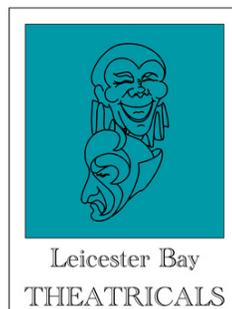


PERUSAL SCRIPT

THE ICE FRONT

by
Eric Samuelson



Newport, Maine

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THE ICE FRONT

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THE ICE FRONT by Eric Samuelsen received its world premiere November 9-19, 2017 at Plan-B Theatre Company. Directed by Jerry Rapier, stage managed by Jennifer Freed (assisted by Michael Scott Johnson), and designed by K.L. Alberts (costumes), Cheryl Cluff (sound), Keven Myhre (set), David Rees (lighting), and Arika Schockmel (props). Featuring Daniel Beecher as Peter, Ariana Broumas Farber as Mette, Mark Fossen as Morten, Stephanie Howell as Birgit, Jay Perry as Egil, Topher Rasmussen as Heinrich, Robert Scott Smith as Anders, Emilie Starr as Bente and Christy Summerhays as Astrid. Special thanks to dramaturg Greg Hatch.

THE ICE FRONT was developed as part of Pioneer Theatre Company's Play-By-Play Series and funded in part by the Venturous Theater Fund of the Tides Foundation.

CAST OF CHARACTERS— 4f 5m

BIRGIT—Stage manager

METTE—Assistant stage manager

PETER—Character actor, mid-forties

ASTRID—Leading lady

ANDERS—Leading man

EGIL—Youthful lead

BENTE—Ingenué

MORTEN—Artistic Director, Norwegian National Theatre

HEINRICH—German soldier, maybe 22

TIME—Spring, 1943

SETTING—The Norwegian National Theatre in Oslo, the mainstage, rehearsal spaces, conference rooms, green rooms, and offices, and also in various apartments, pubs and restaurants in the downtown Oslo area, in the spring and early fall of 1943. All locations are best suggested with a few chairs and tables, with action smoothly flowing from scene to scene and location to location. Changes in location all directed by BIRGIT, who visibly stage manages throughout. She calls cues, and lights or sound respond. She points to actors, and they move scenery pieces. She runs the show.)

THE ICE FRONT by Eric Fielding 4f 5m Interior Setting of a theatre, using props and furniture.

Costumes of 1943. About 110 minutes. ***It takes courage to pretend to be someone you are not in order to be who you are.*** The traitorous takeover of Norway by the Nazis during WW2 was not well received by the vast majority of the Norwegians; especially the acting community. The actors of the Norwegian National Theatre find themselves in an uneasy truce with Nazi cultural authorities during the German occupation. Distrust rises to defiance when they are forced to perform a Nazi propaganda piece, conscience comes face-to-face with The Final Solution. Several of the actors were murdered. The remainder were either imprisoned, or forced to flee to neutral Sweden, where they waited out the war. After the war, laws were changed in Norway to allow the execution of traitors. Those responsible for the invasion and the betrayals paid with their lives. *THE ICE FRONT* honors the heroism of and dangers faced by the trilogy of Nazi victims – Jews, Roma, and Homosexuals – by questioning what it means to be an artist, to be a patriot, to be human. Premiered by Plan-B Theatre Company, Salt Lake City, Utah in 2017. **ORDER #3273**

Eric Samuelsen taught at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio before joining the faculty at Brigham Young University in 1992. He became head of the Playwriting program at BYU in 1999. He has also taught as an adjunct faculty member in the Religion department. He retired from BYU in 2012.

As a playwright, Samuelsen has had twenty-seven plays professionally produced in Utah, Indiana, Louisiana, New York, and California. Some of his plays include *Gadianton*, which has seen three professional productions across the country, *A Love Affair with Electrons*, *Family*, *The Plan*, and *The Way We're Wired*. He is resident playwright at Plan-B Theatre Company in Salt Lake City, who designated their 2013-14 season a 'Season of Eric, including productions of six of his plays.

He is a member of the Playwrights' Circle, and the Dramatists Guild. He is three-time winner of the Annual Award in Playwriting offered by the Association for Mormon Letters (AML) and he became president of AML in 2007. In 2013 the organization awarded him the Smith Pettit Award for his lifetime work as a playwright.

He has been a staff writer for the on-line satirical magazine *The Sugarbeet*. He was also featured in the book *Conversations with Mormon Authors*, edited by Chris Bigelow. He is a noted Ibsen translator, and has also published scholarly articles on 19th and 20th century Scandanavian Theatre, and more recently, on LDS drama and film. He blogged at Mormoniconoclast.com. Eric died in September of 2019 after a long battle with polymyositis. This has left a huge hole in the Theatre Community within, and outside of, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

It has taken me 30 years to write *THE ICE FRONT*.

While living in Norway for three years, I found the story I could use as the vehicle for this celebration in my research files from my doctoral dissertation. In 1990, in the Norwegian National Theatre archives, I discovered the story of *SISTE SKRIK* (aka *THE LAST SCREAM*), a Nazi propaganda play that became a battleground between the actors of the National, and the Quisling Cultural Ministry.

I loved the material I found, but I was also somewhat intimidated by it. Draft after draft fell short of my expectations, so I set it aside. It did, however, revive a lot of family stories for me.

My grandparents, Ragnar and Ellik Samuelsen, lived in Moss, right at the mouth of Oslo fjord. Their house was right on the beach; my Dad swam in the ocean every morning growing up. He was seven when the occupation began, twelve when it ended, in 1945. His sister, Turid, was four years younger. My father had a boat as a kid (having a boat was, for Norwegian kids, like having a bike for American kids). I grew up with stories about the occupation. My grandmother's brother, my Great-Uncle Henry Evensen was a PT boat captain, tasked with making the dangerous run from England to the Norwegian west coast, carrying munitions and explosives. Uncle Henry was a war hero—one of the most highly decorated military officers in Norwegian history. I knew him a little. When we went back to Norway with my Dad (he'd emigrated to the United States in 1950), we'd always see Uncle Henry; he'd take us on his boat (which is now preserved as a museum), and then tell us stories about Viking chiefs of the past. I put it all together in my head: Vikings=Norwegian Resistance fighters=Uncle Henry=my family.

It wasn't quite that simple. Uncle Henry, I later learned, though a kind and gentle and talented man, was essentially incapacitated by untreated PTSD; he fought alcoholism his whole life, tormented by his war memories. His brother, Uncle Fridtjoff, was a local Resistance coordinator during the war; he became a bitter and abusive and angry man.

For most Norwegians, though, the war years were filled with deprivation, but not quite hunger. My grandfather (who I always called Bestefar, just as I called my grandmother Bestemor) worked at the Moss glass factory at a decent wage, but buying food was difficult. It was rationed, and in addition to money, you needed the right ration coupon to buy anything. My Dad said that his job, when he got home from school, was to go fishing. He'd take his little sailboat out into the fjord, and fish for cod or halibut. He thought it was fun; a lark, and a way out of homework. Years later he realized that the fish he caught were dinner, most

nights. Bestefar, meanwhile, after work, would ride his bicycle thirty kilometers or more from town, looking for small farms where he could buy some milk for his kids. All very black market, of course, but that was how things worked.

Still, compared with other countries conquered by the Germans, Norway was treated with comparative benevolence, at least at first. The Nazis' insane racial theories suggested that Norwegians were ethnic cousins to Germans. Surely, in time, Norwegians would come to realize that Resistance to Naziism wasn't just counter-productive, it was racially blinkered. And so, a major cultural institution like the Norwegian National Theatre in Oslo was not just kept open, but heavily subsidized. In time, the theory went, Norwegians would come to their senses.

Mostly, this didn't happen. Norwegian saboteurs destroyed troop ships and bridges and factories. Most Norwegians were expert skiiers, and could swoop down, strike a German target, then ski home. Plans would be hatched in England, and Resistance fighters would execute them, fully aware of how broad popular support would be, and how easy to hide in plain sight.

My grandmother tells a story about a day when she was hanging out her wash on the back line. She could see a German troop ship steaming down Oslo fjord, heading to Germany. Suddenly, an explosion rocked the ship, and she could see it sink, and she could hear the cries of drowning German soldiers. She had a boat; she was an accomplished sailor and rower; she was perfectly capable of rescuing some of the men. She looked up and down the beach, and could see all her neighbors, all making the same calculations. Men were drowning; they could help, perhaps rescue at least a few. Calm seas, the wind fair for an attempt. And one by one, she watched her neighbors take their laundry and go inside. Yes, men were drowning. But they were Germans; the enemy. There was a war on. No. She would do nothing. A few hours later, a German patrol knocked on her door. They were furious, and shouted 'what had she seen, what had she done?' She told them that she had seen nothing. What sinking troop ship? I never saw anything of the kind. That was the only answer the Germans got from any of the women on the beach. She was a little afraid, she told me once, that the Germans would shoot her as an example. But if that happened, she was prepared for it.

The other big story I grew up with involved the destruction, by the Norwegian Resistance, of a heavy water plant in Northern Norway. In Vemork, Norsk Hydro built a commercial heavy water plant, for use as fertilizer. Heavy water—deuterium oxide—was also an essential component in the creation of nuclear weapons. The Allies were worried about that heavy water being used in the German nuclear program, and so, in October, 1942, a joint British-Norwegian task force, Operation Grouse, attempted to destroy the plant and water. It failed, and the Resistance members in the attack were captured and executed. But then, in March 1943, in Operation Gunnarside, the Norwegians tried again, this time without British assistance. They managed to destroy the plant and the heavy water, and then ski 400 kilometers to safety in neutral Sweden. Military experts call it the most successful and important sabotage mission of the entire Second World War. And it's possible that, without that plant's destruction, that Hitler may have had working nuclear weapons before the Allies did. Not likely, but possible.

On the other hand, we mustn't pretend that there weren't collaborators, or that Norwegian policeman weren't crucially important when the Germans tried to round up Norwegian Jews. Among the most prominent Norwegian collaborators were two artist-celebrities. Novelist and playwright Knut Hamsun won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1920. In 1940, he was 80 years old, and estranged from his children. A pro-Nazi caregiver worked on his failing mind, and in 1942, he was able to travel to Germany and meet both Hitler and Joseph Goebbels, a meeting that so impressed him that he gave Goebbels the medal he'd been given with his Nobel Prize. After the war, Hamsun was briefly arrested for treason, but after medical evaluation, the court let him off with a small fine.

