

ENCOUNTER

Lasse Rabenius



**PROVTRYCK
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This is a translation from
the original Swedish text.
Suggestions for corrections,
improvements, or comments..
lucifer.forlag@rabenius.eu

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ACT I**THE HOTEL OF THE
CENTRAL SECRETARIAT****PERSONS****PORTER****SUSANNE** Leonard, age 53**MIMI** and **HERTHA**, Susanne's travel companions**ANDREJ**, Hertha's son, age 12**WOLFGANG** Leonard, Susanne's son, age 27**RODENBERG**, playwright, age 53

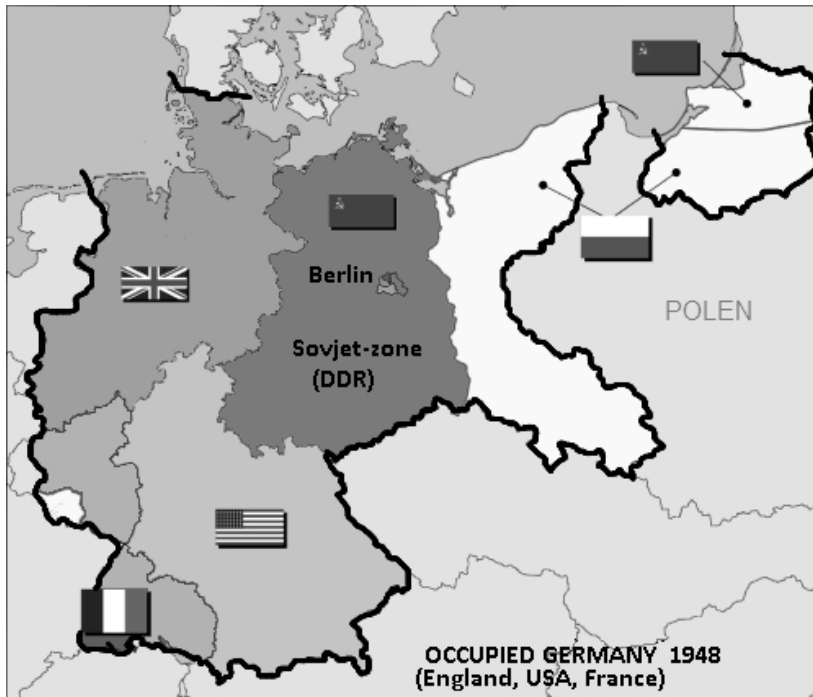
Susanne Leonard



Wolfgang Leonard



Hans Rodenberg



ACT SETUP In the center of the stage, a hotel reception area, complete with a counter and a wall portrait of Stalin. To the left of it, the hotel's restaurant with dining tables, including one with four seats. To the right, a modest hotel room with four beds and table with four chairs in the centre. This description outlines the minimal stage props. Additional elements can be added to evoke the atmosphere of post-war Germany; the play is set in the autumn of 1948.

SCENE 1 : RECEPTION

Time: Sunday afternoon, 29th August 1948.

Location: The Socialist Unity Party's hotel on Wallstrasse in Berlin.

Persons: Porter, Susanne, Mimi, Hertha, Andrej

SCENE The first scene is set in the reception area of a hotel. When the play begins, this part of the stage should be lit. The portrait of Stalin should be visible but not overly illuminated. The restaurant should be discernible but otherwise in darkness.

- *Susanne and her travel companions, Mimi, Hertha, and Andrej, stand tired and hungry in travel attire with luggage in the reception. The porter observes the group. Susanne's coat is patched, her shoes worn - however, she wears an elegant shawl over her shoulders.*

PORTER: On a Sunday at this time, I'm afraid it's not possible. The dining room is, unfortunately, closed.

SUSANNE: Could we possibly have some coffee and a sandwich?
We've been traveling for a week from Moscow, we've had to sleep at the railway stations...

PORTER: No, as I mentioned, there is no staff.

MIMI: I have a piece of bread left. We'll manage...

PORTER: Allow me to assign a room for you, so you can rest. Your names, please.

SUSANNE: I am Susanne Leonard...

PORTER (*interrupting*): **The** Leonard? Are you possibly related to **Wolfgang Leonard**?

SUSANNE: He's my son.

PORTER: Really...? I'm talking about the professor at the Karl Marx Academy, is that your son?

▪ *The porter looks attentively at Susanne.*

I'm know him well, a brilliant speaker! Why didn't you say so ?

SUSANNE: (*shrugs*)

MIMI: Yes, why didn't you say that right away! That's what I've always known about Wolfgang -- he's going to be something big, I said.

