and saw someone running to the woods.

The S. S. Officer nods and walks down the stairs.

S.S. OFFICER

Right; we'll follow him in the car and see if we can head him off.

The two Gestapo officers exit out the front door. The S. S. Officer turns back to Natalia and Frau Helm.

S. S. OFFICER

I apologize for the disturbance.

Frau Helm nods and Natalia glares at him. He exits through the front door. Frau Helm and Natalia wait at the top of the stairs as a car is

heard driving away off screen. Natalia runs down the stairs and peeks around the curtains in the parlor. She turns and nods to Frau Helm then runs up the stairs and follows her into the library.

INT HELM HOUSE LIBRARY NIGHT

Natalia rushes to the bookshelf that the S. S. Officer was searching and pushes it to the side, revealing a small lock in the wall. She retrieves a key from her bathrobe and opens the lock. She opens a hidden door, revealing resistance members Felix and Emil hiding in a closet-sized room. Both men are in their late twenties. They enter the library with sighs of relief.

NATALIA

They said they saw someone running towards the woods and left in the car.

EMIL

Probably that old tramp we saw down the road.

FRAU HELM

Good riddance!

NATALIA

Did you get it?

Felix removes several papers from inside his coat. She skims through the pages then nods and puts them onto the desk. She starts to sit down at the desk.

FRAU HELM

They're saying that you killed him.

Natalia stands. Emil glares at Felix. Felix starts looking around the room and clears his throat.

FELIX

Well, you see-

EMIL

Someone decided that the mission wasn't as important as a quick chance at glory.

FELIX

He was passed out drunk; it wasn't like he could put up any fight.

EMIL

No, but that bullet was a fine way to sound the alarm. If we hadn't gotten here in time—

FRAU HELM

(Sternly) I thought that we agreed to avoid unnecessary risks.

EMIL

She's right! If they had caught up to us the entire organization would have been compromised! A few hours of their interrogations and...

Emil sighs in exasperation and sits down in one of the chairs. Felix removes a pack of cigarettes and lighter from his pocket and leans back against the wall. He lights a cigarette.

FELIX

A few hours? I always figured you were the type to talk, but I'd at least thought it would take longer than that.

Emil stands.

EMIL

I never said I would talk! But you know what they're capable of.

Felix tosses his pack of cigarettes to Natalia. She catches the pack and searches for a light.

FELIX

Sure, we all know plenty about that. What I'm talking about is what *you're* capable of.

Felix walks to Natalia and lights her cigarette. Emil walks to Felix.

EMIL

I'm *not* capable of putting the rest of us at risk on a whim.

Emil raises his hand to hit Felix, but Natalia pulls him away.

NATALIA

That's enough!

FRAU HELM

You both did what you felt you had to; it's over with now.

Natalia leans back against the desk.

NATALIA

I'm not sure I wouldn't have taken the chance if it were me.

Emil throws his hands up in exasperation.

EMIL

Just what we need; another loose cannon.

NATALIA

If I were in Felix's shoes I would have been awfully tempted to pump that son of a-

FRAU HELM

(Reproachfully) Natalia.

NATALIA

(Sighs) I'm sorry, Mama, I just...

Natalia sits down at the desk and takes a drag of her cigarette.

FRAU HELM

We're all a little overexcited.

A clock is heard striking the hour down the hall.

FRAU HELM

You boys have an early morning tomorrow; you'd better get some sleep. There's a guest room down the hall and a sofa in the parlor downstairs.

Natalia follows Frau Helm to the door.

FRAU HELM

Good night, boys.

EMIL

Good night.

FELIX

Thank you.

Frau Helm and Natalia exit the library.

EMIL

I suppose you're going to fight me for the guest room?

Felix shrugs and sits down with a sigh.

FELIX

Knock yourself out; I've taken enough risks tonight.

EMIL

You don't have to tell me twice.

Emil exits the library. Felix takes a long drag of his cigarette then looks up as footsteps are heard outside the door. Natalia enters the library with a bottle of beer and two glasses.

FELIX

I thought it was past your bedtime?

NATALIA

What sort of hostess would I be if I didn't offer my guest a drink?

She pours two glasses and hands one to him. He raises his glass in a toast.

FELIX

In that case, to proper etiquette.

They clink glasses.

NATALIA

I still can't believe you pulled it off.

FELIX

You pulled off some pretty good work yourself. (Imitating a female voice) Why without men like you, wherever would we be?

NATALIA

Remind me to finally give Max Reinhardt a call.

He laughs as she takes a sip of her beer.

NATALIA

But enough with the suspense, what happened to-

FRAU HELM

(Calling from down the hall) Natalia.

NATALIA

Coming, Mama.

She finishes her beer and stands.

NATALIA

So much for breaking curfew.

She walks to the door and starts to open it.

FELIX

Natalia.

She turns around.

FELIX

Thanks for the help with Emil.

NATALIA

I know how he gets.

FELIX

You're alright.

She smiles.

FELIX

We're lucky to have you both.

FRAU HELM

(Louder) Natalia!

Natalia rolls her eyes and turns to the door.

NATALIA

I'm coming!

She turns back to Felix.

NATALIA

Goodnight.

She exits the library as he pours himself another beer.

INT HELM HOUSE PARLOR NIGHT

May 8, 1945. Natalia, Emil, Felix, and several other men and women in the resistance are gathered around the radio in the Helm's parlor. The parlor contains several armchairs, a fireplace, a sofa, a radio, and various decorative pieces.

RADIO

The Allies have reportedly accepted the surrender of the German government...

The members of the resistance cheer at the announcement and start talking over one another in excitement.

EMIL

Quiet! They're about to tell the terms of the surrender.

The broadcast becomes static. Natalia tries tuning in to other stations, but they are static as well. She hits the side of the radio and the broadcast starts to come in clearly.

RADIO

President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill...

The broadcast becomes static again. Natalia hits the side of the radio again, but the broadcast remains static. Some of the resistance members continue staring at the radio in frustration as others resume

talking to one another. Natalia lifts a floorboard in the corner of the room and pulls several records from it.

NATALIA

Let's see...Benny Goodman, Count Basie, the Andrews Sisters...

One of the women rolls her eyes at Natalia.

RESISTANCE MEMBER 1

In case you haven't noticed, we're trying to listen to something.

NATALIA

And in case you haven't noticed, we haven't been able to listen to decent music without being interrogated for twelve years.

She puts the Benny Goodman record on a phonograph in the corner of the room. "Sing, Sing Sing" begins to play.

