

GOLDEN

by Lance Arthur Smith (smitty lancearthur@hotmail.com, 310-903-3678)

SYNOPSIS:

Blonde-haired, tall, and stunning (the Aryan ideal) Helene Mayer displayed unmatched skill with a fencing foil. She was the pride of Germany, with a gold medal in the 1928 Olympics and a staggering array of victories. She was also a Jew and after the infamous Nuremberg Laws denied Jews their German citizenship, she found herself stripped of all privilege to fence for her country. She fled west and found a new life in the United States.

With America and several other countries threatening to boycott the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games over the issue of anti-Semitism, Hitler and his Nazi Party scrambled to improve public relations. For the duration of the August Games, the German capital would be declared a hate-free city. As a show of "good faith", the Third Reich also proclaimed that Helene Mayer would be brought home to fence for the fatherland. As Hitler's token Jewish Olympian she was determined to regain her citizenship, while shielding her family from Hitler's wrath.

The following sample contains the last 10 pages of Act One, approximately three and one-third scenes.

Helene, having just finished a disappointing fifth in the 1932 Los Angeles Olympics, becomes stranded in America by virtue of a rescinded exchange status, and decides to accept an offer to teach German and fencing in the bay area at Mills College. She's shown the campus by school President Dr. Aurelia Reinhardt and meets an athletic student named Bea.

(CONT'D) TWENTY. CONTINUOUS. EXT. MILLS COLLEGE DRIVEWAY, MILLS HALLWAYS, HELENE'S PRIVATE APARTMENT, AND FINALLY THE MILLS FENCING STUDIO .

Helene nods to Bea as she enters the STUDIO. Bea practices her lunges.

BEA

Height has its advantages with this sport. I also play basketball and volleyball.

Displayed on the wall are two flags: that of the UNITED STATES and, next to it, the black, red, and gold-striped GERMAN flag.

HELENE

A little piece of home, eh?

REINHARDT

A reminder.. I was sorry to hear of President von Hindenburg's passing. I understand you two were close.

HELENE

As close as one can be to a world leader. He was a good man. He did his best. Now to this.

She gestures around her.

REINHARDT

My hope is that this studio will suffice as a place to begin. Small introductory lessons and the like.

HELENE

I had some thoughts about that, Dr. Reinhardt. A fencing club, perhaps, with an eye toward competition? I myself will be preparing for your National foil championships next year in New York City. I've had such a good time in previous trips, and the metropolis was inviting.

A MAN appears in another area of the stage, decked out in a German officer's garb.

REINHARDT

There are certainly many opportunities for social enrichment- Northern California, particularly the Bay Area, is transforming into a nightlife mecca.

Helene notices him and smiles. Reinhardt and Bea continue their activity.

REINHARDT (cont'd)

Maybe not as many opportunities as New York City, nor the erudite Land of Los Angeles, but you'll find a more sophisticated form of diversion here.

Removing her long outer jacket, Helene reveals a dazzling BLACK VELVET GOWN.

HELENE

Thank you, again, Dr. Reinhardt, for your warmth.

Reinhardt nods, crossing out of the scene. Helene makes her way across stage, deposits her outer garment, and moves into a new space. Bea fades away.

TWENTY-ONE. MARK HOPKINS HOTEL BANQUET HALL (THE ROOM OF THE DONS); A NIGHTLY PARTY. EARLY SPRING, 1935.

LIGHTS SHIFT to inside the hotel. It's inviting, yet more low key than one might expect. Elegance and taste reign supreme.

The German Officer she spied in the previous scene (JOACHIM) turns, and the two continue a conversation begun hours earlier.

HELENE

(laughing)

You say that, Joachim, yet I've never seen you or your friend-

JOACHIM

Horst.

HELENE

Horst! Yes, I've never seen you at one of these parties.

JOACHIM

Well-

HELENE

And I'm here at least once a month!

They laugh, she louder than he.

HELENE (cont'd)

Where is Horst? He's been gone for half the evening.

JOACHIM

Ah, who knows? More champagne?

HELENE

Yes, let us.

They meander over to the bar. Joachim nods at the bartender, drops some bills, and presents Helene with her glass.

JOACHIM

Zum Wohl!

HELENE

Zum Wohl!

They clink glasses and drink.

JOACHIM

How far is Oakland?

HELENE

Not far. An easy drive.

Bea hurries in, adjusting a slip.

HELENE (cont'd)

Ah, Joachim! This is my dear Bea.

BEA

Joachim! A pleasure.

(to Helene)

Sorry I was detained.

HELENE

Not at all.

BEA

(to Joachim)

After the saint?

JOACHIM

(slyly)

I don't believe so, no.

HELENE

Joachim has a friend, Bea.

BEA

Is he handsome?

JOACHIM

I suppose. He speaks no English. So you may call him what you will. But his name is-

BEA/JOACHIM

Horst!

Both wave to a German Officer who has just entered. He, too, adjusts his clothing a bit.

Bea takes his arm, smiling.

BEA

This is my ... new friend, Horst. We met in the elevator.

HELENE

Yes. He is stationed with Joachim on the Karlsruhe. We've met, briefly.

Horst smiles, gleaned all he needs from the awkward pause.

BEA

Well, perhaps a dance? Horst?

HORST

Yes to dance. Goodbye!

Bea and Horst waltz off.

JOACHIM

It's been a long evening, and yet they twirl.

HELENE

I'm tired.

JOACHIM

I have a room.

HELENE

Of course you do.

JOACHIM

A dance first?

HELENE

(leaning in)

No. We each know what we really want. *Lass uns gehen.*

She kisses his cheek and exits.

