

A TOUCH OF CINEMA

by

Duncan Pflaster

A TOUCH OF CINEMA

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For Diánna Martin

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A Touch of Cinema was originally produced as part of Spotlight On Productions' "Rise of the Phoenix Festival" in 2017 at The Wild Project in New York City, with the following cast (in order of appearance):

Dina Kummerspeck	Diánna Martin
Tomas Kummerspeck	Lars Engstrom*
Regina Fontaine	Kristen Vaughan
Martin Dure.....	Russell Jordan*
Sally Haze	Lucy Spain
Graeme Tupper	Michael Andrew Daly*
Director	Aliza Shane
Stage Manager	Laura Hirschberg
Costume Design	Tricia Bastian

* Indicates member of Actors' Equity Association, An Equity Approved Showcase.

During the pandemic in 2020, The Harlem Camerata did a one-night Zoom reading with the original cast, directed by Rafael Garcia, with Stage Directions read by Phil Williams.

Earlier readings and developmental support provided by Rising Sun Performance Company, art gallery 3Squared (thanks to Sven Trygve Haabeth), and EMG Playwrights Group.

"Cinema is the history of boys photographing girls".

- Jean-Luc Godard

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Cast: 3 Women, 3 Men

<u>DINA KUMMERSPECK:</u>	F, 30s. Any Race. An ex-filmmaker. Currently under house arrest for making films considered anti-government propaganda. She has an alarm bracelet on her ankle.
<u>TOMAS KUMMERSPECK:</u>	M, 30s. Any Race. Dina's husband. A painter.
<u>REGINA FONTAINE:</u>	F. 40s. Any Race. Grande Dame. A highly acclaimed actress.
<u>MARTIN DURE:</u>	M. 40s, Any Race. A gay actor who is highly flamboyant offscreen, but just now aging out of being a matinee idol.
<u>GRAEME TUPPER:</u>	M, 20s. Any Race. A hot young actor.
<u>SALLY HAZE:</u>	F, 20s. Any Race. A glamorous young actress.

Time: Now.

Place: The living room of Dina and Tomas Kummerspeck's well-appointed house in a country that is not the United States of America.

There are no act breaks, the action is continuous, played in real time.

The play has several scenes from a screenplay within the play that the characters read aloud. *Those lines will be indicated in bold and italics, like this.*

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Setting: Dina and Tomas' living room in a country that is not America. Wealthy artists live here; there is a sense of a genteel bohemia. Several chairs and a couch. Large plants on either side of the couch. There is a coffee table, and a small bar or bar-cart in the corner, well-stocked with liquor for a party. At rise, DINA, a female filmmaker in her thirties, enters and deposits a pile of loosely-bound scripts onto the coffee table. It may not be apparent immediately, but she wears an electronic bracelet around her ankle to keep her from leaving the house. She calls off-stage.

DINA. Honey? Where are the cocktail peanuts?

TOMAS. *(from offstage)* I can't find them; where did we put them?

DINA. They're not in the cupboard?

TOMAS. No, I looked there.

DINA. The one above the sink?

TOMAS. No, why would they— Oh they are there. Thanks! *(Dina sits on the couch and examines a plant intensely. She peels back the leaves and stares for a moment. She scoots to the other end of the couch and does the same to the other plant. TOMAS, her husband, 30s, enters, with bowls of peanuts, and sees her doing this.)*

TOMAS. Relax honey, it's only a party. Remember that.

DINA. Only a party!

TOMAS. Look, cocktail peanuts. It's a party. We're having drinks... You don't have a drink.

DINA. I don't want a drink. I want to stay *here*. Pay attention.

TOMAS. It'll seem suspicious if you're not having a drink.

DINA. I'm nervous.

TOMAS. Relax. It's a party. Have a drink. *(He goes to the bar and pours her a whiskey during the following. She accepts it as a prop, but will not drink from it.)* We're going to have a lovely time, nothing unusual. Right?

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DINA. Right. Just a party, while I'm under house arrest, and President—

TOMAS. Don't say his name!

DINA. What more can he do to us *now*?

TOMAS. So much more. You don't know. But let's not think about it now. We're here to have a good time, right?

DINA. Right.

TOMAS. Good. (*The doorbell rings.*) Here we go. Party faces on.

DINA. Kiss me. For luck. (*Tomas leans over the couch and kisses her.*)

TOMAS. Luck. (*He goes to the door, and lets in REGINA. She is a flamboyant actress, a lightly aged (probably 40s) and still glamorous Grande Dame. She enters, and crosses immediately to Dina, who rises to meet her.*)

REGINA. DINA! Oh Dina, Dina, Dina... It's just too awful. Let me embrace you. It breaks my heart to think of you locked away here.

DINA. Thank you for coming, Regina.

REGINA. Oh, I had to! Finally a chance to see my dearest friend, here in her solitude. Let me see the blasted thing. (*Dina holds out her leg modeling the anklet.*) Oh, it's hideous! Come, let's smash this dreadfulness, can we just smash it?

TOMAS. I'm afraid not, darling; if the anklet gets broken it sends a message to the police just as if Dina were to try to leave the house.

REGINA. Oh, and Tomas! Dear sweet Tomas, Dina is so lucky to have a man like you by her side. So many men these days are hateful and full of ingratitude.

