

THE **M**URDERER AMONG US

by
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Friedrich "Fritz" Lang (December 5, 1890 - August 2, 1976)
German-American film director. The best-known émigré from Germany's school of Expressionism, Lang produced an oeuvre that established the characteristics of the "film noir" genre that dubbed him the "Master of Darkness". Film scholars consider Lang's films *Metropolis* and **M** to be *his* groundbreaking masterworks. But the inspiration behind Lang's making of **M** is a story that has been largely left untold. On a cold winter night in 1920, Fritz Lang's wife was found dead on the floor of their Berlin flat with a single bullet wound to the chest. Her death was ruled suspicious. Lang rarely spoke of that night, and history books and biographies have left this little known detail of his early years undocumented... or, strangely omitted.

"My private life has nothing to do with my films."

Fritz Lang

ON BLACK

MAN (V.O.)

The end of genius is sometimes
spectacular: A bomb's explosion. A
madman's gibbering. An orgasmic
suicide before a sell-out audience.
A Faustian pact with the Devil in
which nothing is left to chance.

FADE IN:

ROOFTOPS. DUSK.

CLASSIC NOIR-STYLE

A MAN RUNS. A leather strapped SUITCASE in his hand.

SUPER TITLE: BERLIN 1933

TIGHT ON THE MAN (40) looking nervously over his shoulder,
sensing pursuers closing in around him.

He maneuvers around a steeply sloped shoal of chimneystacks.
Throws the suitcase over the gap to the next roof. It slides
to the edge, clinging to the gutter.

TIGHTER STILL ON THE MAN. A look of relief. A bead of sweat.

He leaps across, almost losing his footing and plummeting to
the ground below. He snatches up the suitcase, drops to the
fire escape, slides down to the alley, vanishes in the dark.

Sun dips below the horizon. Night falls.

INT. SEWER SYSTEM -- CONTINUOUS

The man makes his way along the cavernous artery of gushing
water spilling from conduits to a canal below.

Trudging through knee deep water, he looks up through a metal
grate leading to the street and sees a policeman standing
guard above. Walks a bit more and locates a manhole with
ANHALTER BAHNOF stenciled along the brickwork.

A moment later, sluicing through the water, a UNIFORMED
POLICEMAN in pursuit. The officer shines his lamp on the
manhole and upon noticing that it's displaced -- BLOWS HIS
WHISTLE.

The convergence of loud footfalls and shadows on the stonework
reveals a POLICE SQUAD already in the tunnels.

EXT. WILHELMSPLATZ -- CONTINUOUS

The man turns into a city square with prancing statuary and Communist and Nazi flags hanging side-by-side like two idealistically opposed parents. He burrows into the zigzagging human traffic.

An ORGANIZER spews anarchy on a bullhorn. Books by Freud, Einstein, Mann, Brecht, Hemingway, and Wells thrown into a roaring bonfire.

Bathed in perspiration, the man casts his eyes down and avoids TWO SA BROWNSHIRTS (GERMAN STORMTROOPERS), rifles slung over their shoulders, on a direct collision course with him.

He steps into the motorway to avoid their gaze. Passing automobiles and tramcars puff exhaust fumes.

BLARING HORN from a massive TRUCK.

He sidesteps it by inches. Nearly kills him.

Securely on the walkway now, the man steels himself and carries on.

A street lamp ignites, reveals a DARK FIGURE in a Herringbone TRENCHCOAT crossing the motorway and heading up the street after the man.

EXT. CANAL -- CONTINUOUS

Fog enshrouded TRESTLE BRIDGE.

We find the man alongside the canal, making his way toward the bridge. A barge chugging thick bursts of coal transports freight up the flat gray waterway.

The streetlamps bump on in sequence as the man makes his way onto the footpath. A traveling OOMPAH BAND approaches from the opposite direction.

Behind him, BOOTS CLINK confidently on the iron bridgework. He shoots a look over his shoulder, spots Trenchcoat behind him, trying to close the distance.

TIGHT ON TRENCHCOAT as a KNIFE slides from his coat pocket. Glinting light flickers off the serrated blade as it's unsheathed.

The man stumbles forward increasing his gait, breath heavy, suitcase tripping up his escape.

The thickening fog is blinding. Visibility less than 10 feet in every direction.

The man breaks for the nearing musicians playing a Bavarian standard. Brushing alongside a French horn, clarinet, and squeezebox. Ducking under a trombone. Narrowly avoiding the gyrating bow of the strolling violinist, and coming face to face with a giant tuba.

Trenchcoat pushing through the musicians, moving quickly past them.

Trenchcoat closes in, slashes the knife through the fog. The blade cuts into the man's greatcoat, slicing the back clean off.

LOW AND TIGHT ON TRENCHCOAT'S look of confusion.

Widen to reveal the man's severed, empty coat hanging from the bridge's studded support spire.

Trenchcoat looks 360, races to the parapet, leans over.

The BARGE trudges from underneath the bridge. The man on its bow, drifting up river.

Trenchcoat slams his fists into the steel spire. Rushes off.

EXT. BARGE (MOVING) -- CONTINUOUS

A SEAMAN appears on deck holding a lengthy metal stave with attached kerosene lamp. The man crouches down, hiding near stacked freight off the port bow.

The barge plummets into darkness as it travels beneath another bridge. The seaman pushes off its support pillars with the stave, steering safely through the narrow passageway.

As the barge clears the bridge, the man spots an abandoned troller anchored to piling near the banks of the canal.

The man leaps onto the troller. His footing breaking through the timeworn hull before making his way off the boat and up the weed infested embankment on shore.

EXT. WOODS -- CONTINUOUS

The man crashes through a thicket of Sycamore trees running full throttle. Vapor trails bleating out of his nose and mouth.

A TRAIN WHISTLE BLOWS.

Craning his neck in all directions, he secures the suitcase, and chooses a route.

INT. RAILWAY STATION -- CONTINUOUS

The RATTLE of trains and BOARDING ANNOUNCEMENTS blare through the station as the man crosses the platform to the STATIONMASTER'S BOOTH.

MAN

When is the next train to Paris?

STATIONMASTER

Eight O'clock. Departing in six minutes.

MAN

Fine.

STATIONMASTER

Berth or sleeping car?

MAN

Private, quickly, please.

Perspiring, the man slides damp bills through the slot in the window. The porter thumbs it suspiciously.

STATIONMASTER

Return?

With an expertly raised eyebrow...

MAN

One-way.

The man nervously checks over his shoulder. The platform buzzing with evening commuters, beat cops, and SA Brownshirt foot patrols. No Trenchcoat.

STATIONMASTER

Track two. Boarding now.

He snatches up the ticket and goes through the turnstile, heading towards the northbound line.

A flock of CARRIER PIGEONS explode high overhead.

The Nazi high-speed train known as *The Flying Hamburger* idles on the tracks. Steam billows from its undercarriage, like a fire breathing dragon awaiting flight.

The 10-car chortling beast loads passengers.

The man anxiously holds the ticket, waits in line.

An UNDERGROUND MOB WOMAN in the horde spots the man. She stares at him. Familiarity breeds contempt.

TIGHT ON: Beads of sweat cascading down the man's cheek, soaking his fine linen shirt collar.

The man meets the woman's gaze. Every cell in his body freezes, unsure if he's been tagged. He's one man from safety when she uses her German like a slap --

UNDERGROUND MOB WOMAN

(German)

There. Right there. That's him!

Heads turn. A fervor of excitement permeates the station.

ASKEW ANGLES: Grimacing faces. Glaring eyeballs. Arms extended into accusing fingers.

A wave of emotion spreads through the commuters like a plague. An ANGRY MOB forming before our eyes. What could this man have done?

The train lurches forward on the rails.

The man blunders for the handrail.

WHISTLES and FLASHLIGHTS proceed POLICEMEN as they invade the platform with authority. Some officers led by GERMAN SHEPHERDS.

The man pulls himself inside the moving railcar, disappearing through the steam like a ghost.

Doors close, lock behind him.

EXT. RAILWAY -- CONTINUOUS

The train gains speed and rolls out of the station.

INT. FLYING HAMBURGER -- CONTINUOUS

The man makes his way down the aisle. Glances at TWO OLDER JEWISH MEN who watch him.

The man fills his lungs with air. Sighs relief for the first time. Wrestles with the suitcase as he heads down the...

CORRIDOR

Checking the number plates tacked above the doors, he finds his compartment.

SLEEPING CAR

Now inside, he produces a switchblade and opens the locked latch of the suitcase.

THE SUITCASE filled with BUNDLES OF CASH.

He snaps to attention at the sound of the compartment door sliding opening, flips closed the case.

A PORTER with a stern face.

 PORTER
Ticket.

 MAN
Of course.

Hands him the ticket.

 PORTER
Papers.

 MAN
You'll find they are in order.

Handing off his papers, the porter scrutinizes them, looks back at him suspiciously.

The man nervously glances out the window. The fog of his nervous breath clouds the glass.

 PORTER
Why are you traveling to Paris?

The man searches for a smart reply.

 PORTER
Wait a minute. Lang...Fritz Lang?
Are you making a picture there?

The man removes his trademark MONOCLE from his shirt pocket and positions it over his left eye.

 FRITZ LANG (MAN)
Yes, yes I am.

After everything he's been through, we can glean that his ego still craves the attention.

 PORTER
Fritz Lang, the famous film director.
My wife will never believe it.
Pleasure to welcome you aboard.
Enjoy your trip, Sir.

The Porter leaves the compartment. We hang on Fritz's haunted reflection in the window as the German countryside races by.

VOICE (O.S.)
Training for our '36 Olympics, Lang?

Fritz looks over to LOHMANN (don't worry, you will be officially introduced later), dressed in a Trenchcoat and sitting across from him.

FRITZ
How did you...?

LOHMANN
You know the answer to that question.
Lets start from the beginning, Lang.

With that, we move through the window, following the high speed train from above as it races down the rails on a collision course with Paris.

FRITZ (V.O.)
They're coming for you --

The SPINNING TRAIN WHEELS transforming into --

INT. SOUNDSTAGE, DECLA STUDIO -- DAY

-- SPINNING HAND-CRANKED CAMERA *on the set of "DIE SPINNEN"*
(THE SPIDERS), a silent B-grade adventure serial.

Rolling camera and arc lights pointed at a beautiful ingenue, LIL DAGOVER, clad in a seductive tribal costume, standing in a campy replica of an Incan City.

Shooting script on lap. Cigar smoke clinging in the air. FRITZ LANG, less world weary now, is a powerfully built man in a perfectly-tailored suit. Directing from behind the camera, he's trying to elicit fright from the actress --

FRITZ (cont.)
-- you're all alone. There's no one
to help you. You scream...SCREAM!

Lil's eyes widen. Her lips separate. Trying to summon fear, but the result is --

FRITZ
Cut...cut...cut.

The CAMERAMAN next to him stops hand-cranking.