PORTER: Undoubtedly a significant figure in the Party! Well... as soon as I've registered you, I'll show you to a room. We have many guests at the moment, so, unfortunately, you'll have to share a four-bed room. I hope it won't be too uncomfortable for you.

MIMI: Oh no, not at all. It's fine.

PORTER: Good. May I just ask for your passports then? And while you settle in, I'll see if I can find something for you to eat.

SUSANNE: (*raising an eyebrow*) That's very kind of you. Uh... do you happen to have any messages from my son?

PORTER: I know he's currently on the Baltic coast. He's expected back in Berlin in a few days.

SUSANNE: Thank you for the information. Now I know. You see, we haven't seen each other for a long time.

PORTER: I'll inform you as soon as I know more.

...

SCENE 3: VOLODJA

Time & Location: A four-bed hotel room

Persons: Wolfgang, Susanne, Andrej, Hertha,
(Mimi)

▪ *A young man, Wolfgang, bursts into the room. He throws a briefcase in his hand, heads towards the table in the room, and abruptly takes the remaining chair.*

WOLFGANG: This is something I could hardly have dreamed of!

SUSANNE: Volodja?

WOLFGANG: ...Wolfgang. Nowadays.

SUSANNE (*moved*): ...Meet Hertha and Mimi. And Andrej.

▪ *The women nod silently towards Wolfgang. Andrej stands staring at Wolfgang.*

I can barely recognize you. Is it really you?

WOLFGANG: ...yes? Have I changed that much?

SUSANNE: You were only fifteen.

WOLFGANG: Mm... A lot has happened - since then.

ANDREJ: He looks just like 'The Righteous'! Mum, doesn't he?

HERTHA: Oh yes, he sure does.

SUSANNE: So, you have responsibilities in the Party, I heard.

WOLFGANG: But when did you - all of you - arrive?

SUSANNE: Just last Sunday. I left Kubanka, near Barnaul, about fourteen days ago...

WOLFGANG: Kubanka?

SUSANNE: It's near the border with Kazakhstan and Mongolia.

WOLFGANG: Never heard of...

SUSANNE: And we left Moscow last Tuesday...

- *She makes a gesture towards her roommates.*

We crossed the border in Brest-Litovsk four days ago...

Every passage has been a trial... But now I'm here.

- *she smiles*

After thirteen years, I'm back in Berlin; it's like a dream! I didn't think I would see you again.

WOLFGANG (*almost in tears*): Mother!

- *Wolfgang stands up, approaches his mother, but hesitates. He then places his hand on hers.*
- *The roommates leave Wolfgang and his mother alone.*

SCENE 4: WOLFGANG, RATHER

Time & Location: same as previous scene

Persons: Wolfgang, Susanne

- *Wolfgang pulls up a chair next to his mother and takes a seat. He looks at her attentively.*

WOLFGANG: Everything turns out all right, eventually, doesn't it!

SUSANNE: It's been so long. I was about to help you with your homework...

WOLFGANG: ...I remember. I went to your room.../

SUSANNE: /...I got arrested on the night of October 26, 1936, between two and three in the morning. I had barely fallen asleep when I was awakened by commotion and noise.

WOLFGANG: /...when I arrived, the door was sealed. A woman asked me in a careless voice what I wanted. And I was told, "your mother doesn't live here anymore." That "you had to leave on short notice on an assignment. That you would probably be back soon." She advised me to go home calmly.

SUSANNE: They took me to Lubyanka...

I thought it was just a misunderstanding.

WOLFGANG: The Party doesn't make... mistakes.

SUSANNE: Are you being sarcastic?

WOLFGANG: No, see it this way: the Party meticulously examines its stances on crucial matters. Still, individual mistakes can occur, but they are addressed and corrected.

SUSANNE: It took twelve years.

WOLFGANG: I can understand your bitterness... You've had to make a great sacrifice.

SUSANNE: It was a mistake - us going to the Soviet Union back then.

WOLFGANG: How can you make such a rash and careless statement? I at least stand by the decision.

SUSANNE: You?! You were just thirteen. I have to bear the decision and its consequences.

WOLFGANG: Hold on! You said we couldn't stay in Sweden. That you had good friends in Manchester. And that I could attend an English school. As long as the Nazis were in power.

SUSANNE: That's not how it turned out.

WOLFGANG: No, because the alternative was us going to the Soviet Union. You said I was a big boy and that you wouldn't decide anything I didn't want. And I convinced you it was to the Soviet Union we should go.

SUSANNE: I can't remember that. You've probably exaggerated your own part. What I'll never forget, though, is the conversation I had with Madame Kollontaj at the Soviet Embassy. It was her response that determined my decision.

