

# The Baby

A play in one act

By Owen J. Lewis

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**The Baby**

**A play in one act**

**By**

**Owen J. Lewis**

*(Director's Note)*

*It is essential that the ending of this play must never be revealed either by yourself or your cast. Not even loved ones are to know the main point of this play. It is important because the reveal at the end of this short drama would be destroyed for the viewer if they knew what was coming. (Lewis 2015)*

**Cast**

Klara.....28 The Wife

Dr. Grueber.....40+The Doctor

Alois.....55+ The Husband

Grandpa Johann....70+ Alois' Father

Wolfgang....50+ Alois' friend

*The action takes place in the Spring of 1889 in a humble cottage in the Austrian village of Branau on the frontier of Austria and Bavaria. It is a modest dwelling as the family are from impoverished backgrounds but have found social mobility thanks to Alois' job in the Austrian Customs Service. He is a dour and unpleasant man Klara is so much younger than he is and seems to be if anything, a little afraid of her husband. The action begins with a visit from Dr. Grueber. He and Klara are alone and sitting at the table quite informally. (The content of this drama whilst strongly based on fact allows a little licence with the advent of new characters such as Wolfgang and Dr. Grueber.)*

Dr.

So Klara as tests confirm and I concur you are once again pregnant.

Klara

How so Doctor?

Dr.

Well it's quite simple Klara. I am certain that you don't need me to explain the facts of life to you.

Klara

*(Slightly embarrassed)* No Doctor that is one thing I don't need from you! I have to say though I have been extremely careful.

Dr.

Perhaps not careful enough Klara! You must be this time.

Klara

Doctor?

Dr.

You know what I mean Klara. How many times have we been here before?

Klara

Four.

Dr.

Yes, four. As your doctor Klara I would say you must take care, as your friend I would say watch out please, or this one just like the others might fail. I have been reading a lot of the new research coming out of Vienna and I shall be happy to share that with you.

Klara

Research? Doctor Grueber I don't know why these awful things keep happening. I should imagine all the brains in Vienna won't explain that to me, but if you have anything that will help me then I shall learn.

Dr.

Yes there are things I will advise you to do to help you to full term.

Klara

What?

Dr.

*(He writes on a piece of paper)* Now here is a title of a book by Charlotte von Siebold she has been breaking new ground in the field of gynaecology. She may help you. I believe this book will give you more than I can proffer. You should go to the library and get a copy. It's going to be down to you not to lose this one. Neither I nor all the best experts can be with you twenty four hours a day. Throughout all of this experience you will be mostly on your own. Hmmm yes try this book and don't lose another, maybe?

Klara

You are really quite blunt aren't you?

Dr.

In my work Klara sometimes I have to be. It is the best approach. Expect the best and plan for the worst. So I find it helps to be so.

Klara

What, blunt?

Dr.

Klara I have been your Doctor for many years now. In the past I have tried to help you, but I feel you don't hear what I'm telling you.

Klara

What do you mean?

Dr.

Four babies lost Klara. Forgive me for saying so; but I have supervised you from afar in the past. I am not prepared to make that mistake again.

Klara

I don't understand. What do you mean you're not prepared to make the same mistakes? They weren't your pregnancies.

Dr.

No they weren't, but you are my responsibility.

Klara

Oh?

Dr.

I am ultimately concerned about the preservation of life. Be it you, me, or even the tramp in the street Klara, that is what I do. The preservation of the life of an unborn baby is my premier responsibility.

Klara

I don't understand you; I mean I don't understand what you are saying.

Dr.

It's about what we are calling your pre-natal state. By helping you through this I am not only preserving your life but the new life that you carry inside.

Klara

A new life? I had never thought of that.

Dr.

Well Klara you really should.

Klara

Should what?

Dr.

Think about it. If you don't we will be in the same circumstances as we have been in four times already.

Klara

What can I do differently?

Dr.

Everything Klara; I can only imagine; everything.

Klara

I don't get you.

Dr.

If we are to bring a new life into this world, a helpless tiny baby, then there are things that we both must do.

Klara

You make it sound like you are the one that is to carry this thing.