Fritz approaches Lil to give direction --

FRITZ
Terrified. It's terror.

LIL DAGOVER
Terror.

FRITZ
A conspiratorial organization has
left you a calling card.

Fritz gestures to the prop department as they dress the set
in hundreds of fake Tarantulas.

LIL DAGOVER
What, you mean all them rubbery spiders?

FRITZ
You're only escape from death is
Kay Hoog. Sportsman-explorer with
a vast library, loyal servants, and
the best wines and women at his
disposal.

Fritz gestures to her co-star, RUDOLF KLEIN-ROGGE, having
his rather large and protruding gut cinched into a male
equivalent of a corset by two stage hands.

LIL DAGOVER
It's these bloody feathers.

Lil pointing to the elaborate headdress costume atop her head.

FRITZ
The ostrich plumage on that tribal
headdress was hand sewn by an
Oriental.

LIL DAGOVER
I can feel my neck swelling.

FRITZ
You're the Priestess of the Sun from
a world unknown. Lost treasure
beckons you. Shall I cloak you in
topper and tails?

Frightened by his air of supreme confidence, Lil replies in
nervous laughter.

Fritz sinks back into his director's chair.

His producer, JOE MAY, nervous type and prim as a governess,
walks over glumly.

JOE MAY
Keep shooting, Fritz. We're over
schedule. They're threatening to
shut us down again.

FRITZ
Ego-mad narcissists, all of them.

JOE MAY
Perhaps if you didn't go to bed
with every cabaret dancing ingenue.

FRITZ
Did you read the script I gave you?

JOE MAY
You should eat. I'll have the girl
bring a liverwurst and coffee.

FRITZ
"The Cabinet of Dr Caligari".

Joe May sips his coffee.

JOE MAY
The audience loves the Kay Hoog series.

FRITZ
I make and remake the same picture, Joe.

JOE MAY
I'm too tired.

FRITZ
A film should depict its times.

JOE MAY
Germans are seized in rising
inflation, unemployment, collapse of
moral standards, political unrest.
What do they want with lurid. They
need reassuring.

A STAGEHAND delivers a NOTE to Fritz.

STAGEHAND
Lady told me to give you this, sir.

JOE MAY
Well, what does it say?

FRITZ
(reading)
"Perhaps rubbery spiders are not scary".

He turns towards Lil, who is rehearsing before the next take.

FRITZ
(to Stagehand)
Tell Miss Dagover, her services are
no longer required on set.

JOE MAY
Fritz, you can't fire the star in
the middle the picture.

FRITZ
(to Stagehand)
I want her extracted from the premises
immediately.

JOE MAY
I hate this job. Fundamentally.
Makes me nervous.

STAGEHAND
I'll tell her, Mr. Lang. But the
note came from the lady with the
brass pen.

Stagehand gestures across the stage to THEA VON HARBOU (39)
a blonde stately German with a commanding air. She's
scribbling into a pad with a BRASS PEN.

FRITZ
Who is that?

JOE MAY
Thea von Harbou. Writer. Rather
prolific one at that. Published her
first novel at thirteen.
(beat)
She's Klein-Rogge's wife.

FRITZ
Klein-Rogge is married?

JOE MAY
Mmmm, appears to be a rather
mysterious and closely guarded chapter
of their lives.

Fritz takes Thea in. It doesn't go unnoticed by Joe May.

JOE MAY
There's a party tonight for the
publication of Thea's new book. You
and "L" should come.

FRITZ
No, we can't make it.

JOE MAY
I hear F.W. wants her to write his
next picture.

FRITZ
Murnau?

JOE MAY
Mmmm, something to do with Vampires.

The ASSISTANT DIRECTOR yells --

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
Quiet on the set!

The warning bell rings.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
Lights!

The lights sizzle and blaze.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
Camera!

A young man with a clapboard steps in front of the camera.

FRITZ
Action!

Lil gives another weak take. Fritz doesn't notice. His
eyes are squarely on Thea Von Harbou.

EXT. RIVER SPREE -- EVENING

Borderless inky water. In the distance, a lone Yacht anchored
and strung in glowing Chinese lanterns.

PRELAP SOUNDS OF A PARTY.

EXT. DECK, YACHT -- EVENING

Inscrutable jealous eyes pursuing Thea as she mingles with
intellectuals and artists that eddy around her with admiration
on their faces.

Joe May sneaks up on Fritz, revealing him as the secret
suitor.

JOE MAY
I see you've resorted to stalking.

FRITZ

Wallowing in the glory of parasite
celebrity acquaintances. Why the
odd look on your face?

JOE MAY

Snatched a set of porcelain figurines
dating back to the Ming dynasty.
Little shop in the Chinese district.
Proprietor doesn't have a clue.

FRITZ

Should have snatched a proper tie.

JOE MAY

Thea Von Harbou is emancipated,
accomplished, a devout nationalist,
and nearly forty. You don't fall
in love with people's minds, Fritz.
Stick to your virgin starlets.

FRITZ

I loathe parties.

JOE MAY

I can imagine how much this little
extravaganza is costing Klein-Rogge.
Where's L?

FRITZ

Overboard.

JOE MAY

Funny, I didn't think you the
murdering type.

FRITZ

Nothing gained by a scandal.

JOE MAY

(realizes he's serious)
I gave the toast at your anniversary
party.

FRITZ

We inhabit the same house. Furniture
that you walk around in order to not
bump up against.

JOE MAY

Why not petition for divorce?

FRITZ

She'll contest it. Besides, I
insisted on the Catholic rites.

(MORE)

FRITZ
It's like a vaccination -- enduring
'til death.

Fritz's wife, LISA "L" ROSENTHAL joins them. She's modest, unsophisticated, and desperately trying to exist in her husband's world.

L
There you are, Fritz. I was looking
for you everywhere.

FRITZ
Not many places to hide.

L
Very clever. Hello, Joe.

JOE MAY
Sweet, L. Ever spirited.

L holds up Thea's new book.

L
Look, there's a whole stack of them
near the giant prawns.

Joe May spies a strapping clarinet player in the band.

JOE MAY
L, how about a dance?

L
I accept on one condition.

JOE MAY
Name it.

L
There will be no talk of dividends
and profit margins.

JOE MAY
What's your position on counting
steps?

L hands Thea's books to Fritz as Joe May escorts her to the floor. Fritz scans the deck for Thea, but she's not there.

He goes to the railing. Stares at the dark water.

THEA (O.S.)
Not thinking of ending it all?

Fritz turns, finds Thea next to him holding two Martinis.

FRITZ
Difficult offing oneself with the
Gershwin playing.

Thea grins, radiant in the moonlight. Noticing her book in
his hand --

THEA
Will you read it?

FRITZ
No.

THEA
Then I apologize for the boorish night.

FRITZ
It would be rude to contradict the
lady and criminal on such an occasion.

THEA
I invite your contempt.

Handing him a Martini --

THEA
Forewarning, I make an absolutely
frightening Martini.

FRITZ
Surely with the right Vermouth?

THEA
Afraid not, it's brain-melting, knee-
shaking, bladder-weakening, shivers
down the spine, hair-stand-up-on-the-
back-of-your-neck terror.

He takes a sip. She awaits his response.

FRITZ
Dreadful that.

They giggle.

FRITZ
Your note today "perhaps rubbery
spiders are not scary".

THEA
Observation. Hazard of the business.

FRITZ
No, please enlighten -- tell me
Mrs. Von Harbou, what frightens you?

THEA
Real life. What we do to one another.

He turns her words over in his head. Suddenly, FIREWORKS streak into the night sky.

Clearly inebriated, Lil Dagover staggers over.

LIL DAGOVER
Lights. Lights in the sky!

Lil's sudden shift from bliss to horror seizes Fritz's attention.

Lil SCREAMS.

It's perfect, the scream Fritz has been trying to elicit from her on set.

FRITZ
(sotto)
Circle that.

The BAND ABRUPTLY STOPS PLAYING.

Everyone on deck surges to the rails to see --

-- the CORPSE OF A YOUNG WOMAN grazing the surface of the dark water. Her eyes black, skin an unnatural pallor, and hair splayed like tentacles.

EXT. FRITZ'S HOUSE -- LATER

A wealthy suburb in the solid upper-class neighborhood of Wilmersdorf.

INT. FRITZ'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Headlights from an arriving car shine in the windows, illuminating aspects of the well-appointed residence.

Eyes flickering awake. Feet shuffling into slippers. Fritz's domestic, FRAU NUSSBAUM (60), prying and ignoble in nature, pads down the stairway.

She pours two tumblers of cognac, topping one off liberally.

Fritz and L enter. Frau Nussbaum helps them with their coats.

FRAU NUSSBAUM
To warm your bones, ma'am.

Frau Nussbaum hands L a Cognac, already anticipating her response --

L
Not tonight.

FRAU NUSSBAUM
Very good, ma'am.

L
Night, Mrs. Nussbaum.

FRAU NUSSBAUM
Nighty-nite, ma'am.

As L ascends the spiral staircase that dominates the room --

FRITZ
(to Frau Nussbaum)
She's upset. A girl was killed.

FRAU NUSSBAUM
Tsk-tsk, poor thing.

FRITZ
Garroted. Plunged into the Spree.
Police think it's the work of that
serial murderer.

FRAU NUSSBAUM
Jah, I heard he mailed a girl's kidney
to an Inspector at Scotland Yard.

FRITZ
Bound to be in the morning papers.
Berliners waking to tea and sympathy.

Handing Fritz a cognac --

FRAU NUSSBAUM
To rid the nightmares, Mr. Fritz.

Fritz heads upstairs with the nightcap. Frau Nussbaum downs
L's cognac in a single shot -- her usual routine.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM, FRITZ'S HOUSE -- LATER

L seated at the vanity, taking down her hair.

Fritz yanks off his bow tie, setting it on the bureau next
to Thea's book. He opens the cover, reads --

Blossoming Lotus by Thea von Harbou.

-- runs his finger affectionately along the words.

L
Did you tell Frau Nussbaum about it?

FRITZ
About what?

L
The murder.

FRITZ
I don't know.

L
What did you say?

FRITZ
One doesn't always have to say what
one thinks, L.

L
I went by the Institute today.
Hallways are flooded with legions of
shell-shocked men; syphilis,
tuberculosis, amputees, and worse.

FRITZ
Terrible throbbing in the temples.

Fritz opens his bureau drawer and finds a bottle of Aspirin
near his BROWNING SERVICE REVOLVER, at the quick in case of
intruder.

L
I'm needed there?

FRITZ
Where?

L
The hospital.

FRITZ
You're needed here.

L
Frau Nussbaum does the cooking,
cleaning, washing, mending -- what's
left for me to do?

FRITZ
You do what the others do.

L
You would love a woman like that
wouldn't you? Someone who needs to
check her diary to see if she's able
to luncheon.

FRITZ

You crack on about it, but most women would die to have what you have.

L

The woman who wrote the book -- I saw the way you looked at her tonight.