Joachim stands processing what has just happened. He looks to Horst, who grins widely as he twirls with Bea.

Joachim finishes his drink and exits rapidly after Helene.

TWENTY-TWO. PENTHOUSE, 19TH FLOOR, MARK HOPKINS HOTEL. ONE WEEK LATER.

Wispy curtains billow out onto a small BALCONY.
Helene parts them, resplendent in a silky robe. She peers out over the horizon.

Hands reach from the curtains behind her. JOACHIM steps into view, and places his hands on Helene's shoulders. He kisses her head. She smiles in appeasement, though not in love.

HELENE

It's nearly finished.

JOACHIM

What do the Americans call it?

HELENE

The Golden Gate Bridge.

JOACHIM

It will be stunning. All that beauty next to a prison. That Alcatraz is disgusting.

HELENE

It's a prison. How beautiful should it be?

Helene shivers in the air. Joachim retrieves a blanket from inside and wraps her in it.

HELENE (cont'd)

Thank you.

JOACHIM

(pointing)

And past all that, I can see my girl. The Karlsruhe. I should thank Captain Lütjens and his damned training exercises for bringing me to you!

HELENE

(in thought)

Training exercises...

JOACHIM

Yes, they're abominable but...

She's silent. ALEXANDER GELHAR appears, shimmering, briefly. Then he's gone.

JOACHIM (cont'd)

Have I offended?

HELENE

No. I was thinking of a friend on a ship, from long ago.

She kisses him and points to the harbor.

HELENE (cont'd)

She's beautiful. Powerful. You could toss me on board, whisk me back to Germany, and we could ride horseback along the Rhine.

JOACHIM

I have been away from home for too long. Perhaps one day...

HELENE

Why not now?

Helene caresses his cheek. Joachim shirks back, holding her hand.

JOACHIM

We've been honest with each other thus far. We need not start deceiving each other now. You know that I'm aware you are a Jew. And that is... complicated for me back home.

HELENE

For you? It's far more complicated for me, considering I am not Jewish.

JOACHIM

You are. By our own country's lawful definition, you are.

She turns away, boiling.

JOACHIM (cont'd)

I don't care, truly.

HELENE

(whirling on him)

But you do! Oh yes you do. It compelled you to say something.

(beat)

That is why this will end.

JOACHIM

Well, it wasn't going to last forever. But for now, the Fatherland is far, far away. We should enjoy this city, this harbor, together.

HELENE

Then let us enjoy it.

She kisses him roughly, SHOVES him through the doorway. The curtains billow as the SUN RISES.

A radio somewhere else CRACKLES to life.

TWENTY-THREE. MILLS FENCING STUDIO, EVENING OF SEPTEMBER 15,
1935- THE NUREMBERG ANNOUNCEMENT.

In darkness, a GERMAN VOICE speaks. It is that of
JOSEPH GOEBBELS, the Reich Minister of Propaganda.

GOEBBELS (VO)

Die Gesetze zum Schutze des deutschen Blutes und der deutschen Ehre...

THE FENCING STRIP illuminates. A fencing practice dummy with various targets etched onto its stuffed frame. Helene stands still, her blade at her side. She focuses on the dummy while processing the radio announcement.

Goebbels slowly transitions into English for our ears.

GOEBBELS (VO) (cont'd)

...durch den verstand bewegt, dass the purity of German blood is essential to the further existence of the German people, and inspired by the uncompromising determination to safeguard the future of the German nation, the Reichstag has unanimously resolved upon the following law, which is promulgated herewith.

A QUICK THRUST, testing the dummy. Helene focuses, STRIKES again.

GOEBBELS (VO) (cont'd)

Section 1. Marriages between Jews and citizens of German or kindred blood are forbidden. Section 2. Extramarital sexual relations between Jews and German or related blood is forbidden.

She LUNGES again, harder.

GOEBBELS (VO) (cont'd)

Section 3. Jews will not be permitted to employ female citizens under the age of 45, of German or kindred blood, as domestic workers. Section 4. Jews are forbidden to display the Reich and national flag or the national colors.

Helene takes a moment to look up at the German flag. She closes her eyes, pictures another place.

LIGHTS slowly up on HELENE'S FAMILY. They sit in their home, listening to the radio.

Helene resumes her aggressive assault on the practice dummy. BLOW after BLOW begins to splinter the dummy's straw.

GOEBBELS (VO) (cont'd)

Section 5. A person who acts contrary to the prohibition of Section 1 will be punished with hard labor. A person who acts contrary to the prohibition of Section 2 will be punished with imprisonment or with hard labor. A person who acts contrary to the provisions of Sections 3 or 4 will be punished with imprisonment up to a year and with a fine.

On the other side of the stage, EUGEN places a hand on his mother and little brother. Shakes his head. LUDWIG JR. holds his mother's hand. Their light FADES OUT.

GOEBBELS (VO) (cont'd)

This law will become effective on the day after its promulgation, today being the fifteenth day of September, nineteen hundred and thirty-five. From this day onward, no Jew can become a Reich Citizen, because German blood is a prerequisite in the Reich citizenship code. This is our land, and our law!

Panting, Helene lunges with such force that she
KNOCKS OVER the dummy.

In a sweat, Helene RIPS DOWN the studio's GERMAN
FLAG, and holds it in her hands. She looks up at the
AMERICAN flag.

In disgust she tosses the German flag in the air,
SLASHES it to the floor with her blade and steps away.

The German stripes catch the light. Helene looks, sighs,
and walks back to the crumpled symbol. She unfolds it.
Places it as best as she can back up next to the American
Flag.

END ACT ONE.