FELIX

What kind of victory party is this?

He walks to the phonograph and turns the volume as high as it will go. He walks to Resistance Member 1 and grabs her hand, pulling her off of the sofa. She reluctantly starts to dance with him.

NATALIA

(To Emil) You know where the drinks are, don't you?

EMIL

Sure.

NATALIA

Get as many as you can find; this calls for a celebration!

She starts to run up the stairs.

EMIL

And where are you going?

NATALIA

To tell my mother the good news!

Natalia runs up the stairs and Emil walks through the parlor into the kitchen. Moments later, Emil returns from the kitchen carrying several bottles of beer and glasses, which he hands to the other members of the resistance. The resistance members continue drinking, talking, and dancing as Natalia starts to walk down the stairs. She sees Emil standing by the staircase and leans over the banister. She grabs his beer and takes a sip.

EMIL

Hey! Didn't your mother teach you any manners?

She hands the glass back to him and continues down the stairs.

NATALIA

She was too busy teaching me how to hide ammunition and lie to officers. Why don't you be a gentleman and see if you can find another one for me?

EMIL

On one condition; save me your first dance.

NATALIA

You drive a hard bargain.

She shakes his hand.

NATALIA

But it's a deal.

He walks through the parlor into the kitchen. She stands leaning against the staircase and watches the party. Felix lets another resistance member cut in on his dance as the song ends and another song begins. He walks to Natalia and lights a cigarette.

FELIX

Well, we've finally done it.

NATALIA

Hard to believe, isn't it?

FELIX

After all these years I'm not sure what I'll do without something to fight against.

NATALIA

It'll sure be quiet around here.

FELIX

I'll bet. So, what are your big plans for returning to the drudgery of civilian life?

NATALIA

Finally start teaching, I guess. What about you?

Emil walks back into the parlor with a glass of beer for himself and Natalia.

FELIX

Well I finally have the time to run away and join the circus like I always wanted to.

Natalia laughs as Emil approaches them.

FELIX

Otherwise, maybe I'll put that business degree to some use.

EMIL

Sorry to break up the party but—

Emil starts to hand one of the glasses to Natalia and Felix takes it.

NATALIA

Hey!

Felix takes a large sip of the drink and hands it to her.

EMIL

(To Natalia) How do *you* like it?

Felix picks up a bottle of beer from a nearby table and opens it. Emil puts his beer down and holds his hand out to Natalia.

EMIL

I held up my end of the bargain.

FELIX

For God's sake, Emil, let the girl taste it first.

Natalia raises her glass.

NATALIA

To better times ahead!

Natalia clinks glasses with Emil and Felix. All three take sips of their drinks. Natalia puts her drink down and pulls Emil into the center of the parlor with the other dancers. Emil and Natalia start to dance as Felix dances with another resistance member. The camera pulls back to show all of the resistance members celebrating.

INT DOCTOR'S OFFICE DAY

The scene flashes ahead to 1953 as Natalia, now in her late twenties to early thirties, is sitting in a doctor's office waiting room. She is wearing a casual dress and has cut her hair shorter in a 1950's style. The camera is focused in on a newspaper. The front page of the newspaper details the uprisings occurring throughout East Germany and the backlash from the Soviet government. The camera pulls back as Natalia puts the newspaper down with a sigh and anxiously looks at her watch. The waiting room is small and furnished with several shabby wooden chairs and a receptionist's desk. There are several patients in the waiting room and a receptionist sits at the desk filing her nails while loudly conducting a personal conversation on the phone.

RECEPTIONIST

There's no reason for a married man to be out at that hour; if I were you, I wouldn't stand for it.

Natalia starts to light a cigarette, prompting the receptionist to clear her throat and point to a sign which reads "no smoking in the office". Natalia puts the cigarette away and leans back in her chair, glaring at the receptionist. A doctor assists Frau Helm, now in her early to mid sixties and frail, into the waiting room from the office. Natalia rushes over to Frau Helm and tries to lead her out of the waiting room. Frau Helm gently pushes her away and tries to take a deep breath after the short walk has left her winded.

FRAU HELM

I'm alright.

She takes a deep breath.

FRAU HELM

I just need to stop in the powder room.

She stops as Natalia starts to lead her out of the office.

FRAU HELM

I can make it myself.

She slowly exits the office and Natalia starts to follow after her.

DOCTOR

Fraulein Helm?

Natalia turns around.

DOCTOR

May I speak with you a moment?

Natalia nods and follows him down the hall outside the examination rooms.

NATALIA

How bad is it?

DOCTOR

Over the years the virus has weakened her lungs; from now on her breathing will become more difficult.

NATALIA

But I thought she was getting better; until the last few months..

DOCTOR

Polio is a hell of a disease. After all these years it was bound to take a toll on her, especially with the way that she insists on pushing herself.

NATALIA

There must be something you can do. Why, just last week they mentioned something on the radio about a surgery and-

DOCTOR

Yes, there is a surgery, but it's still experimental at this point. Besides, it's very expensive and-

NATALIA

Well, I can get the money. I'll find some way to-

DOCTOR

It's only available in the West; our hospitals don't have the resources.

NATALIA

Then I'll take her somewhere that offers it.

DOCTOR

Travel would be too much for her right now.

He puts a hand on her shoulder.

DOCTOR

I understand your concern, but the best thing that you can do is try and make her comfortable.

Natalia looks down.

NATALIA

So you're just going to give up after all that she's been through?! You doctors; what a profession!

She starts to storm down the hall.

DOCTOR

(Firmly) I am asking you to try and put aside your own feelings for her sake.

She turns around.

DOCTOR

Just try and appreciate the time that you have; any other arrangements would be against her best interests.

He hands her a prescription.

DOCTOR

Here. This should help with the pain.

He hands her another prescription.

DOCTOR

And this will help her sleep.

NATALIA

(Mumbling) Thank you.

She puts the prescriptions in her purse and starts to walk down the hall.

DOCTOR

Fraulein Helm.

She stops without turning around.

DOCTOR

I'm sorry; I did the best that I could.

She turns around, and nods then continues down the hall.

INT CLASSROOM DAY

Natalia is writing an assignment on the chalkboard in her classroom. She is wearing a pencil skirt and blouse. The classroom is small and bare of any decorations or furnishings except for a clock and a chalkboard on the wall. The classroom contains several rows of students' desks and a small teacher's desk at the front of the room. The class contains between twenty-five and thirty high school students. The students are looking at the clock, writing down their assignment, and daydreaming. A dismissal bell is heard ringing and the students rush out of the room. Natalia puts down her chalk and looks from her watch to the clock and back again.

