

LENI

Written by

Jean Balest

Based on a Revisionist's History

WGA # 1688605
545 N Oakland Ave
Pasadena, CA 91101
(323) 636-3102

FADE IN:

INT. PLANE - DAY - BLACK AND WHITE FILM AGE

The glass and metal windshield frame of a plane cuts through a thick swirl of clouds in the sky. We cannot see the pilot, only the bed of pillowy clouds directly in front. The plane peeks through the end of the cloud formations below.

A city comes into focus beyond the haze and a clock tower bell RINGS. This is Nuremberg, and it's 1934.

INT. PLANE - CONTINUOUS

We frame out a bit and see a film camera is recording this heavenly view from the cockpit, the click clack of the shutter rolling.

LENI (O.S.)
Can I tell you a story?

CUT TO:

EXT. NUREMBERG STREETS - DAY - 1933

LENI (O.S.)
There once was a woman from the
mountains, her name was Junta.

Montage:

- Bustling Germans queue in line for work. A blackened FATHER (40s) and SON (10) look at the camera, covered in ash from the machines.

EXT. CRYSTAL GROTTO SET OF THE BLUE LIGHT - DAY - 1932

Hands hold a shimmering quartz crystal, pan up to a dramatic profile shot Leni. She is in character as Junta in The Blue Light.

EXT. NUREMBERG STREETS - DAY - 1933

A mother pushes a baby carriage across town.

CRYSTAL GROTTO SET OF THE BLUE LIGHT - DUSK- 1932

LENI as Junta walks into the town tavern with a basket, offering the village people grapes. They look at her in contempt, she is clearly an outsider to the townspeople.

EXT. NUREMBERG STREETS - DAY - 1933

A young BROWN SHIRT hands out propaganda to a passerby in front of a decrepit vaudeville theater.

LENI (O.S.)
She had a magical connection with
crystals embedded in those
mountains.

A SHOPKEEPER mends a watch when a rock bursts through his window.

INT. TAVERN SET OF THE BLUE LIGHT - DUSK - 1932

A VILLAGE PERSON (male, brunette, 30s) knocks Leni as Junta's basket down and the crystal is revealed beneath the fruits. His eyes glimmer. Junta becomes defensive.

EXT. NUREMBERG STREETS - DAY - 1932

The shopkeeper sticks his head out the window and sees a group of rambunctious children running off. His eyeline follows to the colorful MOVIE POSTERS plastered on the wall next door. One features Marlene Dietrich in THE SCARLET EMPRESS.

LENI (O.S.)
The people in the town, they hated
her, said she was a witch, they
banished her.

EXT. NUREMBERG RALLY STADIUM - DAY -1934

A TECH ENGINEER grasps mechanical controls, staring in great concentration at something directly above him.

LENI (O.S.)
Then a man came... He loved her
very much. This man, he found her
grotto and thought it could help
the village below.

ENGINEER'S POV: A mechanical lift attached to the stadium's flagpole descends along the edge of a massive flag flapping in the wind.

EXT. NUREMBERG RALLY STADIUM - CONTINUOUS

Wide shot from the POV of an onlooker watching the engineer descend the mechanical lift, we can now see the massive flag in full view and the ominous symbol that it bears.

EXT. SKY OVER NUREMBERG - CONTINUOUS

The same PLANE we saw before passes overhead, with a SWASTIKA painted on the its side.

EXT. BERLIN STREETS UFA PALACE - DAY - 1935

Descend on the upright marquee of a movie theater, a WORKER replacing its letters. TRIUMPH DES WILLENS

LENI (O.S.)

But the greedy people in the
village raided all of it, every
last bit. And she couldn't go on...

- A WEALTHY MAN and his GIRLFRIEND pass. He wears a swastika arm band and pinches her playfully. She pries away from him only to be pulled back in. He grabs her and kisses her deep, she reluctantly submits, her eyes gazing up at the theater marquee and its glowing lights in awe.

END MONTAGE.

CUT TO:

EXT. NUBA VILLAGE, SUDAN 1960S - NIGHT

A confused NUBA GIRL stares into camera, brow furrowed. She studies the sight before her.

NUBA GIRL POV: an OLD LENI (60s, world-weary but oozing perseverance), stares into the night sky. Her eyes twinkle with nostalgia. She looks down at a smoky fire.

Her gaze returns to the girl.

LENI

How was that? Did you like it?

The furrowed brow treatment continues. Leni stares right back, expectant.

LENI (CONT'D)

No?

(beat)

Well, it's just a little fairy tale, nothing more. But I imagine it must be difficult for you to understand right now.

A procession of chalk-covered TRIBESMEN exit a hut. They carry the body of a DEAD GIRL (6).

The Nuba Girl's eyes lock on to the procession. She stands.

LENI (CONT'D)

Go on.

The girl remains. Leni motions for her to join the others.

LENI (CONT'D)

Go join the others...

The girl exits. Leni sits back, satisfied. She raises her camera to her eye.

LENI (CONT'D)

Dear, sweet child, to be young...

SNAP!

CUT TO BLACK:

SUPERIMPOSE:

"LENI"

FADE IN:

EXT. UFA PALACE - NIGHT - 1932

A return to the theater from the opening montage. Now it bustles with dozens of elegantly dressed patrons, a red carpet spills out onto the sidewalk. The marquee reads: DAS BLAUE LICHT LENI RIEFENSTAHL

SUPERIMPOSE:

BERLIN, 1932

A much YOUNGER LENI (early 30s) sneaks out the side door of the theater with this night's entourage-- JACOB FRIEDERICH BOLLSCHWEILER, WALTER RUTTMANN, WILLY ZIELKE.

Leni clutches a BOUQUET of roses.

WALTER

Divine, Leni, just divine.

LENI

Try and tell me it's not one of the best you've seen.

WILLY

There is a front entrance, you know.

LENI

Oh don't be so boring, Willy. That's what everyone would expect.

WILLY

I'm not boring.

WALTER

You're a real trollop in Vatican City!

JACOB

My dear child this is Berlin, it's a whoretown! Please do try and enjoy yourself.

LENI

Leave him alone. Willy, there's just no need to get caught up in the crowds on a night like this.

WALTER

You'll be the best filmmaker this country's never seen with that attitude.

LENI

And what will I care when I'm the best?

Willy steps in dog shit. Walter and Bollschweiller crack up.

WILLY

Shit.

LENI

Precisely.

They reach the car and Willy gets in.

LENI (CONT'D)

Oh please, come on let's walk. It's such a divine evening, just magical. Please?

She takes Walter's hand, pulling like a schoolgirl. He throws her a hopeless look.

WALTER

Germany's greatest director, everyone. She walks!

JACOB

And she climbs!

LENI

You both age me. I'll be damned if I get old! Let's go dancing...

WILLY

You two are going to just let her behave like this?

WALTER

Definitely.

JACOB

Absolutely.

Leni smiles triumphantly. Willy sighs and the curmudgeon of a DRIVER turns to him.

DRIVER

You smell like shit.

WILLY

Do you know who I am?

DRIVER

Yes, you're the man who wiped shit all over my floorboards!

WILLY

You perfectly common little old man. You have no idea who you're talking to.

JACOB

Of course he doesn't. Now come on let's go.

WILLY
But you will!

Leni pulls Willy out of the car, hands the flowers to the DRIVER of the car.

LENI
You know, you should be in pictures. Have you seen The Golem?

The driver doesn't say a word, just stares at her shocked. Leni shoots a coy smile. The four of them walk past the car, taking in the night air, Willy sulking along.

CUT TO:

INT. PUB - NIGHT

A crowded and loud bar. Four BEER MUGS CLANK together in cheers, held by Leni and her friends.

WALTER
To a woman who never knows when to quit. May she never learn.

They drink, except for Jacob. Willy takes a small swig as if he were sipping champagne but the others don't notice as the attention has shifted towards Jacob.

LENI
What's this you say about whoretowns? We have no Prohibition here! Drink up!

WALTER
Haven't you heard? Booze is the ruination of society!

JACOB
(dryly)
I have no reason to celebrate. Not all of us get to be in the picture business you know.

WALTER
He's right, man can't even sell a caricature, let alone a painting.

LENI
For heaven's sake, Walter!

WALTER
Oop, everybody drink, I see one!

Walter points. Not far from Jacob, a page long FLYER for Hitler sticks to the wall.

WALTER (CONT'D)
Grab that, Jake. Hand it here.

Jacob sets his beer down, tears the flyer from the wall, hands it to Walter.

WALTER (CONT'D)
Curious bastard, isn't he?

LENI
I'm not sure how I feel about the mustache.