Also, the Wagnerian soprano Kirsten Flagstad was accused of being a Nazi sympathizer. She was living in the U.S., performing at the Met, when Norway fell, in 1941. Her husband Henry Johansen remained in Norway, and asked her to join him, which, with much trepidation, she did. Johansen made a fortune during the war, profiteering on lumber and shipping, while Flagstad was allowed by the Nazi cultural officials to

tour, though only to neutral Sweden and Switzerland. She was probably not actually a Nazi sympathizer, but her activities damaged her reputation badly after the war.

But, then, there was also Quisling, of course, and his Nasjonal Samling party members. Their numbers weren't consistent, but at their peak, there may have been as many as 100,000 NS members nationwide. When the Germans looked like they were winning, NS numbers went up; when it looked like the Germans were losing, NS members drifted away.

When the war ended, Quisling government officials were all arrested, and tried, but most escaped with small fines or short imprisonments. The exception was Quisling himself. The Norwegian criminal code did not have a provision for the death penalty. So Parliament passed a law mandating death as the penalty for acts of treason in 1940. They tried Quisling under that statute, and shot him, then rescinded the law. Norwegians really didn't like Vidkun Quisling.

So, in 1990, I was in Norway to do research for my doctoral dissertation. I mostly spent my days in the archives of the Oslo University Library, which has a wonderful collection of theatre materials from all the theatre companies in the country. The one exception was the National Theatre; they kept their own archive, under their estimable company dramaturg, Arthur Holmoien. So those were my two main haunts; the National Theatre archive, and the Oslo University Library archive. (I also took quick research trips to Stockholm and Copenhagen). I became fascinated with the subject of Norwegian Resistance theatre during the war years. In Trondheim and in Bergen, theatres did provocative and daring productions of classic plays which they gave an anti-Nazi twist. They had to be careful, but they took remarkable chances, in a hostile environment. The director of the Trondelagtheatret in Trondheim, Henry Gleditsch, was the most daring of these directors, with celebrated and wickedly subversive productions of such plays as *LYSISTRATA*, *ANTIGONE*, *HENRY V* and Ibsen's *BRAND*. My dissertation dealt specifically with *BRAND* in production, which meant I needed most of one chapter just on Gleditsch. Sadly, Gleditsch, in addition to being a wonderfully transgressive theatre artist, was also a Resistance fighter. He was caught by the Gestapo after blowing up a bridge, and unceremoniously shot on the front steps of his theater building. But the National Theatre also did a *BRAND* production in 1942 (it's the only play done in every major theatre in Norway during the war).

And then, one night, as I was working away at the National Theatre archive, my new friend Arthur said 'I couldn't help but notice that you're very interested in the war years. Have you ever heard of *SISTE SKRIK* (aka *THE LAST SCREAM*)?' And Arthur told me the tale, of a playwriting contest, and this dreadful anti-Jewish play that had won and the actors' Resistance. How they set the theatre on fire to prevent the play from opening. How they even got the theatre management to let them go up to the mountains and pick lingonberries. And how, on the much delayed opening night, as the actors performed deliberately badly and inaudibly, a German soldier fired his sidearm at one of them. And how the audience began applauding, likely saving the actor's life.

A couple of years ago, a chance comment reminded me of *SISTE SKRIK* (aka *THE LAST SCREAM*), and I began once again thinking about the controversy surrounding it as the subject for a play. But unlike earlier attempts, the play came to me.

First, I wanted, as a Norwegian-American, to celebrate the courageous resolve of the Norwegian Resistance to the Nazi occupation during World War II. I grew up hearing stories from my father, my aunt, and my grandparents, about the ways ordinary Norwegians fought oppression and hardship, the day-to-day challenges and difficulties.

Second, I wanted to celebrate my family and my homeland.

Third, I wanted to celebrate the theatre. I have given my life to this magnificent art form. I love the people of the theatre, the individual grace and courage and dedication they daily exhibit.

Fourth, I wanted to honor the heroism and dangers faced by the trilogy of Nazi victims: Jews, Roma, Homosexuals.

The result is *THE ICE FRONT*, a celebration of the courage it takes to pretend to be someone you're not in order to be who you are.

THE ICE FRONT

ACT ONE

BIRGIT: Let's get oriented. Oslo, Norway, the National Theatre, Parliament just to our east, the Royal Palace a little north and west, just off Karl Johan's Street. In the courtyard, guarding the theatre entrance, sculptures of Ibsen and Bjørnson. Sound and lights, go.

PETER: (*faint explosions in the distance*) On April 9, 1940, Norway learned the meaning of a new word in modern warfare.

BIRGIT: Standby sound, lights, smoke.

PETER: Blitzkrieg.

BIRGIT: Go.

SFX: a battle

BENTE: Simultaneous air attacks on the Oslo and Stavanger airports.

EGIL: Destroyers, troop ships, paratroopers.

BENTE: Trondheim, key to the North, fell in a matter of hours.

BIRGIT: Standby, act of treason.

EGIL: King Haakon barely escaped to England.

BIRGIT: Go.

SFX: a portion of a recording of Quisling's speech of April 9, 1940, then

ANDERS: Vidkun Quisling, a former cabinet minister, broadcast a message on the radio, ordering Norwegian forces to stand down, and declaring Norway's 'liberation.'

BENTE: And the world added a new word to its collective vocabulary: quisling. Traitor.

EGIL: Quisling was named Prime Minister, two years later.

ANDERS: It took the Germans that long to trust the bastard.

ASTRID: A puppet, a figurehead.

ANDERS: Cabinet ministries were staffed by Quisling loyalists.

EGIL: Norway's actual ruler was a German.

PETER: Reichskommissar Joseph Terboven.

BENTE: (*overlapping 'Terboven'*) Terboven hoped Norwegians could be persuaded to support his government.

EGIL: After all, Norwegians were, in Nazi terms, racial cousins.

BENTE: Aryans. But Resistance forces fought back.

BIRGIT: Standby sound.

ASTRID: And every small victory led to a violent response.

BIRGIT: Go.

SFX: *hand-to-hand combat; gunshots*

ASTRID: Teachers were given Nazi textbooks, and ordered to teach Aryan racial superiority and anti-Jewish propaganda in schools. Norway's teachers refused, and went on strike.

ANDERS: 500 teachers were arrested, and sent to a concentration camp in the north.

ASTRID: Every school in the country closed, and Quisling had to back down.

EGIL: Underground newspapers flourished.

ANDERS: Reading one became a crime.

BENTE: A new prison appeared.

PETER: Grini prison. By Akershus.

ASTRID: And so, King Haakon, in exile, issued the Ten Commandments of the Norwegian Resistance:

BIRGIT: Go.

CAST (*split among those onstage*)

One: You shall not work in Germany, or for a German firm.

Two: You shall not sit next to German soldiers on trains or trolley cars.

Three: You shall destroy any equipment that might benefit the German war effort.

Four: You shall not attend any cultural Performance sponsored directly or indirectly by Germans or quislings.

Five: You shall protect anyone in danger of arrest by German or quisling forces.

Six: You shall not socially interact with Germans, or with quislings. Dating German soldiers is absolutely prohibited.

Seven: You shall deal with quisling traitors as they deserve. You will never shop at quisling stores.

Eight: You shall not read German or quisling newspapers.

Nine: You shall do anything in your power to support and aid the Resistance, even if it costs you your life.

Ten: If you absolutely must work for Germans or quislings, you will work slowly and badly.

(*in unison*) You will not be good at your jobs. You will make a mockery of your job.

PETER: We're actors, members of the National Theatre company.

ANDERS: Moving ahead, 1943, three years into the Nazi occupation.

BIRGIT: You need to understand this: the National is a cultural treasure, and is treated as such by Quisling. Our actors, designers, technicians are all fully paid. We've received annual raises. Petrol coupons, food coupons, travel permits. It's very important to the Germans, for propaganda purposes, that our doors stay

open. It preserves the myth of racial compatibility; maintains the fiction that it's only the wickedness of Churchill and the Americans that keeps the Aryan nations from achieving our shared cultural destiny. It's just as important for the Resistance that no Norwegians ever enter those doors. So we perform for audiences that top out at 20, in a house that seats eighteen hundred.

ANDERS: That's been our war, up to now. We're safe. We're pampered; well paid, well fed.

ASTRID: But our very presence places us at the center of a silent war.

ALL: 'The Ice Front.'

BENTE: Fought with glances and muttered asides.

ASTRID: Gossip and innuendo.

ANDERS: Aimed at us, often enough. 'Lap dogs.' 'House pets.' Collaborators.

ASTRID: To our faces! At the market! My maid does my shopping anymore.

EGIL: Attacks on our patriotism. Which I do understand.

ANDERS: Which I resent tremendously. It's not like we're doing good theatre.

PETER: Speak for yourself.

BENTE: Some of us would love to quit. But always, Grini beckons.

METTE: We're allowed to do any play we want to, as long as it's not by an English or by a Jewish playwright.

PETER: No Shakespeare. Lots of Schiller and Goethe. Hans Andersen. And Ibsen. Angry, subversive Ibsen. Deemed safe by the quisling authorities.

BIRGIT: We haven't done a new play in years. That changes; we're reading the script today. In the main conference room. Dark wood paneling, rich velvet armchairs. Paintings of former artistic directors. Nice one there, of Halfdan Christensen. A room designed to impress. Standby lights. Use your imagination. Go. I'm Birgit, by the way. I'm company stage manager. Stage managers: the staff sergeants of the theatre world. The director decides how the show will look, move, feel, what it will mean. My job is logistics, communications, schedule. Organization, duty rosters. The director directs the actors; I deal with hurt feelings and bruised egos. I'm invisible. I'm essential. And the producer signs the checks.

ASTRID: *(to audience, as MORTEN enters)* Morten Flaxness, current artistic director. A broadcaster and magazine editor, did a little film acting.

PETER: Not for us. He would never have passed our audition.

ANDERS: But he was a member of Quisling's party.

BIRGIT: *(sees MORTEN)* There you are!

MORTEN: Birgit.

BIRGIT: *(to MORTEN)* Do we have a director? Do we even have a script?

MORTEN: The script is printed; it should be here shortly.

BIRGIT: The actors are called for ten.

(PETER, ASTRID, ANDERS, EGIL and BENTE sit by and around the conference table)

MORTEN: And Halfdan is directing.

BIRGIT: Halfdan?

MORTEN: Yes.

BIRGIT: He's agreed? To direct this play?

MORTEN: You see our commitment to the piece? Let me go over your budget with you.

(MORTEN reviews papers with BIRGIT; the actors gather by the table)

ASTRID: Peter.

PETER: Astrid.

ASTRID: Hello, Anders!

ANDERS: *(embracing ASTRID; he's a hugger and a cheek kisser)* Looks like we're married again, darling.

ASTRID: Are we?

ANDERS: That's the rumor.

BENTE: You've read the play?

ANDERS: Bente, love, so good to finally work together.