NATALIA

I guess we really are out of time. Alright, remember, the next three chapters are due Monday; with summaries.

She puts on her coat and hat and starts to gather her papers as the students leave the room. She finishes organizing her papers and starts

to button her coat as the school's principal, Herr Kindler, enters the room.

HERR KINDLER

Fraulein Helm.

Natalia jumps, startled.

HERR KINDLER

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to frighten you, I-

NATALIA

That's fine, Herr Kindler. I'll have to do something about these nerves.

She laughs and finishes buttoning her coat as he awkwardly fidgets.

HERR KINDLER

May I speak with you for a moment?

NATALIA

Of course, (Pause) is everything alright?

He leans back against one of the student's desks.

HERR KINDLER

Well actually...no, everything's not alright. Now, I don't want you to feel that this is anything personal..

He starts pacing the room.

HERR KINDLER

In fact, if I had my choice we wouldn't need to be having this conver-

He abruptly stops pacing and looks at her. She is nervously fidgeting with a glove in her hand, but retains a neutral expression.

HERR KINDLER

I'm sorry, but I'll need you to pack up your things.

She stops fidgeting and slowly nods.

NATALIA

Couldn't you at least have let me finish out the term?

He throws his hands up in frustration.

HERR KINDLER

Don't put this on me! I tried to reason with them but—

He pauses. She clenches her jaw and tightens her hand in a fist by her side.

HERR KINDLER

I warned you, Fraulien Helm, I have warned you time and time again. This school is a facet of the state, if you teach against the principals of the state—

Natalia rolls her eyes, clearly having heard this speech before.

NATALIA

You teach against the principals of the school. I know the story, but how many times can you expect me to cut and recut my curriculum?

HERR KINDLER

I expect you to follow the *established* curriculum. There is a selection of approved works for you to choose from.

NATALIA

If I stayed with that list we would be finished two months before school's out.

He starts pacing again.

HERR KINDLER

This is exactly what I'm talking about. I give you a list, you—

NATALIA

(Pleading) But I *did* teach them the list; you can look at my lessons.

HERR KINDLER

And you go beyond that list. I give you a set of values to avoid.

NATALIA

I've never taught anything remotely counter-revolutionary.

Herr Kindler picks up a book left on a student's desk.

HERR KINDLER

Les Miserables?

She takes the book and holds it up.

NATALIA

It's a story about a social revolution, much like the one lead by Lenin.

She hands the book back to him, and he puts the book down in disgust.

HERR KINDLER

It's a story about a man who recklessly defies the laws of his country, finds refuge in religion of all things, and creates a new life built upon the financial success of a factory.

NATALIA

Which he uses to help the poor!

She leans back against her desk and takes a deep breath.

NATALIA

I understand your concern, Herr Kindler, but there are books besides Marx, and if I'm to give these children an education—

He sighs in exasperation.

HERR KINDLER

I'm sorry, Fraulein, but your idea of education and the state's idea of subversion have too much in common. With more teachers like you—

NATALIA

With more teachers like me these children might actually be able to think for themselves. Isn't that the problem?

He shakes his head and walks to the door.

HERR KINDLER

I need your things out of this room by tomorrow morning.

NATALIA

But-

HERR KINDLER

Good day, Fraulein.

He exits the classroom, slamming the door behind him. She runs to the door then stops and slowly walks back to her desk. The scene fades out as she cleans out her desk.

INT HELM HOUSE FRAU HELM'S BEDROOM NIGHT

The room is furnished with a bed, a small nightstand, a vanity table with a mirror, and a cuckoo clock hanging on the wall. There is a faded oriental carpet on the floor and a set of velvet curtains at the window. A radio and lamp are sitting atop the nightstand and there is a phone on top of the vanity table. Frau Helm, now bedridden, is sitting half awake in her bed listening to the radio when she hears Natalia enter the house downstairs. Frau Helm is startled awake by the sound of the front door closing.

FRAU HELM

Is that you Natalia?

She looks at the clock and sees that it is nearly seven o'clock. Heavy footsteps are heard down the hall.

NATALIA

(Calling from down the hall) I'll be right there.

Natalia enters Frau Helm's room moments later carrying a large bag overfilled with teaching supplies over her shoulder. She puts the bag down next to Frau Helm's bed.

NATALIA

(With a forced lightness in her voice) I'm sorry to be so late, Mama, I should have called. I guess I let myself get sidetracked.

Natalia kisses Frau Helm on the cheek.

NATALIA

I'll get started on dinner.

Natalia rushes out of the room, leaving her bag on the floor. Frau Helm starts to settle back into bed when Natalia's bag topples over onto the floor. Frau Helm is about to call for Natalia but stops herself. She strains to lean over the bed and picks the bag and its contents up off of the floor. She gasps for breath as she lifts the items onto the bed. She starts to put the items back into the bag but stops when she notices an empty folder and several travel brochures. The brochures advertise various cities in the West including London, Paris, and New York. She opens the folder and a page of handwritten notes about the benefits, disadvantages, and costs of living in each city. She hastily puts the items back into the bag as footsteps are heard down the hall. Natalia enters the room.

NATALIA

I forgot my—

She pauses as she sees the bag on Frau Helm's bed.

FRAU HELM

The bag fell over; I tried to clean it up.

Natalia takes the bag and forces herself to smile.

NATALIA

You shouldn't have strained yourself like that; you know that the doctor said—

FRAU HELM

Oh, I know, he said that I need to stay locked up here like a prisoner, and order you about like a servant.

Natalia props up Frau Helm's pillows and closes the curtains.

NATALIA

It's only for a little while. Before you know it you'll be back on your feet as good as new.

FRAU HELM

It's not right for a mother to be living off of her child.

NATALIA

Oh, Mama, stop being so melodramatic; it's just a bit of help around the house.

Natalia walks to the door.

NATALIA

And the sooner you stop pushing yourself, the sooner you'll be able to get back to it. I'll check on dinner.

Natalia starts to walk out the door.

FRAU HELM

You still believe that?

Natalia stops and reenters the room.

FRAU HELM

So that's why the travel brochures; I should have known.

NATALIA

I was going to wait until I was sure we could afford it to tell you, but there's a surgery and-

FRAU HELM

The one that they started in Denmark last year; I know all about it.

NATALIA

You never mentioned it before.

Frau Helm shrugs and puts a handkerchief over her mouth as she gasps for air.

FRAU HELM

I didn't see any point.