WOLFGANG: I do remember clearly... Alright then, what did Madame Kollontaj tell you?

SUSANNE: She received me with enchanting kindness. It had been ten years since I last saw her; she had aged significantly, but her

face still radiated the same beauty. She immediately said...

▪ *She changes her voice to imitate Kollontaj.*

- *Oh, you must travel to the Soviet Union, ma chérie.*

she said, in her lively manner.

- *You can't imagine the great opportunities you'll have in our country! You're a writer, after all! You'll immediately lead an editorial team. The fact that you don't speak Russian doesn't matter at all. You already speak three European languages, which is more than enough. Life in Moscow pulses like nowhere else in the world. Everything in the rest of Europe is stagnating, but not here.*

WOLFGANG (*sarcastically*): Well, that certainly makes **my** responsibility rather insignificant.

SUSANNE: Are you relieved?

WOLFGANG (*acerbically*): Yes, of course! Your camp experience is clearly Kollontaj's fault.

SUSANNE: If only it were that simple... If I could have imagined that a Soviet diplomat, even in a private conversation, would assert things that didn't align with her beliefs, I probably would never have been persuaded to emigrate to Moscow.

▪ *she becomes reflective*

It would be easy for me to curse the Swedish Soviet Ambassador for her propaganda talk after experiencing the truth. Eventually, though, it became clear to me that Aleksandra Kollontaj couldn't have spoken differently than she did.

She couldn't know whether I would pass on every hint of warning from her. Only those who are familiar with the terror and informer system of the NKVD can understand the situation Aleksandra Kollontaj was in when I came to seek her advice.

WOLFGANG (*sarcastically*): So, neither your fault nor Kollontaj's?

SUSANNE: No, the mistake is much more serious.

WOLFGANG (*pretending surprise*): Really?

SUSANNE: Yes... (*hesitates*)

we haven't seen each other in twelve years, and we're already in the middle of some kind of off-course Party debate.

Now... why don't you tell me, what have you been up to till now.

WOLFGANG: OK, perhaps you can imagine what tasks we faced when we arrived here in April last year. Everywhere ruins and mud. Our mission was obvious: to restore food supplies, rebuild electricity and water systems... in short, to establish a new German administration.

SUSANNE (*interrupting*): They sent you from Moscow?

WOLFGANG: Yes, indeed.

SUSANNE: That's an important task. I'm glad for your sake. Who's leading the work?

WOLFGANG: I suppose it's no secret anymore... Walter Ulbricht.

SUSANNE: He was in the Reichstag before the war. Do you get along?

WOLFGANG: Of course! He's very experienced, highly organized, and incredibly hardworking.

SUSANNE: Excellent.

WOLFGANG: Yes... I'll never forget our first evening in Berlin. Ulbricht stopped the car outside the open gate of a damaged apartment building in Neukölln. We entered a simple room in a working-class tenement; there was a kerosene lamp on a table—electricity certainly wasn't available in those days. In that room sat a group of Communists who had worked underground throughout the war: they were alive, dedicated, enthusiastic, and in close touch with reality and the 'ordinary' people.

The atmosphere in that simple room was entirely different from the Party meetings in the Soviet Union. The mood was just as I had imagined it during meetings of the October Revolution. Without waiting for any directives, our comrades immediately realized that the priority was to organize the supply chain, alleviate the most urgent needs of the population, so that we could emerge from chaos and famine.

SUSANNE: During the last war there were indeed similar needs...
as well as quite different .../

WOLFGANG: /Yes, and in those days it didn't end well. We had to
avoid that this time. Ulbricht soon made it clear who was in
charge, despite protests from some comrades. It was absolutely
necessary to tighten up the leadership — especially considering
those historical experiences.

SUSANNE: So, that's your view as well?

WOLFGANG: Of course!

SUSANNE (*raises an eyebrow*): As far as historical lessons... do you
address the **Workers' Opposition** in your lectures?

WOLFGANG: You mean the idea from a time after the revolution?
No... well, perhaps as a cautionary example, as a type of ultra-
democracy that history has rejected.

SUSANNE (*thoughtful*): Isn't it 'funny' that it was **Kollontaj** who led
the faction within the bolshevik movement advocating increased
democracy within the Party — back when the situation had
stabilized in 1921 after the civil war? I mean, this has become a
burning issue today!

WOLFGANG (*dismissively*): That's an odd perspective, considering
that not even Kollontaj herself advocates it anymore. Today.

SUSANNE: How could she? There's no room for even the thought of
it — it's been made a crime against the Party.

WOLFGANG: Anyway, that's history. We can't move backward into
the future.

Continues.. three acts, 20 scenes ...