

THE LADY IN QUESTION

Heidi, Raina (2 women)

Act I Scene 3

Germany, 1940. A catacomb beneath the Baron's schloss. Heidi, a brave, emotional young girl with the resistance has helped rescue the famous German actress, Raina Aldric, from a Nazi camp. They are hiding in the catacomb until they get further word. Heidi is garbed as a prison guard. With her in a wheelchair is the legendary RAINA ALDRIC. Raina is a beautiful woman in her fifties, fragile but still dramatically vibrant. She lives on drama and speaks in the manner of a wildly flamboyant stage actress.

HEIDI

That was close. I was sure the guard saw through my disguise. You may rest now, Madame Aldric. For the moment, you are safe.

RAINA

Safe. The most beautiful word in any language. But where am I? What time of day is it? I'm so bewildered.

HEIDI

You poor darling. It's early morning. A short while ago, I moved you out of the prison infirmary, took you through the secret door and we came down that very long tunnel. We are now in a room off that tunnel and directly under the home of the Baron Von Elsner.

RAINA

A baronial home. I do not understand.

HEIDI

The Baron's ancestors built two fortresses, one they lived in and the other was a prison. They linked them together with a long series of catacombs in case of enemy attack. That door leads to the interior of the Baron's home and to freedom.

RAINA

Why are we waiting? We should go through it now.

HEIDI

The door is locked from the outside. We must wait till my father or Erik opens it and escorts us through the house late tonight.

RAINA

(with great theatricality)

Freedom! I shall never be free. I have seen too much and I shall never be free of the memories. They have destroyed me. I no longer even have the will to walk.

HEIDI

You are a great actress. You have so much more to give.

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RAINA

I once was a great actress. “The shining beacon of the European stage” was what Brecht once called me. “Aldric’s Hilde Wangel sang with a poetry Ibsen could only hint at,” *Munich Bugle*, September 9, 1934. “Raina Aldric’s Ranyefskaya ranks with the Cathedral of Chartres as one of the world’s great artistic treasures,” *Lisbon Daily News*, May 1937. But now I’m old, weak, my legs are worn-out pipe cleaners. You should have let them execute me. My soul died the night they shot my lover, Gebhardt. “Don’t shoot him, don’t, don’t shoot!” Bang, bang, bang. “Then kill me too, kill me!!!”

Heidi bursts into tears.

RAINA
(concerned)

Forgive me, I didn’t mean to upset you.

HEIDI

No, it’s just that I, too, was once in love.

RAINA

Is he dead?

HEIDI

He might as well be. His name was Karel, the most wonderful boy in the world. It seems a century ago that we lay in the weinerwald and he taught me the names of all the birds and flowers that gathered about us.

RAINA

What happened?

HEIDI

He came under the influence of the Baron Von Elsner. They have turned his brains to sauerkraut. When I look into his beautiful eyes, I only see swastikas. (*Weeping vulnerably.*) Madame Aldric, tell me, help me understand why he has turned against me. (*With fierce, hardened vengeance.*) Oh god, how I hate them. They’ve made this whole world LOUSY! Well, something has changed in Heidi Mittelhoffer and I’m gonna make those bastards pay for what they’ve done. They’ve butchered my dreams!!!