DINA. Ingratitude? Surely, you don't—

REGINA. Yes, it's true. Kristoff and I have parted company. I came to discover the foolish boy was rifling through my papers. He had no cares for a mature woman who could teach him the ways of the world. I consider myself a mentor sometimes, you know.

TOMAS. Of course.

REGINA. Well, would you believe, I was out at an audition the other day— Well, really just an informal lunch with Zachary, he's working on a new film that he wants me for, but I'll tell you all about that later— I was out to lunch with Zachary, I'd left Kristoff home alone, and when I

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got back, somewhat earlier than I'd planned, the boy had out my acting journal and was paging through it. Fortunately it was only my intimate thoughts regarding my work, there was nothing seditious that might be exposed and get me reported for re-education, but still. A terrible invasion of my privacy.

TOMAS. That's awful. Do you think he was a professional informant?

REGINA. I doubt it, Kristoff was never that bright. I think he was probably looking for money. OH, and worse than that, after I showed him the door, I discovered there were traces of lipstick in the sink. Kristoff had had some painted woman in my bedroom while I was out. Worse! In my bathroom! I phoned him to give him a piece of my mind, and he denied it of course, said it was mine, but I would never wear that common shade of violet lipstick, I only only always wear "Cherries in the Snow", you know, I have it in all my contracts.

DINA. I remember.

REGINA. Well, of course you do. Oh darling, enough about me! It's such a tragedy having you locked up here! You may never make a film again! Our nation's foremost auteur, a genius of the silver screen, chained up like a dog. It's this terrible country. They don't appreciate art. If you were somewhere like France or America, your genius would be appreciated.

TOMAS. America, ha! How many times has Dina been overlooked at their "Academy Awards"? I mean, my wife has won the Palme D'or at Cannes, the Silver Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival, and the Americans practically ignore her.

REGINA. Well, we are a small country; Harold did get a nomination for cinematography for *Friends with Souls*.

TOMAS. Yes, but that was seven years ago. And you weren't nominated for your brilliant performance, and you've done better and better work since then. And Dina's work. God, every year, on the nominations, I expect to see "Dina Kummerspeck", but I never see her name.

REGINA. America has become so lowbrow in recent years.

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DINA. Don't speak badly of America, darling. I do have a following there. I was told there is an online Internet group that has begun petitioning the government there to get me released. It's on something called "Facebook".

TOMAS. What the hell can Americans do to help you here?

DINA. Oh, I don't know, probably nothing, but it's the thought that counts, right? I have a loyal fan group there, that's all I meant. And some prestigious American filmmakers have signed their petitions and so forth. Some Americans do appreciate my work.

REGINA. As everyone should. And Tomas, your State Building Mural—I passed it on the way here and it's covered in scaffolding.

TOMAS. It's not the State Building anymore, it's the Ministry of Re-education.

REGINA. I tried to take some photos before... well, you know. But the scaffolding obscures it so much.

TOMAS. Thank you, I do still have some photos from when the building was dedicated.

DINA. Happier times.

REGINA. Yes, exactly. Oh, Dina darling, it's so good to see you again. When you were released from Re-education and put under house arrest, I was afraid I might never see you for years and years.

DINA. Well, anyone could have come to visit. At any time.

REGINA. (*beat*) Yes, well. You know how things were just after the revol— After the *election*. So many people out of work. So many people kept from working. It wouldn't have been quite prudent.

DINA. No, I'm sorry, that was cruel of me. I know you were all fearing for your careers.

REGINA. Our *lives* darling, not just our livelihoods. We all are, I'm just not that courageous. That brave. It's a failing. Oh, that horrid blacklist, though. Alfie tried to commit suicide a few days ago, you know.

TOMAS. No! Alfie Shepherd?

REGINA. Yes, when he heard he wouldn't be allowed to act anymore, it was too much for him. At his age, well, what else can he do but character parts? And of course, he's one of the best character men out

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there. That face, what can one say? A genius. Such a shame. He's in hospital now.

DINA. I've missed out on so much news.

TOMAS. That's why he didn't respond to the invitation I sent.

REGINA. Oh, was Alfie going to be here? What a shame, what a shame. Who else is coming?

DINA. Most of the usual suspects. Martin, Elizabeth, Sally Haze, and have you meet Graeme?

REGINA. Graeme...?

DINA. He was in my last two movies, Graeme Tupper?

REGINA. Oh yes, that charming young man with, with the hair!

DINA. Yes, he's a very talented young actor. He's been getting some interest from American filmmakers recently, they all want him to screentest. He's very good.

REGINA. Yes, no, I saw him in *Tender is the Waltz* and *Canine Teeth*, he was just splendid. And quite attractive. But I haven't met him.

DINA. Well, you will soon. They should all be here any minute and we can get started.

REGINA. Started? Started with what?

TOMAS. Well, with drinking, of course!

DINA. Oh, what terrible hosts we've been! Reggie, sweetheart, do you still take your martinis dirty?

REGINA. It's such a pleasure to be amongst good friends who recollect one's predilections. Yes, darling, dirty. But please don't consider yourselves bad hosts. I came for the company as much as the cocktails.

(Dina goes to fix a martini for Regina. Doorbell rings.)

