

L I E S

By

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CHARACTERS

LORELEI BEATRICE BECKMANN, also known as Beebee, a striking woman in her 40s, a federal prisoner up for parole. Born in Cleveland, she spent World War II as a civilian in Berlin. She does not have a heavy German accent, but an odd combination of Midwest American and German.

BENNY KLEINFELD, 25, a young inexperienced Jewish lawyer fresh out of Brooklyn Law School. A hot shot at the beginning of the play.

SETTING

An interrogation room in a minimum security federal prison in New Jersey.

TIME

The summer of 1950, five years after the end of World War II.

SYNOPSIS

A young inexperienced Jewish lawyer for the New York public defender's office is asked to represent a female German-American WWII radio propagandist, imprisoned for treason, for her parole hearing. Except she's doesn't want to leave prison. It's the closest I could get to putting the White House on trial without putting them actually on stage.

NOTES

The play is performed without an intermission.

Lies was awarded the Grand Prize out of more than 5,000 entries across 9 genres in the 88th annual Writers' Digest Writing Competition, 2019.

The author is represented by the Susan F. Schulman Literary Agency, New York, and is a member of the Dramatists Guild.

This script is also available for download at the New Play Exchange of the National New Play Network, <https://newplayexchange.org>.

Scene One

(A sterile interview room in a minimum security federal prison in New Jersey. Gray cinder block walls perhaps with drab olive green paint toward the bottom.

(It's the summer of 1950, brutally hot outside and equally warm inside.

(LORELEI is sitting at a plain metal table, her hands in plain sight, in a women's prison uniform of the time. The table is bare – nothing is on it except a paper cup of coffee she sips delicately from. SHE is a striking woman in her early 40s.

(To one side of the spare room is a smaller table with a coffee maker, some paper cups, plastic stirrers, and creams and sugars, with an industrial type metal office trash can nearby.

(Above the coffee setup, on a wall clearly visible to the audience, is a small, picture-sized mirror on a hook.

(Everything in the room – the tables, the chairs, the trash can, etc. – has seen better days.

(SHE waits and sips from her coffee, and we hold for a relatively long 20 seconds. SHE fidgets, looks around, but otherwise doesn't move. SHE is somewhat agitated, wanting to get this over with, but also bored. SHE's been through this before, and thinks she knows the outcome.

(BENNY finally enters. HE's late, harried and apologetic, the opposite to her stillness. He creates quite a commotion when he enters. HE's wearing a cheap and ill-fitting suit, and carries a briefcase. HE wipes the sweat from his forehead with a handkerchief that's seen a fair bit of use.)

BENNY

Apologies for my lateness. The Holland Tunnel was murder. You wouldn't expect all that traffic on a summer afternoon in the middle of the week. I guess everyone wants to come to New Jersey.

(Pause. SHE doesn't respond. Perhaps SHE sips from her coffee. HE looks her way and flashes a quick, insincere smile.)

Or maybe not.

Usually my clients come to me, you know. Or I see them in the Kings County lockup. Atlantic and Court Street. Two blocks from my office. Easy walk for me. I like walking. Sometimes I sneak out of the office and walk to Ebbets Field to see the Dodgers. It's a long walk. Maybe an hour. But it goes quickly when it's not too hot or humid. Don't get out much to Jersey. Why would I?

Now, let's see... Where's your file...?

(HE rifles through the files in his briefcase.)

Claude Hendricks, breaking and entering, strong arm robbery. Nope. Sally Morrison, loitering with intent to solicit?

(HE looks up at her.)

No.

(HE finds another file.)

Bertha Steinmetz. Sliced off her lover's privates with a kitchen knife. I've got a good defense ready for her, but it might require her to perjure herself. Only slightly though. I'm not crazy about that strategy, mind you. I'm not in love with it. It's not my absolute favorite. But it's not like, I don't know, someone from, say, the government not telling the truth. Even though, technically, I'm part of the government. Or the president out-and-out lying. Or saying something not one hundred percent true. Truman's a straight shooter. In the pursuit of justice, truth must never take a back seat. I mean, if you can't trust the president to always tell the truth, who *can* you trust?

(No response.)

So that makes you...ah, yes.

(HE finds her file, which is surprisingly thin. HE waves it around, astonished it's so small.)

Beckmann. The notorious Beatrice Lorelei Beckmann, to be precise. You're all everyone's talking about in my office, you know. It says here you go by your middle name. Also known as *Beebee*. That's a nice name. *Beebee*. I had a girlfriend named Beebee in high school. Beebee Weintraub. Erasmus Hall. I wonder what's happened to her. Married with a kid or two, I'd think. House on Long Island. South Shore. Maybe a dog. Nice life. You probably don't know her, do you?

(HE looks up at her, but SHE gives no reaction.)

Didn't think you would.

This doesn't list your last address. Before you were...here. Can I, er, get that for my notes?

(BENNY takes out a legal pad and gets a large and relatively expensive pen from his pocket.)

Nice, isn't it? A gift from my uncle Nathan. He came to this country from Poland. He made hats. Good business, hats. Never go out of style. If there's one thing a man always needs, it's a good hat. I didn't wear one because it's windy outside today. But I usually do. Wear one. *Hats*.

So, umm, your last address?

(Pause, as SHE considers his question.)

Just perfunctory. I'm not going to come around and bother you when you get out.

LORELEI

I'm not getting out.

BENNY

Don't be a pessimist. I'm good at what I do, they tell me. Last address? For my notes.

LORELEI

(quietly and reluctantly, with a sigh)

Thirty-seven Potsdammer Strasse.

(BENNY dutifully writes this down, as if taking dictation, not truly hearing or thinking about it, looking only at his legal pad intently.)

BENNY

(repeats as HE writes)

“Thirty-seven Potsdammer Strasse.”

(Pause. HE looks up, surprised.)

Thirty-seven Potsdammer Strasse?

LORELEI

Yes.

BENNY

Where?

LORELEI

Berlin.

BENNY

(writes)

“Berlin.” Berlin where?

LORELEI

Where do you think?

BENNY

Oh.

(Pause.)

Oh. That Berlin?

LORELEI

Yes. That Berlin.

BENNY

Oh. I see. *Berlin* Berlin. Well. And, let's see, what were you doing in Berlin?

(HE looks through her file, but there isn't much to look through.)

Oh. Were you...

LORELEI

Was I what?

BENNY

One of them.

LORELEI

Them who?

BENNY

Them.

(Pause.

(LORELEI looks at him, shifts uncomfortably in her seat, and sips from her coffee.)

LORELEI

Could you pour an old woman another cup of coffee?

(BENNY looks at her, pauses, and goes to the coffee machine.)

BENNY

Black?

LORELEI

One sugar...

(HE gets the pot of coffee. HE hesitates, but pours her coffee and hands her a sugar packet.)

...*danke*.

(BENNY turns and stares at her gaffe.)

I mean, thank you.

(SHE buries herself in the coffee and doesn't return his stare.)

BENNY

So, Mrs. Beckmann...

LORELEI

Miss.

BENNY

(slightly snidely)

Or would you prefer "Frau"?

LORELEI

"Miss" will do.

BENNY

Yes. Uh, I'm sorry. I was taught to treat all women with respect, no matter their circumstance.

LORELEI

Thank you.

BENNY

I mean, it's been five years since the war. We're all on the same side now.

LORELEI

Yes.

BENNY

Against Uncle Joe Stalin and the rest of them.

LORELEI

Strange, isn't it?

BENNY

What?

LORELEI

The fact that we're all on the same side now.

BENNY

Well, some with greater moral clarity than others.

LORELEI

(getting a little more intense)

You were with them until you were against them.

BENNY

I could say the same about you.

(Pause, as HE tries to calm the situation.)

Is the coffee any good?

LORELEI

Not bad for a federal prison in New Jersey.

BENNY

I might join you.

(HE gets up and pours himself a cup of coffee. HE makes an elaborate show of putting in the sugar and creamer, stirs, drinks some, adds more, stirs it, and grimaces.)

By my office on Court Street, there's a diner that makes a hell of a cup of coffee. Balanced, not too strong, not too weak. Holds up to creamer. Joe's Coffee Shop. A cup of coffee and a hamburger, eighty-five cents, and a dime tip to the waitress because she's cute and maybe you'll get her number. You can't beat it. And you've still got a nickel back from your dollar.

(HE drinks.)

LORELEI

Were you...

BENNY

No. Deferments. And bad eyesight. I led the Civil Defense Corps in Flatbush. In case anyone made the mistake of trying to invade Brooklyn.

LORELEI

I had nothing to do with that.

BENNY

But you must have done something. Or else you wouldn't be here and they wouldn't have assigned me. Your file is very very thin.

(HE looks through her file. It's just a few sheets of paper, nothing of consequence.)

So. Beatrice Lorelei Beckmann, a-k-a *Beebee*.

LORELEI

(interrupts him with some annoyance)

Excuse me, but who exactly are you?

(BENNY looks up, startled.)

BENNY

Hmmm?

LORELEI

You haven't introduced yourself.

BENNY

I'm your lawyer.

LORELEI

Lawyer? I have no need of lawyers.

BENNY

You weren't told I was coming?

LORELEI

Perhaps I heard, but it was so long ago. One day drifts into another here.

BENNY

Oh. I'm sorry. I'm your court-appointed lawyer. Benjamin Kleinfeld. But everyone calls me Benny. I'm representing you at your parole hearing next week.

(HE sticks his hand out for her to shake it, but SHE doesn't accept.)

LORELEI

Good afternoon to you, Mister Kleinfeld.

