

## THE LADY IN QUESTION

Gertrude, Erik (1 man, 1 woman)

Germany, 1940. Gertrude Garnet, the very glamorous internationally acclaimed American concert pianist is touring Bavaria with her best friend, Kitty, the Countess De Borgia. Gertrude is totally self centered and oblivious to politics. While staying as guests at the sinister Baron's home, Kitty became involved in a plot to save a famous German actress, Raina Aldric, from a Nazi prison. Her activities were discovered and at the end of Act One, Gertrude found to her horror Kitty dead from hanging. Her entire world shaken, Gertrude is being comforted by Erik, a handsome American Professor, whose mother was the actress, Raina Aldric. Though immediately attracted to each other, up till now, Erik had distain for Gertrude's selfish behavior and Gertrude resented Erik's demands on her.

### Act II Scene 1

*The Schloss, several hours later. Erik is confronting Gertrude. She suffers beautifully in a luxurious full length velvet dressing gown.*

GERTRUDE

It was horrible. Her lovely face, so twisted, her eyes bulging.

ERIK

Here, take my handkerchief. Where is she now?

*(He gives her his handkerchief, she uses it and returns it to him.)*

GERTRUDE

I must have fainted. When I came to, her body was gone. Thank you for rushing over so quickly. You must think me totally mad.

ERIK

I believe every word you've said.

GERTRUDE

How could they do this? She, who was so kind, so gentle.

ERIK

They'll stop at nothing until the whole world is filled with their evil.

GERTRUDE

*(rises from the sofa)*

I must see the swami. He'll make sense of this. He says everything happens because we choose it. I must take comfort in that.

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ERIK  
(Challenging her)

Then Kitty somehow wanted to die?

GERTRUDE  
(cries out in confusion)

I don't know! She couldn't. No one loved life more than Kitty. Erik, I'm so confused. It's as if the ribbon that's kept my world together has untied. You see, Kitty and I fought. She said I was selfish, that I think only of myself...and Erik, she was so right. I've lived a terrible life and now, now I'm so ashamed.

ERIK

I'm sure she would have forgiven you.

GERTRUDE

That I shall never know.

ERIK

I imagine you'll be on the next plane.

GERTRUDE

No, I'm staying on.

ERIK

What do you mean?

GERTRUDE

I must avenge Kitty's death. She was my friend. I must finish the work she died for, saving your mother. The Baron and his henchmen knew of Kitty's pledge to aid your mother. That's why they killed her. Raina Aldric must leave Germany alive.

ERIK

Then you're with us?

GERTRUDE

If you'll have me. I'll cancel my concert at the Festspielhaus. I'll whip up some excuse, but first I must see the Baron. I'll have it out with him. Force him to admit they murdered Kitty.

ERIK

No, you must pretend you never found Kitty.

GERTRUDE  
(aghast)

But Erik...

ERIK  
(forcefully)

Listen to what I say. You can do us more good if the Baron continues to trust you.

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GERTRUDE

You're asking me to pretend I'm in love with him. Aren't you?

ERIK

Yes, I am. It will act as a smoke screen to mask our true plans. Will you do this? Can you do this?

GERTRUDE

(revolted but game)

Yes. You can depend on me. I shall carry out this deception to its very end. Can you ever forgive me for my foolishness? (*Tender, romantic music underscores the scene.*)

ERIK

Of course. You're so unbelievably beautiful at this moment. The way the sunset catches your face and hair.

GERTRUDE

Oh, you mean like this? (*Composing her face into an unforgettable image.*)

ERIK

(with deadpan thoughtfulness)

No, like this (*Adjusting the position of her head.*) I know it's madness to feel this way after so short a time and with so much at stake, but I love you, Gertie.

GERTRUDE

Please, don't say it.

ERIK

I love you. From the first moment I met you.

GERTRUDE

(tenderly)

I believe you, and the strange thing is, I feel the same. For the first time, something has burst inside me and I feel what the poets call love. But do I trust it?

ERIK

You must and you will.

GERTRUDE

(tremulously)

Erik, hold my hands.

ERIK

Really? I know how you feel about your hands.

GERTRUDE

It doesn't seem to matter anymore. Today, we all need as much tenderness as we can find. (*She takes his hands.*) Hold my hands like any American boy would do with his girl. They won't win, will they, darling, the Nazis?

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ERIK

(with inspiring fervor)

We won't let 'em. God is on our side. Yeah, he's a regular Joe who won't let the bad guys get away with just a kick in the pants. You'll see, this time the krauts will be smashed to smithereens forever.

GERTRUDE

And will we be fighting alone?

ERIK

No, ma'am. All of Europe will join together. Uncle Sam'll come in swinging, and Russia too. Sure, the Naxis fooled 'em for awhile, but they've wised up. I met Joe Stalin once, at a seminar in Moscow. He wasn't so bad. Believe me, kiddo, he won't let old Schickelgruber into his backyard.

GERTRUDE

I love hearing you talk this way.

ERIK

I love holding you this way. (*He gently kisses her.*)

GERTRUDE

Darling, we have so little time. Do you see that portrait? Behind it lies a safe. This morning, Kit...Kitty and I opened it and found the keys to all the rooms in the house.

ERIK

Good going.

GERTRUDE

Unfortunately, when I tried to return them, I forgot the combination. I'm terrified the Baron will notice the keys are missing...

ERIK

We can only hope he doesn't go near the safe for (*Looks at his watch*) the next six hours. Let's fetch Mother from the catacombs.

GERTRUDE

I've seen to that already. I've hidden your mother and Heidi in the butler's pantry.

ERIK

You're a genius.

GERTRUDE

(radiantly)

Go to her darling.