FRITZ

Don't be ridiculous. She's nearly forty.

L turns to the mirror, insecurity and self-loathing wearing her face.

L

Someone at the party said that she's a baroness.

FRITZ

She's not a baroness.

L

(quoting)

Poor Fritz, "Germany's premiere film Director marries Russian-Jew Nurse from Vilna slums."

FRITZ

Shall I censor the society pages too?

L

You regret our marriage. Don't be a coward, admit it.

FRITZ

All right, if you must know -- you crack on about the mundane. You're settled in your ways, anemic in your excitements and sober in taste. If it were up to you, we'd go to the Spiesehauster for Kippers every night.

L

At least I don't deny where I come from.

FRITZ

No, it precedes you through the door and takes a seat at the head of the table.

L

Do you think of your mother when you pretend to be one of them?

FRITZ
What the hell you're talking about.

L
You refuse to go to her grave.

Fritz's pain turns to anger.

FRITZ
My mother was Catholic!

L
Your mother lies in *Weissensee* with
her people.

FRITZ
A night of enthusiasms, is that what
you want?

L
If I could, I would kill you.

Fritz races to the bureau and extracts his BROWNING REVOLVER.
It's our first glimpse at his rage.

FRITZ
(handing it to her)
Here, take it. What are you waiting for?

WE TRAVEL through the common dividing wall to --

FRAU NUSSBAUM'S BEDROOM

-- Frau Nussbaum's ear peeled against the wall, snooping on
the private affairs of her employers.

WE TRAVEL through the common dividing wall to --

INT. FRITZ'S STUDY -- LATE NIGHT

Alone at his desk, Fritz is reading Thea's book. We can
tell by his face that the words are aching with resonance.
Turning the final page, he draws a breath, fights back an
onslaught of emotion -- Euphoric. Lost.

INT. FRITZ'S HOUSE, KITCHEN -- MORNING

Blistered sausages hiss in a cast iron skillet on the stove.

FRITZ (O.S.)
Most victims were missing appendages.

Frau Nussbaum prepares breakfast as Fritz reads aloud from
the morning paper.

FRITZ

(reading)

Although the latest victim's limbs were intact, authorities say the condition of body and other unprintable offenses point to the work of a serial-killer dubbed "The Monster of Dusseldorf" by the public, and whose early victims hailed from that district.

FRAU NUSSBAUM

Jah, monster.

FRITZ

(reading)

Authorities believe the unidentified female victim was dead no longer then a few hours before her body was recovered from the Spree.

FRAU NUSSBAUM

Tsk-tsk. Poor girl

FRITZ

Berlin's Chief Inspector Lohmann was unavailable for comment.

FRAU NUSSBAUM

Lohmann's the big wheel at the Alex. They say his homicide record is one hundred percent. He'll unmask the monster.

FRITZ

Frau Nussbaum, I have an engagement at half past ten. I'm not to be disturbed. Show them to my study, all right.

FRAU NUSSBAUM

Jah, jah, jah, half ten.

Fritz's gaze freezes on L's empty chair and place setting at the kitchen table.

FRAU NUSSBAUM

Will Mrs. Fritz be joining for breakfast?

FRITZ

Bit of a restless night, I'm afraid.

PRELAP SOUNDS OF A CUCKOO CLOCK.

INT. FRITZ'S HOUSE -- LATER

Frau Nussbaum eyes Thea Von Harbou warily as she escorts her up the staircase to the upper chamber.

FRAU NUSSBAUM
This way, ma'am.

Thea unwinds her scarf as she makes her way into Fritz's sanctuary.

INT. FRITZ'S STUDY -- CONTINUOUS

The large garret room has been converted into an office. Fritz, a consummate modernist, is posed behind his custom built Bauhaus desk.

FRITZ
Thank you, Frau Nussbaum.

Frau Nussbaum remains planted in the room.

FRITZ
You may go now, Frau Nussbaum.

She flares her nostrils at him and shuffles out.

Fritz stands to receive Thea, but before he's able to make an impression, L barges into the room dressed in a housecoat, head in pincurls.

L
Fritz...
(noticing Thea)
Oh, I didn't realize you had a guest.

THEA
(to L)
Hello, Mrs. Lang. I'm here to discuss business with your husband.

L
Oh, I see. Certainly. Hello.

L self-consciously pats her hair as she eyes Thea's smartly tailored suit.

L
I'm not usually dressed like this.
(re. Thea's stockings)
Are those real silk...

FRITZ
For God's sake, L.

L

Well, I'll just leave you to...

L goes to the dormer window in the sloping roof. Pulling back the heavy draperies so that light floods in.

Thea adjusts her eyes to the harsh glare before noticing the FERRIS WHEEL that fills the glass. The upper regions of the monster rising out of the forested common surrounding it.

FRITZ

Main attraction in Wurstelprater park.

THEA

It's stunning.

FRITZ

Best view in Berlin.

L stares at the spinning gears with trepidation.

L

Fritz says you should try everything once before you die. I get goose pimples just thinking about it.

THEA

It's quite safe. You needn't be afraid of it, unless you're afraid of yourself.

L turns her words over, leaves. Fritz locks the door behind her, turns to Thea.

FRITZ

Read your book. Didn't care for it. Didn't see the point.

THEA

Thank you for that unbiased portraiture of my novel. I particularly like the half sentences and insults dropped like curtsies.

Thea removes a pair of glasses from her handbag. Slides them on and studies his face.

FRITZ

You stare at me as if establishing lunacy.

THEA

Your left eye, the iris, it's...

FRITZ

Yes, injury from the war.

THEA
You look nothing like him.

FRITZ
Who?

THEA
Surely you know they refer to you as
the Stalin of film?

FRITZ
Mark of a truly educated person to
be moved by a statistic.

THEA
It's a love letter to India. Mann
called it "burningly ambitious".

FRITZ
A book should tell a good story.
That's all I'm suggesting.

THEA
I'm sure there are values to such
honest criticism. I'll make sure
to telegram the *Romana Maharishi* who
inspired the rotten opus.

She takes a BRASS PEN and NOTEPAD from her handbag and writes
down an address.

THEA
My Optometrist in the village. He
does a thorough examination. I'll
show myself to the door.

As she's leaving --

FRITZ
You're not really going to work for
that hack Murnau?

THEA
Who told you that?

FRITZ
A little bird. My birds are reliable.
Do you want my advice?

THEA
I didn't come for advice.

FRITZ
His last picture wasn't worth the
train ticket from Babelsberg.

THEA
Goodbye, Mr. Lang.

FRITZ
I want a scenario where characters
aren't always escaping flooded rooms,
mental wards, jail cells, and caves.

THEA
You despised my book.

FRITZ
I didn't care for the story. Your
writing itself seems almost channeled.
Beautiful, passionate, heartbreaking.

She remains stoic, but his words nearly knock her over.

THEA
I see.

FRITZ
A Fritz Lang and Thea von Harbou
motion picture. You would have
complete freedom to create of course.

THEA
Why did you lock the door?

FRITZ
I always lock it when I'm working.

THEA
Lets get one thing straight, you're
not the general and I'm not the
troops.

Thea turns to a door off his study.

THEA
What is this room used for?

FRITZ
Storage.

THEA
Is there a window?

FRITZ
Yes.

THEA
I like to end by three o'clock.

FRITZ
You're accepting?

THEA

I never allow anyone into my personal study. Can you agree to those terms?

FRITZ

Agreed.

THEA

Besides, I'm destined for a rather sordid divorce.

FRITZ

From Rogue-Klein?

THEA

A stiff drink and a good part, he'll be fine.

FRITZ

Forgive me, but that was spoken like a man.

THEA

Then it will command your respect.

(beat)

In the meantime, I'd like to get the uncomfortable business out of the way.

As Thea pushes her glasses towards her upturned nose --

THEA

Now Mr. Lang, I'd like to see you without your pants.

The camera pushes towards the window, landing on the colossal rotating FERRIS WHEEL.

EXT. OPTOMETRIST OFFICE -- DAY

A MONSTROUS BLINKING EYE AND MONOCLE sign hangs over the door.

INT. OPTOMETRIST OFFICE -- CONTINUOUS

Antiquated gadgets, instruments, charts, and diagrams of eye anatomy.

Fritz's grossly enlarged pupil pressed against a magnifying glass as the OPTOMETRIST examines him.

OPTOMETRIST

Open your eye wide. Keep it open. That's it -- that's good. Blink please. Blink. Relax.

(MORE)

OPTOMETRIST

(beat)

The damage to your left retina is extensive.

FRITZ

Russia, Italy, Balkans, I did my bit. Bullets missed all the vital organs. Nearly lost the eye.

OPTOMETRIST

It must have been painful.

FRITZ

More of a spreading numbness. Convalesced in Vienna hospital. That's where I met L, my wife. Amongst the carnage.

OPTOMETRIST

Dynamic range is paramount in your profession.

FRITZ

I was meant to be an architect, like my father.

OPTOMETRIST

You'll need to be fitted.

The Optometrist hands him an Oriental silk palace fan. Throws the lights and flips on a projector that illuminates an eyechart on the wall.

OPTOMETRIST

Stand on the white line. Cover your right eye. From the top row.

FRITZ

F - R - P - S - C - Q - E.

OPTOMETRIST

Good. Now the left.

FRITZ

K. I. L. L. Err...L. No, it's definitely L.

OPTOMETRIST

Patch or monocle?

FRITZ

I don't understand.

The Optometrist walks in front of the projected eye chart.

OPTOMETRIST
Perfect vision in the left eye.
Stone-blind in the right.

FRITZ
Blind, then why a monocle?

OPTOMETRIST
Aesthetics. I can have it ready for
you in a few weeks.

Fritz removes the Oriental fan from his eye and is
instantaneously met by a large letter "**M**" now projecting
on the Optometrist's labcoat.

The striking image vanishing into Fritz's psyche as the
lights flicker on.

OPTOMETRIST
You may experience some disorientation
in the beginning, don't be alarmed.

INT. FRITZ'S HOUSE -- VARIOUS

**MONTAGE TIME PASSAGE with FRAU NUSSBAUM'S POV of Fritz's
locked study door as he works in seclusion with Thea:**

The locked study door from the bottom of the stairs.

The locked study door from down the hallway.

Lugging a basket of laundry, Frau Nussbaum stops and sternly
stares at the locked study door, proceeds up the stairs.

Shadows playing under the locked study door.

Frau Nussbaum at the locked study door with a tray of tea.
Thea appears briefly to retrieve it.

Frau Nussbaum kneeling at keyhole of the locked study door.

CLICK. The locked study door opens, Frau Nussbaum scurries
out of sight.

Frau Nussbaum's ear peeled against the locked study door.
Snatches of conversation overheard.

INT. FRITZ'S STUDY -- DAY

PAN across Fritz's desk. Typed script pages with BLUE PENCIL
notations lead to the shadowy images of Fritz and Thea making
love.