BENTE: *(a little hurt)* We were in The Robbers.

ANDERS: So we were! Darling, don't take it personally; I've tried to forget every detail of that wretched show. Egil, right?

EGIL: Anders. How's life?

ANDERS: No complaints.

EGIL: And Jens?

ANDERS: I've hardly seen him lately. He's got a new product line, flying out of the store.

EGIL: Really? What's he selling?

ANDERS: Sorry, top secret, I'm afraid. But it's selling. He's had to hire two more tailors just to keep up with alterations.

BENTE: Well, thank him for me. My father says the suit Jens made for him is the first one he's ever had that fit.

ASTRID: So what do you know about the play?

ANDERS: Well, again, it's all hush-hush, darling.

BENTE: It's not hard to guess. I'm the girl next door. Either married to Egil, or dating him.

EGIL: Oh, married, I hope. And unhappily, God willing. Gives us something to play.

BENTE: Absolutely. With any luck, we're absolutely miserable!

(THEY laugh)

ANDERS: Details, one hopes, we'll learn soon enough.

BIRGIT: Halfdan's past seventy.

MORTEN: He's seventy-three, I believe.

BIRGIT: And sound of mind?

MORTEN: He's fine.

BIRGIT: *(to MORTEN)* And the script?

MORTEN: The playwright was working on it. Final touches.

BIRGIT: Designers have it? Karl's been driving me insane.

MORTEN: It's a simple box set, a studio apartment, contemporary. Hardly a costume change. And I'm giving you five weeks for rehearsal.

ASTRID: *(to BENTE)* How goes Jeppe?

BENTE: Well. Peter's amazing.

PETER: It's a strong production. So: guilt.

ANDERS: That you're acting brilliantly in a strong production?

PETER: Does it violate the Ice Front rules?

ANDERS: Piffle.

EGIL: I don't know that it matters. Nine people in the house last night.

BENTE: Eleven!

PETER: I didn't count those two soldiers. Talked through the whole first act, then left before the interval.

ASTRID: So, The National Theatre does a play in Danish, which none of us really speak, for a tiny audience of quislings and Germans, who didn't understand a word. Ah! The glamorous life of an actor.

BIRGIT: Does this play have a title?

MORTEN: The Last Scream.

BIRGIT: Really?

MORTEN: That's its title.

BIRGIT: The Last Scream? It's a ghost story?

MORTEN: Contemporary realism.

BIRGIT: He couldn't give it a real title?

(MORTEN smiles thinly)

METTE: *(enters with a box of scripts)* Scripts.

(SHE and BIRGIT sets scripts out on the table; as THEY work)

You're stage managing?

BIRGIT: For my sins.

METTE: Nobody knows anything. It's the mystery show, all rumors and gossip.

BIRGIT: Pretty sure you're my assistant. I asked for you.

(METTE smiles; MORTEN crosses to PETER)

MORTEN: I saw Jeppe last night, watched it from the booth.

PETER: Did you?

MORTEN: It was very strong. Strong production.

PETER: Thank you.

MORTEN: Pity about the audience.

(PETER shrugs, moves away; MORTEN, uncertain, crosses to ASTRID)

So, Astrid.

(SHE smiles, then turns animatedly towards ANDERS; MORTEN stands, trying to pretend he wasn't snubbed)

METTE: Listen, while I was waiting at the printer ...

BIRGIT: Printer?

METTE: I read it. Well, skimmed it.

BIRGIT: It won a contest. How bad can it ... ?

METTE: Nazi propaganda.

BIRGIT: Really.

METTE: So. Word to the wise.

BIRGIT: *(sharing a look)* Why was it at the printer?

METTE: They're doing a print run of ten thousand copies.

BIRGIT: What?

METTE: That's what they told me. I just grabbed what we needed.

BIRGIT: Ten thousand ... ? What on earth?

METTE: Lobby sales, maybe?

BIRGIT: Has to be. *(beat)* All right, then. Thanks.

METTE: I'll get copies to the designers while you read.

BIRGIT: Good.

(as METTE exits)

Actors, table reading today, we'll start shortly.

MORTEN: Yes, could I have everyone's attention please?

(THEY do not respond)

BIRGIT: Listen up, people.

(THEY respond immediately)

MORTEN: Thank you, Birgit. Cast. This is a very exciting day for us all. For the first time in many years, we'll premiere a new work by a Norwegian playwright at this theatre. You know about the national playwriting competition, and the winning entry, by Herr Trygve Reidersen.

(brief pause, while HE waits for a reaction; when none comes, HE continues, awkwardly)

Herr Reidersen is a retired schoolmaster, elderly and in poor health. He will therefore be unable to attend rehearsals, though we have made arrangements for him for opening night, five weeks hence. But we're certain that you will fall in love with his charming characters and powerful storytelling. And even more exciting, directing the play, one of the giants of our theatre's history.

ANDERS: So it is Halfdan?

MORTEN: *(smiles HIS thin smile)* Yes. Halfdan Christensen has agreed to direct. You can see the level of commitment from both this theatre's management and the Cultural Ministry itself. So I'll, um ... let you get on with it. Birgit, casting.

(MORTEN hands HER a slip of paper)

BIRGIT: All right then. Thank you, Morten. So we may as well assign roles, then. Um ...

(consults HER paper)

Peter, it looks like you'll be playing Gullstein.

PETER: Gullstein. A Jew.

(gives MORTEN a penetrating look)

A Jew. At this theatre, now?

MORTEN: What are you suggesting?

PETER: Nothing. I get to break out the red wig, again, it seems.

BIRGIT: Anders, you're Hans. An artist. And you're married to ... Sofie, which would be you, Astrid.

ANDERS: Told you so, darling.

ASTRID: Another loyal, long-suffering wife.

BIRGIT: And Bente, you and Egil are the neighbors next door, the, um, Rindahls. Tove and Magnus. All right. So. I don't know where our director ... tell you what, I'll scout around for him, we'll start in five.

PETER: We can always mark our lines.

(PETER begins doing so, with a red pencil, the other actors follow, MORTEN relaxes)

MORTEN: *(awkwardly)* Brekk et bein.

ANDERS: Thank you, Morten.

(MORTEN hesitates, sees the actors marking lines, exits.)

BIRGIT: *(to audience)* A director not present for a table reading. This is not the way we work here. Twenty minutes pass.

(Enter METTE, shaking her head)

All right. It appears that Halfdan is ... unable to join us. So ...

(Uncertain; PETER to the rescue)

PETER: If I may make a suggestion?

(BIRGIT nods)

Even without Halfdan's able guidance, I see some advantage to reading anyway. We'll want to begin memorizing. And at least we can get a sense of character relationships and objectives.

(OTHERS ad lib agreement: 'absolutely,' 'good suggestion,' 'fine by me')

BIRGIT: Absolutely. Good. That's what we'll do. Mette, if you could handle stage directions.

(THEY all sit, METTE begins)

METTE: The curtain rises on an Oslo studio apartment, inexpensively but attractively furnished.

Downstage left, a large canvas on an easel. Hans paints.

BIRGIT: And so we read. The story: Gullstein is a banker and a landlord, managing two adjacent studio apartments.

(PETER stands, looking sinister)

Hans and Sofie,

(ANDERS and ASTRID stand together)

and Magnus and Tove.

(EGIL and BENTE also form a couple)

Hans is a poor struggling artist, but brilliant ...

(ANDERS mimes painting, while ASTRID admires HIS work)

... and about to have his breakthrough, a big show at a downtown gallery. Meanwhile, in the other apartment, Gullstein has been having an affair with Tove.

(PETER embraces BENTE, who looks uncomfortable)

He blackmailed her into it, by learning of an accounting irregularity at the store where Magnus works.

(THEY act this out)

Tove is now pregnant.

(SHE shoves a pillow up HER blouse)

Now Gullstein decides to seduce Sofie too.

(PETER embraces ASTRID, exactly as HE did with BENTE)

He comes by the apartment one evening, but she pushes him away, and forces him to leave.

(THEY act this out)

Furious, he vows revenge. He forges a document suggesting that Hans' art was painted by himself, Gullstein. He's persuasive. The gallery believes it, and closes the show. Meanwhile, Tove has her baby.

(BENTE pulls out the pillow, looks at it tenderly)

She has this scene where she looks at the baby's features, his nose, his eyes, his chin, and tries to decide whether Magnus is the father, or Gullstein. Magnus overhears it, though, and decides to divorce her.

Then Gullstein tries to sacrifice the baby with a knife.

(PETER grabs the pillow, mimes a knife)

Yes, this play includes an infant sacrifice. Charming. Hans, distraught, dashes in to prevent it, and Gullstein stabs him.

(THEY act this out)

That's his 'last scream.' End of the play, Gullstein frames Sofie for Hans' murder.

METTE: Two hours later.

EGIL: That's it?

BENTE: This has to be some kind of practical joke.

EGIL: This, this won a playwriting contest?!

ANDERS: You wanted an unhappy marriage, you wanted something to play, you said.

BENTE: All right, but come on ...

ASTRID: *(chirpily)* My scenes aren't bad.

BENTE: We really can't ...

EGIL: *(incoherent with fury)* I will not ... I will not ... there is no possible ...

PETER: *(cutting EGIL off with an emphatic gesture)* It's a new play, Egil, and I quite agree; it presents some interesting challenges. Nothing we can't cope with.

BENTE: But, Peter ...

PETER: *(another gesture)* Here's what I suggest. I expect Halfdan has some scheduling conflict that prevented him from joining us today. And we'll all want to begin memorizing ... ?

(Gives BIRGIT a significant glance)

BIRGIT: I think Peter's right. Let's call it a day, fresh start tomorrow. Ten o'clock, rehearsal room C.

EGIL: But, Birgit ...

(PETER again stops HIM with a warning gesture)

BIRGIT: Good. We're decided, then.

PETER: I, for one, am thrilled by this challenge.

EGIL: Peter?!

PETER: Why don't we celebrate?

BENTE: Celebrate?

PETER: The birth of a new play? My house tonight, after Jeppe. It'll have to be late; eleven-ish, say? For wine and cheese.

ANDERS: Lefse and gjeteost, you mean.

(ASTRID and BENTE laugh)

BIRGIT: Excellent thought. Build cast unity, thank you Peter.

ANDERS: (*as THEY leave, turning to BIRGIT*) Birgit, you have to stop this.

BIRGIT: Stop what?

ANDERS: They're turning against the play.

(With a warning look, ANDERS exits, BIRGIT turns to the audience)

BIRGIT: Trust Peter to realize that the National's conference room was probably bugged. And trust Anders to know how dangerous our situation was becoming. But really. That play was the winner of a national playwriting contest? It's political. Quisling's doing. Or Terboven's. Or ... what do I know about politics? Halfdan was nowhere to be found. I ended up back at the theater, and on a whim, took in Jeppe. Standby lights. Go.