NATALIA

I don't understand, this is our chance to-

FRAU HELM

To keep fighting a losing battle. Come here.

Natalia walks to Frau Helm's bed. Frau Helm holds out her hand and Natalia takes it.

FRAU HELM

You're always fighting against something, aren't you, Natalia. You're like your father that way.

Natalia squeezes Frau Helm's hand.

NATALIA

And I'll keep fighting; even if it means—

FRAU HELM

Even if it means giving up living in your fight against death?

Natalia looks down.

FRAU HELM

We've both known this has been coming for a long time, and there's something to be said for keeping a bit of dignity at the end.

Natalia nods without looking up.

FRAU HELM

And as for this traveling business...

Frau Helm waves her hand dismissively.

FRAU HELM

I can do without forging visas and being harassed by the border patrol. The last thing I need right now is—

She hears Natalia sniffing and looks up. She sees that Natalia is fighting to hold back tears.

NATALIA

I'm so sorry, Mama, I—

Natalia turns away as she wipes her eyes and composes herself.

FRAU HELM

What is it?

NATALIA

I don't know if I even *could* get you that surgery now.

FRAU HELM

What do you mean?

NATALIA

I lost my job. I tried to follow the rules, but--

Frau Helm gestures to the end of the bed.

FRAU HELM

Sit down.

Natalia sits down on the end of the bed.

NATALIA

And the more time I have to spend saving money the harder it will be to get out. I-

FRAU HELM

Get out? You mean defect?

Natalia nods as she takes a handkerchief from her pocket and wipes her eyes.

FRAU HELM

If that was your plan, I wouldn't have gone with you.

NATALIA

You wouldn't have?

FRAU HELM

This house is to be your inheritance, I wouldn't have abandoned it.

She takes Natalia's hand and Natalia turns to her looking confused, but composed.

FRAU HELM

And I need you to promise me that *you* won't ever abandon it.

NATALIA

What would I do with a house this size? And besides, how could I keep it if I ever left?

Frau Helm gives her a reprimanding look. Natalia shakes her head.

NATALIA

You can't mean that. Staying under the thumbs of those communist bast—
She looks at Frau Helm and clears her throat.

NATALIA

You would actually choose a house over our freedom?!

FRAU HELM

A house? Is that all that you see this as, a house?

Frau Helm sits up straight and lets go of Natalia's hand.

FRAU HELM

This is the house that your grandfather built. This is the house where you were born. This is the house where we fought back against the fascists. I would have hoped that my own daughter would have understood that.

A tea kettle is heard whistling downstairs. Natalia stares at Frau Helm in disbelief then turns towards the door as she notices the whistling.

NATALIA

Oh, the tea!

Natalia rushes to the door.

FRAU HELM

This house is one of the few things they haven't taken from you.

Natalia stops in the doorway without turning around.

FRAU HELM

And you're going to let them drive you out without a fight?

Natalia turns around and looks Frau Helm in the eye then looks down.

NATALIA

I'll check dinner; I think I smell something burning.

She turns around and rushes out of the room.

EXT STREETS OF POTSDAM DAY

Natalia walks through the winter streets of Potsdam searching for a job with an image of a series of rejection letters superimposed over her. She is wearing a winter coat and matching hat. The rejection letters are from various schools, offices, and businesses, and all state that, "Unfortunately we have chosen another candidate for this position". The dates on the rejection letters change as time goes on. By the end of the scene it is the beginning of spring and Natalia is now wearing a lighter coat and wears her hair down without a hat.

INT HELM HOUSE ENTRYWAY NIGHT

Natalia bursts through the front door in excitement, accidentally slamming it against the wall. She starts to run up the stairs then turns and quietly closes the door. She runs up the stairs.

NATALIA

Mama! I got a job!

She runs up the stairs into Frau Helm's bedroom.

INT HELM HOUSE FRAU HELM'S BEDROOM NIGHT

Natalia rushes into the room. Frau Helm is lying under the blankets on her bed as the radio plays. Natalia quietly walks across the room and closes the curtains. She starts to walk out of the room when she notices that the lamp is turned on. She walks to the nightstand and starts to turn off the lamp when she turns to look at Frau Helm. She sees that Frau Helm is not breathing and rushes to the bed. She gently tries to shake Frau Helm awake.

NATALIA

(Whispering) Mama.

Frau Helm does not move.

Natalia shakes her more forcefully.

NATALIA

(In a normal tone of voice) Mama.

Frau Helm still does not move, and Natalia violently shakes her.

NATALIA

(Shouting) Mama, please! Please, Mama.

Natalia looks at Frau Helm's face and realizes that she is dead. She kneels on the floor and starts crying with her face buried against the bed.

INT HELM HOUSE ENTRYWAY NIGHT

Several elderly guests are leaving the house after Frau Helm's funeral. The guests are all dressed in black dresses and suits with matching hats. Natalia is standing by the front door in a black dress and matching pillbox hat with a veil. She shakes hands with the guests as they leave. She nods and forces a weak smile as the guests offer condolences on their way out the door. An elderly couple approaches her.

HERR SCHULTZ

We're both terribly sorry for your loss. You're mother was a good woman; a truly fine lady.

NATALIA

Thank you, Herr Schultz, she would have been honored to hear that.

Herr and Frau Schultz shake hands with Natalia and exit out the front door. Natalia walks into the parlor and sees that all the guests have left. She tosses her hat onto one of the chairs and starts cleaning up after the guests. As she is cleaning, headlights shine through the window. She looks up as she hears a car door opening and closing outside. She looks out the window then walks to the door. She opens the door, but no one is there. She turns as a noise is heard at the back of the house. She walks through the parlor to the back door in the kitchen.

INT HELM HOUSE KITCHEN NIGHT

Natalia quietly enters the kitchen. The kitchen contains a small table, four chairs, a refrigerator, and several cabinets. She opens a drawer and removes a knife. She raises the knife as she opens the back door with her other hand. She opens the door as Felix approaches the steps leading up to it.

FELIX

Natalia?

She remains standing with the knife raised.

FELIX

Put that thing down before you lose a finger!

He reaches the top of the steps and she lowers the knife.

FELIX

I thought the war would have at least taught you that guns are more effective in these situations.

NATALIA

Felix?

He takes the knife from her.

FELIX

So you *do* remember.

She starts to walk into the kitchen.

NATALIA

Come in!

He enters the kitchen puts the knife down on the table. He follows her into the parlor.

INT HELM HOUSE PARLOR NIGHT

Felix follows Natalia into the parlor.