Thea rolls onto her back.

THEA
I was half-hoping the sex would be
tedious, you know.

FRITZ
That would make it easy.

THEA
Mmm.

Thea notices a photograph of Fritz and Joe May taken in
Manhattan Harbor.

THEA
Manhattan skyline. Is this you?

FRITZ
It was.

Fritz steals a tender glance at her.

FRITZ
Adrift. That's how it feels.

THEA
We should get dressed, finish writing
the scene.

FRITZ
I'm in love, Thea.

Thea manufactures a calming smile.

THEA
Love isn't something you proclaim
while your wife is out treating
Diphtheria and dressing wounds.

FRITZ
I'm going to tell her.

THEA
None of us wants the public shame.

FRITZ
I don't care about that. I want to
marry you.

THEA
It's possible that now is not the
right time.

FRITZ
Do you love me, Thea?

THEA
I'm leaving.

FRITZ
Where?

THEA
India. Six weeks.

FRITZ
India?

THEA
It's where I go to clear my mind.

He interrupts her with the smallest of kisses.

FRITZ
It's where you go to end things.

EXT. STREET (WEEKS LATER) -- EARLY EVENING

Coal smoke pouring from a seemingly endless row of chimneys. L walks home from the hospital wearing a nursing uniform.

She runs across the road to the Optometrist office, which has just turned over its "CLOSED" sign in the window. BANGS on the glass.

L
No, wait. Wait...

The Optometrist unlocks the door and L disappears inside.

A moment later, she resurfaces with a small box wrapped in brown paper and twine.

EXT. WURSTELPRATER PARK -- MOMENTS LATER

L walks past the entrance to the amusement park. She notices two sisters who appear to be lost, 14-year-old LOUISE and 5-year-old GURTRUDE, holding an anthropomorphic BALLOON.

A MAN IN A CRUMPLED FEDORA, is assisting them. Sensing something is off, L approaches. But her gaze is diverted by the swirl and dazzle of the RIESENRAD FERRIS WHEEL looming above.

Gurtrude's deserted BALLOON sails by, drifting skyward. L looks back, but the sisters and man are gone.

The BALLOON catches in the telegraph wires, until the wind shakes it free and carries it away.

AMUSEMENT PARK

Snake charmer, fortune-teller, and shooting gallery booths.
L wanders amongst the painted faces, anthropomorphic balloons,
and sticks of candyfloss.

A CARNIVAL BARKER, paper windmill stuck in his battered hat,
sways L over to a penny slot aptly named: *"What The Frau Saw"*.

CARNIVAL BARKER

See "What The Frau Saw".

Blushing, L heads to the Ferris Wheel. Before she knows it,
she's at the ticket booth.

TICKET MAN

Last ride of the day.

L

One ticket, please.

L steps up on the platform as a young couple exits a gondola
and she's ushered into their place.

Realizing that the couple have left their BINOCULARS behind --

L

Excuse me, you forgot...oohh...

But it's too late, the Ferris Wheel CLATTERS and begins its
revolutions. The throng people shrinking below as Berlin's
city lights rise up. L's apprehension palpable.

The wheel steadily turning, bringing her higher and higher.

The gondola abruptly stops at the top and swings idly.

L nervously looks over to the next gondola, it's empty.

She grabs the binoculars and sweeps them back and forth.
Discovering her own house, she dials in a crisp image of
the outward-slanting windows off of Fritz's study.

The gondola CREAKS in the wind.

L feels guilty about peeping until Thea's naked body comes
into view, standing at the window.

L clutches the binoculars tighter.

L's POV -- Fritz joins Thea at the window, moves his hands
down the curve of her back and kisses her passionately.

L can hardly breathe. Everything becoming faint.

EXAGGERATED CLOSE UP of "What The Frau Saw", a dancing girl bent over a stool as the cabaret promoter thrusts her from behind. The gears turning faster and faster.

INT. FRITZ'S HOUSE -- LATER

L bursts through the door, disheveled. Clammers up the staircase. Pounds her fists on Fritz's locked study door.

The door snaps open. L encounters Thea in the doorway. They hold each other's gaze.

Thea removes the pair of silk stockings that she's hastily thrown inside her handbag and hands them to L as a peace offering.

THEA

French silk. Impossible to come by these days.

L

Fritz!

L throws them to the floor and rushes into Fritz's study.

Thea passes Frau Nussbaum on the staircase heading upstairs with a tea tray. Thea exits the front door as the muffled sounds of an argument are heard above.

A GUNSHOT EXPLODES. TIME STOPS.

The tea tray in Frau Nussbaum's grip CRASHES to the floor. She stands frozen, staring up the staircase.

INT. LANDING, HALLWAY UPSTAIRS -- MOMENTS LATER

Frau Nussbaum moves gingerly along the landing, glancing inside Fritz's bedroom and study as she walks past.

She ambles towards a washroom at the end of the corridor. Light spilling out from beneath the door.

She carefully turns the doorknob, when the door suddenly snaps open and Fritz appears in the doorway.

FRITZ

Hurry, telephone the police.

L's BODY lies motionless on the washroom floor behind him. Her head lolled to one side. Her blood sluiced across the mottled tile. The Browning in her grip.

Frau Nussbaum shudders with fear.

EXT. FRITZ'S HOUSE -- LATER

Reporters loiter the pavement, dangling cameras like black concertinas. Meanwhile in the house, upstairs...

INT. UPSTAIRS WASHROOM -- CONTINUOUS

BLINDING FLASHES from the crime scene photographers camera. A knot of police surrounding L's body.

The photographer snaps off a shot of the blood stained Star of David hanging from a chain around L's neck.

INT. FRITZ'S HOUSE, STUDY -- CONTINUOUS

Fritz stares out the window. A stiff drink in his hand. Frau Nussbaum shuffles in, prattling --

FRAU NUSSBAUM
Detectives be wanting to talk to you
before long, Mr. Fritz.

Fritz spots an indentation on his palm left by the BROWNING'S TRADEMARK PATENT on the grip of his gun. A horrified gasp, as he quickly shoves his hands in his pockets.

FRITZ
Mrs. Nussbaum, about what you think
you might have seen or heard tonight --

FRAU NUSSBAUM
I could never forget as long as
I live -- maybe longer.

Their history rushing in around them.

FRITZ
You know that there will always be a
place for you here.

Frau Nussbaum drops to her knees, wipes a BLOOD SPLATTERING off his shoe. She quickly shuffles out, hiding the soiled rag in her apron pocket.

Fritz notices something on his desk -- the small box wrapped in brown paper and twine.

He unwraps it and finds a ribbonless monocle inside.

Places it in his left eye socket. Studies his reflection in a mirror. The eyepiece altering his appearance to a half repellent Cyclops enigma.

Sound of shuffling feet, Frau Nussbaum races back in --

FRAU NUSSBAUM
They're gone.

FRITZ
What?

FRAU NUSSBAUM
Police. Press. Mrs. Fritz's remains.

FRITZ
I don't understand.

FRAU NUSSBAUM
They're down there.

They turn to the window where an ant line of search party torch fire pierces the darkened forest lining the park.

FRAU NUSSBAUM
Two little girls found murdered by
the footpath near the fair grounds.
Officer said the youngest was
bludgeoned. The older girl's head...
they're still looking for it.

INSERT CUCKOO CLOCK: A woodchopper yielding a sharp ax
appears through a small trap door as the hands strike
midnight.

Frau Nussbaum tightens the shawl over head.

Fritz at the window, an insidious fear spreading over him.

FADE TO BLACK:

EXT. CITY STREET (NEXT MORNING) -- DAY

PAPERSELLERS, latest editions clipped to boards hanging from
they're bodies, run down the sidewalk shouting:

PAPERSELLERS
Extraausgabe, extraausgabe!

The headlines read: **"THE MONSTER OF DUSSELDORF STRIKES AGAIN"**

INT. STUDY, FRITZ'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Having fallen asleep in his chair, Fritz opens his eyes
groggily to the sound of a hauntingly familiar whistle.
("In the Hall of the Mountain King" from Grieg's Peer Gynt)
(Peter Lorre's famous whistle in "M").

He places the monocle in his eye and scans the room in a panic, unable to get his bearings until glimpsing a colossal trapezoid of shadow in the doorway, features barely distinguishable.

LOHMANN (O.S.)

Knock knock.

CHIEF INSPECTOR LOHMANN, a gorilla stuffed into a Herringbone Trenchcoat, is standing in the doorway.

FRITZ

Chief Inspector Lohmann.

LOHMANN

You know me?

FRITZ

I've seen your photograph in the paper.

LOHMANN

I'm never photographed, do you mind?

Lohmann points to a platinum box on the desk.

FRITZ

Suit yourself.

Lohmann, eyes dark orbits, takes THREE CIGARS from the box. Fritz offers him a light, Lohmann declines, tucking them in his coat pocket instead.

LOHMANN

Rang the doorbell. Had to let myself in.

FRITZ

My domestic Frau Nussbaum must be out doing tasks.

LOHMANN

I've heard of you, of course. The serials --

FRITZ

"The Spiders".

LOHMANN

Wonderful how you kept the suspense going. You're a master at it. How at the end one's left guessing.

FRITZ

One learns to keep a sharp eye, in my line of work.

Lohmann casually picks up a PLAYBILL from Fritz's desk and retreats to a corner.

LOHMANN

"The Spiders", that's it.

FRITZ

(nervously)

Will there be an inquest?

LOHMANN

Lisa Rosenthal was shot and killed by a single bullet through the chest, postmortem imminent, fired from the Browning service revolver owned by Fritz Lang. That's you.

FRITZ

That's how women do it, isn't it?

LOHMANN

Through the heart. Yes, very theatrical --

Lohmann slides the playbill for Bizet's "CARMEN" across the desk.

LOHMANN

-- identical to the death of the gypsy girl in "*Carmen*", in fact. However, in the play it's her lover who delivers the fatal blow, making it murder. Well you saw it, you know.

Fritz's nervous under his microscope.

FRITZ

I accompanied my wife to that little exercise last week.

LOHMANN

Uh-huh.

FRITZ

It hadn't occurred to me before, but it may have put the thought in her head.

LOHMANN

You had a row with your wife?

FRITZ

Row?

LOHMANN

These things generally begin with a row.

FRITZ

There was no row.

LOHMANN

What's your relationship with Mrs. von Harbou?

FRITZ

Nothing untoward. She's my mistress.

LOHMANN

Uh-huh.

FRITZ

You think I killed my wife, is that it?

LOHMANN

Lets call it a suspicious suicide.

FRITZ

Look, I heard a shot. I ran down the hallway to the washroom. Pushed open the door. She was lying on the floor. Blood everywhere. Gun in hand.

LOHMANN

Like a lens?

FRITZ

I don't follow you.

Lohmann holds his hands like he's shooting a camera.

LOHMANN

Click-click-click, that's how you saw it?

An abrupt look of anger flashes across Fritz's face.

