

ELSA. You have heard, perhaps, of the Dreyfuss papers? The Colonel Redl letter? The Kruger telegram? The Von Moltke note? The Hotzendorff memo? The Von Emmich shopping list? (*Others are shaking heads.*) Events which changed the course of history; with my father at their center, working in clandestine, covert alliance, cloaked in an atmosphere of secrecy, stealth, and subterfuge.

MARJORIE. But why the secret passages?

ELSA. It was the only way he could leave the room. (*Ken enters.*)

KEN. Is all our company met?

MARJORIE. Ken darling! How divoon!

KEN. Marjorie, honey. (*They kiss . . . exaggeratedly*)

MARJORIE. Kids, this is Ken De La Maize, your director. Whom haven't you met, Ken?

EDDIE. Hi, I'm Eddie McCuen. I just did "Hellzapoppin" and . . .

KEN. Eddie. We'll go to work shortly, but . . . (*Helsa enters.*)

HELSA. Excuse me, gnadige Frau, but I cannot find the meat cleaver.

ELSA. You need a meat cleaver?

HELSA. For the hors d'oeuvres, ja.

ELSA. Well . . . if you need it. (*Starting out.*) My home is yours everyone. Make yourselves comfortable. I'll be right back. You're sure you mean a meat cleaver, Helsa?

HELSA. Ja wohl. (*Elsa and Helsa exit.*)

MARJORIE. (*Crossing to penholder.*) Ken darling, look. (*She moves penholder, and the bookcase opens and closes.*) A secret passage.

KEN. So it is. Very like the one I just used in "The Circular Staircase," with Paulette Goddard, Laird Cregar, Judith Anderson, Lionel Atwill, George Sanders, Peter Lorre, and John Carradine.

MARJORIE. I saw it Ken, and it was some of your best work.

KEN. It hasn't been released yet. Now cast, as I was saying, we will go to work shortly. But let me remind you that although this is only a backer's audition for an audience of one, it is still theater. So, any questions of character or interpretation you have . . . bring them out. Theater is nothing

more or less than life distilled to the pure, clear, ring of truth. A ritual as old as . . . (*Roger enters, carrying a portfolio of sheet music.*)

ROGER. Quick, someone, a martini, I am in danger of . . .

MARJORIE. Roger darling! You look divoon! Simply divoon!

ROGER. Marjorie, sweetheart, love your new word.

MARJORIE. Let me introduce. Actors, this is Roger Hope-well. They're to do your music, Roger. Miss Crandall, Mr. McCuen, Mr. O'Reilly.

ROGER. (*To O'Reilly.*) Your eyes are very blue.

MARJORIE. Perhaps I will have a drink now. It makes it so much easier to excuse licentious behavior.

ROGER. I was not being licentious, Marjorie. A trifle libidinous perhaps. A bit lascivious. But not licentious.

MARJORIE. What's the difference?

KEN. The placement of the tongue, I imagine.

ROGER. Ken! I didn't see you. How wonderful to be working with you again. I was saying to Bernice on the way here, now our script will have distilled truth, and clean rings, and new sparkplugs, and all those wonderful things Ken does. (*Seeing Eddie.*) And you are the comic.

EDDIE. Right. You've seen me work?

ROGER. No. I merely assumed that was why you were only wearing one overshoe.

EDDIE. My gosh, forgot all about it. (*Sits on piano bench and removes it.*)

ROGER. (*Crossing to bar.*) I must have that martini.

MARJORIE. (*Above piano, with martini shaker.*) How about our performers? Dare you have a drink before attempting to entice Elsa out of her money?

NIKKI. No, thank you. O'REILLY. Not right now, thanks.

EDDIE. I wouldn't mind a shot of bourbon, if you've got it. (*Bernice Roth enters. She is 40 to 50, dresses like a gypsy dancer. Her arms are piled with bracelets which rattle every time she moves.*)

BERNICE. Hi, gang.

MARJORIE. (*Rushing to embrace her.*) Bernice, darling.