WILLY
(Sardonic)
I don't know, I like it. It's... subtle.

WALTER
Like your mind.

Willy flips Walter the bird.

JACOB
If we all could be so lucky...

LENI
You're a fine painter, Jake. You'll make your living. Promise.

Jacob halfheartedly raises his glass.

JACOB
So what of this "Amazing Hitler"?
What do we know about him?

WILLY
Well, he's Austrian, has a bad haircut --

WALTER
What do you say we see the man for ourselves?

LENI
What, go knock on his front door?

Walter points at the advertisement. It lists the date of the next Hitler rally.

WALTER
That's tonight.

WILLY
We just got here. Aren't we having enough fun?

JACOB
Speak for yourself.

Leni slyly pockets the ad. Then, smiling:

LENI
Willy, the night is young. Live a little.

JACOB
You heard the lady! Drink up.

They raise the mugs to their lips.

WALTER
It's a whoretown, it's a whoretown!

They all laugh except for Willy who is visibly offended by the statement. He looks at them like a bristled cat who wants to scratch their eyes out.

CUT TO:

INT. EVENT HALL - NIGHT

The ROAR of hundreds of NAZI SUPPORTERS fills every space. The crowds are packed against one another like sardines.

Parents, children, old men and women, even crying babies are present. Some have SWASTIKA ARM BANDS, many don't.

Leni and her group locate a pocket of wall space in the very back, next to a group of OILY STEELWORKERS. The steelworkers gawk at Leni in disbelief. She enjoys the attention and winks at an attractive young worker.

An INTERCOM booms over the crowd:

INTERCOM VOICE (O.S.)
Attention! Attention, ladies and gentlemen! Please locate your seats.

(MORE)

INTERCOM VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Those left standing, please be
 courteous and find a space against
 the wall!

WILLY
 (sarcastically)
 This should be good.

Leni stands on her tip-toes to get a better view but it's hard to make out much other than the large NAZI FLAGS.

The EMCEE strides up to the PODIUM on stage. The crowd is still very loud, shouting.

CROWD
 Heil! Heil! Heil!

EMCEE
 Ladies and gentlemen! Ladies and
 gentlemen, your attention, please!
 Your attention, please!

The crowd gradually calms.

EMCEE (CONT'D)
 Thank you for being here tonight.
 You are sure to be pleased.

Leni cranes her head to see the stage.

EMCEE (CONT'D)
 He has been campaigning very hard
 these past few months, so I invite
 you to give a very warm welcome
 to...

A beaming MOTHER (30s) turns to Leni. She carries her CHILD (3) in her arms.

MOTHER
 Would you just look at him? Such a
 dream!

EMCEE
 Chancellor Candidate for the
 National Socialist German Workers
 Party, and good friend, Adolf
 Hitler!

The pinprick that is Hitler emerges from backstage, and the ocean of supporters erupts into applause at the sight of him.

Leni applauds with everyone else, strains to get a good look at the man on stage.

Between the waving arms and Nazi salutes, she can only make out a fraction of Hitler standing miles away on the stage.

Leni looks around at the audience and the affect this man has on them during his impassioned speech.

Montage:

HITLER (O.S.)

The German farmer is impoverished.
The middle class is ruined. The
social hopes of millions have been
destroyed. One third of all German
men and women of working age is
unemployed and thus without income.
If the established political
parties want to save Germany, why
have they not done so already?

- A DIRTY INDUSTRIAL WORKER (male, 50s) stares at the political candidate, mesmerized by his words.

-A group of WOMEN (30s) look at each other and smile.

-PARTY MEMBERS (40-50s) listen to his speech with reverence and military stoicism at the same time.

Leni continues to look around at the faces in the crowd, and study them. All sounds and speech in the auditorium become inaudible, as she is having a sort of dreamlike epiphany.

Sound returns to normal.

HITLER (O.S.) (CONT'D)

And millions of bourgeois
intellectuals have likewise come to
realize the insignificance of their
own views if the masses of millions
compromising the rest of the nation
do not finally comprehend the
importance of the German
intellectual strata.

Close up on Leni's reaction to this last sound byte. We watch her begin to calculate what this last part of the speech means. Again she looks around. We now focus on Hitler as he delivers the end of his speech, which is delivered with fervor.

HITLER (CONT'D)

The Almighty, Who so far has allowed us to rise from seven men to 13 million in 13 years, will further allow these 13 million to once again become a German folk. It is in this people that we believe, for this people we fight; and it is to this people that we are willing, as thousands of comrades before us, if necessary, to commit ourselves body and soul. If the nation does its duty, then the day must inevitably come that restores us to a Reich, in honor and freedom, work, and bread!

It's a Hard Days Night (Lester, 1964) sort of fangirl stirring in the crowd. Thousands of arms raise in the Nazi Salute, Leni and her group begin to make their way through the crowd to the exit.

WILLY

Well that was just charming, if you like eating shit.

LENI

You really should stop being so cynical.

WILLY

What do you mean dear? The man will be bigger than Jesus!

Leni rolls her eyes, the group finds their way out of the crowd with a similar excitement of theater patrons leaving the cinema. Except for Willy who is mocking the jovial passersby.

CUT TO:

INT. LENI'S HOUSE - DAY

HARRY SOKAL (30s), a wiry and well-kept Producer sits across from Leni, dressed in a fashionable blazer, and slacks. Her MAID (20s), an attractive blue eyed brunette, serves them TEA.

Sokal finishes up a review of The Blue Light in the newspaper.

SOKAL

"...a technical feat!" "Riveting,"
"magical," oh Leni, this is good.

LENI

Are you surprised?

SOKAL

Not at all. Hollywood's already
calling. You knew they would. The
offer from Universal for the S.O.S.
Film in Greenland still stands.

LENI

Tell them I'm considering it, but I
have another project in mind right
now. Besides I'd rather not have to
work with Fanck again if I don't
have to.

SOKAL

Leni, this would be great for you.
Think of it. International stardom.
Shooting begins at the end of this
month.

LENI

I'll consider it.

He stands and sets the paper with a stack of papers on the
counter, then pauses.

The National Socialist German Workers' Party leaflet sticks
out just enough that it can be seen. He pulls it from the
pile.

LENI (CONT'D)

What is it Harry?

SOKAL

What is this?

LENI

Hm? Oh, it must have been placed in
my mail by one of those little
urchins. I should throw it out.

SOKAL

You'll do well to stay away from
such things. A beauty like you has
no place with such questionable
ideals.

LENI

Harry, you sound like my mother. No wonder she liked you so much.

SOKAL

We're all just looking out for you, dear.

LENI

Oh, darling, I'm not your "dear." I'm your director. And according to the latest reviews, a star.

SOKAL

That you are.

LENI

We've worked together for years now, and isn't that so much better than a short-lived romance?

SOKAL

Leni, I've always thought you were wonderful. I want to be the one to take care of everything you need in your career. Anything you need-

LENI

Harry, stop.

SOKAL

You'll forgive my passion, then.

LENI

I always do. Now, if we could just please focus, hmm? Do you know Tiefland?

SOKAL

The opera with the wolf?

LENI

I'm going to make it into a great film. Without the songs, of course.

SOKAL

Leni, who actually wants to see that?

LENI

Everyone will when I'm done with it. You should trust your star director more. You never know what she could do.

Sokal eyes the flyer.

SOKAL

That's what I'm afraid of.

Leni tears the flyer into pieces.

LENI

Happy? You've gotten me all riled up. I have so much planning to do. Let's meet next week.

SOKAL

But I've only just gotten here!

LENI

Yes, and the day is young. I'll need my share of the funds from The Blue Light, don't forget.

They stand and Leni's Maid places a coat on Sokal's shoulders. Leni leads him to the door.

SOKAL

It was good to see you.

LENI

You too, "dear."

She winks.

LENI (CONT'D)

Goodbye.

SOKAL

What should I tell Universal?

LENI

If it will make you happy, then I'll do it.

SOKAL

Good dear. I think it will make YOU very happy.

LENI

I know you do care and I know you know it's probably the only thing *that would* actually make me happy.

Leni starts to close the door when Sokal stops her. He stares directly into her eyes, takes her hand in his, and attempts to kiss it.

LENI (CONT'D)

No!

She removes his hand and closes the door.

EXT. LENI'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Harry stands, stares at the door for a few moments. He then places his hat on his head, straightens his tie and shuffles off.

INT. LENI'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Leni turns to her Maid. They share a look-- "oh brother." She heads to her room.

LENI

Throw out those papers on the counter, would you? I'm not to be disturbed for the next few hours.

MAID

Yes, Frau Riefenstahl.