FRITZ

There's a serial killer massacring children and terrorizing five million people. Perhaps your efforts might be put to better use.

Lohmann smiles, but it's filled with rancor.

LOHMANN

She died instantaneously?

FRITZ

She was dead when I got to her.

LOHMANN

And you're quite certain what you saw was intentional?

FRITZ

Yes. Certain, I couldn't say for sure.

LOHMANN

Accidental then?

FRITZ

No...I don't know. When you say saw it, perhaps I should clarify, I heard it. I was not there.

LOHMANN

So she didn't die instantaneously?

FRITZ

Yes. No. I don't know, I'm all tangled up.

LOHMANN

Did you administer chest compressions?

FRITZ

I was not there.

LOHMANN

You said that.

FRITZ

She was distraught.

LOHMANN

About the affair?

FRITZ

Yes.

LOHMANN

Still, there's something erroneous about the death.

FRITZ

I don't understand?

LOHMANN

The crime scene seems staged. You're a film director. You see what I'm getting at. The matter requires consideration.

Lohmann heads for the door.

FRITZ
Consideration?

LOHMANN
(tapping his pocket)
That's what the cigars are for.

EXT. WEISSENSEE JEWISH CEMETERY -- DAY

Endless catacombs of the dead. Dark clouds. Dark flowers.

A handful of mournful sober faces shouldered together around L's open gravesite. Amongst them, Joe May.

EXT. KNOLL, OUTSIDE WEISSENSEE CEMETERY -- LATER

Downpour. Wet hair plastered to his skull, Fritz bids farewell to his wife from outside the gates of the cemetery as her coffin is lowered into the ground.

Joe May walks up behind him carrying an umbrella.

FRITZ
It was a proper burial.

JOE MAY
L was my friend.

FRITZ
You think I should have been there.
That it looks suspicious.

JOE MAY
Let me take you home, Fritz.

FRITZ
I've been rolling ideas around.

JOE MAY
A conversation for another day.

FRITZ
New focus. New direction.

Joe May is stirred, finally gets it.

JOE MAY
You're firing me.

FRITZ
New direction. New focus.

JOE MAY
What about the picture?

FRITZ
We press on.

JOE MAY
You have great powers of detachment,
Fritz.

Unable to meet Joe's eyes, Fritz shifts his gaze back to
L's gravesite.

FRITZ
You learn to economize grief when
you've been to the front.

JOE MAY
Right. By the way, congratulations
on your engagement.

FRITZ
Rumormongers trying to sacrifice me
in the small print.

Fritz's mouth stiffens. Chief Inspector Lohmann's outline
reflects in the aperture of his monocle.

FRITZ
Who have you spoken to about this?

JOE MAY
No one.

FRITZ
Has anyone been 'round to your place?

JOE MAY
No, of course not.

Surveilling them from under a tree near the gravesite, Lohmann
lights a CIGAR and blows out a jet of smoke.

FRITZ
They're watching.

JOE MAY
Have you been prescribed medication?

FRITZ
I feel like a carp in a bathtub.

JOE MAY
Well something has induced this
galloping paranoia.

FRITZ

They can see into every window.

JOE MAY

Who...who's watching?

FRITZ

Trust me, they will ring your bell.
And when they do, they'll have
questions -- ways of finding answers.

JOE MAY

What are you afraid of?

FRITZ

It would be a shame to forfeit
the treasures you've accumulated.
What, with work particularly scarce
these days. Especially the Mings.
Serial numbers meticulously rubbed
out. Stashed underneath the
floorboards.

JOE MAY

It was never like this between us in
the old days. Fundamentally.

Fritz turns up his collar and makes his way home on foot.
The rain falls steadily, smothering the city like a hand
over its mouth.

INT. FRITZ'S HOUSE, STUDY -- DAY

Rain ticks steadily on the windows. Having just arrived,
Thea is soaking wet.

FRITZ

You're drenched.

THEA

Filthy day.

FRITZ

I'm glad you came.

THEA

Taxi abandoned me at your door. I
walked nearly the entire way back
before I rang the bell.

FRITZ

Here, let me take your wet things.

Noticing her skinned knee and tattered stockings.

FRITZ
Are you alright?

THEA
I'm always tripping up.

FRITZ
Let me get you something for that.

THEA
I can't stay long. I know the funeral
was today. I came to tell you how
terribly sorry I am for your loss.

FRITZ
I've missed you.

THEA
Please, don't --

FRITZ
Don't go to India.

THEA
I need to attend to my knee before
I go.

Thea stops, realizes that she's heading for the bathroom
where L died.

FRITZ
You don't ever have to go in there.
(beat)
Here, please --

-- Fritz indicates the door adjoining his study.

Thea opens the door to find that it's no longer a storage
room, but has been renovated into a serene work space.

FRITZ
Your own corner of the map.

THEA
It's beautiful.

FRITZ
I want to marry you, Thea.

THEA
Klein-Rogge is expecting me.

FRITZ
You told me once that your life was
your own.

THEA

I really have to go.

Tears rolling down her face. He places the key to the door in her palm.

FRITZ

The window gets pink ribbon light in the mornings. You can complete it with your things.

THEA

I wouldn't know how.

FRITZ

I could help you.

THEA

I never allow anyone inside my personal study.

Fritz kisses her deeply. They begin to make love.

The rain ticks on the window as we TRAVEL through it and down onto the wet street, where neighborhood boys are kicking around a ball.

The ball goes rogue and rolls in front of Lohmann, looking up at the window staking out Fritz's house.

"In the Hall of the Mountain King" from Grieg's Peer Gynt orchestral piece starts and crescendos over --

DISSOLVE TO:

SPED UP 16mm BLACK & WHITE SILENT FILM FOOTAGE:

(grainy, white leader, odd markings, sprocket holes)

Fritz and Thea at their engagement dinner party with celebrities in attendance.

Fritz and Thea outside a courthouse holding a marriage certificate.

Fritz and Thea skiing the Alps on honeymoon.

INT. FRITZ'S HOUSE, MASTER BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Grieg's tune continues over Fritz asleep in bed. CLOSE on his perspiring face as he fights ghosts.

His eyes shoot open as he shudders awake.

FRITZ

L!

Turns to find Thea asleep in bed next to him.

Realizing now that there's a steady BANGING sound coming from downstairs.

INT. FRITZ'S HOUSE (VARIOUS) -- MOMENTS LATER

Fritz tracks the BANGING sound through the house to the front door.

He tightens the cord on his robe and opens the door. Nobody there. The street outside stifled with fog.

The knocking coming from a MOURNING WREATH slung over the door handle and lashing against the door in the wind.

Angered, Fritz rips it down. Yells out the door --

FRITZ

I know you're out there, Lohmann.

INT. UPSTAIRS WASHROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Fritz's haunted face stares blankly at the sparkling white tile floor where L's bloody body was found.

Faint footsteps.

He spins around, finding Thea behind him in a drowsy stupor.

THEA

There can be no understanding between
the hand and the brain unless the
heart acts as mediator.

FRITZ

God knows, I --

THEA

(cutting him off)
It's the opening dedication for
Metropolis.

She stumbles back down the hallway to the bedroom.

FRITZ

(sotto)
Metropolis?

SOUND of random typewriter keys STRIKING --

INT. FRITZ'S STUDY -- DAY

-- turns into a steady CLATTERING of typing. Fritz paces around his desk listening to the activity, but it's not coming from inside his room.

The door to the adjacent room open --

INT. THEA'S STUDY -- CONTINUOUS

-- Thea is perched at the edge of the desk, feverishly typing their new manuscript.

She hits the carriage return and snaps her head angrily towards Fritz, who is now standing in the doorway about to pierce her private sanctuary.

THEA

A room of one's own.

FRITZ

I'm to live within your margins, is that it?

THEA

My own corner of the map. Did we not make an agreement?

FRITZ

I don't want an argument.

THEA

Then why are you standing in the doorway?

FRITZ

I had hoped to borrow a cup of your usual composure as you tell me where we are in this story.

Thea takes a deep breath, turns over her typewritten pages --

THEA

Our heroine, the beautiful and evangelical Maria, has taken up the cause of the everyman. Meanwhile, the evil Rotwang builds a robotic gynoid that looks identical to her.

FRITZ

Fusing human and machine energy.

THEA

Precisely.

FRITZ
Why does he build it?

THEA
Power.

Fritz straining to see the photograph in Manhattan Harbor with Joe May. The towering skyline behind them MORPHING into the futuristic dystopian vision for **"Metropolis"**.

FRITZ
Oh, this is good.

THEA
Society is divided into two groups:
Thinkers, who plan but don't know
how anything works. *Workers*, who
achieve their goals but have no
vision.

FRITZ
Neither group is complete, but
together they make a whole.

THEA
Exactly, close my door.

FRITZ
What?

Thea irately swings her chair around, facing him.

THEA
Friedel please, I'm working.

An ELECTRICAL BUZZING sound. Gyrating VOLTAIC LIGHT encompasses her body, slowing MORPHING her into the iconic robotic metallic figure of Maria, the protagonist in **"Metropolis"**.

Fritz stares from the doorway, immobile.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MARMORHAUS THEATER -- EVENING

Fritz Lang and Thea von Harbou's silent masterpiece **"Metropolis"** projects on the massive screen.

The auditorium crowded with tuxedos and gowns gathered for the gala premiere.

Fritz clutches Thea's hand. A MAN in front of them is screwed all the way around in his seat and peering at them.

FRITZ
Why is he staring at us?

THEA
Who?

FRITZ
The man in the third row.

THEA
Where?

Fritz scans the row again, but all eyes are now on screen.

Angle on the man in the third row. He makes a notation in a pocket notebook -- a *NAZI SWASTIKA* on its cover.

INT. MEN'S ROOM, THEATER -- LATER

Fritz at a row sinks, staring at his reflection in the mirror -- not pleased with the reflection staring back.

WHISTLING in the tune of "*In the Hall of the Mountain King*" from Grieg's Peer Gynt emanates from a stall.

Fritz is rounding the corner to the stalls in the direction of the warbling when he stops dead at the sight of --

-- L's NURSING UNIFORM splayed out on the shiny marble floor. A crimson flower of dried blood over the heart.

Fritz is stunned. Stands there frozen.

A TOILET FLUSHES.

Lohmann exits zipping his fly, stands in the half-light. Fritz is caught off guard, unprepared for this reality.

LOHMANN
There you are. Sorry I'm late.

FRITZ
You weren't invited.

LOHMANN
Tough crowd out there.

FRITZ
They seem to be enjoying it.

LOHMANN
Then why the boiling behind the eyes?

FRITZ
You don't know me, Lohmann.

LOHMANN

I am you.

FRITZ

What did you say?

Lohmann scrapes a match against the wall, lighting a cigar.

LOHMANN

Gal in your picture -- I had a woman
like that once. Cold. Robotic.
Can't leave. Can't stay. Like
stepping on a landmine.