Dr.

If only I were.

Klara

I don't like what you are saying.

Dr.

Why?

Klara

You make it sound like I lost the other four on purpose.

Dr.

No Klara I don't think so for a minute. What I am saying is there are new thinkings; new ideas to help you carry to full term and present us all with a beautiful new life. A tiny little bundle. I am damned if I, God or nature will fail you again.

Klara

I never thought of it like that.

Dr.

Well maybe I did. Maybe I could have done something different.

Klara

What?

Dr.

Pardon?

Klara

I said what do you think you could have done differently?

Dr.

Just everything.

Klara

Please Doctor, cease your this contrition. If you think you did something wrong how do you think it makes me feel?

Dr.

You must look forward, we both must. Don't feel responsible and don't feel reprimanded. You are neither. Just this time it's going to work. If, heaven forbid, you lose this one then there will be nothing either of can do. However, there is plenty we can both do to make certain you don't. Well as certain as these things allow. I shall come and see you weekly initially and as we get nearer the time I shall see you at least twice weekly. After eight months, Klara, I shall be like a shadow on you. I do believe you may well get sick of the sight of me, but Klara, this is unique. I have many, many patients on my books as you can imagine, but not one of them and I mean not one, other than you, has so tragically failed in four pregnancies. Not one Klara, not one!

Klara

Failed? You are saying that I have failed. Do you mean in my pregnancies or as a woman?

Dr.

Forgive me Klara, ( *tuts and says to himself*, Explanations?) my use of the word is merely to reflect what has gone before. I do not see *you* as a failure and I am sorry to mislead. What I am talking about is my failure to do the simplest of things, to preserve life. So in that way I use the word failed merely to represent the past. However, we are now working for a new future. Forget the past Klara, maybe it was God's will but if he is a God of mercy then this time he will not let you down and neither will I.

Klara

God's will?

Dr.

I am a Doctor and a scientist. There is no scientific reason that I can see, you are strong and young, all I am saying is there is a higher being deciding all our fates. The four you lost maybe weren't meant to be but God or not, well you know....

Klara

It's not God I fear.

Dr.

Oh? I do!

Klara

Well I don't. If he has taken my four beautiful babies, if it was his responsibility and he deprived me, then I don't fear him so much as loath him!

Dr.

Klara!

Klara

I mean it Doctor. How can I even believe he is real if this is what he has done to me?

Dr.

God moves in mysterious ways Klara.

Klara

Is that the scientific reason?

Dr.

No Klara it's not. It's just that, (*pause*) oh forget it please do.

Klara

Doctor I do believe you are holding back on me.

Dr.

No I'm not holding back on you. All I am doing, well, all I am saying, all I am suggesting is that there are things that both of us can do to prevent number five from joining all the others.

Klara

Thank you for your candour Doctor Grueber. Elucidate please do.

Dr.

It is hard for me to elucidate without hurting you and I care not to. All I can say is this. This time we shall work through this together. This seed of life, this embryonic infant shall live. I will make sure, as you will too, that we shall not do anything to risk that precious gift.

Klara

Gift? Gift you say? In all my pregnancies I never felt I was being gifted.

Dr.

What did you feel Klara?

Klara

I can't say

Dr.

Can't say because you don't know or can't say because you don't want to?

Klara

I can't say because I don't know. How do I know that all my pregnancies won't end in this way?

Dr.

Because I say so! This one will live Klara. If I retire tomorrow it will not be said that there was something I missed. I refuse to let this one go Klara.

Klara

I am scared Doctor. There you are that's it. You ask me how I felt or how I feel. My answer is simple; scared: Terrified that I will go on losing them until it's too late for me to try.

Dr.

Now I thank you for your candour Klara but let me in. Let me help, together we will succeed.

Klara

It's not you who's going through it though Dr. Grueber.

Dr.

No Klara but I will involve myself to such a point that I shall feel I am carrying it.

Klara

Yes but you won't be will you? It will be me. Broken Klara, the woman who can't give birth. The woman who is cursed; just stupid Klara.



Dr.