INT. LENI'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The maid takes a look at said rubbish, which consists of newspapers and magazines featuring German film stars, notably Marlene Dietrich on the cover of a magazine.

INT. LENI'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Leni closes the door behind her. Her room is an assortment of FILM MEMORABILIA and fine furniture, the elements of work and home combined.

At one end of the room sits a DESK. She takes a seat and pulls PAPER, an ENVELOPE, a PEN and STAMPS from various places on the desk.

A copy of MEIN KAMPF sits at the back of the desk with important DOCUMENTS, a BUDGET, and other BOOKS.

She begins writing: "Dear Herr Hitler, I recently attended a political rally for the first time in my life..."

FADE TO:

EXT. NUBA VILLAGE - NIGHT

The smoldering funeral pyre. Somber NUBA VILLAGERS huddle together around the flame, painted in chalk.

The Nuba Girl from before stares at the flame next to her frowning mother.

SUPERIMPOSE:

NUBA VILLAGE, SUDAN, 1965

Suddenly, a frustrated SCREAM O.S.

CUT TO:

INT. LENI'S HUT - NIGHT

A letter grasped between Leni's wrinkled hands. Segments of it fly by in sync with her muttered reading:

LENI
 (under breath)
 ...prospects... film documenting
 Nuba tribe promising... regret to
 inform... cannot finance such a
 work...
 (beat)
 Useless!

Leni throws the letter across the room, past the patient and bewildered ALIPO (30s, Nuba tribesman, muscular). He catches it and places it in a pile of many more.

The room is a clutter with photographic materials and basic living supplies. Leni's bed is covered with maps and papers.

Leni stands next at a makeshift desk covered with LETTERS, NOTES, STORYBOARDS, POLAROIDs, and BOOKS about Sudan.

LENI (CONT'D)
 They will wish they'd let me make a
 film for them.

ALIPO
 Who will wish Miss Leni?

Alipo guides Leni to the bed.

LENI
 Would you get me the wine? Oh, this
 is a fine hand to be dealt.

ALIPO
You should not drink, this night.

LENI
Are you not my friend?

ALIPO
By the looks of it, I'm your only
friend around here.

LENI
Then, please do what I say!

Alipo stares at her with hurt eyes.

LENI (CONT'D)
Go on, Alipo. I'm beyond your help.

ALIPO
Very well, Miss Leni.

Alipo reaches into one of the crates in the back of the room
and returns with a BOTTLE OF WINE, hands it to her.

LENI
And the opener.

Alipo cocks his head.

LENI (CONT'D)
I'll do it myself.

Leni strides across the room and gets the bottle opener,
struggles with the bottle.

LENI (CONT'D)
The thing about people with money,
Alipo-- damn you! No, not you, oh
for God's sake. They have no
perception of what's important in
the world.

She finally gets the bottle open, a triumphant gleam in her
eyes.

LENI (CONT'D)
They would rather watch cheap
amusements than learn something
new.
(beat)
To the rich and tasteless. May they
remain that way.

She takes a long swig from the bottle.

EXT- NUBA VILLAGE - NIGHT.

ENGLISHMAN (O.S.)
Pathetic.

Leni turns to see the ENGLISHMAN (40s), a rational but impatient assistant to her work in Sudan. Sweaty and dirty, he leans in the doorway and munches a BOWL OF RICE.

LENI
Must you buzz around like a fly all the time?

ENGLISHMAN
I thought I smelled something sweet.

LENI
You're too kind.

ENGLISHMAN
I meant the wine.

Leni swigs again.

LENI
What is it, then?

ENGLISHMAN
Let me guess, they won't fund it.

LENI
No, not that.

ENGLISHMAN
Don't lie to me. I saw the letter.

LENI
You've been reading my mail?

The Englishman enters, observes some PHOTOS taped to her wall.

ENGLISHMAN
Just want to make sure we're not wasting time. Would you like some of that? It's terrible.

He sets the bowl on her desk. Leni sets it on the floor. A DOG sneaks in from outside and laps up bits of the rice. Alipo shakes his head at the dog.

LENI
They just need proof, that's all.

ENGLISHMAN

I'd love some proof, I'll tell you that. It's getting more dangerous here.

Leni makes to push past him and exit the hut, but he blocks her way. Leni's eyes burn into his with restrained rage.

The Englishman lets her pass.

ENGLISHMAN (CONT'D)

There's going to be a war, Leni!

LENI

There's been a war. Jesus, I might be old, but I'm far from blind.

EXT. NUBA VILLAGE - CONTINUOUS

Leni storms out of the hut to find NUBA MAN (20s) sitting aside a fire painting his face.

She stands before him, caught off guard by her own wonder.

She removes a CAMERA from her bag and prepares it, never taking her eyes from the man. Like a hunter, she raises the camera to her eye just as a gunman would to his kill.

Then, she lowers the camera.

She approaches the man and adjusts his posture.

LENI

There we go.

She returns to her spot, raises the camera.

CLICK!

The man is captured for a split second in FREEZE FRAME. Leni switches LENSES.

She readies once again, but is interrupted by Alipo.

ALIPO

Do you need anything, Miss Leni?

LENI

Alipo, friend, you shouldn't sneak up on an old woman. It's bad luck.

ALIPO

Are you okay?

LENI
Oh, everything is fine, just fine.
Thank you for asking.

ALIPO
You are joking?

LENI
It's the world who jokes, not me.
I'm the straight woman, didn't you
know?

ALIPO
You are drunk, then.

Leni turns on him.

LENI
Watch yourself, friend.

She peers through the crowd. The man who was painting his
face is now gone.

LENI (CONT'D)
(sighs)
Perfect.

ALIPO
They say you you make men look like
gods. You have magic.

LENI
I shoot men the way I see them.

He motions toward the POLAROID CAMERA around her neck.

ALIPO
You shoot men? I don't believe you
Leni.

LENI
No no no, shoot.

Leni places her finger on the camera trigger, taking his
photograph. It's a violent sound, jolts her into a thought.

INT. LENI'S HOUSE - DAY - 1932

The telephone rings. Leni picks up the phone, while reading a
script, ICEBERG S.O.S.

BRUCKNER (O.S.)
Fräulein Riefenstahl?

LENI

Yes?

BRUCKNER (O.S.)

This is Bruckner, adjutant to the
Fuhrer.

Leni holds her breath and is very still, her eyes widen in disbelief, but she keeps her breath steady.

BRUCKNER (O.S.) (CONT'D)

The Fuhrer has read your letter,
and has invited you to
Wilhelmshaven tomorrow for the day.
We would pick you up at the railway
station and drive you to
Horumersiel, where the Fuhrer is
currently staying. You could leave
Berlin tomorrow morning and arrive
in Wilhelmshaven at 4:00 pm.

LENI

Who is this?

BRUCKNER (O.S.)

Wilhelm Bruckner.

LENI (O.S.)

I don't know who you are, you say
you're...

BRUCKNER (O.S.)

Yes, I am. Of course I am. What
shall I tell the Fuhrer?

LENI

Yes I'll come.

BRUCKNER

Wonderful, we will meet soon.

EXT. NUBA VILLAGE - NIGHT

LENI

You remember what it's called?

Alipo thinks. Shakes his head.

LENI (CONT'D)

Cah-meh-ra. Camera.

ALIPO

Cah-meh-ra.

LENI
Good enough. Come here.

She angles the Polaroid so he can see its functions.

LENI (CONT'D)
Look through the tiny window here,
see?

Alipo holds the camera up to his eye.

ALIPO'S P.O.V.: Leni continues teaching him through the eyepiece of the camera.

LENI (CONT'D)
Now place your finger on the
button.

She reaches up and shows him, and CLICK! He takes an unexpected photo of her. She takes the camera back and the PHOTO slides out of the slot.

LENI (CONT'D)
Now, look.

She pulls him in close and they watch as the blurry image of Leni manifests upon the Polaroid's surface. She hands him the photo.

Alipo is shocked. Leni grins.

LENI (CONT'D)
It's not witchcraft, I promise.
But, you managed to hide my
wrinkles. You really are a noble
one.

ALIPO
Maybe I do help?

LENI
More than I let on.

NUBA MEN'S VOICES (O.S.)
Alipo! Alipo!

ALIPO
I must prepare for the festival.

LENI
Do what you must.

She watches Alipo join the other Nuba men in the distance. Her vision blurs.

VOICE (O.S.)

Leni!

Leni whips around to find only darkness.

LENI

(under breath)

Tricks. Just tricks.

FADE TO:

EXT. BEACH - DAY

A stretch of road lines a seemingly empty stretch of sand. A CAR appears in the distance, grows closer, and pulls over.