(SHE throws a hard T in at the end of his name; it sounds more German that way to her.)

BENNY

Klein-feld. With a D at the end.

LORELEI

Ah. *Kleinfeld*.

BENNY

But Benny is OK.

LORELEI

I will call you Mister Kleinfeld in our dealings here, if it is not too much trouble.

BENNY

Ah, yes.

LORELEI

Excuse me, Mister Kleinfeld, but may I ask your heritage?

BENNY

My heritage?

LORELEI

Yes. Your ancestry.

BENNY

You mean if I'm Jewish.

(Pause.)

LORELEI

Whatever would make you think that?

BENNY

Uh, the last twenty-odd years of German history.

LORELEI

While yes, I may have been inquiring whether you were Jewish or not, I meant no harm or disrespect to your race.

BENNY

My race?

LORELEI

Yes. An ancient race of people, steeped in the law.

BENNY

So you're happy you got a Jewish lawyer?

LORELEI

I am neither happy nor unhappy. It makes no difference to me. It is merely for my own knowledge and edification.

BENNY

You were part of the resistance?

LORELEI

Excuse me?

BENNY

The resistance.

LORELEI

Did I oppose the policies of our government? In my heart.

BENNY

But you kept quiet about it.

LORELEI

Yes.

BENNY

Then you were not. Which may well be why you're here.

LORELEI

Don't play word games with me.

BENNY

Words, Miss Beckmann...words are all we have.

(HE goes back to her file.)

So, let's see... Arrested in Berlin December 1945, tried and convicted in Brooklyn federal court April 1946, sentenced to 30 years for...*treason*?

LORELEI

I know. Silly, isn't it.

BENNY

Why would you be charged with treason if you were arrested in Berlin? And what did you do that was so treasonous?

(Pause. HE looks at LORELEI, who is silent.)

LORELEI

I'm sorry if you're not seeing the penitent prisoner you were expecting me to be. They say I have a "poker face." Displaying one's feelings can lead to nothing but trouble.

BENNY

Denied parole in 1948, and this is your second parole hearing. And that's where your file ends. I don't know what you did, but short of murder – which they would have charged you with, not treason, but I wouldn't mind the challenge... You didn't kill anyone, did you?

LORELEI

(hesitantly)

I was found guilty of the actions of which I was charged.

(Pause.)

BENNY

Hmmm. You do have a poker face. I'm not insensitive, Miss Beckmann. In fact, as they say, I'm from the government and I'm here to help. But I must probe, you realize that. Anyway, let's see what we can do to get you out.

LORELEI

(quietly)

I don't want to get out.

BENNY

Excuse me?

LORELEI

I don't want to be paroled. I was convicted, and I must serve my sentence.

BENNY

You don't want to be paroled.

LORELEI

No.

BENNY

Only the guilty or insane refuse parole. And I get the feeling you're far from insane.

LORELEI

Nor am I guilty.

BENNY

But I'm the only one here who can get up and leave.

LORELEI

I can leave.

BENNY

You can?

LORELEI

I can leave this room right now if I want.

BENNY

You might be able to leave this room, but you wouldn't get very far after that. I, on the other hand, can take a leisurely drive through the Holland Tunnel, along Canal Street, and go back to my house in Bay Ridge.

LORELEI

You own a house? A young boy like you? America is quite a country.

BENNY

Well, it's small.

LORELEI

But still.

BENNY

It's more like a room.

LORELEI

A room?

BENNY

It's my parents' house.

LORELEI

A lawyer who still lives with his parents? I thought they didn't do that in America.

BENNY

Public defenders just out of law school don't make much. And I have the whole basement.

(Pause.)

Why don't you want to be paroled?

LORELEI

I have my reasons.

BENNY

And guilt isn't one of them?

LORELEI

I have no personal guilt, at least none I would admit to you.

BENNY

You also have no file.

LORELEI

What do you need with my file? I don't need you at my hearing. I can say *no* just as well as you.

BENNY

The last client I had, he had a file like a phone book. Salvatore Conte. Collected his victims' ears. Then there was Andy Rabinowitz. Nice Jewish boy from the Bronx, but very adept with a meat cleaver. I needed a circus strong man to lift his file.

LORELEI

And because of your legal excellence they were declared not guilty?

BENNY

Well, not exactly.

LORELEI

I see.

BENNY

But I could have. Maybe with more time, I could have been more...creative in my arguments. And if they were more cooperative. If I didn't have all these trials, all these hearings, these meetings, more help. But I definitely could have gotten them off. So I stretch the truth a little in service to a higher cause. So what.

LORELEI

And you're proud of that? What of the consequences of your lies?

BENNY

I don't have any problem telling the truth.

LORELEI

The truth is a slippery thing, Mister Kleinfeld.

BENNY

You think I'm this puny fresh-faced kid just out of Brooklyn Law School. But you'd be wrong. I was recruited by all the top law firms here. They call them "white shoe" firms – did you know that? I had my pick of them. But I turned them all down. Tens of thousand of dollars, but I turned them down. I became a federal public defender because that's the kind of person I am. And it's a good civil service job.

LORELEI

So by the fruits of your labors, by your lies to gullible jurors, your clients could be back on the streets, stealing, robbing and murdering innocent people.

BENNY

It's the American justice system. Guilt or innocence is up to twelve people you wouldn't sit next to on a bus. And since in your opinion I'm a lousy lawyer, and you don't want parole, we're perfectly matched.

LORELEI

So it seems.

BENNY

Now, your file. This puzzles me. Every closet has its skeletons, Miss Beckmann. It's just a case of finding the key that opens the door. I know you're hiding something behind those glasses.

LORELEI

Glasses? I don't wear glasses.

BENNY

You used to. I see the indentations on your nose. Did they take them when you entered prison?

LORELEI

I lost them. There's nothing to see here anyway.

BENNY

That's a pity.

(HE stands up with the file, pacing and thinking. HE takes a pack of cigarettes out.)

Cigarette?

(HER eyes light up.)

LORELEI

Really? I haven't had one since 1945. Oh, I miss it so. They wouldn't be Lucky Strikes, would they? We used to smoke them all the time. They were the best at making you forget you were hungry.

BENNY

Camels.

LORELEI

We traded those on the black market. You could get one chicken for thirty Camels.

BENNY

Would you like one?

LORELEI

Oh, yes.

BENNY

Well, let me make a note of that.

(HE puts them back in his pocket.)

LORELEI

People use them as currency here. Perhaps you could give me a few. Not to smoke.

BENNY

You'd smoke one or two though.

LORELEI

I might.

BENNY

They'd let you?

LORELEI

With all that goes on here, I'm sure they'd turn a blind eye to an old woman smoking in her cell.

BENNY

You call yourself an old woman. You're only...

(HE looks at the file.)

You're only forty-two.

LORELEI

I feel like an old woman.

BENNY

You do? How so?

LORELEI

I've lived too long.

BENNY

Seen too much, perhaps? Which is why you're here, I'd bet. Except I can't figure it out from your file. And you're an American. An American citizen.

LORELEI

I was born in America, yes.

BENNY

Where?

LORELEI

Cleveland Heights, Ohio. Superior Road, across from Cain Park. Do you know it?

BENNY

I've never been out of Brooklyn for more than a few days. This trip to see you in New Jersey is the farthest west I've been in years.

LORELEI

Really?

BENNY

We Americans don't get around much.

LORELEI

Except when you're fighting wars.

BENNY

Point taken.

LORELEI

You should travel. It broadens the mind. Different places, different people. I recommend it.

BENNY

Have you traveled much? Aside from Berlin?

LORELEI

Yes, I have. All over Europe.

BENNY

Before?

LORELEI

And after.

BENNY

But the "during" is probably why you're here.

LORELEI

I loved Cain Park. We had space and trees and a beautiful old theater. I saw Mark Twain speak there when I was a child. I remember him reading from *Huckleberry Finn*, my favorite book. My sister and I would play tennis in our white shorts, and all the boys would come and watch us. And then on hot summer days we would run through the sprinklers and get soaking wet and momma would be so angry at us!

BENNY

I never thought someone would be nostalgic for Cleveland.

LORELEI

It was a magical time. You know, I've travelled the world, but home is best.

BENNY

And where would that be now?

LORELEI
What do you mean?

BENNY
Home. When I get you paroled.

LORELEI
I do not want to be paroled!

BENNY
That's what you say now. But when I do, where would you go?

LORELEI
I have no one, no place.

BENNY
Your parents?

LORELEI
Long gone.

BENNY
Your sister?

LORELEI
I haven't heard from her since I left for Europe.

BENNY
Well, that could pose a problem. Not insurmountable, though. And when was that?

LORELEI
1929. Paris.

BENNY
Paris?

LORELEI
I was twenty-one.

BENNY
I was four.

(LORELEI laughs softly.)

Why did you leave?

LORELEI

Can you get me some more coffee? Please.

(HE gets up to get her more coffee.)

BENNY

I've always heard the coffee is better in Europe.

LORELEI

When you could get it. Wartime rationing.

BENNY

Here too. My mother would use coffee grounds three times. She was very frugal.

LORELEI

During wartime, you have to be.

BENNY

Except none of us wanted war.

LORELEI

Neither did we.

BENNY

Really? That's not what I remember.

LORELEI

Well, I didn't.

BENNY

Looks like you were outvoted.

LORELEI

No one wanted war. No one who I knew at least. I had nothing to do with war. I was a dancer.

BENNY

A dancer?

LORELEI

That's why I went to Paris. Why does anyone leave a place like Cleveland for Paris? Cleveland is for growing up. I loved being a child there. But Paris is for living. Have you ever been?