Fritz looks back at L's bloody nursing uniform.

FRITZ

Not tonight, all those people out
there. I beg you...

LOHMANN

All your hard work and *wifes* blood.

Lohmann jerking his thumb at the bloody nursing uniform --

LOHMANN

You know we're going to have to talk
about why this happened.

FRITZ

I haven't heard from you in months.

LOHMANN

Just because you don't see me, doesn't
mean I'm not there.

FRITZ

You enjoy this charade.

LOHMANN

Fritz Lang is the only person who
knows what's going on here. He won't
tell you, but he knows.

FRITZ

I had nothing to do with L's death.
And we both know that if you had
evidence to the contrary, I'd be
retaining a barrister.

Lohmann snorts, places his hand on his face like an eyepatch.

LOHMANN

We're pirates, you and I.

FRITZ

I can look in the mirror with a clean conscience and honestly say that my mind and body are one hundred percent intact.

LOHMANN

So it appears.

FRITZ

Excuse me, but I have a job to do.

LOHMANN

I have a job too. I feel the most alive when I'm doing it.

Fritz storms out. Goes back inside the auditorium, stands at the doors.

ON SCREEN: "*METROPOLIS*" MONTAGE of rising temperatures, spinning turbines, pressures coming to a head, bubbling liquids on the boil -- forces welling up from the deep.

The projected images reflecting in the glass of Fritz's monocle, fueling the forces roiling inside him.

INT. ARTIST'S STUDIO -- DAY

Jars of oil colors. Assorted brushes. Stacked canvas. PUSH IN on the back of an artist in front of an easel, slashing the canvas in vivid color.

THE CANVAS TRANSFORMING into a montage of the expressionist poster art for Fritz and Thea's film collaborations:

DR. MABUSE

DIE NIBELUNGEN

SPIONE

FRAU IM MOND

PULL BACK to reveal Fritz behind the artist pondering the now blank canvas, clearly distressed by the lack of ideas for his next creation.

EXT. TERRACE, FRITZ'S HOUSE -- MORNING

Fritz and Thea are having breakfast in the garden terrace. Frau Nussbaum comes down the path carrying a pot of coffee and the morning newspapers.

FRITZ

Cantaloupe was lovely, Frau Nussbaum.

FRAU NUSSBAUM

Herr Ott says give it a good slap.
When it talks back it's ready.

FRITZ

Herr Ott?

FRAU NUSSBAUM

Market stand in Alexanderplatz.

THEA

That district is teeming with common criminals who have a complete disregard for the law. Old women being attacked for their pensions. Just last week a man was beaten in front of his children and shaken by the bootstraps for the small change in his trousers. Surely we can afford that nice shop in Covington Garden.

FRAU NUSSBAUM

Cantaloupe not talking back there,
Mrs. Fritz.

Fritz pours coffee, smirking.

FRITZ

Tell Herr Ott that we could do with
a nice mango next time.

Thea crossly reaches for her reading glasses and riffles through the newspapers.

FRAU NUSSBAUM

Herr Ott and the others have been
doing more than talking, tell you
that. They've been organizing.

FRITZ

Organizing?

FRAU NUSSBAUM

A round-up to do what the police
don't.

FRITZ

Vigilantes?

FRAU NUSSBAUM

To trap the Monster. Got their own
ideas going about it too.

FRITZ
Overturning law by brute force
constitutes a criminal act.

THEA
It's arcane.

FRAU NUSSBAUM
Jah, maybe so, but there won't be a
scared woman or child left in the
city once they've done the deed,
they says.

THEA
Please put the phonograph on inside,
Frau Nussbaum.

Frau Nussbaum makes an audible sigh as she starts back up
the path.

FRITZ
She's been with me for fifteen years.

THEA
She thinks she's married to you.

FRITZ
She's devoted and doesn't steal.

THEA
She's a drunk.

The stylus screeches before catching its groove. The music
gushes from the windows. Fritz's eyes widen in recognition.

FRITZ
What is this? I know this.

Thea peers out from behind the *Berliner Tageblatt*.

THEA
"In the Hall of the Mountain King"
It's from Grieg's Peer Gynt.

Fritz's eyes fastened on the newspaper headline in her grip:

"Monster of Dusseldorf Eludes Police Again"

His mind ticking away as if hit by a lightening bolt idea as
the haunting music crescendos.

INT. STUDY, FRITZ'S HOUSE -- DAY

THE MAKING OF "M"

Fritz excitedly cutting clippings from the lurid daily headlines detailing the Monster of Dusseldorf crimes.

Thea enters, finds her husband holding a large pair of sheers.

FRITZ

What is the most unspeakably heinous
act you can think of?

THEA

Scrapbooking tops the list.

FRITZ

Don't annoy me, Thea. Just listen --

(reads from clippings)

Christine Klein, thirteen years old,
found in her bed with throat cut.

Rose Ohliger, eight years old,
stabbed thirteen times and dumped
near a construction site. Ida Reuter,
nineteen, skull crushed with a hammer.
Elizabeth Dirries, also nineteen,
also bludgeoned.

(pointing)

The Doering sisters massacred right
down there near the park footpath.

(beat)

It's all here, interviews with
eyewitnesses, new theories by police,
there's even a boasting letter sent
to the press and signed by the Monster
himself. What do you think?

THEA

I think a very bad man is stalking
the streets of Berlin.

FRITZ

Right and what better story than the
one etched indelibly in the mind of
every German.

THEA

What are you proposing?

FRITZ

No playboy adventurers, industrial
bigwigs, scientists, inventors, or
spies.

THEA
Nonsense, there's always a hero.

FRITZ
The hero always wins yet they are
never as compelling to watch as those
they pursue.

THEA
Fritz, you can't make a film about a
serial murderer.

Fritz lowers the scissors, looks at her.

FRITZ
An ordinary man. An unforgivable
crime. We're all capable of that.

INT. NERO-FILM STUDIOS -- DAY

HIGH ANGLE of Fritz with three Nero-Film Investors:
FAT MAN, FEZ HAT, and PINCE-NEZ, sitting at a circular table.

FAT MAN
Is there a manuscript?

FRITZ
Thea and I are working on it now.

FEZ HAT
What's it about?

FRITZ
I prefer not to divulge any specifics
until the scenario is complete.

FAT MAN
Don't want to jinx it, aye?

FRITZ
I can tell you that the subject matter
is especially current.

FAT MAN
Current?

FRITZ
Especially.

PINCE NEZ
Good?

FRITZ
Frightfully.

FEZ HAT
Popular?

FRITZ
The motion picture will be vastly
influenced by sound.

FAT MAN
Sound?

PINCE NEZ
I hear F.W. is experimenting with sound.

FRITZ
Murnau.

FEZ HAT
I saw a talking picture called
"Blackmail" in London. Very challenging.
Young director named Hitchcock.

Prelap CLACKITY-CLACK of the typewriter --

INT. THEA'S STUDY -- LATER

-- Thea feverishly typing as Fritz paces outside her doorway.
Their usual routine.

The last key crashing like a punctuation mark, Thea turns
and looks at the WHITE ORCHIDS on her desk.

FRITZ
I thought you would like them?

THEA
We step on each other's feet.

FRITZ
And...?

THEA
(nodding to typewriter)
It's confused.

FRITZ
We'll work the story out.

THEA
It requires inquiry.

FRITZ
Inquiry, is...

THEA
Underlying truth.

FRITZ

I was going to say dangerous.

THEA

The ability to look from the inside.
Methods. Procedures. Pathology. A
synthesis of facts.

FRITZ

Do you understand what you're asking
me to do?

THEA

We need to see everything before us.

FRITZ

I'm only a plodding director. This
is completely out of my depth.
Besides, has it occurred to you how
long that will take?

THEA

Writers are patient. We watch. We
wait. We think. It's our one
virtue.

FRITZ

You're asking me to --

THEA

Shine a flashlight into dark places.

Thea leans over, smells the Orchids.

INT. FRONT DESK, ALEX -- LATER

Berlin's Police Headquarters at Alexanderplatz. Locals call
it the "Alex".

Wearing a heavy frock coat and holding a dripping umbrella,
Fritz is pleading with a DESK OFFICER --

DESK OFFICER

Chief Inspector Lohmann?

FRITZ

That's right. It's about the murders.

The Desk Officer makes a face like he just drank piss.

DESK OFFICER

Murders?

FRITZ

In the papers.

DESK OFFICER
You want to confess?

FRITZ
Confess?

DESK OFFICER
Over two hundred people have confessed
to the murders.

FRITZ
Why?

DESK OFFICER
The glory I suspect. And if it's
not a confession, it's neighbor
suspecting neighbor.

FRITZ
Listen, I'm doing research and if I
could see the files...

DESK OFFICER
Sure, down the street, try knocking
on the doors of Boim's School for
the deaf.

FRITZ
Look, Lohmann could vouch for me.

DESK OFFICER
I'm sure he could, but Lohmann isn't
here is he.

FRITZ
I think you know who I am.

DESK OFFICER
Only by reputation.
(beat)
Mind if I ask you a personal question?

FRITZ
All right.

DESK OFFICER
How did you do it?

FRITZ
What?

DESK OFFICER
C'mon, you were drunk. One thing
led to another --

FRITZ

You have me mixed up with someone.

DESK OFFICER

Goat shit, you're notorious.

FRITZ

Cruel rumors.

DESK OFFICER

Tell me, what did it feel like?

FRITZ

I'd like to speak to someone in authority.

DESK OFFICER

You don't want to say, sure I understand. But if it was me...

(lowering voice)

...if I had nailed Marlene Dietrich, I wouldn't leave out a single detail.

Realizing the influence he holds, Fritz leans in two inches from the Desk Officer's ear --

FRITZ

It's the way she used her mouth.

DESK OFFICER

Mouth, huh?

FRITZ

(sexually charged)

Had all her molars removed.

DESK OFFICER

I can see that.

FRITZ

And she sucked lemon wedges in between takes to keep the muscles tight.

The Desk Officer breathes heavily, aroused.

INT. SQUAD ROOM, 2ND FLOOR, ALEX -- MOMENTS LATER

Fritz bangs up the stairs leading to the second floor, giving way to full access of the departments inner-sanctum.

Tired policemen coming off their beats slump on benches.

A large MAP OF BERLIN on the wall is marked with murder sites and compass circles signaling combed areas.

A blown-up FINGERPRINT projected onto a large screen is being studied by GRAPHOLOGIST.

An OFFICER with a MASTER KEY on a chain around his neck approaches Fritz.

OFFICER
You here to see Lohmann's brain?

FRITZ
What?

OFFICER
File room, end of the hall. You got
ten minutes.

Key in grip, Fritz makes his way down the corridor until arriving at the iron grillwork door at the end. Unlocks it and goes inside. Jerks a string that lights a naked bulb.

The room, a dizzying box crowded with floor to ceiling files chronologically marked and dedicated to murderers.

FRITZ
(sotto)
Lohmann's brain.