A CHAUFFER gets out and opens the passenger door. Leni steps out, her hair swept by the open air. She stares down the beach to a GROUP OF MEN.

LENI

(to Chauffer)

Thank you.

She hobbles through the sand toward the group of men, scans them for her target. Then she sees him:

HITLER (40s) is turned from her. He is dressed in a blue suit, humble and unassuming. BINOCULARS hang from his neck. He laughs with his company.

The men stop talking. Hitler turns to her, his blue eyes pierce, and he breaks into a grin.

HITLER

Leni Riefenstahl, you didn't
disappoint me.

He approaches her and kisses her hand.

A photographer, HOFFMAN (40s) leans in to capture the moment. Hitler waves him off.

HITLER (CONT'D)

Don't, Hoffman, this could harm
Fräulein Riefenstahl. Gentlemen.

Hitler nods at his men. The group migrates away, over a bluff of sand.

HITLER (CONT'D)
You're a wonderful artist, your
Blue Light was magic. It was.

LENI
Thank you, Herr Hitler.

HITLER
Come.

He beckons for her to follow.

FADE TO:

EXT. BEACH - CONTINUOUS

He holds up his binoculars and peers out to sea.

HITLER
Ah, look! You can see the fisherman
reeling in the catch.

He hands the binoculars to Leni, who takes a look.

Sure enough, through the binoculars' lenses, a FISHERMAN'S
BOAT can be seen out at sea reeling in fish.

LENI
Oh! The net's nearly full. They'll
eat for weeks.

He laughs.

HITLER
No, it's not for them.

She smiles, not entirely sure of what he means.

HITLER (CONT'D)
They feed the world, but so often
are hungry. They are not so
different than us Leni.

LENI
In what way?

Hitler smiles at Leni, ignoring the question.

HITLER
You're an excellent filmmaker,
Fraulein Riefenstahl.

LENI
That's very kind of you to say.

HITLER
I say it because it's true.
I've seen every one of your films,
every single one. The Blue Light is
a masterpiece, and you, so
accomplished for a *WOMAN* in this
industry.

He peers out with the binoculars again. Leni opens her mouth to respond when he cuts her off.

HITLER (CONT'D)
Once we come to power, you must
make my films.

LENI
It's an honor, Herr Hitler, but...
well, it's just not possible.

He looks at her like she's crazy.

HITLER
Why not?

LENI
Just last week, the Catholic Church
approached me with a commission. I
really don't work this way for
anybody.

Hitler listens intently.

HITLER
I'm impressed.

LENI
About?

HITLER
The Pope sent for you, and you
declined him. He's an important
man.

LENI
I have to have a very personal
relationship with my subject
matter, otherwise I can't be
creative.

Hitler takes her hand.

HITLER

I admire that...

(beat)

But I think you'll come around.
Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm late
to my own election rally.

He makes his way up the sand where his adjutant WILHELM BRUCKNER (40s, humorless and dry) and an idling CAR wait.

Hitler whispers in his ear and gets in the car.

Bruckner approaches Leni, extends a hand.

BRUCKNER

Leni Riefenstahl, I am Wilhelm
Bruckner, adjutant to Herr Hitler.
I'd like to personally invite you
to our rally tonight.

LENI

Nice to meet you.

Leni shakes his hand.

BRUCKNER

My employer tells me you're on a
tight schedule, due to your film
commitments with the Americans.
We'll have you on a plane first
thing tomorrow morning.

That's very kind of you, Herr
Bruckner, but--

BRUCKNER (CONT'D)

(all smiles)

I'm not asking you.

Leni forces a smile.

CUT TO:

INT. RALLY PLACE - NIGHT

Hitler stands at a podium, flanked on either side by NAZI OFFICIALS. On the walls hang NAZI FLAGS and the audience watches him, transfixed, under his spell.

We see Leni from an UNKNOWN P.O.V. on the stage. She has a front row seat, surrounded by PRESS PHOTOGRAPHERS.

A pair of fingers tap a brown-slacked leg.

HITLER

... So it is only natural that when the capable intelligences of a nation, which are always in a minority, are regarded only as of the same value as all the rest...

PAN up from the fingers to the alert JOSEPH GOEBBELS (40s, sly and lizard-like) staring at Leni from the stage.

...Then genius, capacity, the value of personality are slowly subjected to the majority and this process is then falsely named the rule of the people...

Leni feels Goebbels' gaze and makes eye contact with the man.

HITLER (CONT'D)

... For this is not rule of the people, but in reality the rule of stupidity, of mediocrity, of halfheartedness, of cowardice, of weakness, and of inadequacy....

Their eye contact breaks as the crowd bursts into APPLAUSE.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL KAISERHOF - NIGHT

Bruckner leads Leni down the elegant hallway to the ballroom where the Nazis and their high-end supporters mingle.

He guides her to Hitler and his company-- Goebbels, his wife MAGDA, GREGOR STRASSER and a few others.

All attention on Goebbels:

GOEBBELS

I crossed ways with Henrik, the banker, the Jew, oh and you should have seen the look on his face when he saw me.

STRASSER

Your face has that effect, Joseph.

The crowd giggles.

GOEBBELS

How is your tongue so quick with
all that fat surrounding it?
Anyways.

He lowers his voice.

GOEBBELS (CONT'D)

He tried to start casual
conversation, as if I couldn't
smell the rot coming from him. It
almost made me sick. I spit in his
face!

HITLER

You're all talk, Joseph.

Goebbels raises his hand in oath.

GOEBBELS

I cannot tell a lie.

The group laughs.

GOEBBELS (CONT'D)

But then-- then-- the poor bastard
started crying! And that's not the
best part! His children came
outside to see what the matter was.
(imitates a child)
"Daddy, what's wrong? Daddy,
daddy!"

MAGDA

Oh Jesus Christ, Joseph.

GOEBBELS

Shh! You'll ruin this for everyone.

Magda shuts down. It's awkward. She makes eye contact with
Leni, who offers a sympathetic smile.

GOEBBELS (CONT'D)

Where was I? So this goes on, and I
haven't said a word, and finally,
the bastard faints out of hysteria.

He chuckles, beaming.

STRASSER

Is that it?

Goebbels stops laughing, the smile on his face stuck in
limbo.

GOEBBELS

I'm sorry?

STRASSER

That was hardly a story, Joseph.

GOEBBELS

I didn't know you were the resident expert in entertainment here, Gregor.

STRASSER

Spare me the vitriol. I'm getting a drink.

He pushes past Leni, and all eyes fall upon her.

GOEBBELS

What? What do you want?

HITLER

Joseph, your manners. This is Fraulein Leni Riefenstahl, the filmmaker.

Hitler pulls Leni into the group.

HITLER (CONT'D)

Leni, this is Joseph Goebbels, good friend and esteemed Doctor. My Minister of Propaganda.

Joseph kisses Leni's hand.

GOEBBELS

Adolf flatters me. Having a big mouth can be a good thing, wouldn't you agree?

He steals a wink at Leni.

GOEBBELS (CONT'D)

My wife, Magda.

Magda extends her hand.

MAGDA

An honor, Leni. It's refreshing to see a woman like you, making something of yourself.

LENI

I suppose I know what I want to do with myself is all.

MAGDA

Isn't that the sweetest thing.

GOEBBELS

Magda, you'll boost the young lady's ego.

HITLER

And why not? She'll need a healthy dose to contend in this circle.

Nervous laughter from the group.

LENI

You all are very kind, but--

HITLER

No, buts. Come with me. Gentlemen, Ladies, if you'll excuse us...

He gives a slight bow and takes Leni by hand through the crowd. Goebbels watches them go.

CUT TO:

EXT. HOTEL KAISERHOF BALCONY - CONTINUOUS

Hitler and Leni stand at the balcony. She admires its sweeping view of the land below.

HITLER

Did you enjoy yourself today?

LENI

I found it exhilarating. I couldn't help but think of my days on stage.

HITLER

I once was an artist too, you know.

LENI

You don't say? I would have never pegged you the creative type.

HITLER

I clean up well, no?

He now turns to face the balcony's view.

HITLER (CONT'D)

But then it's artists like you that make it enjoyable to be a spectator. Reminds me of youth, before all this nonsense...

He stares out at the stars, and they share this silent moment.

LENI

I've thought about your offer, and I'd love to do it, but I do have offers from American studios right now I'm considering.

HITLER

If you go to America, you'll never be able to realize your full potential. You'll be a subordinate, a coffee girl. Griffith, Ford, Capra. It's a boys club, always has been. You're too naive to understand this. I'm offering you something more, I'm offering you to write your own destiny.

LENI

You might be right, but that's something I'll have to learn for myself.