BENNY

No. Tell me about it.

LORELEI

Why?

BENNY

Why?

LORELEI

Yes. Why do you want to know?

BENNY

So I can help you. It's my job.

LORELEI

No it's not. Your job is to represent me.

BENNY

We all want something, Miss Beckmann. And at times, the needs and wants of a lawyer do not align with his client's.

LORELEI

Really?

BENNY

You *want* to stay in prison. I *need* to set you free, whether you want it or not.

LORELEI

Why is that? To prove your skill as a lawyer? That you could lie and cheat to get freedom for even someone like me? I am not just an academic question that you can debate with your friends and put on your resume, Mister Kleinfeld.

(Pause.)

BENNY

In any case, I am being paid to lie by the good people of the United States of America, and not you.

LORELEI

When we lie, we lose our moral compass as a people and a nation.

BENNY

Fine words coming from someone whose last address was Thirty-seven Pottsdammer Strasse. But there is something else you do want, I'd bet.

LORELEI

And what would that be?

BENNY

Absolution.

LORELEI

Really? Absolution? Why would you think that?

BENNY

I read the newspapers like anyone else.

LORELEI

And I need it from you? From a mere boy like you? You can absolve me of my, my...

(SHE stops.)

I don't think I should talk any further.

BENNY

Tell me about where you lived in Paris. There's no harm in that.

LORELEI

How do I know?

(BENNY gives a big smile.)

BENNY

Trust me.

LORELEI

I haven't trusted anyone in five years.

BENNY

Then this is a good chance to start again.

(Pause.)

LORELEI

If you give me a cigarette.

(HE pauses for a second, thinking it over. HE then takes out a cigarette and gives it to her. SHE places it delicately in her mouth, looking at him with both expectation and a silent thank you that SHE feels but does not want to outwardly express.

(HE strikes a match, bends down, lights her cigarette. SHE inhales and savors it for a while.

(BENNY takes notes as SHE speaks.)

Incidentally, am I under oath?

BENNY

Excuse me?

LORELEI

All that Perry Mason silliness.

(mockingly)

“Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.” I remember that from the movies. What a silly film – *The Case of the Velvet Claws*. Even then I thought that telling the truth was not something to be taken lightly.

BENNY

Oh really?

LORELEI

The real truth, anyway. The unvarnished real truth. No one wants that.

BENNY

So how will I know whether you're lying to me or not?

LORELEI

You have to take my word.

BENNY

And you will have to take mine. Agreed?

LORELEI

If we are to make any of this bearable, *you* must trust *me*. Expressly and unyieldingly.

(Pause.)

So, am I under oath?

BENNY

Does it matter?

(Pause.)

LORELEI

Did you ever play poker, Mister Kleinfeld?

BENNY

I'm not a gambling man.

LORELEI

We used to play, just a few of us, while we were waiting outside the studio. I was able to supplement my wages with my winnings. As I said, I had a poker face. They could never tell what I was thinking. I never showed any emotion, unless I wanted to.

(Pause.)

BENNY

What studio?

LORELEI

What do you mean?

BENNY

You mentioned a studio. What studio? Where? In Paris? Or in Berlin?

(SHE ignores him and changes the subject.)

LORELEI

I lived in a student dormitory off Saint Germain. The lower floor, so I saw everyone come in and out. And heard them. What a racket they made! We all lived together. We were very forward thinking for the times, even though the men and women were on separate floors. I was on the girl's floor, of course, but everyone came in the same entrance. All the dancers lived near each other, and I'd watch them, young and lean and graceful, even just walking to get coffee or out for a smoke. Remember, they were all French, and I was the only American. I felt so...awkward. A girl from Cleveland among all these lithe and lovely bodies. I spoke French relatively well, and between my French and their broken English, I made friends. Slowly though.

BENNY

Why Paris?

LORELEI

You ask that because you have never been there. It's like asking "Why breathe? Why eat?" To be twenty-one in Paris and a dance student and have a few francs in your pocket, well, there's nothing better in the world. I didn't hate Cleveland, of course, but mama had died suddenly, and father didn't know what to do with the two of us. Marguerite was only seventeen, and she went to live with our aunt and uncle in New Haven. We called them Aunt Rose and Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut. She was kind, and he had a funny red nose. The checks they sent me every other week helped with my popularity, of course.

That's all I remember of them.

BENNY

And that's when you met him.

LORELEI

Yes. Wait a minute. How did you know that?

BENNY

I haven't had many clients, but of the ones I've had, it's always the same. A good woman gets corrupted by a bad man.

LORELEI

I'm not a good woman.

BENNY

But you once were.

LORELEI

When I was young.

(BENNY suddenly looks at her.)

All right. *Younger*.

BENNY

That's what I like to see.

LORELEI

I fail to understand...

BENNY

You still can be that good woman you once were. Until I do more research I won't know what lead you here. But you were, and can be again. And that's how I'm getting you out of here.

LORELEI

How many times must I say it. I don't want parole.

BENNY

What you want doesn't matter. The legal system will take its course. My job is nudge it along a bit, in our favor.

LORELEI

Our favor?

BENNY

We're in this together, Beebee.

LORELEI

You must have other things to do, other clients to see.

BENNY

Nope. They cleared my calendar for this. My boss, Mister Ryan, he came up through the Tammany Hall political machine. My uncle David was his tailor, and he introduced me. You've got to know people in this life to get ahead. He's a nice guy and all, but if you ask me, not a great legal mind. Not a political animal, either. But he knows people, you see. He discussed your case with the boys in Washington. He said to me, he said, "Benny, you're the only one I trust with this case. Focus on it, take all the time you want. Forget your other cases. And remember," he said, "make sure justice is done. True justice."

LORELEI

Justice is done if I stay here.

BENNY

Justice is done when I say it is.

(Pause. LORELEI begins to quietly laugh.)

LORELEI

How old are you, Mister Kleinfeld?

BENNY

Twenty-five. And a half.

LORELEI

And tell me, *mein kleines Kind*, what do you know of justice?

BENNY

What are you guilty of?

LORELEI

I am guilty of meeting the wrong people. Of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. I am guilty of going along with the crowd.

BENNY

Nothing else?

LORELEI

Nothing that would interest you.

BENNY

I'm your lawyer. It all interests me. You must have had some real lousy attorney representing you to wind up here on treason.

LORELEI

I don't remember. It was a military court.

BENNY

A military court?

LORELEI

I was convicted in a military court, but transferred to a federal court for my sentence.

BENNY

But you weren't in the military. Were you?

(Pause. Silence from LORELEI.)

Were you?

(Pause. More silence.)

We're getting nowhere. I can't do anything without more research. And your hearing is in six days.

(HE closes his briefcase.)

I'll be back on Thursday. Can I bring you anything?

(SHE pauses, and thinks.)

LORELEI

Yes, actually. You know what I crave? A sweet roll. A sweet roll from the bakery on 83rd Street. I used to visit someone there.

BENNY

Who was that?

LORELEI

I'd be in your debt ever so much. A sweet roll. For an old lady. Tell them Lorelei asked for it. They'll know.

BENNY

Well, I really don't get into the city often. How about one from Brooklyn? Lots of good bakeries in Brooklyn.

LORELEI

I asked for a sweet roll from the baker on East 83rd Street. East 83rd and Second Avenue. Pfannenstiel's Bakery, 312 East 83rd Street. Helga makes them. Tell her it's for me. She called me Lorelei.

BENNY

I don't think I'll be able to...

LORELEI

(sharply)

Just do as I say!

BENNY

Well, I can't make any promises...

LORELEI

All I ask is for some common decency!

(SHE breaks.)

Go. Look at books. Read your journals. Then come back to Beebee and let me tell you about life.

(Pause.)

Now go home to mother and wean yourself from your legalistic fantasies.

BENNY

My God. What did you do?

(Pause.)

LORELEI

Light my cigarette.

(BENNY lights her cigarette again. LORELEI composes herself, takes a long elaborate drag on the cigarette, and puffs out some smoke.)

Have you ever heard of Axis Sally?

(END OF SCENE ONE.)

Scene Two

(The same interview room in a minimum security federal prison in New Jersey.)

(LORELEI is dressed as before, and seated at the same table, sipping coffee from a paper cup. Again, we hold for a bit.)

(It is two days later.)

(BENNY enters very much as HE did in the first scene, harried and rushed, in the same ill-fitting suit. HE seems a bit more disheveled today, though.)

BENNY

Good morning, Miss Beckmann. Actually...

(HE checks his watch.)

Good afternoon. I'm sorry. I thought I had it figured out. The traffic. So instead of Canal Street and the Holland Tunnel, I figured I'd go uptown and take the Lincoln Tunnel and double back in New Jersey, where there's less traffic. Big mistake. I didn't account for the tolls on the Garden State. It's ten cents every few miles, and you have to stop, fish a dime out of your pocket, and then pitch it at the basket like you're Preacher Roe. You know who Preacher Roe is? Pitcher for the Brooklyn Dodgers. Throws a spitter. Totally illegal. But he can get away with it. I have his autograph. Canny guy, that Preacher Roe. Canny guy.

(SHE looks blankly at him.)

So, let's get down to...

LORELEI

(sternly)

I've been waiting for you for over an hour.

BENNY

Yes, I'm sorry, but I told you, the Garden State Parkway, the traffic...

LORELEI

I do not enjoy waiting for people, Mister Kleinfeld. Even here in this god awful place, my time is precious. If that sounds arrogant, so it must be. I ask you in the future to be on time for our meetings.

BENNY

Um, it was unavoidable...