DINA. Oh! Someone—

TOMAS. Got it! *(He opens the door and in comes MARTIN, 40s, a gay actor.)*

MARTIN. Oh Tomas, how are you? So good to see you! *(They hug.)*
Oh my, have you been working out? Let me feel the pecs.

TOMAS. *(Rolling his eyes, amused)* I haven't been working out, but go ahead, Tiger.

MARTIN. Oh, you're on to me, but you still accept my blandishments.

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TOMAS. Flattery will get you everywhere.

REGINA. (*Standing and holding out her arms to him*) Martin, honey!

MARTIN. Oh, Regina! I'd hoped you'd be here, oh, it's like a college reunion!

TOMAS. We mostly only invited actors who'd been in Dina's films.

DINA. Friends, you know.

MARTIN. Then I hereby decree this shall be the most fantastic party, even if it's for a terrible reason. (*Dina comes round the couch with Regina's drink, hands it to her, and hugs Martin, who strokes her hair.*)

DINA. Oh, Muffin. It's been too long.

MARTIN. I know, I've been so scared for you. Oh, is that the beastly thing that's keeping you enslaved? It's quite ugly. Impervious to damage, I assume?

DINA. I'm afraid so.

MARTIN. What about paint? We can at least dress it up a bit. Oh! Let me run home and get my glue gun and my sack of rhinestones, and we'll have you looking sharp as shit and ready for the red carpet in no time.

DINA. Well, there's no point in dressing it up, as I certainly shan't be attending any red carpet premieres any time soon.

MARTIN. They've given you no inkling of when your incarceration might end?

TOMAS. Still scotch, Marty?

MARTIN. Yes, thank you, Tomas.

DINA. No idea. It's been nine months already. We hear nothing except when the technicians come by every other week to change the batteries in my shackle.

MARTIN. Ugh, "shackle", what a terrible word. Let's reframe it, think of it as jewelry.

REGINA. Mandatory accessorizing.

MARTIN. That's the spirit! "Everything I wear simply *must* match this manacle. It's hideous, but it's the 'in' thing, you know."

DINA. "The well-dressed prisoner this season always wears a stylish ankle cuff while in the shower."

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REGINA. “Marilyn Monroe, you know, wore nothing to bed but an electronic tether and a splash of Chanel Number 5”. (*All laugh.*)

DINA. Oh, I’ve missed you all so much. It’s good to laugh again.

TOMAS. (*Handing Martin his drink*) Here you go.

MARTIN. Oh Laphroig! You are my savior, Tomas, always know that. (*Tomas smiles, and walking past Martin, pinches his butt. Martin jumps, amused.*) Fresh! Oh and Tomas, I just saw your mural, all shuttered up. Just beastly, what they’ve done.

REGINA. I saw it too. Terrible.

MARTIN. You’re like a modern Diego Rivera. Just shocking.

TOMAS. My work is hardly as controversial as Rivera’s.

REGINA. One would think it wasn’t, but any suggestion of the previous administration is verboten. (*Doorbell rings. Dina goes to the door.*)

DINA. Got it! (*GRAEME, a handsome actor in his 20s, and SALLY, a beautiful actress in her 20s, enter. They look fabulous.*)

SALLY. Hello Darlings!

DINA. Oh, Graeme, Sally! Perfect, we’re just waiting for Elizabeth now.

GRAEME. Not too late, are we? Sally and I met up for a few drinks at the Gaslight Club beforehand, and our waitress was incredibly slow bringing our check.

DINA. No, you’re right on time.

SALLY. Damn, Graeme; I told you my clock was right. I deeply feel it’s important to arrive just a little bit late to anything truly significant; it creates a sense of drama. Just about five to ten minutes, I think.

Anything less, you seem overeager; anything longer is vulgar. Dina, darling: how have you been holding up?

DINA. Much better, now that you’re here. I’m so happy you consider my little party significant enough to attempt to be late for.

SALLY. Well, of course, sweetie. I’m just honored to be invited.

DINA. And look at Graeme there, trying to be inconspicuous.

GRAEME. I wasn’t trying to be inconspicuous; I was letting Sally have the floor.

SALLY. Such a gentleman.

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GRAEME. I was trying to be unobtrusive.

MARTIN. With *those* shoulders? Pshaw. Come, let me fix you a drink.

GRAEME. Thank you. Oh, Tomas, I'm so sorry to hear about your mural.

SALLY. Me too.

REGINA. Hear?

GRAEME. Well, yes – we just heard on the car radio it's scheduled to be painted over with a new mural tonight. It'll be gone by tomorrow. Oh god, I'm sorry, didn't you know?

TOMAS. No, they didn't even have the decency to tell me.

GRAEME. Oh gosh. Sorry to bring it up.

TOMAS. No, it's- I expected it. I just didn't expect it so soon. Did they say who's doing the new mural? The artist?

GRAEME. Matthew Orestes, I think they said?

DINA. Oh god, your student.

TOMAS. I taught him.

GRAEME. It's a new mural meant to extol the new regime of President Har—

DINA. Don't say his name in this house.

GRAEME. Sorry. A glorified portrait of The Man Himself.

REGINA. Appalling.

DINA. I can't believe Matthew would take on a governmental contract like that.