FELIX

Sorry if I frightened you; I have a lot of memories sneaking in through that door.

She nods and he sits down in one of the chairs. She stands next to the radio.

Natalia

And hiding in the library.

FELIX

And slipping a few nightcaps behind your mother's back.

He laughs, Natalia looks away.

NATALIA

Mama...

FELIX

I know; that's why I came. I meant to get here earlier, but I had some business to take care of. (Pauses) You look like you could use a drink; where do you keep the beer around here?

NATALIA

It's in the basement, I'll-

She starts to walk back to the kitchen.

FELIX

You stay right here, I'll get it.

He walks into the kitchen. She turns on the radio and starts tuning in to various stations. She leaves the radio on a station playing an instrumental version of "Lili Marlene". She sits down with a sigh and closes her eyes. She starts to hum along with the tune when the broadcast becomes static. She stands and walks to the radio. She hits the side of the radio with the palm of her hand, but the broadcast remains static. She hits the radio several times then stops and leans forward over the radio as she holds back a sob. Felix starts to walk into the parlor carrying two glasses of beer, but stops when he sees her. She looks up and quickly wipes her eyes when she sees him. He hands her a glass.

NATALIA

Thanks.

She sniffs.

NATALIA

I'm sorry, I-

FELIX

There's nothing to be sorry about.

NATALIA

I know, but—

FELIX

But I won't tell if you won't.

He sits down in one of the chairs and takes a sip from his glass.

FELIX

Drink up; I hate seeing good beer go to waste.

She sits down on the sofa and sips from her glass. He looks around the room.

FELIX

It's like stepping back in time after all these years. Same old house, same old drinks...

NATALIA

Some things never change.

He laughs.

FELIX

(Sarcastically) Never change? Haven't you heard? We're making more progress every minute!

NATALIA

Now where have I heard that before...I know! It was from that loud man with the little mustache.

FELIX

I think I know the one you mean; I hear that they replaced him with another guy with a bigger mustache.

She laughs.

FELIX

That's more like it. So, how's the school life treating you?

NATALIA

It isn't.

FELIX

Oh?

NATALIA

Let's just say I was a bad influence on the little darlings.

FELIX

Still fighting the good fight then, I take it?

NATALIA

More like ranting the good rant. But there isn't as much time for griping in the dress shop I started working at. What about you, did you ever make it to that circus?

FELIX

Nothing that exciting; just some odd jobs here and there.

He takes a pack of cigarettes from his pocket and puts it on the coffee table. He lights two cigarettes and hands one to her.

NATALIA

What sort of jobs?

She takes a drag on her cigarette.

FELIX

Let's just say a little importing and exporting.

NATALIA

Importing and exporting?

She looks at the pack of cigarettes then back at him.

NATALIA

That explains the top-end merchandise.

He laughs.

FELIX

Glad you approve. Be sure to pass on the good word; I could use the business.

He starts to take another sip of his beer then realizes that it's empty.

NATALIA

I'll get you another.

She stands and takes the glass from him. She finishes the last of her glass and walks into the kitchen. He stands and walks around the room, looking at various items. He looks at the clock in the corner of the room then at his watch. Natalia walks into the room carrying two full glasses.

NATALIA

Here we are, freshly imported.

She hands a glass to him.

FELIX

I'd better make mine for the road.

She nods, but looks disappointed.

FELIX

I'm sorry, but that appointment set me behind and I forgot how long the drive out here is.

He takes a large sip of his glass. She puts her glass down on the coffee table.

NATALIA

I'll walk you out.

He finishes his glass and puts it on the coffee table. He follows her out the front door.

EXT HELM HOUSE NIGHT

Felix follows Natalia out of the house into the driveway, and they walk to his car.

NATALIA

Thanks for coming, Felix. Mama would have been glad.

FELIX

It's the least I can do (Pauses), which reminds me...

He reaches into his car window and removes a book from the front seat.

FELIX

Speaking of little things that I can do...

He hands her the book then steps into the car and turns it on. She winces from the headlights as he exits the car and walks back to her. She looks at the cover of the book.

NATALIA

War and Peace? I've taught that one so many times I have it practically memorized.

He takes the book from her and opens it to the cover page. The camera focuses in on the cover page which reads "*Gone With the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell".

NATALIA

You weren't kidding about that import export stuff, were you?

FELIX

Let me know how you like it.

She closes the book and looks up.

NATALIA

Thank you, but it's too much. With all the risks you must have taken—

FELIX

Technically, it was my associate who took most of the risks. Besides, I think you and Scarlett might have a few things in common.

She flips through the pages absentmindedly then looks up in surprise.

NATALIA

A Southern belle?

FELIX

Well, she did manage to get on the nerves of both the Fuhrer and the Man of Steel.

NATALIA

Well, when you put it that way...

She extends her hand.

NATALIA

Thank you, for everything.

He takes her hand as if to shake it then kisses her on the cheek. He takes a business card from his pocket and hands it to her.

FELIX

Let me know if you need anything.

She puts the card between the pages of the book as he walks back to the car. He steps into the car then lowers the window.

FELIX

Just don't wait another eight years.

He pulls out of the driveway. She puts her hand to her cheek as she watches the car drive away.

INT TRAIN DAY

Natalia is riding a train on her morning commute. She drowsily stares out the window as the train reaches a stop. Two police officers come on board the train with several other passengers. One of the police officers whispers something to the Conductor. The Conductor turns around to look at the passengers, and then points to a nervous looking young man sitting in the back of the train. The conductor whispers something to the officer, and the officer nods. The conductor keeps the train stopped at the station as the police move to the back of the train. The police approach the young man.

OFFICER ONE

May we see your papers?

The young man hands the officers his passport without looking at them. Officer One looks at the passport then hands it to Officer Two.

Officer Two puts the passport in his pocket and signals to Officer One. Officer One pulls the young man out of his seat. The young man tries to fight against them but Officer One and Officer Two take him off of the train, and onto the platform, where several other police officers are waiting. Officer Two turns steps back onto the train and turns to the passengers.

OFFICER TWO

I apologize for the disruption; just a routine inspection.

Officer Two exits the train. The train resumes its course and Natalia anxiously watches through the window while the young man struggles against the police as they force him into an unmarked car.

EXT POTSDAM DAY

Later that morning as Natalia commutes to work. The city has still not recovered from the damage it sustained in the war. Various ruins of businesses and homes line the streets, which contain numerous cracks and potholes. Natalia passes a group of students in one of the city squares protesting against the communist regime. Many of the protesters are running from the square with signs and pamphlets while several others are struggling against police in the street and being forced into police vans. Natalia tries to force her way through the crowd, but is knocked down by one of the protesters as he tries to outrun the police. As she gets up off of the pavement, a police officer grabs her from behind. She pulls away from him and dusts off her clothes then starts to walk away. He steps in front of her and blocks her way.