LORELEI

Nothing is unavoidable if you plan well.

BENNY

Besides, I've been up late for the past two nights. Pulling all-nighters.

LORELEI

The waitress at your coffee shop? Beebee remembers everything.

BENNY

No, as a matter of fact. I've been researching your case.

(HE takes out the small, slender file from scene one from his briefcase.)

LORELEI

That's quite the large satchel. Did mother pack your lunch as well?

BENNY

I found out why your file was so small. Someone wants you to stay in prison. Aside from you, of course.

LORELEI

As I told you, I will serve my sentence.

BENNY

I also found out all about you.

LORELEI

(suddenly a little nervous)

Oh?

BENNY

Yes. And you weren't Axis Sally, the famous Nazi radio propaganda broadcaster.

LORELEI

Please don't use that despicable word to describe me. And I never said I was.

BENNY

Yes you did.

LORELEI

No. I asked if you *had heard* of Axis Sally. Language must be used precisely, Mister Kleinfeld, or else why speak?

BENNY

Precisely yes, but truthfully, too.

LORELEI

Truth is always in service to a higher loyalty. What good is the truth if it has no further use?

BENNY

Because the truth is the truth.

LORELEI

There are many truths in any situation. And a lie can tell more of the truth than all the judges and lawyers in all the world.

BENNY

There are no "both sides" to the truth.

LORELEI

On the contrary. You can pick and choose the truth as you see fit. As you seem to do with your other clients.

BENNY

In any case, you may have been *an* Axis Sally, but you never were *the* Axis Sally.

LORELEI

There were a number of us.

BENNY

Yes. The most famous of which being prisoner 37229, one Mildred Gillars, an American citizen like you, currently also serving time for treason, in the Federal Reformatory for Women in Alderson, West Virginia.

LORELEI

I filled in for her. And after she left I took her slot. I even had my own broadcasts on Saturday mornings. *Behind the Lines with Lorelei*. A very successful program, I might add.

BENNY

Your audiences, however, were not the German people, since you were broadcasting in English. They were the American and British troops, and your broadcasts told them of their impending doom if they were to even think of invading Germany. You even started every broadcast with "*Hello, suckers!*"

LORELEI

Your side did the same. I heard them.

BENNY

Perhaps.

LORELEI

I remember one. *Toni From America*.

BENNY

She broadcasted from Italy. But she wouldn't ridicule the soldiers, insult them or tell them to surrender. They never were as lurid and vitriolic as yours.

LORELEI

It was wartime and my actions were justifiable.

BENNY

So lying in pursuit of a higher goal is okay?

LORELEI

We all lie. We lie everyday to everyone.

BENNY

Yes, but some more than others. For instance, let me quote from your broadcast of May 17, 1943, on the *Back on the Farm* program. Do you remember it?

LORELEI

Of course not. One broadcast among dozens.

BENNY

“It was a shame what happened to those American flyboys over France last night. Instead of being back on the farm, they bought the farm. Now, they will never see their mothers and fathers, or their sweethearts, ever again. Simply because they obeyed illegal orders. I’ll bet some of them were on their last mission, thinking of going home and tasting a big slice of mom’s apple pie with frosty vanilla ice cream on top. The only thing they taste now and forever is the muddy German soil in which they lay. Poor devils. All fighting for a lie.”

LORELEI

This is the perhaps the truest thing I said. Where is the falsehood there?

BENNY

First of all, no American or other Allied planes went down over France or anywhere else in the war zone the night before, or the week before.

LORELEI

Details.

BENNY

But not the truth.

LORELEI

I spoke in metaphors, Mister Kleinfeld, in allegories. It was one hundred percent true, even though it may not have happened exactly as I said. There is an art to telling the truth.

BENNY

One you have mastered, it seems.

LORELEI

Your truth is not necessarily my truth. We have a saying in German. *Nur Gott kennt die Wahrheit*. Only God knows the truth.

BENNY

God, and the Southern District of New York.

LORELEI

Truth does not have to be true to be truthful.

BENNY

So it was true even though it wasn't.

LORELEI

You're twisting my words.

BENNY

The orders were not illegal.

LORELEI

They were illegal in Germany!

BENNY

And that's a pretty rough picture you painted.

LORELEI

Language is a weapon of war. And war is language with armaments to back it up.

(Pause.)

You naive boy. Where did you find that passage?

BENNY

In the transcript of your trial.

(HE takes from his briefcase a large file with perhaps one hundred or so pages.)

Now, this isn't everything, but it's a start.

May I read you another? From *Lunchtime with Lorelei*, December 22, 1942. "It's Christmas in three days, suckers. Lorelei knows how much you Americans love Christmas. Don't you all wish you were home now, wrapped tight in a soft and warm blanket of your mother's love, your hometown choirs singing hymns, a big fat goose roasting in the oven? You could have that, and so much more. Leave your units, suckers! Just walk away. You must know the German army will show no mercy if you continue to fight. And who are you fighting for? Roosevelt, Morgenthau, Rothschild, Ochs. Jews, all of them. Jews who killed our Lord. Is this

why you are fighting? If you love peace, and you love Christmas, leave. You must leave!”

(Pause.)

LORELEI

Nonsense. Those were scripts. I didn't write those. Those were written for me.

BENNY

But you read them.

LORELEI

(dismissively)

I read whatever they put in front of me then.

BENNY

Who put them in front of you?

LORELEI

We had writers then. I had a good job, so I did as I was told. You would have done the same.

BENNY

How can you read something so monstrous? How did you sleep at night after all those lies?

LORELEI

(sharply)

You weren't there!

(Pause.)

After the first broadcast, I went to the bathroom and vomited. Does that make you happy? Then, a year later, when all the men were taken from their cushy office jobs and sent to the military, I wrote my own material. It was art. A word here, a catchphrase there, the more outlandish, the better to keep my bosses happy.

BENNY

Is that all you thought about?

LORELEI

As a matter of fact, in wartime, yes.

BENNY

But you were an American. Didn't that mean anything?

LORELEI

Do you know the German legend of the Lorelei? It's the name of a hill on the Rhine, and the girl who lived on top of it. She was betrayed by her lover, and devoted the rest of her life to sweet-talking men and luring them to their deaths.

BENNY

So you were aptly named.

LORELEI

I was living in Berlin with a man, I had a job that provided me food rations beyond what others had, and I had the exhilaration of performing for an audience. And once you begin to embellish the truth a bit, you never know when to stop. I was dancing again, but this time with words. Dancing faster and faster until it all collapsed. I no longer could tell our truth with impunity.

BENNY

Living with a man? Who?

LORELEI

That's no concern of yours.

BENNY

Was he your boss?

(Pause. No response.)

He wrote that crap for you? Did he write this? May 12, 1944. "Whose side would George Washington be on today, suckers? Or Lincoln? Not yours, let me assure you. They stood for freedom, not slavery to a so-called chosen race." Most of the men had left in late 1943, so that was you.

LORELEI

Yes. Yes that was me! I did it alone, a demure woman, so used to being ignored but when they called me, when they needed me, I rose up and said *Yes, let me! I can do it!* And did you know that by the end of the war, I was the head of the

propaganda branch! Some little lady no one paid attention to! So don't tell me I can't do anything a man can. Don't tell Beebee she didn't contribute to the cause!

BENNY

Whose cause?

(Pause.)

LORELEI

I thought you were trying to obtain my release, not prosecute me again.

BENNY

We strive for justice and truth no matter where it lives, Miss Beckmann. Now I know who I'm dealing with. And nice little reference to the "chosen" race there. I won't hold it against you. After all, I'm not the one in prison now.

LORELEI

Mister Kleinfeld, I've long thought you can have justice or truth, but rarely both. And notice how *prosecute* and *persecute* have similar roots.

BENNY

Very good. First thing I learned from the great legal minds of Brooklyn Law School.

(Pause.)

LORELEI

Do you have anything for me?

BENNY

What do you mean?

LORELEI

I asked you for something. Do you remember?

BENNY

Oh. Yes. Yes I do! Here.

(HE digs around in his briefcase and pulls out a small white paper bag. From the bag he takes a sweet roll and hands it to her, with some paper wrapping.)

These are great. I bought one myself. Ate it on Garden State. I almost threw it in the toll basket.

LORELEI

(aghast)

You ate it?

BENNY

I know. It can get messy. I'll have to take my car in for a good cleaning.

(LORELEI takes the pastry and smells it, then tears it apart.)

LORELEI

This is not from Pfannenstiel's as I asked!

BENNY

You can tell?

LORELEI

This is a poor imitation. Artificial vanilla, fake cinnamon, stale dough. Where did you get this monstrosity? Certainly not Pfannenstiel's. Nothing like this would come from Helga's hands.

BENNY

Couldn't get up there. Yorkville's a long drive from Brooklyn. I've been preparing for your hearing for two straight days. This is from the A&P.

LORELEI

You didn't have the time merely to go to a store for an old lady, an imprisoned old woman, who has need of everything but gets nothing. No wonder you're living in your mother's basement.

BENNY

You could have said thank you.

LORELEI

For what? This garbage? This inedible rubbish?

(SHE throws it at him.)

BENNY

I didn't think you were in a position to throw away food.

LORELEI

On the contrary. The food here can be quite serviceable.

BENNY

(getting heated)

Listen, you're lucky they didn't hang you with the others in Nuremberg. Good to be an American, isn't it? You try to do one nice thing for a person, and they crap in your face.

LORELEI

Beebee understands. I apologize. It must be horrible to be you.

BENNY

I'm going to get you out of here whether you want to or not. And do you know why? Why? Because they don't want to let you go.