REGINA. That kind of money is hard to turn down, for a young artist. And I'm sure he wants to stay on the bright side of the blacklist.

TOMAS. Excuse me, I need a moment. (*He exits.*)

MARTIN. Here's your drink, handsome.

GRAEME. Thank you.

SALLY. No drink for me?

MARTIN. I thought Graeme would bring you one, after I made him one. We'll pass it on down the line. Sort of an alcoholic's evolution.

SALLY. Evolution? I do hope I don't inherit Graeme's taste for whiskey sours.

MARTIN. Ah well, survival of the fittest.

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GRAEME. There's nothing sour about you, Sally. Have a seat and I'll bring you an appletini.

MARTIN. Gross.

REGINA. Well, you and Graeme seem to be quite familiar with each other's drink preferences these days. And palling around at the Gaslight Club? Is there some news?

SALLY. What? No! Graeme and I are merely friends. You know I've always considered myself to be one of the guys. He's such a joy to be around, and certainly is fantastic eye candy if any paparazzi are lurking. I find that so few good actors have the stamina to truly party, if I may use "party" as a verb. Either they're fantastic on screen or they're fantastic while doing shots of tequila at 3am. So rarely is it both. But with Graeme – well, you saw him in *Friends with Souls*; he was incredible. And he can still drink me under the table, and I've been under tables for years.

REGINA. Oh my.

DINA. Well, he wasn't drunk while he was shooting.

GRAEME. That's right. When I'm working, I'm completely abstemious (*Tomas re-enters.*)

MARTIN. "Abstemious", don't you love him? (*Graeme crosses to Sally with her drink.*)

SALLY. But wait, does that mean next time you're cast in something, partying and my drinking buddy will go out the window?

GRAEME. I'm afraid so. But there is some good news in that regard. Although it is bad news for me, in a way. You won't be losing your drinking buddy any time soon.

MARTIN. No... They didn't.

GRAEME. Yes, I'm afraid so. As of this morning, I'm on the blacklist. No longer allowed to work in any sort of performing arts, film or stage, in this country. I just got the phone call today.

SALLY. And you didn't tell me? All night? We've been out drinking for hours.

GRAEME. I wanted to tell everyone together. Get it all out at once, pull off the band-aid. I've been let go from working on David's new movie,

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and my television contract has been ripped up. I was supposed to go to America next month for my screen test for the new Steven Spielberg movie, and my passport has been revoked. So here I am: an actor without a film, a puppy without a leash, a man without a country.

TOMAS. No! What a shame.

MARTIN. How awful for you, honey.

GRAEME. No no, I may be a man without a country, but I am a man with a drink. It's as Sally says: Party time.

SALLY. That's not what I said.

GRAEME. I am a man without pressing responsibilities. For the moment, I am finding it refreshing to have nothing to do tomorrow. So, bottoms up! *(He sits down heavily by Sally, clinks his glass against hers, and tosses back his drink. Everyone with drinks except Regina toast sadly. Dina toasts for show, but doesn't actually drink.)*

DINA. Cheers. To Graeme.

TOMAS. To us all.

MARTIN. Skoal.

GRAEME. *(holding out his empty glass to Martin)* More, homo.

MARTIN. Yes sir. *(He goes to refill Graeme's drink.)*

REGINA. Well, I think it's appalling. Just appalling. When young actors in their prime can just be shut down like this. And the roles I'm being offered recently? Nothing but brainless institutional publicity. When artists like Tomas can just have their work erased and covered up. When a promising artist like Matthew Orestes can just be bought? And Dina, with your Re-education and house arrest?! Disgusting what's happening all around us. And where will the art come from now? When all the films are propaganda, when all the art is government-approved, when all the stage plays are censored, what will be left? Nothing but bland oatmeal, only fit for babies. Weak tea.

DINA. Hear, hear! *(They toast again, Dina doesn't drink.)*

REGINA. *(to Graeme)* And darling, we haven't officially met. I'm Regina Fontaine. I've seen you in Dina's movies, you're wonderful.

GRAEME. Oh my gosh, I've seen you in her movies too; I didn't recognize you. It's an honor, Miss Fontaine.

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REGINA. Thank you. I feel so badly for you. Your career was just beginning.

GRAEME. These peanuts are great. (*Pointedly changing the subject, he begins to eat cocktail peanuts on the table.*)

TOMAS. Oh, we have some little nibbly things for everyone! Besides the peanuts. A little crudité. I'll go get it. You sit. (*He exits to the kitchen.*)

REGINA. What happened to Lester?

DINA. We had to let him go, I'm afraid. The government agency considered him a security risk.

MARTIN. How awful for Lester, too, to suddenly be without work. How long was he your butler?

DINA. Five years. We gave him excellent references, of course, but with my current status as persona non grata, who knows how much those will even help? Indeed, I think the smartest thing for Lester to do would be to lie about his previous employment.

SALLY. Well, we've all done that. I auditioned for a show once and it turned out the choreographer had worked on a play I said I'd been in on my resume, so she obviously knew I hadn't.

GRAEME. What happened?

SALLY. I got the role anyway. They thought me charmingly brazen.

DINA. I've often said that about you.

SALLY. I believe the Jews call it "chutzpah".