NATALIA

I'm on my way to work.

OFFICER 3

And where's that?

NATALIA

At Wagner's.

He looks skeptical.

NATALIA

It's a dress shop around the corner.

OFFICER 3

Papers?

She hands him her identification papers, and rolls her eyes as he examines them. He hands her the papers and she turns to go.

OFFICER

You should be more careful, Fraulein.

She curtly nods and stuffs her papers into her purse. She runs out of the square.

EXT WAGNER'S DRESS SHOP DAY

Natalia dusts herself off again as she reaches the dress shop then enters the building.

INT HELM HOUSE ENTRYWAY DAY

Natalia enters the house and closes the door behind her. She removes her hat and places it onto a hat stand in the corner of the room. She puts her purse onto the coffee table and starts to walk towards the stairs. She stops when she notices an envelope lying on the floor by the front door. She walks to the door, picks up the envelope, and opens it. The camera focuses in on a government issued letter. As Natalia reaches the end of the letter, the camera focuses in on the final sentences of the letter which read, "Due to these circumstances, the German Democratic Republic has determined to convert this residence to property of the republic. You have thirty days to vacate the premises." Natalia reads the letter again then walks to the coffee table. She takes her purse and stuffs the letter into it, then storms out the front door.

INT FINANCE MINISTRY WAITING ROOM DAY

Natalia is sitting in a waiting room outside of the Deputy Finance Minister's office. The room contains a coffee table, three chairs for visitors, a clock hanging on the wall, and a booth at which a secretary sits answering the telephone and arranging appointments. There is also a door to the Deputy Minister's office next to the secretary's booth. The room is empty except for Natalia and the secretary. Natalia takes a drag from a nearly finished cigarette as she stares at the clock. Deputy Minister Muller enters the room and walks to the secretary's booth.

DEPUTY MULLER

Cancel my appointments for the rest of the day, and move up the noon meeting with the Minister to nine.

The secretary writes down his requests.

SECRETARY

Yes, Herr Muller.

Natalia stands as he starts to walk into his office. The secretary sees her.

SECRETARY

Herr Muller?

He turns around with a sigh.

DEPUTY MULLER

(Irritably) What?

She signals to him to walk to the booth. He walks to the booth.

DEPUTY MULLER

Well?

SECRETARY

(Whispering) I'm sorry, but there's a woman here to see you.

DEPUTY MULLER

I said cancel all my appointments.

SECRETARY

But—

He walks into his office. Natalia stubs her cigarette out in a full ashtray on the coffee table and walks to the office door.

SECRETARY

I'm sorry, but the Deputy Minister—

NATALIA

You can't cancel on me when I didn't have an appointment to start with.

Natalia enters the office.

SECRETARY

But Fraulein!

She picks up the phone receiver on her desk and dials Herr Muller's extension.

INT DEPUTY MINISTER MULLER'S OFFICE DAY

Natalia enters the office as Herr Muller tosses his hat and coat onto his chair. The office contains a large desk, two chairs, a filing cabinet, a painting of Lenin hanging on the wall, and a hat stand. On the desk lays a telephone, a large stack of papers, and several pens. Deputy Muller answers the phone as it starts to ring.

DEPUTY MULLER

(On the phone)What?!

He looks up and sees Natalia seated across from him.

DEPUTY MULLER

(On the phone)Glad you bothered to tell me.

She takes the letter from her purse and removes her coat.

DEPUTY MULLER

(On the phone) That won't be necessary.

He hangs up the phone. He turns to Natalia and starts to speak. She places the letter in front of him.

DEPUTY MULLER

I'm sorry, Fraulein, but I'm a busy man and—

NATALIA

Then you understand the value of a person's time. Including the time I spent waiting for you to show up when I could have been working.

He stands and takes her coat. He shoves the coat into her hands.

NATALIA

After all, just think of the productivity the state missed out on for those three hours.

He takes her arm and tries to pull her out of the chair.

NATALIA

Of course, I could just keep on paying calls to the office until your secretary gets sick of my face.

He sighs and looks at his watch.

DEPTUY MULLER

You have five minutes.

She picks the letter up and hands it to him. He scans the contents and tosses it aside.

DEPUTY MULLER

It's unfortunate, but you understand that in times like these—

NATALIA

So it's the times that have made my house so valuable?

DEPUTY MULLER

To put things simply.

He hands the letter to her. She briefly looks at the letter.

NATALIA

But the letter doesn't say what the land is valuable for.

DEPUTY MULLER

Well, you see, it's a rather complicated matter...

NATALIA

Could you try and put it simply? I don't want to go past my time limit.

She smiles sweetly. He looks at his watch and clears his throat.

DEPUTY MULLER

The state will be converting various properties through the new agricultural initiative. It's not as if yours is the only house to-

NATALIA

Agricultural initiative? What do they plan on harvesting, rocks?

She folds the letter up and puts it back into her purse.

NATALIA

Because that's all you'll be harvesting on that property; believe me, I've tried.

DEPUTY MULLER

Regardless of the property's merits, it's the republic's concern now, not yours.

NATALIA

But as a concerned citizen-

He stands and walks to her chair. He pulls her out of her chair and starts to lead her to the door.

DEPUTY MULLER

I'm sorry, Fraulein, but you're time is up. The Ministry's decision is final. My secretary will show you out.

She notices a picture of a woman and a boy on his desk and picks up the photo.

NATALIA

Yours?

He nods and takes the photo from her. He puts the photo back on the desk.

NATALIA

He's awful cute.

DEPUTY MULLER

Thank you. Fortunately, he takes after his mother.

NATALIA

What is he, about eight?

DEPUTY MULLER

Nine.

NATALIA

That's a good age; expensive though.

He leads her to the door.

DEPUTY MULLER

Yes, well—

NATALIA

And judging by the looks of this office it's probably no picnic keeping up with a growing boy on your salary.

He opens the door. She throws herself against the door, closing it behind her.

NATALIA

And with the nearest factory well over an hour away you'll be lucky to get a handful of renters at the house. That would hardly be enough to—

DEPUTY MULLER

What are you suggesting Fraulein?

NATALIA

I'm just giving you facts. (Pause) Of course if you chose, you could use those facts to your advantage.