LORELEI

They? Who is this they?

BENNY

My boss, Mister Ryan. And his boss. And his. And his friend's boss. Up the chain it goes.

LORELEI

Why me?

BENNY

Because none of them want a so-called traitor to their country let out of prison on their watch. And McGrath might run for president in '52. He's the attorney general in Washington. Wouldn't look good for him if you were out on the streets.

LORELEI

Am I that infamous? That much of a pariah?

BENNY

You're called a "traitor" and a "liar." That's never good. But, now I know why they withheld your file. So I wouldn't have all the material I needed to win your release.

LORELEI

Perhaps that is also why they assigned me a 25-year old inexperienced lawyer who lives in his parents' basement.

BENNY

I have plenty of experience.

LORELEI

Carl William Ellsworth.

BENNY

Excuse me?

LORELEI

Sentenced to twenty-five years to life for second-degree murder of a policeman.

BENNY

I know his case. Last year. I kept him from the chair.

LORELEI

He maintained his innocence throughout the trial.

BENNY

I got his sentence lowered.

LORELEI

Did you know he was three thousand miles away in California when it happened?

(Pause.)

BENNY

(quietly)

What?

LORELEI

His sister and I sit next to each other in the mess hall. Poor girl. Stole one hundred dollars from her employer to buy bread for her baby.

BENNY

He told me that but the other side had proof.

LORELEI

Doctored falsehoods, no doubt.

BENNY

I could reopen his case.

LORELEI

He was stabbed to death by another inmate last week.

(Pause.)

He was in Los Angeles fixing cars when the policeman was killed.

BENNY

I didn't know.

LORELEI

You knew. You just didn't believe him!

BENNY

They lied to me.

LORELEI

To assure someone would go to prison. Meanwhile, the real murderer is on the streets. Seems to be a pattern from you, letting killers go.

(Pause.)

BENNY

Can I see her?

LORELEI

I doubt she'd want to see you.

BENNY

Can you tell her I'm sorry.

LORELEI

I will pass the message along.

BENNY

Thank you.

LORELEI

If you get me a sweet roll from Pfannenstiel's window for our next meeting.

BENNY

You want to have a next meeting?

LORELEI

Yes. I find your attempts to play lawyer amusing.

BENNY

How do I know you're not lying to me about Ellsworth?

LORELEI

Why would I lie about that?

BENNY

Yes. Why would you lie about something like that. Why indeed.

(BENNY takes out a magazine from his briefcase and slaps it on the table.)

LORELEI

Reading material? Do you find our conversations boring?

BENNY

I was wondering whether or not to confront you with this.

LORELEI

With what? A magazine?

BENNY

Where did you say your sister went in 1929 when your mother died?

LORELEI

To our aunt and uncle in New Haven.

BENNY

And what did you call them?

LORELEI

I don't know what you mean.

BENNY

You called them something very specific. Do you remember?

LORELEI

Ah yes. Aunt Rose and Uncle Wiggily. He had a funny red nose.

BENNY

I thought it was his ears you found funny.

LORELEI

Ears, nose, what of it?

BENNY

And what else did you call him?

LORELEI

I don't see...

(BENNY looks at his notepad.)

BENNY

You referred to them specifically as Aunt Rose and Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut.

LORELEI

Yes. So? They were in New Haven.

BENNY

But you couldn't have.

LORELEI

You are telling me what I called my aunt and uncle as a child?

BENNY

Page thirty-four.

LORELEI

What are you driving at?

BENNY

Open the magazine to page thirty-four. It's the March 20, 1948 issue of the *New Yorker*. I stole it from the library.

LORELEI

Could it be an advertisement for a transatlantic cruise?

BENNY

It's a story. A story by a young writer named J.D. Salinger. I've read his stuff. Not my taste really but all the intelligent girls think it's the rage so I read it. Page thirty-four. Please read the title.

(LORELEI throws the magazine down on the table.)

LORELEI

We called him Uncle Wiggily after the children's books about a long eared rabbit, and he was living in Connecticut.

BENNY

What a coincidence. What a coincidence that you happened to call your uncle in 1929 by the exact same name as a short story by J.D. Salinger published in 1948!

LORELEI

A mere coincidence.

BENNY

No. A lie. Clear as glass! And if you're willing to lie about something as simple as what you called your uncle, what else are you lying to me about?

LORELEI

This Salinger person must have known my uncle.

BENNY

And then, there's this.

(HE takes out a copy of *Huckleberry Finn* and throws it on the table.)

LORELEI

Ah, *Huckleberry Finn*. The great American novel, so they say.

BENNY

Pick it up.

LORELEI

To what page shall we open our hymnals?

BENNY

The forward. Page V.

LORELEI

Page V?

BENNY

Roman numerals. I have no idea why they do that. The fifth page of the forward. It describes the end of Twain's life.

LORELEI

Again, I don't see...

BENNY

Please read the third paragraph on the page.

LORELEI

There's no need...

BENNY

(sharply)

Read it.

LORELEI

"Twain fell into a deep depression in the last two years of his life. After a close friend died suddenly in 1908, and his daughter Jean died in 1909, he never gave another reading or performance. Twain died in his New York home on April 21, 1910, the day after Halley's Comet returned."

BENNY

You told me you saw him give a reading in Cain Park in Cleveland.

LORELEI

And?

BENNY

You were born in 1908. There's no possible way you could have.

(LORELEI throws the book on the table.)

LORELEI

Why are you bringing this up? It has nothing to do with my hearing.

BENNY

(pleading)

Miss Beckmann. *Beebee*. If you won't be honest with me, if I can't depend on your honesty, if you lie about the most inconsequential things, how can I prepare an adequate defense, a cogent argument to win your parole?

LORELEI

From what I've seen of your record, you'd find it hard to prepare an adequate defense for anyone. And why should I help you if I don't want to be paroled?

BENNY

I still don't understand you. Why don't you want your freedom? You just made some lurid radio broadcasts. It's been four years. Isn't that enough?

LORELEI

You shouldn't go places you might not want to go.

BENNY

Can we at least do this. Let me argue for your parole, for my sake, so I can show everyone what I can do.

LORELEI

But I can't just say I'm not leaving. I don't think that's how it works, Mister Kleinfeld.

BENNY

Please. I need this. I need to show them I'm not some dumb kid playing attorney with a cheap suit and his father's briefcase.

LORELEI

Since when are your needs and wants my concern, my dear boy? And just as you have done your research on me, I have done some research on you.

BENNY

I know. Ellsworth.

LORELEI

No. Let me have one of those cigarettes.

BENNY

Why?

LORELEI

Because I asked you for one.

(Warily, BENNY gives her a cigarette and lights it.)

Benjamin Kleinfeld, 7739 Shore Road – actually it's Emanuel and Miriam Kleinfeld on the deed. Graduate of Brooklyn College 1946 and Brooklyn Law School 1949, 49th of 75 in his class. Not a sterling student. Excelled in research, but not in, shall we say, putting that research into practice. Received exactly two offers on graduation. One from a bankruptcy firm in Forest Hills, the other from a collection agency in Astoria. No white-shoe firms came calling, unlike your story, no prestige positions awaited him. And, your uncle David was not a tailor to the political elite. He was a simple milkman, but a lucky one, since among the customers on his route were Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. David proved a reliable source of information in the early stages of the investigation against the spies, and asked for nothing in return except for consideration for his nephew, Benjamin, who was soon named an attorney in the Southern District of New York and immediately transferred to the public defender's office where he could do no harm.

Shall I continue? Word travels fast in these walls.

(Pause.)

BENNY

So you think you know all about me.

LORELEI

I'd say so.

BENNY

All my secrets. My truths, as you'd say.

LORELEI

Just the facts. Isn't that what the man on the radio says? "Just the facts, ma'am." Strange show to play in a prison. And I've met your type before, you see.

BENNY

Where would that be? Paris?

LORELEI

As a matter of fact, yes.

BENNY

At your dance school? The...

(HE looks in her file.)

The Institut des Arts Chorégraphiques.

LORELEI

Yes. In Montmartre. I met him in a small bakery, far from my apartment. I didn't want the other dancers to see I was eating a croissant, much less putting butter on it. These other girls didn't eat a thing. A leaf of lettuce, some juice perhaps. And smoked like the tailpipe of an automobile. That's where I picked it up. But I was American, from the home of ham, eggs and butter. He saw me with a double espresso and a croissant, and he said hello. He had the Berliner Zeitung newspaper under his arm. I should have known then. His name was Paul.

BENNY

(checks his file)

Paul Debravka. From Prague, originally.

LORELEI

Yes. Debravka. His name danced in my mouth. And he was tall, friendly, and had eyes like pools of deep black water, water I instantly wanted to bathe in. It was the fall, but he was dressed for the summer. He said he had overstayed his welcome in Paris, and wanted to get back home. He was leaving in two weeks. Then he asked me for a piece of my croissant, which I thought was rather forward. But he took it,

placed a microscopic pat of butter on it – and placed it in my mouth, like a mother bird does for her young. My lips caught a bit of his finger, and I immediately gave him a napkin to wipe the lipstick off. No, he said, I'll still have a bit of you with me when I leave.

BENNY

Suave guy for a German.

LORELEI

Later that night, much later, he told me he was a journalist, about ten years older than I was. He was returning to Berlin to help staff the German national radio for the new government. His was the cultural department, and he asked if I wanted to help him.

BENNY

So you went to Berlin with a man you had only known for two weeks?

LORELEI

You would have too. I was never meant to be a dancer. The other dancers told me constantly I was an awkward American, too fat and too dumb.