DINA. Oh, where is Elizabeth? It's not like her to be late.

TOMAS. (*Entering with party food*) Here we go, everyone; dig in!

SALLY. Oh, thank you, but I shouldn't. Oscar wants me to lose twenty pounds for the new TV show.

REGINA. Twenty pounds? But darling, you're already divine, just the way you are.

SALLY. Thank you Reggie, but needs must. Cameras add pounds, television ones more than film. And when the director calls...

GRAEME. They are delicious, though. Just one?

SALLY. Well, maybe. A carrot. (*Graeme feeds her one.*)

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REGINA. Oh dear, I remember those days, having to conform to the industry's beauty standards. For a time I was eating nothing but fish and onions for months; my breath stank like the dickens, but I was always thin, thin, thin.

DINA. (*Standing, making an announcement*) So, everyone, thank you for coming and visiting me in my loneliness. Tomas and I are glad to have you here. Now, I was waiting for Elizabeth to show up, but she can just jump in when she gets here; I think now is the time to announce that I have a special surprise for you all.

MARTIN. (*pause*) Darling, perhaps this isn't the best political climate to announce a surprise to people enjoying themselves at a party run by a radical criminal.

DINA. Oh now, it's nothing like that. And I'm not technically a criminal, I am a "guest of the state"; that's what they call it. I thought you'd be happy to know that I've been working, is all! I wanted to announce that I've finished a new screenplay!

GRAEME. (*beat*) But, Dina. You're not allowed to make films anymore. The government won't let y—

DINA. They can't stop me from writing, though. I mean, honestly. Even when I was struggling to make it, I kept writing. Even when I was one of the country's top filmmakers and could have coasted a bit, I kept writing. When I got the worst reviews of my career, for *Maxie Three-Shoes*, you remember that, Reggie...

REGINA. Remember? I lived it!

DINA. Even at my lowest, I kept writing. Well, maybe I took a day or two off to lie in bed and lick my wounds and have Tomas bring me chicken soup—

TOMAS. Happy to.

DINA. —but then I got right back on the horse. They can't stop me writing.

TOMAS. And I think it's wonderful, don't you all?

SALLY. Yes, wonderful. A toast. To Dina. Don't let the bastards get you down.

GRAEME. May your films ever flourish.

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REGINA. May you never run out of cute young actors to kiss your ass.

MARTIN. Oh Reggie, you're incorrigible. Seriously, Dina.

Congratulations on finishing a new screenplay. I'm sure, if it ever gets made, that it will be fantastic. *(They all toast her.)*

DINA. Thank you, thank you all. Your friendship means so much to me. And of course, our working relationships. Some of you I've known longer than others of course, and some I've only come to know recently. But I deeply respect and admire you all so much. Your work, your craft: It's sublime. That's why I'd like you all to read my new screenplay. *(All begin to nod, and agree.)* Right now. *(There is a hush.)*

SALLY. Wait, what?

DINA. *(As she produces the scripts and begins handing them out.)* You see, I've been writing this all on my own. Back in the days when I had the studios to back me and corporate money to burn, I'd have taken the time to have a few readings with actors I trust, just to hear it out loud, you know, see if I was on the right track. But with this one, I've been here alone, with only my sturdy Tomas to lean on, and I can't read with him, he's not really an actor. No offense, darling. Love you.

TOMAS. None taken. Painting is a very different medium.

DINA. So you see, I've had a bit of an ulterior motive in inviting you all here tonight. This isn't so much a party as an impromptu screenplay reading. Surprise.

MARTIN. *(pause)* Oh dear. Darling, do you think this is wise?

DINA. I'm surely allowed to just have some friends over to read my new work. It's not like I'm broadcasting it to the masses. I'm sure I'm totally safe.

SALLY. But what about us? No offense, Dina, I'm glad you're safe, but what if it should get out that we actors attended a reading at the apartment of notorious governmental insurgent Dina Kummerspeck? How do we know your house isn't bugged? We could all be blacklisted, like Graeme. I have a new TV show to think of.

DINA. Don't be ridiculous. You're actors, just tell them you were here for the free food.

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MARTIN. It's too too easy to be flip, darling, but the girl has a point. I love you, but I don't know if this is the best idea for you right now. You're shooting yourself in your handsomely manacled foot.

GRAEME. Come on everyone. Don't be cowardly. It's only a script. It's only a screenplay. Don't you hate how the government is treating our art? Don't you want to be a little subversive?

MARTIN. Want, yes. But to actually rebel? I've been so careful for so long, I wouldn't want to take the risk.

TOMAS. Well, we can't force anyone to read. But Martin, there's a great role for you.

MARTIN. What's that?

DINA. Well, I wrote a role just for you. You and Regina would get to play together again.

REGINA. Well, that is tempting; I am a great admirer of your work, Martin.

MARTIN. And I you, of course. We haven't been in a film together since *Man-Poison*.

TOMAS. And Regina, I know you're a huge fan of Arletty?

SALLY. What's that?

REGINA. Arletty. She was a wonderful French actress from the 40s.

TOMAS. Arletty was in the film *Children of Paradise*, which was made under Nazi occupation, and she was the mistress of a Nazi Commander.