Outside a freight train lumbers past the small window with a loud clatter, sending the files quaking.

Fritz locates a dossier flagged with a BLUE TAB. Hoists it down from the tall shelf.

CLOSE ON the classified file, case name: **Fritz Lang**

Fritz flips amongst the pages of his own file:

Fingerprints taken from the bathroom and gun.

Photographs of the crime scene. Lurid.

Fritz's heart sinks at the thought of all the information gathered on his wife's death. He flips to a page with a ruling marked: **"Suicide"**.

The thunderous ROAR from another freight train. The files in Lohmann's brain juddering violently.

INT. STUDY, FRITZ'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Fritz races into the room breathing heavily. Thea right behind him.

FRITZ
Put the light out.

THEA

Why?

FRITZ

Just do it.

Thea kills the overheads.

Frau Nussbaum shuffles in with a lit candle.

THEA

What did you do?

FRITZ

I stole it.

Fritz unbuttons his coat and removes a DOSSIER three inches thick hidden in his waistband.

CLOSE ON the classified file, case name: **MONSTER OF DUSSELDORF**

FRITZ

They'll shoot me. I'll get shot.

THEA

What's in there?

FRITZ

Detective notes, fingerprints, photographs -- things of that nature. Methods I've never seen before. They call it the new science. There must have been sixty volumes dedicated to the Monster alone. Files thick as thieves.

Thea gingerly opens the file --

FRITZ

Careful, I have to return that.

THEA

Where are the poison pen letters?

FRITZ

They keep all bodily evidence in another room, under heavy lock and key.

She turns a section in the file marked **CLASSIFIED**.

THEA

What is this?

FRITZ

A twenty-five page special bulletin on the case. Things not made public. The hunt for the killer goes as far as asking organized crime for their help.

FRAU NUSSBAUM

Herr Ott?

FRITZ

On the payroll.

THEA

Frau Nussbaum can get us to Ott.

FRITZ

I don't want any part of that.

THEA

Look at the file, no physical description, no clues. The police don't know anymore then we do about the killer.

FRITZ

They know he wears a hat.

THEA

That's every person in Berlin.

FRAU NUSSBAUM

The monster is among us.

The candle light casting long shadows on the wall.

EXT. GHETTO, ALEXANDERPLATZ -- NIGHT

Working class marketplace inhabited by thieves, grifters, smugglers and your average garden variety hoodlums. Streamers of fog twist along the menacing streets, smearing the streetlights.

Fritz's parks his Maybach at the curb and leans against a circular pillar with countless wanted posters.

HERR OTT, fur-collared overcoat and bowler, padlocks his produce stand for the night. He walks along the road carrying a wooden pole with affixed cages -- trashing feathers and cooing inside.

Fritz tails him into a twisting alley lined with tenements.

Herr Ott ducks into a alcoved cellar. Vanishes.

Fritz trains on the alcoved entry and spiral staircase descending into darkness. Considers it.

The sound of typing emerges.

(It should be noted, Thea's intermittent typing emerges through making of "M" sequence.)

CUT TO:

INT. THEA'S STUDY -- CONTINUOUS

Thea hits return and glances at the typed page.

THEA
Where did it lead?

FRITZ
An underworld lair known as
"The Crocodile Club".

THEA
What happened down there?

On edge, Fritz rummages through his notes.

FRITZ
I want to organize my thoughts first.

THEA
I understand.

Thea hits the carriage release and places a fresh sheet of onionskin in the typewriter. Looks back at Fritz --

THEA
Done procrastinating?

Fritz stares blankly at her.

Prelap sound of footsteps.

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. "THE CROCODILE CLUB" -- CONTINUOUS

Fritz descends the spiraling staircase and is swallowed up by darkness.

INT. "THE CROCODILE CLUB" -- CONTINUOUS

A beaded curtain clattering behind him, as Fritz enters the underworld hideout.

The room is a raw dark space. A taxidermied CROCODILE hangs above, its reptilian underside running the length of the room. But where is everybody?

Fritz walks down a long rickety underground passageway, eyeing a sump pump along the way.

A faint hum, growing louder.

Pips of sweat on Fritz's brow.

Coming to the end of the passageway, there's a puzzled look on Fritz's face.

Trains his eyes on a METAL DOOR WITH PRESSURIZED SPINLOCK.

INT. SEWER SYSTEM -- MOMENTS LATER

Fritz descends a steel ladder and sinks into a cavernous artery of gushing water spilling from conduits.

FRITZ

Ugh!

Holds a handkerchief to his nose, can't take the putrid stench.

Herr Ott appears out of the murk.

HERR OTT

Berlin's bowels. Runs right into the Blue Danube.

FRITZ

Herr Ott.

HERR OTT

Why are you shadowing me?

FRITZ

I just want to talk.

HERR OTT

Passport, birth certificate, or marriage reversion?

FRITZ

Sorry?

HERR OTT

Peculiar time to be a jew.

Fritz gets a closer look at the pole Herr Ott carries, the affixed cages occupied by pigeons.

HERR OTT

Follow me.

Treading ankle-deep water, Fritz stays close behind Herr Ott navigating the catacomb of twists and turns until they reach --

INT. UNDERGROUND MOB LAIR -- CONTINUOUS

A secret area teeming with surging hats, sticks, and fists forming a circle. Torches hanging from the walls.

CAMERA TRACKS down a long table lined with brass knuckles, hammers, bats, pipes, burglary tools, pickax, guns, knives.

Fritz tries getting a better view over the heads and through the gaps between the shoulders. Glimpses a BLOODY MAN restrained to a chair. Writing in pain. Eyes rolling.

UDO, a colossal Ukrainian finger-breaker with a tattoo of a second mouth on his chin, is administering the blows.

Udo turns to Fritz. Towering above him, the second mouth on his chin quaking in rage --

UDO

We got a copper here!

The angry mob swirls around Fritz. Fritz tries to answer, but the crowd is too loud --

Herr Ott hops up on some piling, addresses the crowd.

HERR OTT

WAIT! WAIT! WAIT! He's not a cop.

MOB MAN

How can you tell?

HERR OTT

Look how he's dressed -- like he's going to shul or a job at the bank.

Whistling, harrumphs, and laughter from around the room.

But Fritz can't take his eyes off the captive man --

FRITZ

That's him isn't it -- you've caught the Monster of Dusseldorf?

HERR OTT

No, him...he's a cop.

FRITZ

Cop?

HERR OTT
That canary said he would die for
the cause. The tragedy is that he
was right.

Udo slams a fist into the cop's kidney. He squeals in pain.

Herr Ott uncaps a pint bottle, offers it to Fritz.

HERR OTT
Drink.

FRITZ
No.

HERR OTT
Definitely not a cop.

More laughter from around the room.

Fritz seizes the bottle and takes a stiff pull.

HERR OTT
That was a bad idea.

Fritz spits it out, trying not to dry-heave.

HERR OTT
Your piss is going to burn like hell.

Fritz suddenly queasy, could faint.

UDO
You must be crazy coming here.

FRITZ
I wanted to see for myself.

Herr Ott releases the pigeons, they fly to a row of stalls.
Numbered bands on their legs corresponding with markers on a
large map of Berlin mounted on the wall.

HERR OTT
We have our own stool pigeons. They
work quite efficiently.

FRITZ
Look, I'm a film director. I'm
researching my next picture.

HERR OTT
Researching down here?

FRITZ
It's about you -- all of you.

MOB WOMAN

A picture about us.

FRITZ

Your efforts to catch the Monster of
Dusseldorf.

HERR OTT

Why should we trust YOU?

FRITZ

I know you're working with the police.
I've seen the records.

HERR OTT

There's an abyss between us and them.
This district is tethered by one
leash. They don't cooperate, but
they don't interfere.

FRITZ

(nodding to cop)

Then what happened to him?

HERR OTT

Sometimes they send a canary. And
it's not just the police.

FRITZ

The political police?

HERR OTT

Enough. We're done talking.

FRITZ

Why are you doing it?

UDO

To look after the little ones better.

FRITZ

Bullshit, what's in it for you?

HERR OTT

They go house to house, hedge to
hedge looking for the monster.
Disrupting our legitimate criminal
activities.

FRITZ

So you're going to catch him.

HERR OTT

We're going to kill him.

Udo grabs Fritz, digs his wallet out of his coat and hands it to Herr Ott.

FRITZ
Wait, I need that.

UDO
Not here you don't.

FRITZ
Maybe we can help each other.

HERR OTT
Whatever you spit -- we get a cut.

FRITZ
Cut?

HERR OTT
Of your motion picture.

FRITZ
No, I don't think that's a good --

Herr Ott fishes through the wallet, finding Fritz's identification card.

HERR OTT
We get a cut or you get cut. Get it
Fritz Lang from One One Charlottenburg
Lane?

FRITZ
I recognize a good turn when I hear
one.

HERR OTT
You remember the way outta here?

FRITZ
Big crocodile.

HERR OTT
There are no crocodiles in Berlin.

FRITZ
I saw it.

HERR OTT
Good, because now that you saw it,
you need to forget it.

Udo shoots his fist straight into Fritz's face.

THWACK.

Everything goes PITCH BLACK.

EXT. GHETTO, ALEXANDERPLATZ -- DAWN

Fritz out cold by a dumpster. Disheveled. Unshaven. He opens his eyes groggily. Disoriented. Eyes blurry.

Checks his coat and finds his empty wallet, keys, and monocle still inside. As he puts the monocle in place -- Lohmann comes into view, looming above him.

FRITZ
Lohmann, what are you doing here?

LOHMANN
You were in my brain.

FRITZ
Jesus, it's morning already?

LOHMANN
What are you doing in my brain, Lang?

FRITZ
Looking at the reports.

LOHMANN
Why?

FRITZ
I'm writ--

LOHMANN
What are you writing -- your confession?

FRITZ
It's about the monster.

LOHMANN
What happened to your face?

FRITZ
Uh,...nothing.

Fritz daubs blood from his mouth with a handkerchief.

LOHMANN
They talked to you?

FRITZ
Sure.

LOHMANN
What did you promise them?

FRITZ

The Alex is two blocks south, in case you've lost your way.

LOHMANN

I found you didn't I.

FRITZ

Look, it's a good story. An ordinary man. An unspeakable crime.

LOHMANN

Well we're all capable of that.

FRITZ

Don't speak for me, Lohmann.

LOHMANN

(sneering)

"I think it's the best work I've ever done."

FRITZ

Stop it.

LOHMANN

Those are confidential police records, you shit. I should drag you down to the Alex right now.

FRITZ

I saw my file, Lohmann. It had a **BIG BLUE STAMP** on the jacket.

LOHMANN

Yeah, you like that -- I got a **BIG RED STAMP** just like it.

FRITZ

It's over, all right. I don't know why you keep digging it up.

LOHMANN

It's digging itself up.

They hear approaching sirens.

LOHMANN

C'mon, you better come with me.