PETER: Am I dreaming? I don't think I am. I'll pinch my arm; if it doesn't hurt, I'm dreaming.

(pinches HIMSELF)

Ouch! Felt that ...

(looks around)

The bed, the room, the clothes. All those riches ...

BIRGIT: Jeppe of the Hill. Holberg's comedy, about a drunken peasant, victim of a prank, made to replace a local baron. It's exactly the kind of safe classic the Nazi authorities want us to do. And, of course, it's so brutally difficult to do comedy to an empty house, with no laughs to energize the performance. But Peter. Oh, my goodness: Peter. It's not just that Peter made that old play work. It's the quiet, subtle way he turned Jeppe, the drunken peasant, into, well, Quisling. Powerless, but treated as powerful by his superiors. As a joke. Just as well no one saw it. Except, if he was telling the truth, Morten. So Peter gives a brilliant performance. In a production sponsored by the quisling Cultural Ministry. A violation of the Fourth and Tenth Commandments, and arguably an act of treason. Except also an act of defiance. Which could get him arrested. Peter's apartment was just off Frognerpark. Wish I could afford an apartment there. But then, the luxurious rugs and sofas and lamps and easy chairs. Peter likes his comforts. Imagine it. Lights, go.

ANDERS: Well, we can't just refuse to do it, Bente, darling.

BENTE: Anders ...

ANDERS: All right, the play's rubbish; we expected that. So what?

BENTE: So what? It's not just rubbish, it's political, and it's wrong.

ANDERS: It's a job. We memorize it, do our best, move on to the next.

EGIL: No.

ANDERS: We've honestly become spoiled at the National. Most actors do rubbish plays all the time.

Rubbish films, rubbish radio ...

EGIL: But not bad like this, not pro-everything we hate.

BENTE: I'm with Egil. We can't.

ASTRID: So you're turning down the role?

BENTE: Why not? We go to Morten ...

ANDERS: And we say what? Sorry, you'll have to recast? We don't like the play.

EGIL: Why not?

ANDERS: Because we'll be arrested.

EGIL: You don't know that.

ANDERS: You were there, you heard his speech. Have you ever seen Morten at a rehearsal? Giving speeches?

ASTRID: This is my point. The Cultural Ministry ...

BENTE: I don't care about the Cultural Ministry.

ANDERS: The Ministry that issues our paychecks?

ASTRID: This play is important to them.

EGIL: To the quislings in the Ministry.

ASTRID: So we say 'We don't want to do it.' And what is their response?

ANDERS: It's as I said. Straight to Grini prison, and let's not kid ourselves ...

EGIL: First, we don't know that.

ANDERS: I know I'm not going to risk it.

ASTRID: This is not something we can simply refuse to do.

ANDERS: Certainly not.

ASTRID: We work, we keep our jobs, and our paychecks. And our apartments, and our food coupons ...

ANDERS: We stay safe. And our families, our loved ones; we're not the only ones in danger.

BENTE: Look. My brother is on a torpedo boat, making that run, Hardanger fjord to England and back with guns, ammo, bombs.

PETER: That's an incredibly important job. Without those armaments, the Resistance could hardly fight at all.

BENTE: I know.

PETER: I need hardly mention how dangerous it is.

BENTE: Yes.

PETER: Are you close?

BENTE: We are. Yes.

(emotional)

I'm sorry.

ANDERS: It's all right, dear.

BENTE: My parents don't want to face it. But I know. If they catch him, they shoot to kill.

ASTRID: You poor thing.

BENTE: So. How do I look him in the face? How can I be here, living my dream. At the National. When I know, in my heart, I collaborated.

ANDERS: He doesn't have to know, love. You just don't tell him.

ASTRID: He'll probably be glad that you're safe.

BENTE: I'd still know!

ANDERS: But have you thought this through?

BENTE: What do you mean?

ANDERS: We're all vulnerable. If we do as you suggest, what about our loved ones? What about your parents? And you have a younger sister, right? They hold a gun to her head, they say 'act, or she dies.' What then?

EGIL: I won't do it. I'll go to Grini. I don't care.

ANDERS: Just off to Grini, like it's a big adventure. We're at war. People are dying. Prisoners at Grini, every day.

BIRGIT: And so it went. For over an hour. And Peter just sat, listened. Passed around crackers and cheese, opened another bottle. And then, in a pause in the conversation:

PETER: I met with Halfdan today.

(A pause; THEY all turn to HIM)

BIRGIT: You did?

PETER: After our reading, I found him in a pub. And he reminded me of something. A production I acted in five years ago, in Copenhagen.

BENTE: Of what?

PETER: The Merchant of Venice.

(a pause, as they consider it)

Not Berlin, not Munich. Or Vienna. But we knew what was happening in Germany. The burning of the Reichstag. And immediately thereafter ...

ASTRID: Kristallnacht.

PETER: That's right. And that's what Halfdan reminded me. That I was playing Shylock, Shylock the Jew, during Kristallnacht. But I need to go back further. To a production, maybe fifteen years ago, in Trondheim. I was cast as Barabas, in Marlowe's Jew of Malta. An old-fashioned villain, complete evil. I'd played villains before, of course. Macbeth, remember that one, Astrid? First time we worked together, I believe.

ASTRID: Indeed it was.

PETER: But never anyone as purely evil as Barabas. Still, I found objectives to play, gave what I thought of

as a solid performance. And I didn't regret it, I never do. We play evil characters to serve the larger moral purposes of the script; that's what we do. And then, Halfdan reminded me of Copenhagen. Shylock. A much more human character, of course, though, again, very difficult to render sympathetically. But we could feel something stirring in the audience. Not from everyone, or even a majority of the Danes in the house, but especially one night, when a large contingent came from the German embassy. Anger, rage, it's hard to describe. A thirst for violence. Something ... very very dark.

ANDERS: The look, in the eyes of the SS when you pass them in the street.

PETER: That's right, Anders. That same ... hunger. I'm from Harstad, originally. And when I was young, a Jewish family, the Haugens, owned a bakery close to my home. I'd stop on my way home from school, for pastries or rolls. They had a boy my age, Òivind; we were in school together. Not close friends; acquaintances. But I knew them. And last year, Òivind and his family were arrested. His sister, Synnøve, worked as a stenographer here, in Oslo; she made it to Sweden. The rest of the family were in a concentration camp in Bardufoss. I understand that they've since been shipped to Germany. Where they will be murdered.

ASTRID: We don't know that.

BENTE: Don't we?

EGIL: The language they use, Hitler and his thugs. Jews are vermin. Cockroaches. Subhuman.

BENTE: You see a cockroach, you smash it with your slipper.

ANDERS: We don't know. But yes. It's possible.

PETER: I will grant you that we don't know that for certain, that the arrested Jews will be killed. But when has Hitler ever hesitated to murder? I'm an actor. I play the roles I'm cast in. And I've never considered even the possibility that my acting choices, the fantasies I help create might ... Two thousand Norwegian Jews have been arrested. A fool is our puppet prime minister; a madman invaded and controls our country. The very air feels poisoned. And I've been cast as another Barabas, another Jewish villain, a banker who seduces women, and forges documents, and sacrifices infants, as though the Protocols of the Elders of Zion are ... real. Another villain, in a career where I've often played them. Here's what really angers me, though. We had a deal. Unspoken, perhaps, but still mutually binding. We would act. Night after night, we would appear on-stage at the National, to empty houses. And they could use that fact, the fact of our acting, for their own propagandist purposes. And we would accept their coin. But classics only. Not this. Not this ... piece of anti-Jewish excrement. No. This time, I say no. I will not play this role. I will not be complicit. I'm a poor excuse for a patriot, heaven knows. But rather than perform in this ... abortion of a play, I will put my country before my career, and my fellow human beings over my art. This time I say no. And I ask you, friends and colleagues, to join me.

ANDERS: I can't. We can't.

ASTRID: Nor I.

PETER: I am saying we're going to have to be careful how we do it.

ANDERS: Peter ...

PETER: But by all means, let's continue to discuss the matter.

BIRGIT: *(to audience)* And so we did. But the ground had shifted. Looking around, it seemed we had, at least tentatively agreed. The Last Scream would not open. We were, some of us, willing to risk Grini prison to that end. But the tension and danger we all felt did not dissipate. And so we lingered. Peter opened another bottle. We had rehearsal in the morning, of course, but not until ten, and, at that point, of course, it didn't seem to matter whether we rehearsed at all. And we opened up to each other.

METTE: I think it might be wise for us to stay in touch with the underground. And I have a contact there. My boyfriend, as it happens. If we need it, they have developed escape routes to Sweden, even for people who are wanted.

BIRGIT: Einar? He came to the Christmas party?

METTE: That's him.

ASTRID: The black-haired fellow?

METTE: He has dark hair.

ASTRID: I do remember him. Made sure I kept a good count on my silverware, with a Gypsy in the house.

ANDERS: Is he?

METTE: He prefers Roma. And your silver was perfectly safe.

ASTRID: With Gypsies about?

METTE: Roma. And he has a master's degree in mechanical engineering. And considers himself as Norwegian as you.

ASTRID: You say that, swarthy as he is?

ANDERS: We don't know him the way you do. Is all Astrid was saying.

ASTRID: I do know Gypsies can't be trusted. Thieves and vagabonds.

METTE: *(with a rush)* He's my boyfriend. More accurately, my fiancée. We're engaged.

ANDERS: Congratulations, darling!

(THEY ad lib similar congratulations, ASTRID excepted)

BENTE: So when's the big day?

METTE: We haven't actually set a date yet.

(pause, then another rush)

You see, the war's still on. And we decided we would wait until it's over. Until we've won. He said to me, 'The day we see King Haakon parade down Karl Johan's, that's the day we marry.' And I agreed. We will be married in a free Norway, or not at all.

ANDERS: But that may be years, darling.

METTE: We don't care. Five years or fifty. We will marry when we're free. All of us: free. *(embarrassed)* I'm sorry, I know that's probably terribly naïve.

PETER: Not at all.

ASTRID: Well, that's all wonderfully patriotic. But it doesn't change the facts. He's a Gypsy. Can he be trusted?

METTE: I know him, I trust him completely. As does the Resistance. And think about the Roma. They live in the shadows, and see everything.

PETER: Good source for information.

METTE: Without them, our fight would be a good deal more difficult.

ASTRID: If you say so.

METTE: And, sorry Astrid, but I'll thank you to keep your ... opinions to yourself.

PETER: It's a word they use to describe us, you know.

ASTRID: What is?

PETER: Gypsy. Itinerant traveling entertainers? Back in theatre history?