REGINA. For all the good that did her. One of the other actors was taken away during filming.

SALLY. What movie is this?

MARTIN. *Les Enfants du Paradis*. "Children of Paradise". Marcel Carné. 1945? The Americans call it the French *Gone With the Wind*, but I think it's more the French *Casablanca*? It's this huge epic period piece that was made during Nazi Occupation of France. A beautiful life-affirming work, right under the nose of the Nazis. It's still one of the top films in the world. They say it's always playing somewhere in France.

TOMAS. The lead actress, Arletty—

MARTIN. One name. "Arletty".

A TOUCH OF CINEMA

REGINA. My role model. She was a stage actress who broke into films in her 40s, playing beautiful desirable women. So different from today.

TOMAS. Well, she was gorgeous.

MARTIN. A goddess.

TOMAS. And in real life she was the mistress of a German Luftwaffe officer. After the fall, she was dragged into court and questioned about the affair. She told the court “If you men hadn’t let them in so easily, I wouldn’t have slept with him.”

REGINA. And then her best line, “My heart is French, but my ass is international”.

SALLY. Whoa.

TOMAS. Reportedly, after that *bon mot*, the crowd cheered and she was set free.

GRAEME. Ugh, she had sex with a Nazi?

MARTIN. Well, that’s not so bad, if you’re into blond and muscly and hate-sex and so forth. And a good uniform can be very exciting.

GRAEME. Or even a bad uniform, apparently.

DINA. Well, Regina, with this piece, I tried to write you a role like Arletty would have played. Passionate, young at heart. With the wistfulness of a Greta Garbo, but the backbone of a Joan Crawford. A fighter. Someone who stands up for what she believes in.

REGINA. Well, that is very tempting.

DINA. And the same for you, Martin. Something that shows off your strengths: your passion, your masculine vulnerability. The two of you together will be screen magic.

MARTIN. Though we won’t be on screen.

DINA. No, of course not. But think of the chemistry!

REGINA. Well, I suppose... Dear Martin, will you read with me? For our friend Dina?

MARTIN. Yes. I’ll read.

REGINA. We’re in.

GRAEME. I’d like to read too. If there’s a role for me?

DINA. Of course, there are roles for all of you, that’s why you’ve been invited. And Elizabeth too, when she gets here.

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GRAEME. Fantastic. Let's do it.

DINA. Sally?

SALLY. You all are insane. This could be dangerous.

DINA. You're right. I won't ask you to read if you don't want to. I wouldn't want you to endanger your career.

SALLY. It's not that. Not exactly. I just feel you're all being foolish, and I wish you would just stop. Shouldn't you think twice? It's best, isn't it, to fly under the radar? Don't you think? These days? To keep a low profile? It's best to not draw attention to yourself?

REGINA. Darling, we're actors.

SALLY. Yes, but...

MARTIN. I've flown under the radar all my life. The only time I truly feel alive is on a set or on a stage. And telling the truth. And that's being taken away from us, isn't it? My little cabaret downtown, the speakeasy? That's the only time I truly get to be myself anymore. The only time I get to be a true performer. Sally, I know you're starting a new TV Show and all, but you must feel the same. Read with us, Darling.

SALLY. Well, okay, I will. But only so it's understood that I'm doing it under duress.

DINA. Thank you, sweetheart, I appreciate that.

SALLY. Hand me a script.

MARTIN. Hand me a drink. *(Tomas gets Martin another drink as Dina finishes passing out scripts to everyone.)*

DINA. Thank you all so much. It means so much to me to have you all reading this. The movie is called "The Third Movement of Winter".

SALLY. Good title.

DINA. Thank you.

REGINA. Vivaldi?

DINA. Yes, indeed. Now, Regina, you'll be reading Arielle. Martin, you'll be reading "The Man".

MARTIN. Provocative.

DINA. Graeme, you're reading Bennett. And Sally, you're Cordelia.

SALLY. Ah, Shakespeare.

DINA. When Elizabeth gets here, she'll be reading Jocelyn.

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REGINA. Do you want me to ring her?

DINA. No, I'm sure she'll call if anything is amiss. So, Tomas will be reading the action as we go...

REGINA. And you, darling?

DINA. I will listen. And take notes. Let's go. (*Tomas reads from the script; all following lines of ARIELLE, THE MAN, BENNETT, and CORDELIA will be read by the actors; asides will be marked with their real name. Lines from the screenplay will be in **Bold and Italicised.***)

TOMAS. *In Darkness, we hear music. A Cello. We fade in on a close up of that cello playing. We pull back to see ARIELLE LORELAI, a beautiful woman, playing. A sudden boom as of a door closing as the music is cut off and the screen goes black. Title: The Third Movement of Winter. FADE IN: Interior. Day. Interrogation Torture Cell. A bare room with a table and chair. We see Arielle sitting in the chair, her hands bound behind her—*

MARTIN. Darling.

DINA. What?

MARTIN. Do you really think this is wise?

DINA. Keep listening. Keep reading.