Now you are being ridiculous Klara. One thing science has taught me is that whilst God moves in mysterious ways, science moves in a stranger one.

Klara

Science. What that has to do with anything I don't know.

Dr.

As yet Klara I know not also, however God or science this time we will be victorious. I will make sure that I shall do everything in my power, as you will I am sure, to make sure this little boy or little girl will survive. Of that we will be certain.

Klara

Forgive me for not sharing your certainty Doctor Grueber.

Dr.

Klara you must. Together both you and I will ensue that this time, this child, this unborn child will make it. We will prevail.

Klara.

Forgive me Doctor but when you are eating sauerkraut and coal, then I will see that we are both in this together.

Dr.

Ha Klara, you make me smile. Sauerkraut and coal eh?

Klara

It's been known.

Dr.

If I have to eat such a ghastly riposte to ensure that we will not fail then bring me my knife and fork and maybe a strong pair of nutcrackers to make sure the coal comes in palatable sizes. Ha Ha

Klara

Hmmm? What a scientific feast.

Dr.

Scientific or not Klara I shall not let you lose another. I will not. What about you Klara are you ready for a baby?

Klara

I am, not sure about Alois though. I imagine he'll come round but I don't know.

Dr.

I would worry about him later. There's nothing that can be done now.

Klara

I will not blame you or anyone else if I lose this one. As for Alois there is only thing he had to do in this and he's done that.

Dr.

Rather well I should suggest. But apportioning blame already before the baby is even born is a little premature.

Klara

Maybe it is Dr. Grueber but I am hoping for the best and am preparing for the worst.

Dr.

That's good to hear but put it from your mind Klara, banish those thoughts. This baby will live. I just know we can do this. I just know.

*(Lights fade...lights up Klara is doing some dusting Alois and Wolfgang enter they are both a little drunk, they stumble in. They take their coats off and sit around the kitchen table.)*

Wolfgang

And so my good friend I am only here for the schnapps you spoke of, get it out!

Alois

Oh my friend slow down a little perhaps we should at least get our coats off. *(Laughter: Then they take coats off and sit around the kitchen table.)*

Wolfgang

There will be time enough for coats when there are no schnapps.

Alois

*(With no formal greeting)* Klara, get the schnapps from the cellar. We are thirsty.

Klara

Yes my husband.

*(She exits)*

Wolf

She's a fine looking lady your Klara.

Alois

Oh really? Maybe that extra stein was a mistake.

Wolf

Don't you think so?

Alois

She is plain and she is a bore.

Wolf

I can't agree.

Alois

Have her, go on take her. I mean it friend she is nothing but a barren cow; good for nothing but flicking dust and making food. She also likes fucking.

*(Long embarrassed pause 5 beats)*

Wolf

Oh Alois I was only joking with you.

Alois

I wasn't.

*(The men are both sat at the table now Wolfgang takes out his pipe)*

Wolf

May I?

Alois

Yes please be my guest.

Wolf

So that story, that story you didn't finish at the tavern please go on.

Alois

Where were we?

Wolf

( *He lights his pipe slowly savouring it*) I think we were up to your third wife and the nine hundredth child you have sired throughout all of Austria.

Alois

Ha you have a fine mind for detail. But I don't believe I said it was nine hundred.

Wolf

No you didn't but it sounds like that had been your objective for sometime.

Alois

Maybe, then. Ha those were the days.

Wolf

Past tense? Has the bear decided to go back to his cave for good?

Alois

Meaning?

Wolf

Have your objectives

changed?

Alois

I am getting old, things are changing.

Wolf

What is this one going to work?

Alois

What do you mean?

Wolf

This marriage? The good Lord above knows how many times I have stopped myself using the wrong name for the wife you might have had at any one time.

Alois

I watched a stick once in the river. I saw it run, I saw it bob and sail by gladly, midstream powering its way to the sea. A week or so later I saw that very same stick and it was caught in the bank. The river was slower and it had caught my stick on an overhanging willow tree. How different now it was. That liberty, that vibration, that strength all sapped and gone; as the river

had disempowered it voyage. I realised we are all just sticks, in the river and maybe we chose to slow down , maybe we sink maybe we get caught. I realised then only a few maintain that speed and strength and make it to the sea.