ASTRID: I'm not a Gypsy!

METTE: Can't be. You're blonde.

ASTRID: At least we don't ... tell people's fortunes. (an awkward silence)

EGIL: Well, since we're ... sharing.

BENTE: What?

EGIL: It's probably not important ... but. You see, Peter, I was grateful for what you said. About Merchant of Venice.

BIRGIT: What is it?

EGIL: All right, look: I don't really know what it means to be Jewish. The Nazis seem to think that it's about one's bloodlines. I've always thought of it more as a set of religious practices. And I don't. Practice. But, in fact, well, I probably am. Or at least count as, well, Jewish.

ASTRID: You're a Jew?

EGIL: I don't know how official that is.

ASTRID: You either are or you're not. Which is it?

EGIL: According to the official guidelines, you need three grandparents to count as Jewish. I have three. But I don't have a J on my identification papers.

ANDERS: How did you work that?

EGIL: My grandpa Halvorsen, my mother's father. He was non-practicing, and changed his name when he went into politics, Liberal party, in the 20s; Minister of Education under Gunnar Knudsen. I don't think anyone knew. And if there was some official registry, he would have been able to keep us off it. Certainly, no one in my family has been arrested. Our identity papers are all clean.

ASTRID: So there may be more of you? Secret Jews. In Norwegian society. Hidden, hiding.

BENTE: Would you have a problem if that were true?

ASTRID: No. Of course not. I would like to know, of course. As would we all.

METTE: Why?

ASTRID: We're cast, in a play, a five-actor play. Yes, I want to know that, if I'm acting with a Jew.

EGIL: And you'd find it difficult? To act with a Jew.

ASTRID: If I had to kiss him?

(THEY stare at her)

Don't look at me that way. I'm not anti-Jewish. Nor, really, anti-Gypsy. I just want to be careful who I trust.

ANDERS: We understand, darling.

ASTRID: We're doing an anti-Jewish play, and I find it as horrid as you all do. On the other hand, I do have a certain position to maintain in polite society. Which has never been all that welcoming to an actress, believe me.

EGIL: Well, we don't kiss, and haven't many scenes together, so, the taint you fear ...

ASTRID: That is unjust! And unkind!

PETER: That's good, Astrid. Well-acted.

ANDERS: *(catching on)* Precisely. That pose. Maintain that pose, and you'll never be suspected. In fact, I can see your position being quite advantageous. To us, I mean.

PETER: Absolutely. That's where Quisling found his government ministers; the highest reaches of Oslo society.

ANDERS: If you've infiltrated that group, well done. You're our highly placed intelligence source, my dear. Of course, you'll pull it off. There was never any question of your acting skill.

EGIL: With Einar in the shadows, and you shining from the heights, we'll be well supplied with information.

BIRGIT: *(amused)* Exactly.

ANDERS: But that's the way to play it. Haughty; superior.

ASTRID: Which is all that I was suggesting.

ANDERS: And the larger point Egil raises is worth considering. In Quisling's Norway, Terboven's Norway. For those with something to hide. Like Egil, and his Jewishness.

METTE: Or Einar's background as Roma.

ASTRID: You're certain you want to marry him?

METTE: *(jaw clenched)* Yes.

PETER: Can we be trusted, is what you're asking? Do we all agree to keep ... certain secrets?

ANDERS: Precisely.

ASTRID: And now you're all looking at me again.

ANDERS: Not at all, darling.

ASTRID: I am a woman of the theatre!

ANDERS: Of course.

ASTRID: I don't betray confidences!

ANDERS: She really doesn't, Egil.

EGIL: I never supposed she did.

PETER: And if we do this, trust must be absolute. It's a dangerous game we're contemplating.

BIRGIT: *(to audience)* So, we had a Jew in the cast. A Gyp ... Rom. Something of an anti-Semite. And, of course, Anders. Interesting challenge to our esteemed director.

PETER: I need to talk to you.

BIRGIT: I was hoping so.

PETER: Halfdan.

BIRGIT: Yes.

PETER: He's not directing this play.

BIRGIT: He's not.

PETER: No.

BIRGIT: Lovely. Then why on earth did he tell Morten he would?!

PETER: 'Direct, or be arrested.'

BIRGIT: That openly.

PETER: Oh, certainly not. All couched in euphemism and innuendo. But he's Halfdan; he can read subtext.

BIRGIT: Great. So they think he's directing, we think he's directing. Why not just direct?

PETER: Because he's Halfdan. Cantankerous old devil. He says he will not spend his declining years working on a piece he despises.

BIRGIT: This is bad, Peter. They'll arrest Halfdan, they'll assign us a new director.

PETER: Or Morten will direct it himself.

BIRGIT: This is a disaster. Why didn't you tell me this immediately?

PETER: Look, Halfdan's willing to pretend to direct. He doesn't want to be sent to Grini, and he says he's not well enough to run off to Sweden. He'll be seen in the building at the appropriate times. And who ever comes to other show's rehearsals? No one will know he's not actually in the rehearsal room with us.

BIRGIT: All right. But someone has to actually direct the play.

PETER: Well, I thought you could do it.

BIRGIT: No no no. I'm a stage manager. I know my limitations.

PETER: What does it matter?

BIRGIT: (*catching on*) If it's not going up anyway.

PETER: But it will need blocking. Stage business. It will need to look like a play, all the while we sabotage it.

ANDERS: So you're directing?

BIRGIT: Private conversation, Anders.

ANDERS: Darling, we're theatre people; there's no such thing. Besides, didn't we just agree to keep each other's secrets?

EGIL: What's going on?

ANDERS: Well, it seems Birgit's directing, Halfdan being mysteriously unavailable. And we need to ruin Trygve Reidersen's loathsome little play.

BIRGIT: Yes. All right then, fine.

ANDERS: Excellent.

(Ad libs of approval)

PETER: Just as well. Given our plans; we want a director who's on our side.

ASTRID: But Birgit. Have you directed before?

BIRGIT: No, nor ever wanted to. But Peter's right. There isn't an alternative.

METTE: (*sidling up to BIRGIT*) How do we handle this?

BIRGIT: It's a simple enough show, Mette. No scene changes, hardly any costume changes.

METTE: A pregnancy pad. A dead baby.

BIRGIT: Yes, for Bente. But we can manage it. Prop baby, with blood bags. I'll need you to stage manage.

METTE: I can do that.

BIRGIT: I'm more concerned about how we're going to stop it. This show.

METTE: I have some ideas. We may have to injure some actors ...

BIRGIT: (*to audience*) The secret dream of stage managers everywhere.

PETER: We need to keep this conversation going. I suggest we meet again tomorrow. After Jeppe. And I hardly need point out how important secrecy is. We must keep this to ourselves.

METTE: Except for Einar.

PETER: Yes, all right. But keep the circle tight. Astrid? You're still seeing what's his name? Lorentzen?

ASTRID: Kåre Lorentzen. And no, our relationship isn't really built on trust; there's no reason for him to know a thing. I have a new role; that will suffice.

PETER: Anders?

ANDERS: I tell Jens everything.

EGIL: In this case, though ... ?

ANDERS: He has never and will never betray me.

BENTE: But Anders. If he were to be arrested, say ... ?

ANDERS: He has my trust absolutely. Really, do we need to continue with this?

ASTRID: No. Certainly not.

PETER: Of course not. All right then. We're agreed.

BIRGIT: And so it was decided. But I wasn't able to sleep, of course. Tomorrow's rehearsal was my directing debut. Granted, directing a play I despised. But: directing nonetheless. Rehearsal, go.

ANDERS as HANS: I'd best be off. Final arrangements for the exhibit's big opening.

ASTRID as SOFIA: I'm so excited for you, darling! Your big break!

ANDERS as HANS: Our big break.

ASTRID as SOFIA: Ours.

BIRGIT: All right. Cross back to her, quick kiss.

(Rehearsal kiss)

ASTRID as SOFIA: Darling. I love you so.

ANDERS as HANS: And I love you.

BIRGIT: And exit left.

ANDERS: I think I'd give her one more quick embrace first.

BIRGIT: Sure, fine.

ASTRID: And perhaps I would follow him? A step or two left?

PETER: Should I knock? Or does he surprise me when he opens the door to exit?

ANDERS: I like that.

BIRGIT: Yes. But ... I'm getting a traffic jam left. Astrid, could you counter a little right on Peter's entrance?

ASTRID: My husband's leaving, my landlord's entering. Why would I move right?

ANDERS: Because it balances the stage?

ASTRID: Never mind. I'll motivate it.

ANDERS as HANS: Mr. Gullstein?

PETER as GULLSTEIN: Hello ... hmm ... Hans.

ANDERS as HANS: Is everything all right?

PETER as GULLSTEIN: Hmm yes. Fine. Was hoping to ... hmm ... have a word.

ANDERS as **HANS**: I really do need to be off ...

ASTRID as **SOFIA**: You go, darling. Mr. Gullstein?

BIRGIT: Peter, short cross upstage right.

PETER as **GULLSTEIN**: (*adjusts*) Hmm, yes. It's a simple matter. I'm ... hmm ... certain your lovely wife and I can sort it out.

ANDERS as **HANS**: All right then.

BIRGIT: And exit left, Anders.

PETER as **GULLSTEIN**: Hello ... hmm ... Sofia.

ASTRID as **SOFIA**: I'd prefer it if you called me Mrs. Eversen.

PETER as **GULLSTEIN**: Yes. Sorry. Hmm ... Mrs. Eversen.

METTE: (*quietly*) We're past time.

BIRGIT: Right. Thank you. We'll take ten, people. Peter, about the hmm thing.

PETER: It's scripted.

BIRGIT: No, I know. It feels like ...

PETER: What?

BIRGIT: You're backing away from them. They're in the script, as you say. Annoying affectation, but that's the character.

PETER: So: commit.

BIRGIT: I'd say so.

PETER: He's such a caricature.

BIRGIT: Then ... he's a caricature.

PETER: Yes.

(decisively, as though the character suddenly makes sense)

Yes, of course, you're right.

(as HE exits)

Good note.

BIRGIT: (*pleased as punch, quietly to herself*) Peter liked my note!
(to audience)

And so it went. Quickly enough; we had the first act blocked by the end of our first day. Then Peter and Bente needed to prepare for Jeppe, and after their show, we met again, back at Peter's flat.

(METTE takes notes while they brainstorm)

ANDERS: Broken leg, broken arm, broken collarbone.

EGIL: Broken back.

ASTRID: That seems a bit much.

BIRGIT: Brainstorming, people, we're just thinking aloud.

BENTE: An illness, Perhaps. I was thinking we could go to the tubercular ward at the hospital...

PETER: I do actually draw the line at consumption.