TOMAS. *We see Arielle sitting in the chair, her hands bound behind her back. She has been sitting there for an hour. It seems longer, but she is resilient. A door opens behind her in what seemed to be a featureless wall. The sound of cello music from outside. Arielle startles at the noise. Light floods into the room from the door. It is obscured by the Shadowy figure of THE MAN, then by the door closing behind him with a boom. The cello music is heard no more. The Man walks up to Arielle. Though their words are civil, they bristle with unspoken hatred and passion.*

THE MAN. *Did you miss me, Miss Lorelai?*

ARIELLE. *Would you prefer me broken or rebellious today?*

THE MAN. *To be honest, it doesn't matter, though by virtue of you asking the question, I assume we're in for rebellion.*

ARIELLE. *It's possible that I am so broken that I have nothing left to lose. That brand of recklessness can often be mistaken for rebellion.*

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THE MAN. *But even a false rebellion is still rebellion, no?*

ARIELLE. *Perhaps.*

THE MAN. *Perhaps. But then if you are indeed already broken, then...*

ARIELLE. *Yes?*

THE MAN. *Then it would seem we don't have much farther to go. All we ask, after all, is a confession of your crimes. If you could deliver that...*

ARIELLE. *Again we run into problems with clarifying our terms.*

THE MAN. *Terms?*

ARIELLE. *"Crimes", I haven't committed any.*

THE MAN. *You're only making it harder on yourself, Miss Lorelai.*

ARIELLE. *I have done nothing.*

THE MAN. *Do you still deny that there are subversive themes in your "Sonata for Cello in E Flat Major"?*

ARIELLE. *There cannot be, it is entirely instrumental.*

THE MAN. *Do you not recognize the similarity of your main leitmotif to that of the National Anthem of a certain foreign power with which we are at war?*

ARIELLE. *Coincidence. There are only so many notes, so many melodies that can be made of them. You might as well say it sounds like Puccini.*

THE MAN. *More rebellion. So you will continue to deny your guilt, and so will continue to accept our ministrations.*

ARIELLE. *I'm afraid so. We'll have to continue.*

THE MAN. *I thought this might be an easy day.*

ARIELLE. *Nothing is easy. Nothing can be anymore.*

TOMAS. *She holds up her hand to him. We see that it is a bloody mess from previous tortures.*

SALLY. *Oh my god, Dina. Is this what you went through?*

DINA. *Keep reading.*

SALLY. *No, but were you tortured like this? I had no idea. What was the "Sonata for Cello"?*

GRAEME. *Canine Teeth, obviously.*

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DINA. They thought the relationship between Graeme's character and his puppy dog was a hurtful allegory for the State and its loyal citizens.

SALLY. And was it?

TOMAS. That's not the point.

DINA. They want an allegory, I'll give them one with this screenplay.

MARTIN. Honey...

DINA. Shh... Keep reading.

TOMAS. *She holds up her hand to him. We see that it is a bloody mess from previous tortures.*

MARTIN. Oh god.

ARIELLE. *Do your best.*

TOMAS. *Cut to: Interior. Night. A bedroom. Caption: "Six Months Earlier". We see Arielle, in flashback, in bed with Bennett, a handsome young clarinet player, her lover. Bennett, lying back in bed, alternates a lick on the clarinet with a puff on a cigarette, playing a fractured tune.*

ARIELLE. *That's lovely. Is that Mozart?*

BENNETT. *I wrote it.*

ARIELLE. *No! How clever you are! I didn't know you were a composer.*

BENNETT. *Not really, it's only for fun. Playing the clarinet is what I do. It's my calling.*

ARIELLE. *But your song is beautiful.*

BENNETT. *No, I must hide it. If a conductor discovered I was a composer, then I would never get work simply playing the clarinet again. That is my true joy, to be subsumed in the orchestra, to be an interpreter of the work. No, not just an interpreter, to be a servant of the work. The tiny songs I compose are worthless, workmanlike. You are the true composer, Arielle. And I fear for you.*

ARIELLE. *Fear? For me?*

BENNETT. *Will you come with me?*

ARIELLE. *With you? Where are you going, Bennett?*

TOMAS. *Bennett gets out of the bed, we see he is naked.*

SALLY. Of course.

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GRAEME. What?

SALLY. Dina always includes a naked young man in all her movies. It's sort of her trademark.

DINA. Not *all* my movies have naked young men in them.

SALLY. Nearly all.

DINA. Well, Godard once said "The history of movies is of men photographing girls". I wanted to change up that history a bit; the male gaze shouldn't necessarily be the privileged one. We can break away from the Cinema of our Fathers. A naked young man, there to be merely regarded, is still a revolutionary role.

MARTIN. Some of us aged out of that role eventually, and graduated to more adult and clothed parts. But back then one paid one's dues.

SALLY. Lord knows I've shown my breasts in a few films, myself.

DINA. I include sex and nudity in my movies because sex and nudity are part of life.

TOMAS. And because they sell tickets.

DINA. Yes, that too. Martin, you're still very cute; if you want another nude scene, just let me know.

MARTIN. Thanks, hon; not till I lose ten pounds.

REGINA. Graeme already had a Dina Nude Scene in *Friends with Souls*.

SALLY. And don't think I didn't appreciate that.

REGINA. Checking out the merchandise?

SALLY. Oh, Regina; you are a naughty old bitch.

REGINA. Old!?

SALLY. Oh gosh, I am so sorry: You are a naughty bitch.