BENNY

They were jealous of you.

LORELEI

Perhaps.

BENNY

You aren't fat, and you're certainly not dumb.

LORELEI

But if you're told a lie long enough, you begin to believe it.

BENNY

Which is kind of why you're here. So you were lied to...

(HE gets an idea, returns to his chair, grabs his legal pad and pen, and starts feverishly writing.)

LORELEI

What's this?

BENNY

Mitigating circumstances. Your defense. You've been lied to all your life, so you couldn't know the consequences of your own lying.

LORELEI

I don't follow.

BENNY

Don't you see! This doesn't mean just parole, but maybe a retrial – and an acquittal!

LORELEI

I can't participate in such foolery. I won't. Acquittals are for innocent people.

BENNY

But under American law...

LORELEI

Truly innocent people. Now I won't hear another word about it.

BENNY

C'mon.

LORELEI

Really? Is that all you can say?

BENNY

I'm at least as suave as a German.

LORELEI

I had a puppy dog like you when I was a girl in Cleveland. Chapman, for Ray Chapman. My father loved the Cleveland Indians. Chapman would slobber all over the house, track in mud and dirt. He'd jump in a puddle and shake off the water all over papa.

BENNY

Those are lovely memories.

LORELEI

Then one day out of nowhere he attacked my grandmother and we put him down.

(Pause.)

BENNY

Give me something. Please. Give me something to help your case.

LORELEI

Why?

BENNY

To prove I'm not like your dog.

(Pause.)

LORELEI

Remember I said I would play poker outside the studios?

BENNY

Yes.

LORELEI

You've called my hand. Now take this down.

(BENNY scrambles back and gets ready to write.)

One night, Paul and I invited the Peruvian ambassador to our apartment for a game of cards.

BENNY

There's a lot to unpack there. You were married to Paul?

LORELEI

Not quite.

BENNY

But you were living together.

LORELEI

That's how it was then. He was a producer at the station for wartime propaganda. And he found me a job cataloguing tapes.

BENNY

Which later provided evidence of your guilt.

LORELEI

Of my legal misconduct. But never guilt.

BENNY

And the Peruvian ambassador?

LORELEI

Paul was also a supplier of various, shall we say, medicinal powders and substances popular among our crowd. And the Peruvian ambassador at the time, Vincente, was one of his regular customers. We would play cards and he would leave with his small parcel.

BENNY

How Bohemian.

LORELEI

The apartment block we lived in had a caretaker, Matts. He lived in the basement with his family, a wife and two small children. One of his daughters took to me when she found out I had been a dancer. I taught her all the ballet positions. Matts was a master plumber, an electrician, and he also knew of places to hide small parcels, if you understand. Except he had a problem. It was 1934, and Matts was Jewish. They were being thrown out of the apartments. I pleaded with the owners, but they said their hands were tied, and that Matts and his family were lucky that the government was not going to provide him, what did they call it, “alternative living arrangements.” We weren’t fully aware, but we knew that meant something horrible.

BENNY

You didn’t know? You were working for the government!

LORELEI

If we did know, we didn’t believe it. We heard so much all day, it was hard to separate truth from “truthful hyperbole,” as they called it.

That night, we all played cards, Paul, myself, and Vincente and his wife, but rather than just hand him his usual small parcel at the end of the evening, I made sure Matts personally came to our flat while the ambassador was there to hand it me.

As I suspected, Vincente immediately ripped it open and put a good amount of it up his nose.

After four hands, Vincente owed us nearly a month's salary. "Vincenzo," I said to him – he thought I was Italian since the only Americans he had ever met were Italian, and I played along – "Vincenzo, the man who brought you your parcel, and knows what was in it, he needs your help. He and his wife and two young daughters. Is there anything you can do, my sweet Vincenzo? We would be forever in your debt. And you would no longer be in ours."

The next day, I received an envelope by courier at the studio with no return address. It was four blank Peruvian passports.

So you see, Beebee was not all bad.

BENNY

And Matts?

LORELEI

Last I heard he owns a prosperous coffee plantation outside Cusco. And his daughter dances with the national ballet.

BENNY

So all you did was a few radio broadcasts, and there's evidence of good deeds. And from everything I can see, you've been a good prisoner. This sounds like an open and shut case for you.

LORELEI

I was sentenced, and I will serve my term.

BENNY

That's twenty-six more years! You'll be...

LORELEI

Sixty-eight. Beebee can do math.

BENNY

Twenty-six more years here.

LORELEI

I've already served four.

BENNY

I don't know if I could do a week.

LORELEI

We each have our own prisons. This one is actually more comfortable than most.

BENNY

But your sister, your relatives, you must...

LORELEI

I have no need of visitors. I have been visited enough in my life. You, young man, are my first visitor in two years.

BENNY

The other?

LORELEI

My previous court-appointment attorney. A Mister Mulrooney. For my last parole hearing. Do you know him?

BENNY

Yes. Kevin Mulrooney. Spends most of his time at the New York bar, and I don't mean the legal one.

LORELEI

He came in drunk, and smelled like he hadn't bathed for weeks. He was here for five minutes and I sent him away.

BENNY

Wow. Kevin Mulrooney. Now I really believe someone doesn't want you to get out.

LORELEI

And so they sent you. Not much of a vote of confidence.

BENNY

All the more reason to put up a good defense.

LORELEI

Ah, child. One day you will look back on this time and realize the forces lined up against you. I at least am content to pay my debt to society.

BENNY

For a couple of radio broadcasts?

LORELEI

Things happen in wartime your sensitive ears might best not hear.

(BENNY checks his watch.)

BENNY

I've got to get going. My sister is having a baby shower this afternoon.

LORELEI

Men go to such things?

BENNY

I have to pick up the food.

LORELEI

Celebrating a new life. I once thought that was in the cards for Paul and me. But life takes you on a journey, doesn't it? Well, be on your way.

BENNY

We can pick this up again on Monday.

LORELEI

Must we?

BENNY

Of course. Your hearing is next week, and that gives me more time for research and writing my arguments.

LORELEI

A fool's errand.

BENNY

Lord, what fools these mortals be.

LORELEI

Shakespeare.

BENNY

I've been. I'm not a total dunce.

LORELEI

I never said you were.

BENNY

But you thought so when we met.

LORELEI

I wouldn't say so. Although I've asked around here, and I've been told your use of the Holland Tunnel was not very smart.

BENNY

The George Washington Bridge?

LORELEI

Longer but faster.

BENNY

I'll consider it.

LORELEI

It also takes you into upper Manhattan.

BENNY

Pfannenstiel's?

LORELEI

You remembered.

BENNY

How could I forget?

LORELEI

Please. Ask Helga. Make sure you tell her the sweet roll is for me. Remember, for Lorelei. You'll do that for me, won't you?

BENNY

On one condition.

LORELEI

Yes?

BENNY

When I win your parole, you get to be my partner on poker night with the other lawyers.

LORELEI

Benny. How like an over-enthusiastic beagle you are. Like a dog with a new squeeze toy. My dear sweet Benny.

(THEY glare at each other and HOLD.)

(END OF SCENE TWO.)

Scene Three

(The same interview room in a minimum security federal prison in New Jersey.)

(LORELEI is still dressed as before, and seated at the same table, sipping coffee from a paper cup, almost a mirror image of the first two scenes. Again, we hold for a bit, but SHE seems more fidgety than before.)

(It is three days later.)

(However, BENNY enters very much *unlike* HE did in the first two scenes. HE seems slightly weak, dizzy and sweaty, and mops his brow with his handkerchief. HE has his briefcase.)

(HE sits down carefully, perhaps steadying himself on the chair, and stares at LORELEI but says nothing.)

(After a long pause:)

LORELEI

So? No traffic report?

(Pause.)

Did the Washington Bridge make sense? You know I spent a few cigarettes getting that information for you. I also heard about a much more roundabout route, through the Bronx of all places. Have you been to the Bronx? I was there once, Yankee Stadium. My Uncle Wiggly, remember him? I was visiting my sister when she lived with them, and they took us to Yankee Stadium to see the Cleveland Indians. And I actually met my hero, Bob Feller, the pitcher. He autographed my program. I wonder if that's worth anything here.

BENNY

I want to know why.

LORELEI

Why what?

BENNY

Why you continually lie to me.

LORELEI

Nothing I have said is a lie.

BENNY

Just stop it. Stop fucking around with me.

LORELEI

Mister Kleinfeld, I will not have you speak to me with such language.

BENNY

You just did it again. You couldn't have met Bob Feller when you were a child. You were born in 1908, and he was born in 1918, ten years later.

LORELEI

Did you read that in one of your books?

BENNY

No, in the Daily News.

(HE takes a newspaper from his briefcase and slaps it on the table.)

He lost to the Yankees last night in ten innings. Rizzuto beat him with a single to left with two out.

LORELEI

Well, someone must have had the game on the radio. I apologize for my confusion. But there's no reason to get so upset.

BENNY

No reason? Do you know what I've been doing for two days and two nights? I've been researching you and your family.

LORELEI

I did not give you permission...

BENNY

I'm your lawyer, whether you like it or not. My job is help the court system dispense justice. There are documents, Miss Beckmann, census records, birth certificates, death certificates. Or lack of death certificates, in this case.

(HE stands up, but falls back into his chair.)

Could you be a good person and get me a cup of coffee? Please.

LORELEI

Is everything all right?

BENNY

The heat, overwork, this place, you, it's all getting to me.

LORELEI

Shouldn't I get you a cold drink?

BENNY

No, coffee is fine. Something to pep me up a bit.

LORELEI

You seem weak.