Wolf

Which are you the stick or the river?

Alois

Ignore me my friend, I am drunk and rambling. Where the hell is my schnapps? *(He gets up from the table and crosses to the door and calls)* Klara, Klara, where the hell is my schnapps?

*(Off stage)*

Klara

Coming *(she enters with a bottle and two glasses)* I had to wash it, it was thick with dust.

Alois

The sign of a goodly matured schnapps I would argue. *(He holds the bottle up and inspects it)* Ah yes the drink of a gentleman.

Wolf

What are you doing with it then eh?

Alois

If I didn't know you better I would take that as an insult Mein heren!

Wolf

Sit down and pour there was none intended.

Klara

Do you require anything else?

Wolf

No I just require you to leave us men to talk. Don't disturb us and come only when called.

Klara

Yes Husband. *(She exits)*

Wolf

I will say it again you have a good one there.

Alois

Say it all you like I have told you how it is. Anyway they are like dogs. Train them well and they won't bite.

Wolf

And the training, how's it going?

Alois

I feel I am wasting my time on this lowly bitch.

Wolf

You say some funny things Al you really do.

Alois

In that case I suggest we raise our glasses and drink to pedigree.

Wolf

I think you are drunk.

Alois

In vino veritas.

Wolf

What does that mean?

Alois

It means we will raise our glasses and drink to truth.

*(They clink their glasses and together they say Prost)*

Wolf

*(Exhales with a satisfied aaaaaah!)*

What did you do? You know before you ended up here in Branau?

Alois

I worked for a cobbler in Vienna.

Wolf

Really?

Alois

I did . I'm not proud of it nor am I ashamed.

Wolf

One should never be ashamed of one's work. So why aren't there a chain of cobblers shops all over Vienna by now with your name over the door?

Alois

Because I hated it. The money was poor. The hours were long. The blacking would die my hands until I couldn't wash them clean. I didn't like the boss, he was mean with his money and with his tongue. I gave it up.

Wolf

What with nothing to go to? Very brave.

Alois

No it was then I joined the customs service.

Wolf

Was that a self promotion?

Alois

Well I was able to throw my leather apron away and wear a suit. The money was suitably more impressive and here I am now 55 and retired. I have a few schillings put away and I need never work again.

Wolf

Never work again. Every man's dream really. All the time in the world to do nothing in: Sounds like a dream.

Alois

Does it, does it really? Stuck with a Barren bitch at an age when I will find no more women willing. I get up, I go into Branau, I drink and I come home. We sometimes speak, more often than not we don't: I go to sleep, I wake up and do the same again. Not a perfect dream, believe me.

Wolf

I would swap with you. Market trading is pure grafting. I make just enough to keep my impoverished roof over my impoverished head and that's it.

Alois

Oh look at us; a man with no schnapps is a poor man, a man with schnapps is the richest man in the world. Let's drink to our wealth.

*(Prost again, they drink)*

Wolf

Maybe some children about the place would employ you suitably?

Alois

I told you she is useless, no worse than useless. She has lost four in a row. She cannot carry a pregnancy off. That ship as they say, has not only left port but is bowing under full sail in a strong wind. I am in the north as the ship sails south. No there's nothing like that in my future. Nothing at all!

Wolf

I never took a wife; never felt the need.

Alois

Oh?

Wolf

When your poor and only have one bowl of soup. It's best you eat it all and not just half. Two people into one bowl of soup won't go. If there is one thing I like is a full bowl of soup all to myself. *(pause 1 beat)* It's a good job I don't think like that about schnapps!

Alois

Well yes I suppose it is.

*(They clink glasses again. And again together say prost...lights down.)*

*(Lights up Klara enters and Wolfgang is asleep on the chair. He wakes looks at Klara and it obvious he is heavily hung over.)*

Klara

Oh Wolfgang you stayed! Alois didn't stay

Wolf

Ah, Wie viel Uhr ist es? *(Translates: What time is it?)*

Klara

Just after seven.