REGINA. *Thank you.*

DINA. Could we continue with the reading, please?

SALLY. Sorry. Sorry. Continue, Tomas.

TOMAS. *Bennett gets out of the bed, we see he is naked. He begins dressing, agitatedly. He gets his pants and suspenders on and turns to Arielle.*

BENNETT. *It's not safe here anymore. I'm going to France while I still can.*

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ARIELLE. *Why France? Why now?*

BENNETT. *France has always appreciated musicians. I had a French nanny as a child, so I can get by in the language. And if you can't see what Old President Za—*

ARIELLE. *Don't say his name!*

BENNETT. *If you understood what's happening in this country right now, you would come with me. Our freedoms are slowly being eroded.*

ARIELLE. *Don't be so melodramatic. Or paranoid.*

BENNETT. *Did you hear what happened to Dorothy Polari yesterday? The police determined that she had embedded politically seditious messages in her new oratorio "Six Inches of New Growth". She's been taken into police custody. No one's seen or heard from her.*

ARIELLE. *It's only been a day.*

BENNETT. *Claude Massimo was disappeared into custody last week, when his opera "Castle Montanto" was judged to be anti-government.*

ARIELLE. *But surely—*

BENNETT. *Suzanne Vorhees was arrested last month because of supposed hidden communications in her choral work that was presented at—*

ARIELLE. *You've certainly made a study of this, haven't you?*

BENNETT. *Our friends are disappearing. If you're not upset, you're not paying attention.*

ARIELLE. *If you don't pay attention, you won't have to get upset.*

BENNETT. *You can't ignore what's happening to musicians in this country right now!*

ARIELLE. *But they're all composers for vocalists. We're instrumentalists, you and I. Surely they won't come after us!*

BENNETT. *Even so. This could only be the first step. Do you want to live in a country that countenances this censorship? They're coming for our colleagues!*

MARTIN. *Nice alliteration.*

TOMAS. *Shhh.*

BENNETT. *One by one people like us are being silenced. I'm getting out while I can, and I want you to come with me.*

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ARIELLE. *But I can't leave Cordelia.*

BENNETT. *Bring her too. We can all find a place together.*

ARIELLE. *You, me, and my daughter? That is French, indeed. I don't know if I want you to meet her. She doesn't know I have a young lover.*

BENNETT. *So?*

ARIELLE. *She wouldn't understand what we have. You're younger than she is. She would judge me.*

BENNETT. *But when it comes to our safety, to our lives? Shouldn't we be above such awkward social moments? Will you allow yourself to be muzzled, your work destroyed, just to keep up a semblance of propriety?*

ARIELLE. *I think the look of things is important.*

BENNETT. *Arielle, when your home is burning down, you don't stop to get your hat and gloves.*

TOMAS. *Closeup on Arielle's face. Cut to: Interior. Day. Interrogation Torture Cell. Continued from the first scene, but about an hour later. Arielle is panting and sweating. She is breathing hard from the pain and attempting not to show it. The Man is standing behind her, washing his bloodied hands in a clear basin. We see the blood swirl around.*

THE MAN. *The first song I remember hearing was from a carousel. My mother took me on it when I was just a young boy. It was one of those old-fashioned ones with a real old pipe organ attached. It wasn't loud, exactly, but it seemed to fill the air entirely.*

TOMAS. *Cut To: Exterior. Carousel. Day. We begin to see and hear visions of The Man as a young boy on the carousel. The Music is the same tune played by the cello in the prologue. The Man continues in voiceover.*

THE MAN. *I think I had an out-of-body experience. All of a sudden I was one with the music, the lights, the animals. I was a carousel horse, going around and around. When we returned a year later, the park had been remodeled and the carousel destroyed. I was heartsick. My mother didn't understand. I ran around and around where the*

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carousel had once stood, and in some bushes I found a piece of it. A little wooden horse hair. Or at least, I like to think so.

TOMAS. *Cut to: Interrogation Cell. The Man's hands are wet, and he has become lost in reverie. He comes to, dries his hands, and then takes a piece of wood out of his pocket. He holds it up to Arielle.*

THE MAN. *I still carry it everywhere.*

ARIELLE. *So you see, then, how important music can be. You must let me go.*

THE MAN. *Oh yes. I know the importance of music more than anyone. Goodnight, Miss Lorelai.*

REGINA. Really, Dina. This is much too much like your own situation. If you want it to be allegorical, or at least allegorical enough to evade your inevitable government censure, you must disguise things a bit.

SALLY. I agree. This is too on-the-nose. It's horrible the tortures you went through, but does anyone really want to hear about it? Movies should be for escapism.

REGINA. No darling, that's not what I mean. I mean, yes, tell the truth, but disguise it enough that it won't seem to be you.

DINA. Do you really think so?

REGINA. I do.

DINA. How do you think I should change it?

REGINA. Well, I don't know. Make the main character as little like you as possible. I know, make him a man.

MARTIN. Oh, and then make the torturer a woman? That's certainly interesting. Let's switch parts!

DINA. No, but I wrote these roles for you. Martin, you'll be great as the torturer. Regina, Arletty!

REGINA. Oh, I know, darling, but still...

MARTIN. It's only a reading. We're just going to have a little fun with it. Stretch ourselves, actors love that.

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