BENNY

I barely slept last night. And I barely slept the night before.

LORELEI

I hope not on my account.

BENNY

Very much on your account. Very much.

(LORELEI gets up and carefully pours BENNY a cup of coffee in a paper cup.)

LORELEI

Sugar? Any of this tepid cream?

BENNY

Yes, please. Two sugars.

(LORELEI carefully measures out the sugar and creamer, stirs it, and brings him the coffee.)

LORELEI

Take care with it. Beebee wouldn't want you to get a nasty burn on your tongue.

(HE slowly sips the coffee a few times.)

Feeling better?

BENNY

A bit. All of a sudden I felt sick.

LORELEI

Automobile fumes from the tunnel, no doubt.

BENNY

(still weak)

No, I...I took your advice.

LORELEI

The bridge? The clean, fresh air of the Bronx should have cleared your lungs. Beebee is always right.

BENNY

Thanks. But Miss Beckmann...

LORELEI

You can call me Beebee after all this time.

BENNY

Beebee, we have to get down to the truth. I can't be of any help to you if you continually lie to me.

LORELEI

When have I lied to you?

BENNY

Pretty much from the moment we first met.

LORELEI

As have you, with your tales of white-shoe law firms and made-up stories.

BENNY

Not intentionally. I wanted you to think I was a better lawyer than I am. I'm sorry.

LORELEI

Never apologize, Mister Kleinfeld. It shows you're weak. To be honest, everyone lies. We lie every day, even about the most trivial matters. To see if we can get away with it. To gain an advantage, no matter how slight. And anyway, what are lies but the truth with a little bend to it. It's like a mirror, like a funhouse mirror where everything is slightly distorted.

(LORELEI goes to the mirror on by the coffee machine and takes it off the wall, and walks to BENNY.)

When you see your reflection in a mirror, that's not really what you look like. It's reversed, left for right and right for left. So it is with truth and lies. The truth becomes a lie, and lies become truth. Mirror images of each other – and who's to say which is reality and which is illusion?

(SHE looks at BENNY's reflection in the mirror.)

My, but you do look unwell.

(SHE returns the mirror to the wall.)

Nothing I've said to you or on the radio was an out and out lie. Perhaps there was only a kernel of truth, but it was all true.

BENNY

I don't mean what you called your uncle, or your dog, or whether you met Bob Feller. Your mother, Beebee. Your mother and your sister and your father.

LORELEI

What about them?

BENNY

Your mother.

LORELEI

She died and father sent my sister to Connecticut and me to Paris because he couldn't take care of us.

BENNY

Your mother disappeared in 1928, and was never found.

LORELEI

You're lying to me.

BENNY

Am I?

LORELEI

I don't believe you.

BENNY

Unlike you, I can backup my truth with evidence. They teach you that in law school. Always have evidence.

LORELEI

And once you can fake evidence, you've got it made.

(HE takes out a piece of paper and shows it to her.)

BENNY

A copy of the Cleveland Plain Dealer, September 23, 1928. It was on microfilm at the Fifth Avenue library. *Fears grow for Heights woman missing two weeks.*

LORELEI

Their grammar is atrocious.

BENNY

September 30th. *Heights woman still missing.*

(Pause.)

Husband held for questioning.

(LORELEI looks at the paper and examines it.)

LORELEI

What difference does this make? I don't want parole, and I don't want your help.

BENNY

Back to that again? You do need my help.

LORELEI

For what?

BENNY

What kind of person lies about everything? Your broadcasts, your childhood, your family? I'm sick of your doubletalk. "Truth are lies, lies are the truth." Why? Why? I'm sick of it and sick of you.

LORELEI

This is getting into the realm of my personal experiences, which I hope you will respect.

BENNY

What happened to you? Your father killed your mother, didn't he? Didn't he? Don't tell me that's not traumatic.

LORELEI

(quietly)

One must have a tough soul to get through life.

BENNY

How can I help you if I can't understand you?

LORELEI

What is there to understand? I am a simple person, living a simple life.

BENNY

Now *that's* the biggest lie of all.

LORELEI

There is no easier lie than the truth, Mister Kleinfeld.

BENNY

(frustrated)

What the hell does that doublespeak mean?

(Pause.)

LORELEI

So my father murdered my mother. So what. Happens every day. Don't forget I was in Berlin in World War II. I've seen worse. Read the papers. I'm sure you'll represent one of them soon, and try to get them off.

BENNY

What about Europe? Was that true about Paul?

LORELEI

Don't you come in here and tell me what to do or what to think. Don't come in here and accuse me. Every word about Paul was true.

BENNY

For once, you're right.

(HE shows her another paper.)

Mattheus Thal, also known as Matts, formerly of Berlin, travelled first to New York on the *SS Carpathia* June 7, 1942, with his wife Bertha and children Katya and Suzanna, all on Peruvian passports. A friend of mine works in a deli in the same building as the Peruvian consulate on 49th Street. A dozen bagels loosened a few lips. They then took a plane to Lima, and a month later bought a small farm on the outskirts of Cusco.

LORELEI

You've done your homework.

BENNY

Yes, I have. And with all I've found out, I can easily argue for your release, whether you want it or not. You are not a monster.

LORELEI

But I've done monstrous things.

BENNY

And the occasional act of kindness.

LORELEI

I can't go.

BENNY

Being in prison is not a right. The state decides who gets to enjoy its hospitality, and for how long.

LORELEI

(angry, and lashing out)

I will leave prison on my terms, no one else's!

BENNY

I got in touch with your sister as well.

LORELEI

Who gave you permission? This is a red line which you must not cross, Mister Kleinfeld.

BENNY

She's living in Shaker Heights, just a few miles from where you grew up. She's thirty-five, married with two children.

LORELEI

You know she told me she never wanted to see me again.

BENNY

She changed her mind when I told her of your present condition.

LORELEI

My present condition!

BENNY

She'd be happy to take you in.

LORELEI

As if I would want to be incarcerated in Shaker Heights with her two sniveling children. She just wants a free nursemaid, nothing more.

BENNY

I don't know why I keep coming back here.

LORELEI

It's a challenge for both of us.

BENNY

How can I get through to you? Your hearing is in two days, and then I need to start preparing for my new client.

LORELEI

A new client? Is Beebee no longer interesting enough?

BENNY

Her name is Nelda Moore. She poisoned her husband for the insurance. A lousy five thousand dollars. Is that the price of a person's life these days?

LORELEI

I wouldn't know. But I'm sure your legal wizardry can reduce her sentence to no more than a parking ticket.

BENNY

I can't fathom you. You lie constantly, you deflect, you're guilty, you're not guilty but you don't want to leave prison, you're young, you're old, you never tell the truth. Your father killed your mother and it doesn't seem to faze you. You may have been responsible for the deaths of American soldiers, but you never out and out killed anyone, right?

(Pause. HE turns to her, knowing he's on to something.)

Right?

(Pause.)

LORELEI

Is there such a thing as confidentiality between attorney and client, Mister Kleinfeld?

BENNY

Yes, of course.

LORELEI

So I can be assured of your silence here. Nothing I say will pass these walls.

BENNY

Not by me. You have my full confidentiality, as a lawyer practicing in New York state.

LORELEI

And you will be discreet.

BENNY

Discretion is my middle name.

LORELEI

Actually I'm told it's Stephen.

BENNY

Metaphorically.

LORELEI

At least we agree on that.

BENNY

(with a slight chuckle, warming up to her)

We do.

LORELEI

And tell me, Mister Kleinfeld, tell me. What of forgiveness?

BENNY

(taken by surprise)

Forgiveness?

LORELEI

Yes. You offered me absolution last week. Where do I get it? Where do I go for forgiveness?

BENNY

I'm afraid I can't help you there.

LORELEI

Is it here in these prison walls? Is it in your courtrooms, your wood-paneled offices?

(Pause.)

Am I under oath?

BENNY

No.

LORELEI

Will you look for evidence?

BENNY

I should.

LORELEI

I can't allow that. Tell me you won't look for evidence, that you will believe whatever I tell you, with no questions and no reservations. You must not dig deeper. You must believe every word I say, every single word, no matter what.

BENNY

How can I be sure...

(BENNY sits down.)

LORELEI

Agreed?

BENNY

But then I can't use it in court.

LORELEI

(strongly)

Agreed?

BENNY

(quietly)

Yes.

LORELEI

Your pen.

BENNY

Yes?

LORELEI

Your pen from your uncle. Show it to me.

(BENNY hands her the pen.)

You said your uncle the hatmaker gave it to you. Where was he from?

BENNY

Poland.

LORELEI

Do you know where exactly?

BENNY

He mentioned a town called Lodz. Do you know it?

LORELEI

Do you see the rowboat on the barrel of the pen? That's the city's symbol. *Lodz* is *boat* in Polish. Have you noticed my necklace? It has the same rowboat on it. Come over here. Have a look.

(BENNY slowly walks over to her, with some trepidation.)

Come. Lorelei won't hurt you.

(HE cranes his neck awkwardly to get a close look at the necklace she's wearing.)

BENNY

I'm sorry...

LORELEI

Yes, quite awkward.

(SHE unclasps it and puts it on the table.)

See? The same as your pen.

BENNY

Why do you have it?

LORELEI

Memories. My haunted memories.

BENNY

Was it Paul's?

LORELEI

It was some point in the fall of 1944. I thought my program was getting stale, and Paul said he was ordered to do something to lift the soldiers' morale.

BENNY

I can understand why. 1944 was a bit of a tipping point.