BENTE: I don't think we can rule anything out.

ANDERS: TB?

BENTE: Rather that than allow this play ...

BIRGIT: Brainstorming!

EGIL: There's always Sweden.

ASTRID: They'd just recast.

EGIL: Some roles, certainly. Mine. But who else in the company could play Gullstein?

PETER: Kjetil could. Steinar.

ANDERS: Not as well as you, Peter.

PETER: They don't need someone good.

(THEY consider this)

ASTRID: We could set the theater ablaze.

BENTE: I like that. Light the old place up.

BIRGIT: Let's save that one for last.

PETER: I think so.

ASTRID: All right, then. I do have a suggestion, it likely sounds mad, but if we're brainstorming ...

BIRGIT: Go on.

ASTRID: A lingonberry holiday.

METTE: A what?

ASTRID: It's a long tradition in Scandinavian theaters. Actors take a weekend in the spring to go to the mountains and pick lingonberries.

PETER: I've worked in Scandinavian theaters all my life, and I've never heard of it.

ASTRID: Well, they do it in Sweden.

ANDERS: Where in Sweden, darling?

ASTRID: They did it at Dramaten.

BENTE: You worked at Dramaten?

ASTRID: 1923. I played Miss Julie.

ANDERS: I bet you were wonderful.

ASTRID: I was quite splendid. But on the second weekend in March, they gave us a weekend off to pick

lingonberries.

ANDERS: Morten's not a man of the theatre. He's not likely to know better.

EGIL: It would only give us a weekend.

BENTE: It gives us a weekend, though.

PETER: It's something. The longer we stall ...

ASTRID: We always go dark for the summer.

BIRGIT: That's it. That's our first move. Morten's office, go.

MORTEN: Lingonberries?

BIRGIT: It's a tradition. An important one.

MORTEN: A lingonberry holiday?

BIRGIT: A long weekend, yes.

MORTEN: Delaying our opening.

BIRGIT: Yes.

MORTEN: Do you have any idea how ridiculous you sound?

BIRGIT: In fact, I do, yes.

MORTEN: I can't possibly ...

BIRGIT: Morten, please. We're talking about actors, here.

MORTEN: I know perfectly well ...

BIRGIT: They're superstitious. You know that.

MORTEN: Still ...

BIRGIT: Like the Macbeth traditions.

MORTEN: Macbeth?

BIRGIT: The Scottish play stuff? It's haunted? There's an entire exorcism ritual.

MORTEN: I've heard that. Leave the theater, spit on the ground, spin three times ...

BIRGIT: Exactly! Or good luck. Opening nights, you can't wish someone luck.

MORTEN: No, I know that one, it's brekk et bein.

BIRGIT: Break a leg, yes. It's that kind of thing. Like keeping a ghost light burning when the theater's empty. Or whistling backstage.

MORTEN: Whistling.

BIRGIT: Oh, yes. I had to fire a stage hand last year because he whistled.

MORTEN: Still. Lingonberries.

BIRGIT: Lingonberries are only ripe for a few days. It's a long tradition; on the second weekend in March,

the theater goes dark so the actors can go to the mountains and pick as many as they can find.

MORTEN: And we open March 10.

BIRGIT: Another week. That's all I'm asking.

MORTEN: They're nasty. Lingonberries. Sour and harsh.

BIRGIT: They're a wonderful laxative.

MORTEN: Really.

BIRGIT: Call Dramaten. They'll tell you all about it.

MORTEN: Dramaten. In Stockholm. Neutral Sweden.

BIRGIT: One of the great theatres in the world. They'll tell you all about the lingonberries.

MORTEN: And of course, they would be delighted to take a phone call from me. In Occupied Norway.

BIRGIT: They might.

MORTEN: Fine, then. The Swedes know all about this supposed tradition. I've never heard of it, but let that go. Why should I? That's my point. We have a schedule; everyone agreed to it. Why deviate?

BIRGIT: Tradition.

MORTEN: Aside from the tradition.

BIRGIT: A gesture, then. They're professionals, of course. But they're ... fragile.

MORTEN: They don't like the play.

BIRGIT: I didn't say that.

MORTEN: You didn't have to.

(pause)

How is Halfdan working out?

BIRGIT: Wonderfully.

MORTEN: Really?

BIRGIT: Of course.

MORTEN: He's been spotted, more than once, in the greenroom.

BIRGIT: During our breaks.

MORTEN: And he's there for every rehearsal?

BIRGIT: He's had a touch of the flu. He may have missed one or two. But he gave me good notes for the actors.

MORTEN: And he's on top of things?

BIRGIT: Very much so. Honestly, this holiday was his idea.

MORTEN: All right. We'll delay the opening a week. So the actors can pick their lingonberries.

BIRGIT: Thank you so much, Morten.

MORTEN: Birgit. You mustn't think of me as the enemy, you know. We're both on the same side.

BIRGIT: Of course.

MORTEN: I may stop by rehearsal sometime.

BIRGIT: We would love to see you.

MORTEN: All right. I'll pass the word. The Last Scream opens March 17.

BIRGIT: We're very grateful.

(as ACTORS rearrange chairs for rehearsal)

And so, another mystery. Why was Morten being so reasonable, about something as absurd as the lingonberries? Also, why? Why this play? Why now? Rehearsal room, go.

PETER: He agreed to it?

BIRGIT: Postponed the opening a week.

ASTRID: I told you. Picking lingonberries is good luck.

BIRGIT: It's certainly that. All right. Bente, Egil, places.

(THEY stroll into place then, suddenly, THEY attack the scene)

BENTE as TOVE: How dare you!

EGIL as MAGNUS: I want to know! I need to know! I must know!

BENTE as TOVE: Of course, darling, I've been faithful! How can you doubt me!

EGIL as MAGNUS: Then what was Gullstein doing here?

BENTE as TOVE: He was ... repairing the furnace.

EGIL as MAGNUS: I don't believe you! How can I believe a word you say?!?

BENTE as TOVE: Because, darling, because I love you! I love you with all my heart!

EGIL as MAGNUS: I only wish I could believe you.

BENTE as TOVE: You must!

BENTE: And now I embrace him?

BIRGIT: That's right.

BENTE: Not on the 'with all my heart.'

BIRGIT: I don't ... think so.

EGIL: And now I pull out the knife?

BIRGIT: That's right.

EGIL as MAGNUS: When the baby is born, I will know! I will know for certain then! And if my worst fears are true ...

(brandishing the knife; with quiet intensity)

This will be for us both.

EGIL: I think I should pull the knife out then. Not earlier in the line.

BIRGIT: No, I think you're right.

(Short pause, then BENTE starts laughing)

BENTE: Sorry, sorry.

BIRGIT: It's all right.

BENTE: So ridiculous.

(EGIL laughs too)

BIRGIT: Let's take ten.

(THEY do)

METTE: So, Egil.

EGIL: *(sobering)* Yeah.

METTE: We're nearly done for the day. If we're going to do this ...

EGIL: No, you're right.

BIRGIT: What's going on?

EGIL: Broken foot.

BIRGIT: We didn't agree on that.

METTE: We talked about it last night. Makes sense.

EGIL: If we have a broken bone too close to opening night, it'll look suspicious.

BIRGIT: But this is too early.

METTE: I don't think so. Egil's got all the stage combat in the show; the fight with Gullstein, plus the skylight entrance.

PETER: Which he can't rehearse with a broken foot.

BIRGIT: Did I miss a vote or something?

EGIL: I'll be fine. So, Mette, what do you think?

METTE: I was thinking a counterweight.

EGIL: I was on break, went into the wings, wasn't paying attention.

BIRGIT: All right then.

METTE: I've got it all set up over here.

EGIL: Let's do this.

(HE and METTE exit)

BIRGIT: Just like that.

BENTE: He's not the only one. We may all be getting injured, one way or another.

BIRGIT: Let's hope not. Standby sound.

(... then a counterweight crashes followed by EGIL's involuntary cry of pain)

And so, on to another unpleasant meeting with Morten. But in the meantime, he had another visitor. Morten's office, go.

(Before BIRGIT enters)

HEINRICH: Herr Flaxness.

MORTEN: Yes.

HEINRICH: I was ordered to report ...

MORTEN: Yes. Your Norwegian is very good. I requested ...

HEINRICH: I have Norwegian relatives.

MORTEN: Yes. You understand, I don't actually ... I have suspicions ...

HEINRICH: What do you need me to do?

MORTEN: Theatre companies are hotbeds of gossip, rumors.

HEINRICH: I know it well.

MORTEN: But not to me. I'm not privy ... Conversations shut down when I ...

HEINRICH: I understand.

MORTEN: And, you see, the man I'm asking you to surveille is ... one of the giants of our theatre.

HEINRICH: Christensen.

MORTEN: Halfdan Christensen. Yes.

HEINRICH: Leave it to me.

(HEINRICH salutes, exits, passing BIRGIT as HE goes)

MORTEN: Birgit. What's this about a broken foot?

BIRGIT: I'm just furious with him. Theaters are dangerous places. He's been told repeatedly, don't just wander around backstage. Especially with no work lights.

MORTEN: You were in a rehearsal room downstairs. Why did he even go upstairs?

BIRGIT: I don't know. He says he likes to walk the space.

MORTEN: The space?

BIRGIT: It's what he calls the theater. He calls it 'the space.' I think it's an American thing.

MORTEN: He's not American.

BIRGIT: He studied there. The, something, Actor's Studio ...

MORTEN: Like Bjørn Bjørnson and the Meininger.

BIRGIT: (*surprised*) Very much so.

MORTEN: So, do we need to recast?

BIRGIT: I'm tempted. But he's doing nice work. He's off-book.

(*sees MORTEN's quizzical look*)

Memorized. No, I'm just concerned about some of the stage combat, plus the skylight scene. They're both Egil.

MORTEN: Which he won't be able to rehearse with a broken foot.

BIRGIT: Not for a couple of weeks, at least. If not longer.

MORTEN: So what do you want?

BIRGIT: Well, it's not so much me as Halfdan ...

MORTEN: Understood. What do you want?

BIRGIT: Another postponement?

MORTEN: Fine. We open March 24. It works better for Reichskommissar Terboven anyway.

BIRGIT: Terboven's coming to the opening.

MORTEN: As will Prime Minister Quisling, Cultural Minister ...

BIRGIT: I don't think we knew that.

MORTEN: They're all coming. Everyone. The mayor and Oslo city council. The bishops of Oslo, Bjørgvin, Stavanger, Hamar and Tunsberg. And their priests. The entire cabinet. Regional governors. Everyone's coming.

BIRGIT: That's ... impressive.

MORTEN: And most higher ranking Germans. So, as you can see, it makes my job particularly demanding. We have to be ready for them. All us of need to be.