There is an awkward pause between them, Hitler turns away from Leni, winces, and out of nowhere begins acting manic.

HITLER

When I am leader, the people who savaged this nation will perish.

LENI

What?

HITLER (O.S.)

Every last one.

LENI

That's very passionate of you.

Hitler brings Leni in close. It's awkward.

HITLER

I am passionate. I have been called to save Germany, I know it sounds crazy.

(MORE)

HITLER (CONT'D)

I think it sounds crazy, I don't
know, maybe I'm mad, but no, no...
(beat)

It would be the highest sin to
refuse this calling.

Silent again. They stand stiff, his arms draped around her
like a virginal child's.

HITLER (CONT'D)

You are a remarkable woman, Leni.

He draws her closer.

LENI

Herr Hitler...

HITLER

Yes?

LENI

I...

She doesn't need to say it. He lets her go, humiliated like a
man who has prematurely ejaculated on his wedding night.

HITLER

You're right, this is foolish.
Especially when I've yet to
complete the tasks at hand. Passion
is its own worst enemy, I suppose.

LENI

(teasing)

Hm. Should I count on having this
pleasant conversation again in the
future?

HITLER

No. Goodnight, Leni.

She places a hand on his shoulder.

LENI

Practice what you preach, Herr
Hitler.

HITLER

What do you mean?

She smiles, glides past him into the hotel. He watches her
go.

SUPERIMPOSE:

FLAMES fade over Hitler's face, as we

FADE TO:

EXT. NUBA VILLAGE - NIGHT

PULL OUT from the dying flame at the Nuba girl's funeral. Leni watches from the doorway of her hut.

The WHISTLE of a train far in the distance. Leni gasps and turns.

Her English and GERMAN (30s, a hairy dive-bar type with a temper) Assistants approach her from the darkness.

LENI

Do you hear a train?

The German and Englishman exchange a glance.

ENGLISHMAN

There aren't any trains near here.

LENI

Impossible, I just heard one.

Her assistants say nothing. A pregnant pause.

LENI (CONT'D)

What? What's wrong?

GERMAN

What's wrong? We're under-equippeded, under-paid, and to top it all off, every day feels like my last!

LENI

What are you saying?

ENGLISHMAN

There's fighting in the cities, and who knows how long until it reaches us here?

Leni laughs.

LENI

The warfare will not reach the Nuba.

ENGLISHMAN

Then you are a fool.

LENI
 Bite your tongue.
 (beat)
 Get me my canteen, I'm thirsty.

The Englishman doesn't budge.

LENI (CONT'D)
 Go on, it's inside.

GERMAN
 Don't you see what's happening? Or
 is the old dog too blind and lame?

LENI
 Nevermind that if it wasn't for me,
 you'd still be at home tearing the
 rest of your kind apart for little
 scraps. So don't you worry, I'll
 get it myself.

INT. PUB 1932 - NIGHT

Leni is back with Jacob Bollschweiller, Willy Zielke, and
 Walter Ruttman in the pub, in a dreamlike flashback. The men
 are clinking glasses and cheerful, she is in the same gown
 she wore to her Blue Light film premiere, but she is old.

INT. LENI'S HUT

CU Leni's face, she is sweating.

ENGLISHMAN
 Fräulein?

Leni returns to the present, disoriented.

Leni searches for her canteen but can't find it. The German
 and Englishman wait in the doorway.

LENI
 What did you do with it?

ENGLISHMAN
 Are you serious? We haven't touched
 a damn thing.

LENI

You're playing tricks on me, aren't you?

She searches around the hut, grabs a LETTER sitting on the desk and puts it in her pocket.

LENI (CONT'D)

So you don't read any more of my mail. You're playing tricks on an old woman. There's a special ring in hell...

GERMAN

We're leaving you, Leni.

Leni stops searching.

LENI

No you aren't.

ENGLISHMAN

Yes, we are. We're taking the equipment and we're leaving.

Leni turns to them, eyes on fire.

LENI

You can't. I'm here for a reason, I'm here for--

GERMAN

For fate?

He approaches her.

GERMAN (CONT'D)

It's been two weeks. I've shit out every piece of food that touches my lips. Fuck your fate.

LENI

You don't know what you're saying.

The German turns to go, but Leni spins him around.

LENI (CONT'D)

You aren't leaving tonight!

GERMAN

Watch us go, then.

They exit.

EXT. LENI'S HUT - CONTINUOUS

Leni follows them outside.

LENI

Stop!

Lights catch her eye-- torch light. A steady DRUM BEAT emanates from the distance.

LENI (CONT'D)

No.

Leni runs after her assistants.

LENI (CONT'D)

What you're doing is criminal!
You'll be arrested the moment you
step off the plane!

GERMAN

Don't you shut up?

They keep walking. Leni catches her breath and returns to the hut.

EXT. NUBA VILLAGE - NIGHT

Leni's boots clomp along the hard earth. She carries an immense travel pack, giving the appearance of a wrinkled turtle.

ALIPO (O.S.)

The journey. It is happening.

Leni finds that Alipo follows her from behind. He carries his supplies with ease.

LENI

I suppose it is, isn't it?

She hears the CRACKLE of the fire. She glances at the fire to see ASHES of the dead girl's body rising into the air.

Leni cannot look away.

ALIPO (O.S.)

Hurry!

She pulls herself away and catches up with him.

LENI

Do they always burn the bodies?

ALIPO

It is custom, yes. You would know
all about it!

Leni stops, horrified look on her face.

LENI

What did you say to me?

Alipo slows, doesn't stop.

ALIPO

I asked, 'you are curious about
it?' Come on, we must catch up!

He starts again, then turns back to her.

ALIPO (CONT'D)

You are okay?

Leni shakes her worries off and joins him again.

LENI

Just tired, friend.

Alipo grasps a torch of his own and it illuminates their path
to the rest of the group.

Finally joining in with the rest of the villagers, Leni and
Alipo's flames grow tinier and tinier in the Sudanese night.

Back at the flame, the ashes spill into the sky.

CUT TO:

INT. LENI'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Kathy Kollwitz's charcoal piece "Hunger" hangs on Leni's
wall. It depicts a skinny woman weeping, her dead child lying
in her lap.

HITLER (O.S.)

You like this painting?

Leni and Hitler stare at the piece.

LENI

I do. Just look at the lines on the
mother's face. Look at the small
detail given to the child. There's
so much sorrow here...

HITLER

There is no place for such themes in my Germany. When I lead, the memory of such misery and hunger will be wiped clean. We have suffered enough.

LENI

I think you're missing the point.

HITLER

Enlighten me, then. Make your case and I'll consider it.

LENI

Well mustn't something be gained from these mementos? Some of the finest works are our greatest reminders.

HITLER

Of what, the trenches or the sunken, eyeless faces? The fragments of children spared of starvation? You've mistaken your empathy for understanding, Leni.

(beat)

The finest works are beyond flaw.

LENI

Don't let anyone ever tell you that you didn't care about the arts.

HITLER

Of course I do, I have taste. That's why I'm here.

Leni folds her arms, stares at the Kollwitz piece again.

LENI

God, but I can't imagine these works informing anything so... forgive me, but dry as politics.

HITLER

Oh, but you're mistaken. The political stage is the most thrilling of all.

LENI

Speak for yourself. Come, let me show you something else.

She leads him to another PAINTING, a white horse's head with thick strokes.

LENI (CONT'D)
His name is Bollschweiler, a friend
of mine.

Hitler observes the piece, and Leni observes him.

HITLER
You are blessed with talented
friends, Leni.

LENI
I thought you would like it. He is
very capable, just look at the
strokes he uses.

She guides his hand along a stroke of the painting.

LENI (CONT'D)
I love the feeling.

A tense silence.

HITLER
You're better than this. Better
than a thousand of these. You
cannot deny your destiny with the
Party my dear, only prolong it.

He places his CAP on his head and kisses Leni's hand.

HITLER (CONT'D)
I do enjoy these meetings.

LENI
As do I, Herr Hitler. Be well.

Leni leads him to the front door. Outside, Bruckner waits at the car. Hitler steps outside, then turns back to Leni.

HITLER
We'll make wonderful films! The
best!

LENI
You still assume I'll do it!

HITLER
You're the only one who could-- the
only one!

BRUCKNER
Herr Hitler!

Hitler grins, waves to Leni as he returns to the car. Leni smiles and closes the door.

SOKAL (V.O.)
Are you kidding me?

CUT TO:

INT. RESTAURANT - DAY

Leni sits at lunch with Sokal at a fancy restaurant. Clean white tablecloths, a busy atmosphere, with potted plants and men in suits speckled everywhere.

