

THE LADY IN QUESTION

Gertrude, Baron (1 man, 1 woman)

Act I Scene 2

Germany, 1940. The grand sitting room of the Baron's ancestral home. Gertrude Garnet (GARNAY) is a glamorous internationally acclaimed concert pianist. However, before she became so grand, she was Gertie Garnet, who played honky tonk piano on the vaudeville circuit. Occasionally, she accidentally drops her high tone elegant accent and reveals her tough dame earlier self. She is totally oblivious of the Nazis and their politics, she is outrageously self centered. She is a guest of the charming Nazi Baron.

BARON

Gertrude, this has been such a delightful surprise, meeting you.

GERTRUDE

And you were a godsend. I really don't know what we would have done.

BARON

I only wish I could spend more time with you. I have so many meetings and military obligations. I hope you won't find our little village too tiresome.

GERTRUDE

Oh no, I adore *quiet* places.

BARON

Away from the glamour of Manhattan?

GERTRUDE

Rather.

BARON

Away from the many stage door Johnnies. Isn't that what you call them?

GERTRUDE
(Amused)

Yes, that's what we call them.

BARON

I imagine a woman of your fame and beauty has many, how do I say, flirtations?

GERTRUDE

Fewer than you may think. I'm completely devoted to two figures, the bass and treble clefs. (*Sits on sofa*)

BARON

Is there no place in your life for love? (*Sits beside her*)

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GERTRUDE

I'm not too keen on love, never having known it. Besides, my spiritual advisor, the swami, has made me realize that I can't love others until I love myself first. I must be number one. And I can only make others happy after I have made myself completely happy, first and foremost. It may take years.

BARON

You're very mysterious, Gertrude. As mysterious as a prelude by Debussy.

GERTRUDE

Am I? (She plays piano scales on her arm of the sofa.)

BARON

Such beautiful hands. Let me see them. Ah, lovely. So delicate. (*She displays her hands in a picturesque manner.*)

GERTRUDE

Yes. Every finger is double-jointed and X-rays have revealed large air pockets in the bone marrow.

BARON

So sensitive and yet so practical. Rather like myself. I feel as if we were two melodies that fit together in perfect counterpoint.

GERTRUDE

I'm flattered, your Excellency.

BARON

Your Excellency? Why so formal? You Americans are so famous for your nicknames. What shall you call me?

GERTRUDE

(Flirtatiously)

Well, for Wilhelm, I could call you "Bill." And, of course, you are a bit older than I, I could call you "Popsie."

BARON

No, I don't care for that. What about "darling?"

GERTRUDE

Don't you think that's a bit too intimate?

BARON

(Rises. Intimately)

No, I don't. And to demonstrate our intimacy, I shall let you in on a little secret. I'm going to show you something of mine I don't let everyone see.

THE LADY IN QUESTION

GERTRUDE
(Dubious)

Oh, yeah?

BARON

You see that portrait of the Führer?

GERTRUDE

An excellent likeness.

BARON

(Pulls it away, revealing a safe) It conceals a safe. Most clever. Everthing of importance is locked in that safe. Let me see if I can remember the combination. Now, close your eyes.

She does. He murmurs the combinations, she mouths it to remember.

BARON

Turn right three times to zero, left all the way round to six, right back to twelve. Open sesame. Voila!

GERTRUDE

(Stands and crosses to Baron.) Watcha got in there, Billy boy?

BARON

All sorts of goodies. This ring once belonged to the Grand Duchess Mathilde.

GERTRUDE

Ooh, daddy, emeralds.

BARON

(Gives her the ring.) It looks lovely with your hair. Try it on.

She puts on the ring.

BARON

Most attractive. It's yours.

GERTRUDE

I couldn't possibly...

BARON

Please, it gives me pleasure, but for now, when you see Mother, turn the ring around.

GERTRUDE

By all means.

THE LADY IN QUESTION

BARON

(Silly)

And there's more where that comes from, baby. But only for the girl I marry.

GERTRUDE

Mmmm, you're tempting me. And all in that safe?

BARON

No, no, no, no. They are in a special vault. The most precious object in this safe is this set of keys. The keys to every room in the house and for the rooms off the catacomb.

GERTRUDE

The catacomb?

BARON

The house was build in the fifteenth century. My warrior ancestors built a mile-long network of tunnels leading away from the house as an escape route.

GERTRUDE

And where does it end?

BARON

A nasty place. Let's not speak of it, particularly when these keys lead to such nice places, such as the vault where we keep the family jewels. (*Returns the keys and locks the safe*) Now, my darling, does that illustrate our intimacy and my trust?