BIRGIT: All right then. All the more reason to give them a good show.

MORTEN: Delays like these haven't been ... difficult to arrange. In the current environment. Filling the house, well, that's my mandate, and it's not been easy. There are ... invitees who have expressed a certain reluctance to attend. I have resources available to me. Persuasive resources. But I do admit, having two weeks extra has actually been useful.

BIRGIT: But that's no longer true.

MORTEN: No. It most assuredly is not.

BIRGIT: And so back to Peter's flat.

ANDERS: A full house?

BIRGIT: That's what he said.

METTE: Including Terboven? And Quisling. And the Gestapo chiefs?

BIRGIT: He said nothing about Gestapo.

PETER: But they'd have to be there. He said, 'Persuasive resources?'

BIRGIT: To fill the house. With the city council, the mayor, bishops and priests. Cultural Minister Lunde.

ANDERS: Lunde?

BIRGIT: He said the Cultural minister was coming.

ANDERS: You can't possibly not know this.

BIRGIT: I don't follow politics.

ANDERS: You don't notice who signs your paycheck?

BIRGIT: Apparently not.

ANDERS: Gulbrand Lunde's not Cultural Minister. He died six months ago. It's Fuglesang.

METTE: Rolf Jørgen Fuglesang. He's on the list.

BIRGIT: Wait a minute, wait. I've never heard of this Fuglesang. And what list?

ANDERS: He was, something, Minister for Party Unity? Something like that.

BIRGIT: So not just a functionary? A fully committed Nazi?

METTE: That's why he's on the list.

BIRGIT: What list?

METTE: Assassinate immediately. If anyone in the Resistance sees him in the street.

BIRGIT: Really?

METTE: Of course.

BENTE: You have a list of people you're supposed to shoot on sight?

METTE: Ice Front rules. Yes.

BIRGIT: So we'll be playing for a full house. Of patriots. People who wouldn't be caught dead in Quisling's National Theatre.

ASTRID: Where we're employed.

BIRGIT: You know what I mean.

EGIL: (*foot now bandaged*) But Mette. You must talk to Einar about this.

METTE: That's what I was thinking.

ANDERS: This list, everyone on your list, is coming to us.

METTE: It's a splendid target.

ANDERS: That's not what I ...

METTE: Quisling, Terboven, the Gestapo, all under one roof the same night.

BIRGIT: Along with a house full of Norwegians.

METTE: Yes, that is unfortunate.

ASTRID: Wait wait wait. What are you suggesting?

METTE: They'll be intrigued.

ASTRID: A bomb? In our house?

METTE: When else would we have this opportunity?

ASTRID: But that's murder!

METTE: It's a legitimate wartime target.

ASTRID: It's absolutely nothing of the kind! Besides, an explosion there, in our home? Just how are we to escape?

METTE: A true patriot is always prepared to sacrifice for her country.

ASTRID: Well, I'm certainly not prepared! To give my career, my life? So you can kill ... the cream of Norway's clergy?

PETER: That is a consideration, Mette.

METTE: Ask them. Ask the bishop of Oslo if he's prepared to die for his country.

PETER: He would certainly appreciate being given a choice in the matter.

BENTE: I don't disagree with you, Mette. But it's one thing to attach a mine to a German ship. Quite another to kill a theater full of innocent people.

METTE: Including Terboven. Including Quisling!

ASTRID: We should have a say in this!

ANDERS: I agree.

METTE: We're fighting the Nazis, we're fighting for freedom! Any tactic must be considered!

PETER: And will be, I'm sure. I would remind you all; this is not our call. The Resistance decides its targets. After consulting with London.

ASTRID: So, the King? King Haakon?

METTE: And London won't be sentimental about it.

BIRGIT: In the meantime, we're on. March 24, and Morten made it clear that further delays will not be tolerated.

METTE: And I'll make the case to the Resistance.

BENTE: Well, I have an idea. A delaying tactic, but one that could be worth weeks. At least, it gets us past the twenty-fourth.

BIRGIT: Go on.

BENTE: I've mentioned it once before. I thought perhaps I could get pregnant.

ANDERS: Darling. You're not married.

BENTE: And unmarried women never become pregnant.

ANDERS: I'm thinking of your reputation.

BENTE: I'm an actress.

ANDERS: That's again not my point.

BIRGIT: I don't know that we can count on ...

BENTE: Don't be so dense. My gynecologist is a patriot. He'll sign whatever medical documents we need. Some condition requiring bed rest, something that prevents me from acting.

PETER: You've spoken to him.

BENTE: (*nodding*) He thought perhaps preeclampsia, or cervical effacement. Gestational diabetes.

EGIL: And those are real conditions?

BENTE: Yes, Egil. They are.

PETER: And how long would this bed rest last?

BENTE: Could be months.

ANDERS: Again, though, darling. You're not married.

BENTE: A marriage certificate is not actually required ...

ANDERS: That's not my point, darling. Who is in power right now? Not just Morten, but those above him?

PETER: And how much do they value human life? Even infant life?

BENTE: Oh.

PETER: Would they hesitate to forcibly abort your child?

BENTE: But I wouldn't actually be pregnant.

METTE: Which they would discover. Then, what would they do?

BENTE: I don't know.

ANDERS: I think ...

(With a finger, ANDERS mimes a gun)

PETER: This is the point Astrid has been making.

BENTE: They wouldn't simply commit murder. A woman, an artist.

ANDERS: Of course they would, darling.

ASTRID: So it shouldn't be you. I thought so the first time you mentioned this. You're an ingénue, a pretty girl. Easily replaced. I think they would probably just arrest you. That's bad enough. But you see, Bente. Star power matters. It should be me.

EGIL: What should be you?

ASTRID: I should become pregnant. I assume your doctor will document my imaginary condition same as yours.

BIRGIT: If it wouldn't work for Bente ...

ASTRID: You're what, twenty-two? Bente? Thereabouts?

BENTE: I'm twenty-one.

ASTRID: And thus vulnerable. I'm forty. And I'm childless. Not that I regret my life choices. Still. At an age where a woman, if she is to give birth, had best get on with it.

ANDERS: And an age when that decision becomes ... risky.

ASTRID: Indeed. The unfortunate conditions you listed are far more likely for me than for ... a younger woman.

BIRGIT: That's true.

ASTRID: And more to the point, I am a star. I am Astrid; I'm not replaceable.

PETER: Nor are you someone they could ... force. In some way.

ASTRID: I should say not. Does anyone tell Kirsten Flagstad what to do in her personal life?

METTE: Flagstad doesn't sing in Norway.

ASTRID: Because she's Flagstad; she's allowed not to.

METTE: Plus, her husband's a Nazi. And she may pretend she's not one, but ...

ASTRID: (*imperiously*) Kirsten. Is my friend.

METTE: (*to HERSELF*) Still a Nazi.

ASTRID: She is a star.

METTE: A Nazi star.

ASTRID: She's Flagstad; the greatest Wagnerian soprano of our time!

METTE: You don't think Wagner ...

ASTRID: A great artist, performing great music!! That still matters! She is allowed to travel.

METTE: She's privileged all right.

ASTRID: To Switzerland to perform, and then back to Oslo! Life is different when you're a star. And if privileges exist, they are also earned. Deserved.

METTE: (*under HER breath*) I bet.

PETER: Still. A problem pregnancy. It might work.

BIRGIT: Not yet, though. We need to wait. Spring it on him a few days before we open.

METTE: Tech week, then.

BIRGIT: Yes. This could work though. If you're sure, Astrid.

ASTRID: (*regally nodding*) Indeed I am.

BIRGIT: All right then. And you'll talk to the Resistance, Mette?

(METTE nods)

I want more information, damn it. Why did they do this, break our deal with this play? Anders, can you ask around?

ANDERS: Inquiries among my fellow denizens of the demi-monde. Certainly.

METTE: And I'll ask Einar.

BIRGIT: Something happened last October. Lunde died, and Fuglesang took over, yes, but why? What changed?

ANDERS: Yes, yes, I'll ask around. I just hope ...

BIRGIT: What?

ANDERS: You do all know how dangerous this is, right?

ASTRID: Of course.

BIRGIT: We need to get this show ready to open, people. At least, expect Morten to come to rehearsal.
(to audience)

But that never happened. And for weeks, it felt very much like a normal rehearsal process. Exploring, discovering, refining. Or in this case, figuring out how to finesse this wretched, wretched script.

BENTE as TOVE: *(holding a prop baby)* They say you can tell. You can look at an infant, and see the faces of its parents. But who do I see? Those eyes; do they reflect the gentle love of Magnus? Or the evil hardness of Gullstein? What of the little fists? Are they small yet grasping? Or hands that hold mine with such tenderness? And what of his nose? Gullstein's Jewish hook? Or Magnus', smaller, more sensitive? Oh, child, my lovely child! Who is your father? And who, finally, is your mother to become? Are you my Jew bastard? Or are you my child born of true love ... Or are you a baked potato?

(the CAST laughs)

How in the living hell am I supposed to ... ?

BIRGIT: Say the words, do your best.

BENTE: Sorry.

BIRGIT: I know. Take ten, people. I'm off to see Morten. Morten's office, go.

(the CAST ad libs 'Good luck,' etc.)

MORTEN: Pregnant?

BIRGIT: It came as a surprise to us as well.

MORTEN: Astrid. Pregnant.

BIRGIT: She says she's always wanted a child. And she's seeing that shipping magnate, Lorentzen.

MORTEN: And she's suffering from cervical ...

BIRGIT: Effacement, yes.

(indicating HIS desk)

You can see the doctor's note.

MORTEN: From Dr. Aage Jakobsen.

BIRGIT: Uh, yes. A prominent Oslo gynecologist and obstetrician.

MORTEN: Yes. A fine doctor.

BIRGIT: You've heard of him.

MORTEN: Oh, yes.

BIRGIT: Really? That's ... surprising.

MORTEN: In fact, I know at least two things about him that you do not.

BIRGIT: *(uneasy)* Really?

MORTEN: He is a traitor. A liar, a writer of false diagnoses. This ...

(indicating the doctor's note)

Is nonsense.

BIRGIT: I don't think that's fair ...

MORTEN: And he's dead.

BIRGIT: Excuse me?

MORTEN: He's dead. Shot to death. This morning, in fact. You should know I had nothing to do with it! I asked for an arrest; only an arrest!

BIRGIT: Lights on me. Go! My God. My God, they know.

(close to panic, then deep breath.)

Stay alive. Keep the cast alive.

(LIGHTS restore)

MORTEN: I did save his daughters. Sent to Grini.

BIRGIT: You ... You had him shot.

MORTEN: I told you, no. But I am the one who uncovered it, your whole ungrateful plot!