Two salads sit in front of Leni and Sokal. Sokal wipes his mouth on his napkin.

SOKAL
"Another project?" What about Tiedland? I've already started budgeting for you. You can't expect me to let this go lightly!

LENI
Harry, I'm not saying I'm letting Tiedland go. I'm not even saying that I'm working on another project. But an opportunity has come to light.

SOKAL
My god, you could have just called if that's the case.

Leni removes a LETTER from her jacket. She hands it to him but won't let go yet.

LENI
Promise me you won't be angry.

SOKAL
Okay, fine.

LENI
Promise me, Harry.

SOKAL
I promise I won't be angry. Are you happy?

Leni lets go. Sokal reads to himself.

SOKAL (CONT'D)
(under breath)
Fraulein Riefenstahl... Pleasure
meeting... please consider...
documentary film... Sincerely
yours...

Sokal freezes. The blood rushes from his face.

LENI
It's not like I'm entertaining the
idea but it's flattering
nonetheless. I mean, can you
believe it? He calls himself my
biggest fan...

Harry's hand trembles.

LENI (CONT'D)
Harry? Harry, you promised.

Finally, he looks up at her.

SOKAL
What did I say? Didn't I tell you
to stay away from this man?

LENI
Harry--

SOKAL
Now he wants you shooting his
propaganda, the bastard. How long
has this been going on?

LENI
Calm down, Harry. He obviously
likes my films, and besides, I
should have the right to choose my
friends.

SOKAL
You're a public figure for god's
sake!

LENI
So is he!

SOKAL
You don't know what the hell you're
doing. You're making a terrible
mistake.

LENI
I'm making you jealous, that's all.

Sokal slams the letter on the table and stands up. Leni looks around, embarrassed.

SOKAL
Do you know the threats I've received in the past few weeks?

LENI
Harry, really. Sit down.

SOKAL
I will not sit down while you plot playdates with a- a raging anti-Semite!

Now, the whole restaurant stares at their table.

LENI
(hisses)
Sit down!

Harry throws some money on the table.

LENI (CONT'D)
Harry... well-well, what about Tiefland?

Harry puts his coat on.

SOKAL
Enjoy your meal.

LENI
You promised, Harry! Oh shit!

He runs into a WAITER, causing PLATES to CRASH to the floor. Leni stares after him, and the rest of the restaurant patrons stare at her.

INT. HOTEL KAISERHOF ELEVATOR - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE:

HOTEL KAISERHOF, 1932

Leni stands squeezed between numerous others in the hotel elevator. No one makes eye contact, their placid faces frozen in content silence.

DING!

The elevator reaches Leni's destination. She steps out, and a previously unnoticed MAN in an overcoat and hat pushes through the group to follow her.

INT. HOTEL KAISERHOF - CONTINUOUS

Leni doesn't get far before the man in the coat grabs her arm.

MAN
Leni Riefenstahl?

She faces him.

LENI
Herr Goebbels?

The man removes his hat, revealing that it is indeed Goebbels, his face marked with a mean welt.

GOEBBELS
Forgive me, I get so starstruck and
I forget proper introductions.

He grins a toothy grin, making the comment even more uncomfortable.

LENI
It's quite all right... What ever
happened to your face?

CUT TO:

EXT. WORKER'S RALLY - DAY

Goebbels stands at a platform delivering a speech to a crowd of rowdy MACHINERY WORKERS.

GOEBBELS
... It is for this reason that full
capacity of employment management
shall be handled by the Party...

Several Workers grumble and whisper to each other.

GOEBBELS (CONT'D)
...An effective and fair means of
process...

A BEER MUG is whipped from the crowd, hitting Goebbels directly in the face.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL KAISERHOF - DAY

GOEBBELS

Skiing.

Leni nods. There is an awkward silence.

LENI

Well it was good to see you,
anyhow.

She smiles politely and turns to go. Goebbels follows.

GOEBBELS

Perhaps you can help me with
something.

Leni smiles.

LENI

I'm sure I could do nothing to
further your illustrious work,
Doctor.

Goebbels looks suspicious of this statement. They reach a staircase. The two ascend.

GOEBBELS

You must have heard the news?

LENI

I'm afraid not.

GOEBBELS

(whispers)

Gregor Strasser has abandoned the
Party.

They reach the top of the stairs.

LENI

I have no idea who that is.

GOEBBELS

Surely you remember him? One of our
best...

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL KAISERHOF - NIGHT

FLASHBACK of Strasser drunkenly insulting Goebbels the night of the rally.

GOEBBELS (V.O.)
..Why, he was at the after party
the night you joined us.

LENI (V.O.)
The drunk fellow?

GOEBBELS (V.O.)
The very same.

Strasser pushes past Leni and Hitler's group lock their gaze on her.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL KAISERHOF - DAY

Leni has stopped walking. They stand outside of a hotel room.

LENI
I remember.

GOEBBELS
Why else do you think you were
called here?

Leni's eyes narrow just slightly.

LENI
I never told you I was called
here...

Goebbels chuckles.

GOEBBELS
You don't know who I am.

Leni stares him down expectantly. He leans in close, as if to tell her something dire.

GOEBBELS (CONT'D)
Don't presume I haven't been
briefed on our affairs,
particularly those of Adolf.

LENI
And why should that be of any
concern to me?

GOEBBELS

(proudly)

I am the invisible wire puller of this party. I have all the strings in my hand and I make the puppets dance.

LENI

If you have something to say, Herr Goebbels, say it. Otherwise, you're wasting my time.

GOEBBELS

Careful where you tread, and nothing more. Little girls shouldn't play with fire.

The hotel room door opens, and Bruckner steps out. He looks annoyed to see the two of them standing outside.

BRUCKNER

Haven't either of you more interesting things to do?

GOEBBELS

I was just leaving. A pleasure Fräulein Riefenstahl, we shall be meeting again soon. Heil Hitler.

Leni raises an apathetic salute to humor him and he leaves.

LENI

He has the most peculiar resemblance to a snake.

BRUCKNER

Are you coming in or not?

LENI

Lighten up. As if I were the bane of your existence.

INT. HOTEL KAISERHOF SUITE - CONTINUOUS

Leni enters the spacious hotel room, its elegant furniture and classical paintings provide an aura of aristocratic wealth.

Bruckner opens another door, and Leni steps through to the rear section of the suite.

All across the floor lie papers, pens, folders, a paperweight and a briefcase. PAN UP and we see Hitler pacing to and fro across the space of the room.

He doesn't notice Leni until she speaks up.

LENI
Herr Hitler?

Hitler stops.

His face is sweaty, his hair matted to his forehead. He nods at her and walks to his makeshift desk, the room's table. He cleans some of the mess, shuffles papers without direction.

HITLER
Come in. I'm glad to see you. You found the room without trouble?

LENI
Almost. Your lap dog has a lot to learn about speaking to ladies, I must say.

HITLER
You can't imagine the hell I'm going through right now.

LENI
Doctor Goebbels stopped me on the way here. He told me about Strasser.

Hitler raises a hand, as if to dissuade any mention of Strasser.

HITLER
Don't speak his name. Those traitors, those cowards!

He continues to organize the papers, TAPPING them on the desk to straighten them.

HITLER (CONT'D)
We've struggled and labored and given our all for thirteen years, survived the worst crises...

TAP TAP TAP goes the stack of papers. Hitler is manic, lost in thought.

HITLER (CONT'D)
And now this!

He throws the papers at the wall where they scatter and litter the ground once more.

LENI

Calm down, would you? Look at yourself. Is this how a leader behaves?

HITLER

What do you expect from me? If the party crumbles, I'd- I'd have to put an end to my own life.

LENI

You don't mean that. This will pass, I know it.

HITLER

Of course it will. I can't abandon my supporters... Hess, Goring, any of the loyal party members, I can't. We will go on fighting even if we have to start from scratch.

He calms and takes a seat.

HITLER (CONT'D)

Do you want schnitzel?

LENI

I'm sorry?

Hitler holds up an untouched plate of SCHNITZEL that had lain on the desk.

HITLER

The schnitzel, go on. It's delicious, but I hate it. Full of meat.

LENI

Oh, erm. Well...

HITLER

Take it, take this. You'll like it.

He shakes the plate, which Leni takes. She stares at him.

LENI

Now what?

HITLER

What?

LENI

What do I do with this? I can't eat it here.

HITLER

I suppose you can't. I don't know, throw it out the window.

Leni sets it on a desk. Hitler stands and cleans up the papers from the floor once again.

HITLER (CONT'D)

So, you spoke with Joseph on the way here, yes?

LENI

Something like that, yes.