LORELEI

We had just gotten some new lightweight recording equipment, and I thought perhaps we could go far away from the studio, say hello to some of the soldiers, and do a broadcast from there, to show their resolve. It would also get me to a domestic audience for the first time. Two weeks later we were on a luxurious overnight train stocked with wine, cakes and the most delicious sausages. Rations were running low at home, but we had enough food there for six people. We thought we should keep some for the soldiers, to get them to talk to us.

BENNY

How generous.

LORELEI

We passed through so many towns I had heard of on the radio – Frankfurt, Poznan, Kutno – and the farther east we got, the more desolate it became. Bombed out farm houses, overturned carts with dead horses still tethered to them, sometimes a body. And mud. Everywhere mud.

Paul insisted we bring an engineer with us, Kurt, to run the tape recorder and the microphones. Kurt was a short, stubby man, perhaps fifty, barely said a word ever. He kept to himself, which was not a bad strategy, I've come to learn.

And Paul also was strangely quiet the entire train trip. He was usually bubbling over with talk, about sports, about the latest jokes he had heard. But he was silent, just mumbled a few words when he asked me to pass him a sausage.

BENNY

What did you think of that?

LORELEI

Nothing. Nothing at all.

The train stopped eventually in Lodz, and a contingent of soldiers met us at the station. I had always imagined our troops to be tall, strong men, with chiseled jaws and bright eyes, like those Leni Riefenstahl movies. But these were boys, young scared boys with crooked teeth and dirt in their hair. They smiled at me, probably because I was the first German woman they had seen in months.

Paul shook a few hands, and told the soldiers we were going to record a few interviews and broadcast them back to their families. They were overjoyed. They hadn't heard a word from home for months. Paul went over to their commander, a tall man in a crisp uniform, unlike all the others, and whispered a few words to him. The commander pointed to a makeshift building. I thought, you know, it was a long trip, and Paul perhaps needed to relieve himself.

Kurt was setting up the recorder and the microphones when Paul came out, but he was dressed in a military uniform. I had never seen him like this. I didn't think he was in the forces, but looking back on it, I guess we all were. And he had with him a young boy, in knickers and a flat cap, no more than nineteen, caked in mud. One eye was half shut, as if he had been beaten. His hair was wild, and missing in some places. I had never seen anyone look like that, and I never imagined our soldiers could do that to someone.

BENNY

I can't believe that. How could you not know? After all your lies? How could you not know the horrors your lies gave cover to?

LORELEI

My lies? *My lies?* You're the liar here! You! You and your fakery! And you dare to accuse *me* of lying? You untruthful, ungrateful boy! Without me, you'd be nothing! You'd be defending kidnappers and child molesters and trying to win their freedom. And I am the liar? *Me?*

(Pause.)

You must believe me. Tell me you believe me.

(Pause. BENNY does not react.)

(anguished)

Tell me you believe me!

BENNY

(quietly, weakly, still ill)

I...I believe you.

(LORELEI catches her breath, and continues.)

LORELEI

Paul looked at the boy, and pushed him down to his knees. “This boy is a member of the Polish Home Army,” I remember him saying, in a voice I had never heard him use before. This was not the same man I lived with, who I attended parties with the Peruvian ambassador with, who held me and kept me warm when I remembered home. “He is responsible for the death of the Warsaw chief of police.” Kurt drew his revolver and pointed it at the boy, who smiled.

But then he turned quickly. And he shot Kurt.

“And this is the so-called resistance fighter who gave the order.”

BENNY

Which is why he insisted on Kurt coming along.

LORELEI

I had never seen a dead body, let alone anyone killed in front of me. I screamed, but I stood still, not knowing whether to run to comfort Kurt or save myself and run to Paul.

Paul gave me his pistol. It was still warm from the bullet that killed Kurt. “Now it’s your turn,” he said.

The commander said no, she can’t be trusted. But Paul took out another pistol, and he aimed it at me.

She’s only a woman, the commander said, she’s not strong enough, she’ll never do it. *Not strong enough*, he said to me.

The boy looked up at me as I aimed at him, with Kurt's dead body a few feet away, Paul pointing his gun at me, and a dozen armed soldiers facing me. The boy kept smiling. "I've killed my share of you," he said. "Where I go, you can't catch me."

The air was still, and you remember such strange things. There was a cow pasture a few kilometers away, and you could hear their mooing and the cowbells tinkling around their necks. Cows are such interesting creatures, don't you think? Simple, unassuming. They ask little and give so much. Such simple, giving creatures.

Then Paul screamed at me to shoot.

I closed my eyes, fired, and heard a small thud at my feet. It was the boy. I ran over to him. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry."

He managed to whisper something to me. *Ego te absolvo*. It's from the Catholic sacrament of penance. What a priest says to a confessor. *Ego te absolvo*. I absolve you. I don't know. Perhaps I made it up. Perhaps it's what I wanted to hear.

Yes. Perhaps I made it up.

Paul looked at him, and kicked him onto his back to make sure the boy was dead. And he grabbed this from his neck and gave it to me.

"You're one of us now," he said.

BENNY

Is this the boy's necklace?

LORELEI

I never learned his name! I shot him, and I never learned his name!

There were no interviews, no broadcasts. Paul stayed with the unit and I traveled back to Berlin alone.

I went back to my apartment, and packed a suitcase. I called my friend from Peru and asked for a final passport, then I stole a car. You pick up certain talents and skills in wartime. Four days later I was back in Paris, under a new name, Marjorie Reynolds, an American in Paris dancing again like Gene Kelly. I spent a lovely year there, talking to no one, alone, yes, teaching dance, but not getting close to anyone. I never wanted to get close to anyone again.

After the war, I made the stupid mistake of returning to Berlin. Maybe I was looking for Paul, but I never heard from him again. I figured he was dead. It was as Voltaire wrote, that those most excited about cutting off heads during the Terror were themselves soon kneeling at the guillotine.

I thought everything was over. But it never will be over. And that's where they arrested me.

(Pause.)

(Throughout the speech, LORELEI has walked around the room. SHE is now face to face with BENNY.)

So now you see why I can't be paroled. Why I never can be.

Take the necklace. It would go well with your uncle's pen.

(Pause.)

(BENNY looks at her, and slaps her hard on the face. SHE winces, but does not retaliate.)

Just like papa would. I expect it now.

(Pause. SHE returns to her seat, and looks at BENNY.)

You believe me, don't you? Say it.

(Pause.)

Say it!

(HE gives no response, partially from not believing her, and partially from still being ill.

(A long awkward pause.)

Well, I think we could all use some coffee. May I get you some, my dear Benny?
Are you still unwell?

(SHE pours two coffees and brings them over.
BENNY is breathing heavily.)

BENNY

Let me get ahold of myself. Yes. I've dealt with murderers before. This is nothing different, no different than the Bertha Steinmetzes of the world. I can work with this. I can do this. I can use this. I can take your stories and use them. It's going to work. Yes. I can use them. I'm going to win your...

(HE's fading.)

...your...your...release.

(Pause.)

Is it warm in here?

LORELEI

It's always hot in here. Preparation for where we're all going afterwards.

BENNY

I feel dizzy.

LORELEI

Perhaps you're hungry. Oh – did you bring my sweet treat? I need it now, more than ever.

BENNY

Yes, some sugar will help me. Yes.

(HE weakly takes a bag out of his briefcase and puts it on the table.)

You were right. Those sweet rolls at Pfannenstiel's were incredible. I bought two. One for me and one for you. I had half of one on the way here. Helga was surprised I asked for two. It took her awhile to get the second one. "Just the way Lorelei asked for it," she said. They're delicious. I've never had a sweet roll with a slight almond taste.

LORELEI

Almond? *Almond?* Oh no. Oh no. Benny, Benny, oh no, what have you done?

BENNY

I ate a sweet roll. I can afford the calories.

(HE tries to get up, but slumps down in the chair.)

So dizzy. My head...

LORELEI

You need water. Here – the coffee. Drink it, drink it quickly, oh my God. The sweet roll. You have to vomit, here.

(SHE grabs the waste basket by the coffee maker and bends his head into it.)

BENNY

What are you...

LORELEI

Come on now, my sweet Benny, let it all out...

(Nothing.)

Oh god, oh god...

(With his head still in the basket, SHE quickly sticks her fingers in his mouth and down his throat. HE vomits into the basket a few times.)

Good. Good boy. Good boy.

(HE slumps back into the chair.)

Now drink, drink. More! Drink more.

(SHE loosens his clothing, as he slowly begins to recover. LORELEI returns to her chair, and sips delicately from her coffee.)

BENNY

Those sweet rolls, they really pack a punch.

LORELEI

They do. Helga's special recipe, just for me. She shouldn't have given you one. Perhaps a cookie. A warm bread. Those sweet rolls are special, only for me. Only for Lorelei. Did you know what happened to the Lorelei on the hill, after she lured all her lovers to their graves? She fell to her death from a cliff. The legend says she was pushed by three guards, but I think know better. I think she jumped.

BENNY

(still panting and weak)

What do you mean?

LORELEI

They're my only way out of here.

(SHE reaches in the bag, takes a sweet roll, and begins to eat it, slowly.)

(BENNY sits up and looks at her, wide-eyed, still weak, dizzy and mopping his brow.)

BENNY

(softly, resigned)

Beebee. No. Beebee. Don't.

LORELEI

I have to. They're my only way out. I thank you for getting them. It was very kind of you. Please excuse me if I don't pay you the dollar-fifty-nine I owe you.

(Pause.)

Now, may I get you more coffee?

(SHE eats more and more of the poisoned roll, as lights go down.)

(End of scene three.)

(END OF PLAY.)