He looks at the photo on his desk and steps away from the door.

NATALIA

How much rent would the state be getting for converting it to a collective?

DEPUTY MULLER

About fifteen thousand marks a month.

She whistles.

NATALIA

Not bad. And how much of that is your cut?

DEPUTY MULLER

Well, I work on a salary.

NATALIA

I see. So you do all that work getting rid of pests like me, evaluating the place, and finding renters without getting your cut?

He walks to his desk and sits down with a sigh.

DEPUTY MULLER

I suppose that's one way of looking at it.

He shakes his head. She sits down across from him.

NATALIA

Well, perhaps an arrangement could be made so that both of us would get our fair share.

She removes a check book from her purse and opens it to a blank check.

DEPUTY MULLER

Fraulein.

He looks around the room nervously then turns back to her.

DEPUTY MULLER

(Whispering) Are you offering to bribe an appointed official of the republic?

NATALIA

To put it simply.

He nervously looks from the painting on the wall to the photo on his desk. He writes something down on a piece of paper and hands the paper to her.

DEPUTY MULLER

I'm sorry, but I'm afraid that we'll have to continue this discussion tomorrow.

He leads her to the door and leans close to her.

DEPUTY MULLER

I take lunch by the fountain at Sanssouci Park. Meet me at one.

She extends her hand. He nods and opens the office door without shaking hands with her. She exits the office. He walks back to his desk and sits down with a sigh.

INT WAGNER'S DRESS SHOP BACK ROOM DAY

Natalia is altering a customer's skirt in the back room of the dress shop. The back room is small and contains a sewing machine on a small table, a stool, a mannequin, and a rack of clothes to be mended. The back room connects to the main entrance through a small hallway, and to Fraulein Wagner's apartment through an adjoining staircase. Natalia jumps as she hears gunshots outside and pricks her finger on a sewing needle. She walks down the hallway into a restroom.

INT WAGNER'S DRESS SHOP MAIN ENTRANCE DAY

Natalia exits the restroom with a paper towel wrapped around her finger. She starts to walk into the back room then stops and turns toward the main entrance as she hears the front door open. A young woman, Erika, rushes into the shop and looks around. She is wearing a spring jacket and glasses, and wears her hair pulled back in a ponytail. She repeatedly turns to look out the front window as she pretends to be examining a dress on display. Natalia watches her in confusion then looks past her to the front window and sees a policeman approaching the shop from across the street. Erika tries to hide herself behind a clothes rack and peeks around the corner to look out the window. Natalia runs to Erika and takes her by the hand.

NATALIA

Follow me.

Erika tries to pull her hand away.

ERIKA

Who-

Natalia leads Erika down the hall to the back room. She takes the stool and puts it behind the table. She gestures to the stool.

NATALIA

Sit here.

Erika sits down. Natalia tosses the skirt she was working on onto the table.

ERIKA

What are you—

Natalia walks to the hallway then stops and turns around.

NATALIA

Just play along. Pretend you're working.

Erika nods and starts to sew. Natalia walks down the hall to the main entrance.

INT WAGNER'S DRESS SHOP MAIN ENTRANCE DAY

The policeman is looking around the store as Natalia enters from the hallway. She steps back in surprise when she sees him.

NATALIA

Can I help you?

POLICEMAN

That depends. Did anyone come in here this afternoon?

NATALIA

I wouldn't know; Fraulein Wagner usually handles the customers.

POLICEMAN

And where is she?

NATALIA

Buying supplies.

POLICEMAN

Mind if I take a look around?

He starts searching the room before she can answer, leaving the display window and clothes racks in disarray. She follows behind him and attempts to reorganize the room.

NATALIA

Excuse me, but this is a business, if we have customers come in-

POLICEMAN

That reminds me, why didn't she have you work the counter?

NATALIA

I was about to; I was just finishing some work in the back room.

He walks down the hallway and into the back room. Erika has put her coat on the clothes rack, taken off her glasses, and taken her hair down to obscure her face. She keeps her eyes lowered and continues sewing.

NATALIA

I would have heard if anyone had come in.

POLICEMAN

(To Erika) Who are you?

NATALIA

She's my assistant.

The policeman leans down to look Erika in the face. She reluctantly looks up.

POLICEMAN

(To Erika) So, why didn't they send you on the errands?

Natalia steps between the policeman and Erika.

NATALIA

She's new. The last time we sent her to the store she nearly-

POLICEMAN

Can she speak for herself, or is she a mute too?

Erika exchanges a glance with Natalia.

ERIKA

She wishes I was.

NATALIA

What did I tell you about talking back?!

ERIKA

He asked me a question, I only-

Natalia slaps Erika across the face. Erika sits back down with her hair covering her face. The policeman awkwardly looks at them then turns to the stairs. He starts to run up the stairs.

NATALIA

(Calling after him) That's the boss' apartment. We don't have keys. The sound of a lock being turned repeatedly is heard off screen. He walks back down the stairs.

POLICEMAN

If you see anyone suspicious, let us know.

Natalia nods and Erika resumes sewing. Erika looks up as the front door is heard closing off screen. Natalia looks around the corner of the hallway then walks back to the back room. Erika pulls her hair back into a ponytail as Natalia enters the room.

NATALIA

Sorry about that, are you alright?

ERIKA

Better than I would have been if you let *him* slap me around.

Erika takes her coat from the clothes rack.

ERIKA

Sorry for barging in like that.

She puts on her coat.

ERIKA

And thanks for the help; I'm not sure how I would've gotten out of that one.

Natalia sits down at the table and examines the skirt.

NATALIA

Just doing my part.

Erika starts to walk towards the hallway. Natalia resumes sewing the skirt.

ERIKA

Well thanks just the same, I really...

Erika stops and turns around.

ERIKA

What do you mean, 'just doing your part'?

NATALIA

(Without looking up) Only that I don't like the authorities any more than your friends marching in the square do.

ERIKA

But how did you know that I—

Natalia looks up.

NATALIA

Call it a lucky guess. Besides, you don't look like any of the maniacs and killers I've let hide here.

Erika looks at Natalia in confusion then laughs.

NATALIA

In fact, you look sort of...

ERIKA

What?

NATALIA

Familiar.

Erika shakes her head.

ERIKA

Trust me; I'd remember someone with a slap like..

Erika looks at Natalia closely then smiles.

ERIKA

Fraulein Helm?

NATALIA

(Confused) Yes...

ERIKA

I can't believe I didn't recognize you sooner!

Natalia looks at Erika closely as she approaches the table, but is unable to recognize her.