HITLER

He is a good friend. I'm sure it was difficult to resist his charm, no?

LENI

I found a way.

HITLER

What did you talk about?

LENI

Oh... just Strasser, really. I didn't know that was why you had called me here.

Hitler laughs.

HITLER

For Strasser? No, no, my dear. You're as funny as you are beautiful.

Leni permits herself a polite smile.

HITLER (CONT'D)

What are your thoughts for our film?

LENI

I told you, I'm committed to other projects at this time. There's no way I can make that work, Herr Hitler.

HITLER

Call me Adolf. Tell me about these projects.

LENI

Well, my next project is an adaptation of an opera, Tiefland.

HITLER

You're kidding me! It is my favorite opera, how did you know?

LENI

Well, I didn't.

Hitler goes to his desk, opens a CHECKBOOK.

HITLER

This is a sign, this is a sign. I can finance it for you, you know. How much do you need?

Bruckner pokes his head around the corner, phone against his ear, hearing this prospect of money going out the door. He mouths the word "WHAT" to Hitler.

LENI

Your offer is flattering, but I can't accept, I'm afraid.

HITLER

It would be my honor.

LENI

I'm financing it myself, you see.

HITLER

With what money?

He closes the checkbook.

Bruckner closes his eyes in relief then returns to his seat.

LENI

Well, it isn't here quite yet, but I'll collect from my producer for The Blue Light.

HITLER

A Jew, yes?

LENI

... Yes, yes he was-- is...

Hitler nods, smiles.

HITLER

Then I'm sure we'll be having this conversation again soon.

He takes her hand in his.

HITLER (CONT'D)

Thank you for coming.

CUT TO:

INT. PRIVATE SCREENING ROOM - DAY

The image of MARLENE DIETRICH (late 20s) in *The Blue Angel* plays upon a screen.

She sits upon a barrel-- her famous scene on the cabaret stage, and she grips her leg in a seductive pose. She wears a TOP HAT and lingerie.

INT. SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

DISSOLVE into Dietrich's live presence on stage.

SUPERIMPOSE:

1930

Dietrich maintains her pose, but looks bored. In front of her sit several CAMERAS, and the CAMERAMAN discusses a section of STORYBOARD with the Director JOSEPH VON STERNBERG.

They murmur to each other in the darkness of the stage.

DIETRICH

Gentlemen, are we ready? I can feel myself aging.

VON STERNBERG

Patience, Marlene. These things take time.

Dietrich folds her arms, takes a deep breath.

Near the backstage exit, a slightly YOUNGER LENI (late 20s) flags down a Production Assistant.

LENI
 (whispers)
 I was invited here by Joseph Von
 Sternberg, where can I find him?

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT
 (whispers)
 Around the corner, first stage. But
 be quiet, they shoot soon.

Leni creeps through the set until she reaches the filming
 area. She stares in awe at Dietrich on stage.

VON STERNBERG
 Okay, Marlene. Are you ready?

DIETRICH
 What do you think?

Von Sternberg and his cameraman exchange a brief glance,
 "yeesh." Nearby stands the ASSISTANT DIRECTOR and SOUND
 RECORDIST..

VON STERNBERG
 Cameras?

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
 CAMERA?

The entire crew flinches at the yelling.

CAMERAMAN
 Go for camera.

VON STERNBERG
 Sound?

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
 SOUND!

CREW MEMBERS flinch again. Von Sternberg and his Cameraman
 exchange another look.

SOUND RECORDIST
 Go for sound!

VON STERNBERG
 Action!

Von Sternberg covers the mouth of his Assistant Director
 before he can scream again.

Marlene composes herself, gets into the mood of the scene.

The Production Assistant places the needle on a RECORD PLAYER in motion. MUSIC pours out of the player, and Von Sternberg silently gives Dietrich her cue.

DIETRICH

(sings)

I'm programmed for love from head
to toe... 'cause that is my world
and nothing else.

Dietrich spots Leni watching her from backstage. She stops singing.

Von Sternberg conducts like a composer, mouths the words, then stops when he sees that Dietrich has stopped singing.

VON STERNBERG

Cut!

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

CUT!

Dietrich glares at Leni.

VON STERNBERG

You have to actually sing the song,
dear. Move your lips, at least.

DIETRICH

Sorry, I got thrown off. It feels
like something's out of place here,
don't you think?

VON STERNBERG

I think you were doing fine,
Marlene.

DIETRICH

Like something was here that didn't
belong, that marred the quality...

Leni stares at her, hurt and angry.

DIETRICH (CONT'D)

A sore thumb.

Leni retreats to the backstage exit and pushes outside.

DIETRICH (CONT'D)

Or maybe it's just me. Let's go
again.

Von Sternberg massages the bridge of his nose.

VON STERNBERG
 (annoyed)
 Okay! Cameras?

CAMERAMAN
 Go for camera!

VON STERNBERG
 Sound?

SOUND RECORDIST
 Go for sound!

Dietrich regains her composure.

VON STERNBERG (O.S.)
 Action!

FADE TO:

INT. PRIVATE SCREENING ROOM - DAY

Back to the projected image of Dietrich on screen. In the seats below, Leni and Von Sternberg watch the film.

The screening room is modest, but well-kept. The two filmmakers grasp their own respective drinks.

LENI
 Look at her. She doesn't even hold herself well.

VON STERNBERG
 Leni, you're too harsh a critic. The audiences love her.

LENI
 Oh please. The audiences love a pretty face, and she's nothing special. She'll wear out her welcome.

She takes a drink.

LENI (CONT'D)
 I could have danced circles around her pretty face.

VON STERNBERG
 You're jealous, aren't you?

Leni stands and returns her drink to the mini bar at the side of the room.

LENI
Hardly. The woman doesn't
understand the value of perfection.

VON STERNBERG
Nothing's perfect.

LENI
Put it on her gravestone.

She pours another drink.

VON STERNBERG
I didn't know we were having a
party.

LENI
A going away party, of all things.

She returns to sit with him.

VON STERNBERG
You know how I feel about the
direction of things these days.

Leni rests her head on Von Sternberg's shoulder.

LENI
You worry too much, Joseph. Stay
here, stay in Germany.

VON STERNBERG
We both know I'm not the director
for the job.

Leni watches Dietrich on the screen. Von Sternberg stares at
her in quiet expectance, waits for her response.

LENI
Well, neither am I.

VON STERNBERG
Then why stay?

LENI
Tiefeland--

VON STERNBERG
Oh, who gives a rat's shit about
Tiefeland?

LENI
How dare you!

VON STERNBERG

It's him, isn't it? He's charming,
isn't he?

LENI

I can't afford to be distracted by
charm right now, Joseph. And what
do you care? Maybe you're jealous?

VON STERNBERG

So how do you feel about him?

RING! RING! Saved by the phone.

LENI

Excuse me.

She stands, goes to the PHONE by the mini-bar. She picks it
up.

LENI (CONT'D)

Hello? ...

(beat, whispers)

This is the fourth time in two
days.

CUT TO:

INT. GOEBBELS' OFFICE - SAME TIME

Goebbels sits in his office, stacks of PAPERS on his desk. He
doodles a NUDE WOMAN on a NOTEPAD.

GOEBBELS

I told you I wanted to speak with
you.

INTERCUT: PHONE CONVERSATION

LENI

(quietly)

I'm very busy Doctor. I've told you
this. How clear must I make myself?

Goebbels sits up in his chair.

GOEBBELS

Entertaining friends? How time-
consuming.

LENI

What I do in my time is no business
of yours.

GOEBBELS

On the contrary-- it is specifically my business! Especially when you choose to blanket yourself in the company of Jews!

LENI

(beat)

Are you spying on me, Doctor?

GOEBBELS

Watch your tongue, woman. there are some places you shouldn't stick it.

LENI

Is that all? Because I could be spending my time with a dozen other things right now.

GOEBBELS

I'm sure. Do tell your guest to stay in America next time. I hate messy affairs, don't you?

Leni hangs up the phone, CLICK! She takes a moment to gather herself. Von Sternberg watches, a bit taken aback.

VON STERNBERG

Sweet nothings from Herr Hitler?

LENI

Not quite.

VON STERNBERG

Don't tell me you're pregnant.

LENI

That's not funny. Just an overzealous fan, that's all.

VON STERNBERG

Won't you come to America with me?

LENI

Why ever would I do that? I have everything I need here at home.

On screen, EMIL JANNINGS' obsessed character Professor Rath sounds a wretched crow on stage before backing into the shadows.

FADE TO:

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Leni clips down the sidewalk and reaches an OFFICE BUILDING. She stops outside, staring up at the front door. She adjusts her hair and sighs.