BIRGIT: You ...

MORTEN: It was Halfdan who gave you away. I kept hearing things. Halfdan was in the green room, Halfdan loitering in the lobby. But never in the rehearsal room. I even spent half a day lurking, waiting for him to come out. Actors, yes, but not the supposed director. And so I called Minister Fuglesang with my suspicions, and he ordered Halfdan followed. I would be very careful what you say next, Birgit.

BIRGIT: Or you'll make another call.

MORTEN: We should be honest with each other, should we not?

BIRGIT: Yes.

MORTEN: Halfdan Christensen is not directing *The Last Scream*. Do you want to see my surveillance report? For the play's director, the week before tech?

(BIRGIT shakes her head)

You have been director of *The Last Scream*?

BIRGIT: *(quietly)* Yes.

MORTEN: When I heard that the doctor, had been shot, I was physically ill. I was, me, vomiting. Horrified. That was never my intention. I'm a theatre administrator, not a murderer. I didn't even want Halfdan arrested, despite his lies and deception. But that's all out of my hands, now. Grini now gets three more inmates; Halfdan, and the doctor's two girls. You'll be joining them soon enough, but first I have to get the play opened, and I'm not about to conduct tech week without the play's director.

BIRGIT: I really don't think we can open.

MORTEN: Shut up.

BIRGIT: Astrid is genuinely unwell, and Egil's foot ...

MORTEN: Shut up! Do you really think I'm that big a fool?

BIRGIT: No.

MORTEN: I have tried to be your friend; I have tried to protect you and your cast. No more. It's out of my hands. Minister Fuglesang is in charge now, and those above him. The play will open the twenty-fourth. Your actors will perform. I know you hate the play; I know they hate it. I don't care. They're professional actors, and they will do their professional best.

BIRGIT: Morten. You're a Norwegian, just as we are. The play's not just badly written.

MORTEN: It isn't that badly written.

BIRGIT: It's terrible, you have to know that, it's inhuman ...

MORTEN: No. I don't know that.

BIRGIT: Of course you do. You're not a fool. You know anti-Jewish garbage -

MORTEN: No! Its villain is a Jew. There are many plays with Jewish villains. One rather good one by Shakespeare!

BIRGIT: It's a play full of hate. It's a play that does nothing but hate.

MORTEN: It's a play that tells the truth about Jews.

BIRGIT: Oh, Morten. How can you do this?

MORTEN: My job? How can I do my job?

(calling to the next room)

Send him in.

(to BIRGIT)

You've made too big a fuss over nothing. *The Last Scream* is a piece of entertainment. Of no importance or consequence. It will play for the right audience.

BIRGIT: Morten ...

MORTEN: Enough!

(HENRICH enters)

Meet your new shadow.

HEINRICH: This is her?

MORTEN: That's right. Sgt. Heinrich Koenig, of the Wehrmacht. His father and older brother are both actors, his mother a costumer. And he speaks fluent Norwegian. Heinrich, this is Birgit. Production stage manager.

BIRGIT: Sergeant.

MORTEN: And I'm done! I did my job, I reported an act of sabotage, now it's out of my hands! Just remember, Birgit. I tried to be your friend. This is your fault. Yours!

HEINRICH: (*snaps HIS fingers*) Eyes on me.

(*SHE looks at HIM*)

You will do as I tell you, and nothing else. Is that clear?

(*SHE nods*)

You, and the rest of the company, are under surveillance. We've been watching you for days. If you hadn't already guessed it. You will rehearse, and then you will go quietly home, separately. No more clandestine meetings in someone's flat. You won't see those watching you, but be aware that they are omnipresent. No talk of running off to Sweden, or something equally foolish. As for Mette's Gypsy terrorist boyfriend, Einar—yes, we know all about him too—he'll be found soon enough. He evaded our first arrest squad, but he can't hide forever. Certainly, there will be no more talk about bombings.

BIRGIT: You know about ...

HEINRICH: We have recordings from Peter's flat and from your rehearsals. Nearly a week's worth. Assume we know everything.

BIRGIT: My God.

HEINRICH: So. To rehearsal. On the main stage?

BIRGIT: That's right.

HEINRICH: I have my orders, and I will obey them. Your life has, in most respects, become much simpler. If you continue to direct the play in a professional manner, and if it opens without incident, you will spend the rest of your life in Grini prison. Any more delays, any more nonsense, and you will be shot. Instantly and without warning. Do you understand?

BIRGIT: Morten. I'm sorry.

MORTEN: Go.

HEINRICH: We're off then.

(*gesturing to BIRGIT*)

After you.

BIRGIT: Fine.

(*to audience*)

Barely able to walk without stumbling.

(*back to HEINRICH*)

So, how did you learn to speak Norwegian so well.

HEINRICH: Family connection.

BIRGIT: Good for you. So, your parents, or perhaps ...

HEINRICH: No. I know what you're doing: no. Before we go in. Let's be clear about a few things.

BIRGIT: All right.

HEINRICH: I have worked backstage on more shows than I can remember. If I see anything that strikes me as unprofessional, or if I hear anything that disparages the Third Reich in any sense whatsoever, I will set matters right. If I shoot, I will shoot to kill.

BIRGIT: Understood.

HEINRICH: This. Play. Opens.

BIRGIT: Yes.

HEINRICH: Don't try to make friends, don't try to get to know me. I'll tell you this much: I have two brothers freezing in the mud outside Stalingrad. You think I want to be here, in Norway, babysitting actors? But: orders. Do your job, as I most assuredly will do mine.

BIRGIT: I understand.

HEINRICH: All right then.

BIRGIT: I understand.

HEINRICH: All right then.

BIRGIT: Lights, go.

(entering rehearsal)

Hello, cast. This is Heinrich. He'll be ... observing.

PETER: *(after a moment)* So, you met with Morten?

BIRGIT: We're still on for the 24th. So we have some work to do.

ASTRID: We're still on? I had a letter from a doctor! What on earth ...

PETER: *(reading the situation, quiets HER)* So: we rehearse.

ASTRID: What?

ANDERS: There's a German soldier with her, darling.

ASTRID: So? I'm pregnant!

PETER: Not now.

ASTRID: I am, absolutely, pregnant! And in a most delicate ...

HEINRICH: No. You're not. Stop lying.

(THEY all stare at HIM)

By my watch, rehearsal should have begun two minutes ago.

(THEY all shuffle into position)

BIRGIT: *(to HERSELF)* Keep them alive.
(to THEM)

Let's begin.

ANDERS: *(whispers to PETER)* What now?

PETER: Fire.

HEINRICH: What did you just say?

PETER: Blocking change.

HEINRICH: You have it, then?

ANDERS: I think so. Yes.

METTE: Um. All right then. Places, people. Act One Scene one. We have work to do.

BIRGIT: We need to get this play ready to open. Lights. Sound. Go. And so we rehearsed, an awkward, terrified run-through. The actors went their own ways, sullen and afraid. Heinrich drove me to rehearsal and back, arranged overnight surveillance outside my apartment, was there, by my shoulder, every note I gave an actor. Our nightly meetings at Peter's place were over; all the actors were surveilled. What Morten did not know is that we had already made our plans. They began surveillance on the seventeenth. The day before, we had decided to set the theater on fire. Act break, people. Audience. Take ten. House lights, go.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO CONTAINS AN ADDITIONAL 23 PAGES

REVIEW: (In retrospect)

THE ICE FRONT

Les Roka for Salt Lake Magazine

As outstanding as *The Season of Eric* was, Samuelsen gave Plan-B some of its most incredible blockbuster moments in *The Kreutzer Sonata* (2015) and *The Ice Front* (2017).

In 2017, *The Ice Front* again raised the bar for Plan-B. It featured the largest cast ever (nine actors) and was among the longest plays in the company's history. And, it sold out its entire production run more than a week before its scheduled opening.

It is a masterful synthesis of all of the most significant traces that encompassed Samuelsen's work and his life. *The Ice Front* takes audiences back to Nazi-occupied Norway in 1943 and to the precise moral dilemma confronting the members of the Norwegian National Theatre in Oslo. The actors contemplate the prospects of sabotaging a production in which they would have to submit as performers and agents of propaganda.

In one scene, Peter (played by Daniel Beecher), a character who normally plays leading man roles, says, "We could act badly on purpose. We could sabotage the play, and limit its propaganda value to the degree that we can. That's risky, very dangerous. We very well could be killed. But it remains a possibility." Still trying to sort out why the authorities insist on making the play happen, Birgit (performed by Stephanie Howell) worries about becoming a "victim of circumstance," adding, "I don't want events to control us; I'm a stage manager. We want to make things happen." Eventually, the actors vote 4-1 in proceeding but by following the tenth and most consequential commandment of the Resistance: "If you absolutely must work for Germans or quislings, you will work badly."

The idea of writing the play that became *The Ice Front* was more than 30 years in the making, based on research he discovered as he wrote his dissertation. However, Samuelsen had become fully absorbed with his life as a playwright, scholar and university professor so the project always lingered in the background. But, his father, Roy Samuelsen, who died in 2017 and to whom *The Ice Front* is dedicated, never gave up on encouraging his son to bring this play forward to completion and production. Samuelsen's grandfather knew first-hand the moral significance and strategic value of *The Ice Front* rules and the brave risks many took, acknowledging that Resistance was the only morally correct thing to do. His uncle was a war hero who received among the highest honors of the Norwegian military. But, some of those courageous men and women involved in the Resistance paid a deep price in terms of their physiological and cognitive well-being, as anger, alcoholism and untreated Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder would disrupt and consume their lives long after the war ended.

Samuelsen was at the height of his intellectual and creative powers, even as his body struggled to cope with numerous health crises and long hospitalizations. The humanistic challenges in *The Ice Front* are as formidable, incisive and existential as they were in *Nothing Personal*. However, the 2017 audience also was better prepared emotionally than the 2013 audience to heed the warning signs of history – the virulent expressions of intolerance, hatred, discrimination and bigotry that currently cause great distress in our nation.

As previously highlighted at [The Utah Review](#), Samuelsen deftly excavated stories about ordinary individuals – the actors and professionals in a national theater in Oslo, for example – who variously fall along points on the spectrum between the protagonist victim and the antagonist villain. Again, as Birgit mentions, “I don’t like this, being a victim of circumstance.” In *The Ice Front*, Birgit and the other characters vividly demonstrate what it must have been like for ordinary Norwegians to endure that period of history. Late in the play, they begin to comprehend the dynamics of history’s critical judgment and the hope that they will be forgiven. The contemporary parallels are unmistakable. The formula for Samuelsen drama’s contemporary relevance always will be urgent, wise, sensitive, intelligent and spiritual.