ERIKA

You probably don't remember, but I was in your literature class about four years ago.

NATALIA

Well, I...

ERIKA

I always remembered how you defended Peter when Herr Kindler tried to expel him for that paper on Orwell.

Natalia looks at Erika with recognition and stands.

NATALIA

Of course, Erika! How have you—

The front door is heard opening off screen. Natalia gestures to the coat rack and Erika hides behind it. Natalia resumes sewing as Fraulein Wagner enters the room with a large shopping bag.

NATALIA

Did you get everything you needed?

Fraulein Wagner shrugs.

FRAULEIN WAGNER

As much as they had left. Over an hour of waiting in line and...

She shakes her head and walks up the stairs. The apartment door is heard closing off screen. Natalia gestures to Erika. Erika comes out from behind the clothes rack and rushes down the hall. Natalia breathes a sigh of relief then sees Erika's glasses on the floor next to the table. She picks up the glasses and walks to the bottom of the staircase. She looks up at the top of the stairs then runs to the front of the store.

INT WAGNER'S DRESS SHOP MAIN ENTRANCE DAY

Natalia runs to the front door as Erika opens it to leave.

NATALIA

(Whispering) You forgot these.

She hands the glasses to Erika.

ERIKA

(Whispering) Thanks.

Natalia nods and starts to run to the back room.

ERIKA

(In a normal tone of voice) Fraulein Helm?

Natalia turns around and gestures to the back room.

ERIKA

(Whispering) Sorry. Are you free after work tonight?

NATALIA

Well, I...

ERIKA

If you are, why don't you meet Peter and I for coffee; we could catch up.

NATALIA

I don't really...

ERIKA

Oh, come on, it'd be fun.

Natalia shakes her head. Erika walks to the counter and writes something on a slip of paper. She hands the paper to Natalia.

ERIKA

In case you don't want me barging in again to visit...

Natalia starts to say something but stops as Erika runs out the door.

FRAULEIN WAGNER

(Off screen) Fraulein Helm?

Natalia puts the paper in her pocket.

NATALIA

(Calling down the hall) I thought I heard a customer.

Natalia rushes into the back room.

INT CAFÉ NIGHT

Later that night, Erika is sitting with her boyfriend, Peter, in a crowded café. The café contains marble columns and floors that suggest it was an elegant establishment before the war. The walls of the café are covered in fading cabaret posters and new government-issued propaganda posters. An accordion can be heard playing in the street and a thick layer of cigarette smoke hangs over the café. The majority of the customers are those on the fringes of East German society; students, black market racketeers, and artists. A group of students has gathered in one corner of the room, enthusiastically discussing politics as a couple arranges to purchase forged identification papers from a black market racketeer at another table. The camera slowly focuses in on Peter and Erika's table. She laughs as he whispers something to her. She looks ahead distractedly as he whispers something else to her then stands up and waves.

ERIKA

Fraulein Helm, over here!

The camera shifts to the entrance of the club where Natalia is checking the address Erika had given her. She looks around the café

then waves back when she sees Erika. Peter takes a chair from an empty table for Natalia as she approaches their table.

ERIKA

We were beginning to think you wouldn't come.

Natalia shrugs and sits down.

NATALIA

I had to stay late taking inventory.

PETER

It's good to see you again, Fraulein.

They shake hands. He sits down and puts his arm around Erika.

NATALIA

You too, Peter.

She looks at Peter and Erika and shakes her head.

NATALIA

Look at the two of you all grown up on me, I could barely recognize you.

PETER

Barely recognize us? You're making me feel old, Fraulein. And here I was just going to say you hadn't aged a day.

NATALIA

You're a little old for charming grades out of me.

PETER

Old habits die hard. Would you like a coffee?

NATALIA

I'd love one.

PETER

I'll be right back. (To Erika) Ready for another one?

She shakes her head. He stands and walks to the counter. Natalia looks around the café.

NATALIA

This is quite the place; I wish someone had told me about it sooner. Erika leans in conspiratorially.

ERIKA

Well, it tends to attract a rebellious crowd, if you know what I mean. Peter returns to the table with a cup of coffee. He hands the cup to Natalia and sits down.

NATALIA

Thank you.

Natalia sips her coffee.

PETER

Erika told me about what happened this afternoon; I want you to know how much I appreciate your help.

NATALIA

I'm sure she would have done the same if it were the other way around.

ERIKA

I doubt I would have been able to think that fast, though.

Natalia takes a sip of her coffee.

NATALIA

I had some practice during the war; in those days everyone had to do a little quick thinking.

PETER

Still, that was a hell of a chance you took.

Natalia looks up at the propaganda posters on the walls.

NATALIA

Speaking of chances, it sounds like the two of you have been taking a few too many.

PETER

Probably, but someone has to do it.

He takes a pamphlet from his pocket and slides it across the table.

PETER

If we can get a few more of these in the right places—

ERIKA

People might start to take action.

Natalia slides the pamphlet back to him.

NATALIA

(Halfheartedly) Right.

She takes another sip of her coffee.

ERIKA

What?

NATALIA

Nothing, it's just...

PETER

I thought you'd understand. After what you told Erika this afternoon—

NATALIA

I do understand, but—

ERIKA

You said yourself that you don't like them anymore than we do.

Natalia puts her cup down with a sigh.

NATALIA

I don't, but I don't like the idea of you two locked up in some prison either.

Peter throws his hands up in frustration.

PETER

Do you like the idea of us burying our heads in the sand any better?

Natalia removes a small package of cigarettes from her purse and lights a cigarette. She leans back in her chair and takes a drag.

NATALIA

No, but being aware and being obvious are two different things.

PETER

What else can we—

NATALIA

(Firmly) Let me finish.

Erika gives him a reprimanding look and he slumps in his chair with a sigh.

NATALIA

There's no point in taking action if you get caught. In the war, we figured out that we'd get more done if we didn't have the Gestapo breathing down our necks every three seconds.

PETER

You were in the resistance?

She nods.

ERIKA

What sort of work did you do?

NATALIA

A lot of different things, but I can tell you that we never needed anyone to make pamphlets and signs.

ERIKA

But that was years ago, it's different now.

NATALIA

Right, now they'll lock you in a gulag instead of a concentration camp. (Pauses) All I'm saying is if a cause is worth fighting for it's worth surviving for. The more attention you draw to yourself the more ammunition they have to take you down.

Natalia stubs out her cigarette in an ash tray on the table. Erika looks down into her coffee as they sit in an awkward silence. Erika suddenly rises from the table.