LENI

Here we go.

She walks up the steps toward the front door.

CUT TO:

INT. SOKAL'S OFFICES - DAY

Leni steps through the door. The office is completely empty, desks arranged as if ready for workers to take a seat and get to work.

Light shines through the windows, resting on file cabinets, film canisters, typewriters.

Leni scans the room. All is quiet. She creeps through the rows of desks and knocks on the door at the end of the room marked HARRY SOKAL, PRODUCER.

Behind the fogged glass a shape moves around.

SCRATCHING can be heard from beyond the door. Leni grips the door handle with frightened eyes. Opens it. Leni gasps. An old JANITOR (60s) nearly jumps out of his overalls. He turns to her, eyes wide with fright. He holds a BROOM in his hands.

LENI

What are you doing?!

JANITOR

Take a wild guess! You have half a mind, going around scaring people like this.

LENI

Where is everyone?

JANITOR

That's rich.

Leni stares at him. He adjusts his hat before getting back to work.

JANITOR (CONT'D)

What do you think happened?

The Janitor continues sweeping.

LENI

Aren't they coming back? Herr Sokal, he owes me money, you see.

JANITOR

Sounds like a personal problem, dear.

LENI

What am I supposed to do?

JANITOR

You haven't had to struggle much before, have you?

Leni shakes her head, "no."

JANITOR (CONT'D)

No. Listen, you go home now and get some rest.

LENI

Isn't there a number, someone I can call?

JANITOR

A number?

The Janitor cracks up and continues his work.

JANITOR (CONT'D)

A number!

She backs out of the room. SCRATCH SCRATCH goes the broom on the empty office floor.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Leni pushes her way out of the building, disturbed and confused.

Edging past people, the rising sound of people's VOICES begins drowning out the rest of the audible world. Leni's head spins, and she bumps into people on the street.

The noise of voices rise, and in Leni's vision, people are watching her. Faces in windows make direct eye contact.

She bumps into another person.

RANDOM STRANGER (O.S.)
Watch where you're going!

She picks up her pace. The SWASTIKAS on people's arms are becoming more visible.

SMACK!

She runs directly into a WOMAN exiting the supermarket.

A BAG OF GROCERIES tumbles to the sidewalk.

LENI
Oh my God, are you okay?

She helps the woman up, revealing her to be Magda Goebbels.

MAGDA
My groceries...

Leni picks up the bag of groceries, and faces Magda. Magda pauses.

MAGDA (CONT'D)
Frau Riefenstahl! It's me, Magda,
Joseph's wife. From the party?

Leni blinks, takes a moment to realize.

LENI
Magda, yes! My goodness, I ran you
right over.

MAGDA
Think nothing of it. You know, it's
the funniest thing. Joseph has been
wanting to see you ever since
Hitler told him of your interest in
working with the Party.

Leni cocks her head.

LENI
(coyly)
Is that so?

MAGDA
Oh yes, well he does enjoy the
picture business, you know. I
sometimes think he regards himself
as the next Fritz Lang, Lord help
us all. But he does have a talent,
there's no denying that.

LENI
And such a charmer.

Magda smiles.

MAGDA
You're sweet. Won't you join me for
a cup of coffee? You look like you
could use one.

LENI
Well...

Magda turns, beckons Leni to follow. Leni obliges.

Camera pans up to an aerial shot of the two women walking together.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - DAY

Harry Sokal carries a single suitcase as he boards a train to Paris.

INT. HOLLYWOOD THEATER

Marlene Dietrich is on the screen singing the famous number Falling In Love Again in the Blue Angel.

Cross Dissolve to

INT. GOEBBELS FAMILY HOME - DAY

Joseph is writing in his study. His children run past the door, he starts screaming at them and at Magda.

INT. HITLERS BEDROOM - DAY

Hitler stares at a photo of a teenage girl. His eyes begin to water.

EXT. SUDAN - NIGHT

The Nuba Girl eyes Leni from the procession line. She fights back tears while looking deep into Leni from behind a cloud of smoke. The young girl's MOTHER, young and beautiful, stands behind her, comforting her, notices this exchange and approaches Leni, shrieking in her native language.

MOTHER

(In Nuba dialect)

You did this! You brought death!
None of this would have happened if
you hadn't come here! No one wants
you here, you witch! White devil.
LEAVE!

The Englishman runs to LENI'S aide, pulling the wailing Mother away from Leni, who can't seem to muster the appropriate emotional reactions to this woman's pain. She studies her instead, unaware of what could have provoked the woman.

FADE OUT

CHARACTER KEY (IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER)

Alipo: Nuba tribesman who took a liking to Leni Riefenstahl throughout her numerous trips to the Sudan. A kind soul, he was at times one of her only real friends during her African expeditions.

Jakob Friedrich Bollschweiler: One of Leni's few constant friends, Bollschweiler was a moderate success as a painter. His works garnered attention, and Riefenstahl- eager to help a friend- even managed to convince the Fuhrer himself of Bollschweiler's talents.

Wilhelm Bruckner: Hitler's stiff adjutant, not swayed by Leni's charm one bit. He was somewhat of a guard dog for the Fuhrer, and likely saw Leni's frivolous disposition as a waste of the Nazi Party's time.

Marlene Dietrich: German actress whose debut role in The Blue Angel garnered such international success that she moved to the US under contract at Paramount Pictures. Her pictures helped build the Hollywood Noir Genre via her notable femme fatale persona. Unlike Leni, Marlene knew when to get out, though she too was courted by the Third Reich.

Englishman: One of two personal assistants to Leni in her African expeditions of the 1960's. He and his German counterpart were far from enthusiastic about the project's trials and errors, but the Englishman managed to tolerate the elderly Leni's demands much more than his partner.

German: The second of Leni's personal assistants in 1960's Sudan.

Hotheaded and repulsed by the director's irrational behavior, his temperament led to her near-abandonment more than once.

Joseph Goebbels: Hitler's Minister of Propaganda was effectively the boss from Hell. Alternatively trying to take control of Leni's works and stop their production altogether, he proved to be one of her greatest obstacles during her involvement in the Nazi regime.

Magda Goebbels: One of the irrefutable matriarchs of Nazi Germany. Although faithful to her husband Joseph Goebbels, her documented fascination with Hitler perfectly captured his allure- especially amongst the women of Germany.

Hermann Goering: The rotund commander-in-chief of Hitler's air force, the Luftwaffe. He and Goebbels couldn't stand each other, and he would often take pleasure in ruffling the Minister of Propaganda's feathers.

Adolf Hitler: Chancellor of the National Socialist party, avid fan of Leni Riefenstahl, and self-proclaimed expert in the arts. He commissioned Riefenstahl's Triumph of the Will, which became a seminal propaganda film during WWII. History has yet to confirm whether Hitler's courtship of Leni was beyond professional.

Leni's Maid: A composite of several domestic servants for the director over the years, Leni's Maid never asked questions or doubted Riefenstahl's actions until the siege of Berlin. She was present when bombs struck the property mid-war and helped Leni and her neighbors clean up the rubble.

Leni Riefenstahl: Matriarch of Nazi Germany, femme fatale, obsessive filmmaker, opportunist, or naive artist? Riefenstahl was a cinematic genius who perverted her talent for the Nazis and was never again able to thrive in her profession. She traveled to the Sudan during the 1960's and for the remainder of her life attempted to mount a film that would never be. Her photographs of the Nuba tribe have been charged as a vain attempt at career rehabilitation, but this project can also be seen as a self-imposed exile. In Africa, the director must take stock of her life before and after her affair with the Third Reich.

Walter Ruttmann: The care-free friend and Assistant Director to Leni during Triumph of the Will. Although Ruttmann was a prominent exponent of avant-garde film, he died on the front lines during WWII from wounds sustained while working as a war photographer.

Harry Sokal: Jewish film producer of The Blue Light, who was in love with Leni and played an instrumental part in her rise to fame as an actress in German mountain films.

She never returned his affections. He emigrated following the Nazi rise to power, and she harbored a grudge for him never paying her the full receipts for the Blue Light never fully understanding the urgency of him needing to leave Germany. Joseph Von Sternberg: The famed Austrian-American filmmaker who directed one of Germany's first talkies, The Blue Angel. Riefenstahl considered him to be a friend and colleague, though her decision to stay in Germany after Nazi rule inevitably produced a falling out between the two artists.

Willy Zielke: One of the cameramen for Triumph of the Will. His experimental short film, The Steel Animal, was regarded as degenerate art and hence repressed by the Nazis. Zielke attempted suicide following a mental breakdown and was committed to an institution. Like many, he was a German artist who could not function in National Socialism despite his connections to those in power.