FRITZ

Why would I do that?

LOHMANN

The monster struck again last night.

FRITZ
Last night?

LOHMANN
Grafenberger Woods.

FRITZ
That's not far from here.

LOHMANN
Why pay for the matinee if you can
see it free, huh Lang?

As Lohmann heads out --

FRITZ
Wait, I have a car.

LOHMANN
Should have taken the train.

Lohmann cocks his head in the direction of Fritz's Maybach --
completely stripped and burning in the street.

FRITZ
Oh, Jesus.

Lohmann keeps walking.

Fritz hesitates, unsure, then runs to catch up to him.

EXT. COURTYARD, TENEMENT BLOCK -- MOMENTS LATER

A group of SCHOOLCHILDREN standing in a circle, are playing
a game and chanting in high-pitched voices --

CHILDREN SINGING
(in German)
*"Just you wait, it won't be long.
The man in black will soon be here
with his cleaver's blade so true.
He'll make mincemeat out of you".*

Fritz and Lohmann walk past a row of tenements. Signs posted
along the street: **"Wer ist der Morder? 10,000 Marks Reward"**

FRITZ
(to Lohmann)
Do you hear that awful song they're
singing.

LOHMANN
As long as they're singing, we know
they're still there.

A PREGNANT HAUSFRAU hanging washing out to dry from a high story balcony, yells down --

PREGNANT HAUSFRAU
Elsie! Elsie!

LITTLE ELSIE BECKMANN looks up to the window --

ELSIE
Ma'am?

PREGNANT HAUSFRAU
You children should be at home.

ELSIE
Yes, ma'am.

As Elsie turns, she spots Fritz nearing --

ELSIE
It's the monster! It's the monster!

The children all SCREAM and take flight.

FRITZ
(to Lohmann)
Why are they behaving like that?

LOHMANN
Children are sensitives.

FRITZ
Sensitives?

LOHMANN
To the diabolic. We've done tests.

FRITZ
When are you planning on bringing this out to the public.

LOHMANN
All in good time, Lang.

SMASH! SMASH! SMASH! From the Underwood.

CUT TO:

INT. THEA STUDY -- DAY

The typewriter keys striking against the pulp paper.

THEA
Fantastic. Keep going.

Fritz yells back from the adjoining office.

FRITZ (O.S.)
Lets move on to the crime scene.

THEA
Where?

FRITZ (O.S.)
Behind a church in Grafenberger Woods.

THEA
God, what was it like? Describe it.

FRITZ (O.S.)
Horrible. The crime scene was like
a haunted fairy tale. "Haunted fairy
tale" -- that's good, put that in.

THEA
It's a tad dramatic.

Editing pages with his trademark BLUE PENCIL, Fritz pauses.

FRITZ
You think?

THEA
No, it's good. I'm putting it in.

She types it. Fritz appears in the doorway.

FRITZ
Scratch that. The violence should
be implied never seen.

Thea rolls the paper up a few lines -- looks.

She aptly rips the paper out of the carriage.

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. GRAFENBERGER WOODS -- LATER

Tree branches throw distorted shadows. A gothic style church
can be seen in the distance.

A knot of police surround the pallid corpse of a young woman
slain in the woods behind the church. The victims LEFT HAND
missing, severed above the wrist.

Lohmann and Fritz observe the scene from a few yards away.

LOHMANN
Stay here. Don't touch anything.

Lohmann marches past the police officers with authority.
Begins conducting his own investigation.

Veiled behind trees, Fritz strains to see, but TWO OFFICERS
securing the periphery block his view.

OFFICER ONE
Butchered.

OFFICER TWO
Who found her?

OFFICER ONE
Priest from the church.

OFFICER TWO
Someone talk to him?

OFFICER ONE
He's a servant of God, half-wit.

OFFICER TWO
I'd like to go back to bed.

OFFICER ONE
What number is this?

OFFICER TWO
Twenty two.

FRITZ (O.S.)
Twenty three.

Fritz scowls at his idiocy, slowly withdrawals.

OFFICER ONE
Twenty three?

OFFICER TWO
I didn't say anything.

Fritz wanders through the thick tangle of undergrowth. Leans
against a tree and relieves himself. Herr Ott was right, it
burns like hell.

Hears something FLAPPING in the breeze in the wooded footpath.

Eyes tired and bloodshot, he squats down for a closer look.
A swath of paper weighted by the victims SEVERED HAND, the
WEDDING BAND on her finger glitters in the sun.

He looks sharply around, alone.

FRITZ'S POV: It's a POISON PEN LETTER from the Monster of
Dusseldorf scribbled in BLUE PENCIL.

Fritz rises. Lohmann looming behind him.

LOHMANN
Trust me, you don't want to get inside
of that head.

FRITZ
Lohmann! I didn't touch it.

LOHMANN
It was just sitting here in the open
like a grave marker.

FRITZ
I swear, I didn't touch it.

LOHMANN
Did you read it?

Fritz anxiously fussing with his monocle.

FRITZ
What kind of animal does that?

LOHMANN
He stalks little girls like hunters
stalk elk over mountains.

FRITZ
Any suspects?

LOHMANN
Suspect everyone.

Lohmann palms the poison pen letter.

FRITZ
Who knows where it can lead.

LOHMANN
System in place at the Alex, it might
as well disappear into a chasm.

FRITZ
What do you mean? They can run
fingerprints and...

LOHMANN
It should be analyzed properly.

FRITZ
Right.

LOHMANN
I'll do the dirty work for you.

FRITZ
What?

LOHMANN
Take it.

FRITZ
Me?

LOHMANN
Take it.

FRITZ
Lohmann?

LOHMANN
You want to know the nature of evil,
here.

Lohmann thrusts the poison pen letter into his palm.

FRITZ
How about you, don't you want to
know the nature of evil?

LOHMANN
No, because then I'd be out of a
job.

FRITZ
Lohmann...

LOHMANN
Get out of here, Lang.

Fritz's mouth hangs open.

Lohmann clomps away, vanishing into the dense woods.

INT. NERO-FILM STUDIOS -- DAY

HIGH ANGLE of Fritz with the three Nero-Film investors sitting
at a circular table arguing production details.

FAT MAN
Do we have a manuscript?

FRITZ
It's near completion.

FEZ HAT
Why is it taking so long?

FRITZ

Thea and I are studying our subject matter in detail. Avoiding all the grotesque caricatures in lesser films. An accurate psychological profile of the killer is paramount.

PINCE NEZ

What's the name of your character?

FRITZ

Hans Beckert.

FAT MAN

Hans Beckert? That's the name of a balloon vender, bus driver, butcher. Doktor Mabuse, Rotwang, the Thin Man -- that's a name.

FRITZ

It's important that everything look and sound realistic. In fact, I'd like to employ real criminals for the catacomb finale scene.

FAT MAN

Real criminals?

FEZ HAT

How can we entice a star of any caliber when you're asking them to work with real criminals?

PINCE NEZ

No pressure, but Klein-Rogge would be perfect.

FRITZ

Klein-Rogge?

FAT MAN

What's wrong with Klein-Rogge?

PINCE NEZ

Just shot a pirate picture in Norway.

FAT MAN

It's not because he was married to your wife?

Fritz clears his throat.

FRITZ

Hans Beckert needs to be a different. Someone who fits snugly inside the psyche, like a Russian nesting doll.

EXT. GRAND DUCAL LUNATIC ASYLUM -- DAY

Tall iron security fences surround a sinister circular facility with prison windows.

INT. GRAND DUCAL LUNATIC ASYLUM -- DAY

A shabby pisshole with hard edges, harsher shadows.

Inmates spew jeers and hurl spit from their cells as a NURSE on shift escorts Fritz down the main corridor.

INT. DOKTOR WERBEL'S OFFICE -- CONTINUOUS

The nurse gently raps on the door, enters with Lang. Running water can be heard from the adjoining washroom.

NURSE
Doktor Werbel?

DOKTOR WERBEL (O.S.)
Yes?

NURSE
Mr. Lang to see you, sir.

FRITZ
I appreciate you seeing me on such short notice, Doktor Werbel.

DOKTOR WERBEL (O.S.)
Yes, I'll be right with you Mr. Lang.

The nurse shows Fritz a chair, leaves.

Fritz waits for the doctor, looking around the room -- bookshelves crowded with psychiatric tomes, lobotomy instruments, and anatomical brains in formaldehyde.

Something catches Fritz's eye -- a steel door with a diamond shaped observation window bored into the wall.

He peers inside the window -- a padded cell for patients in between sessions.

Suddenly a HAND fills the glass. Fritz draws back.

Frantic POUNDING on the door. The hinges RATTLING.

A PATIENT locked inside, caged like a wild animal.

Muffled words emanate from the thick door. Fritz moves closer trying to make them out --

CAGED PATIENT

(faint)

Please help me. Hurry get the --

Suddenly a metal plate slides across, closing off the window. Fritz cocks his head to see -- DOKTOR WERBEL, unfazed, buttoning a crisp white lab coat.

DOKTOR WERBEL

Sorry about the interruption.
Sedative seems to be wearing off.

FRITZ

Difficult, I imagine.

DOKTOR WERBEL

Patient became highly agitated during
our session. Needed restraining.
It's quite common after the procedure.

FRITZ

Procedure?

DOKTOR WERBEL

Please, make yourself comfortable,
Mr. Lang.

FRITZ

Yes, thank you.

DOKTOR WERBEL

Leucotomy. Greek for cut/slice.
Severing the connections to and from
the prefrontal cortex. The Americans
refer to it as Lobotomy.

Bloody surgical instruments are lying on a metal tray.

FRITZ

Does it change them?

Doktor Werbel studies Fritz curiously, surprised by the sincerity of the question.

DOKTOR WERBEL

It's a commonly used treatment in a
wide range of mental illnesses,
including schizophrenia, clinical
depression, anxiety disorders.

FRITZ

What's he being treated for?

DOKTOR WERBEL

Poisoned his wife and four children then ground up their remains. Hungry customers believed they were eating pork, when they frequented his hot-dog stand near the train station.

FRITZ

His entire family?

DOKTOR WERBEL

They deserved it.

FRITZ

Excuse me?

DOKTOR WERBEL

They are Satan and his dominion. At least in his mind.

FRITZ

What possesses a man to do that, Doktor?

DOKTOR WERBEL

In my experience, it's the critical moment between the intention and the act itself. The difference between an impulse and a grave if not fatal error. Why did you say you were here?

FRITZ

The Monster of Dusseldorf murders.

DOKTOR WERBEL

Right.

(beat)

Did you serve, Mr. Lang?

Fritz stiffens, startled by the question.

FRITZ

Yes, why do you ask?

DOKTOR WERBEL

The aftermath of this war has been a particularly fertile breeding ground for serial homicide strains.

FRITZ

Strains?

DOKTOR WERBEL

Haarmann, Denk, and Grobmann most notably in the last decade. Have you killed someone?

FRITZ

What, no.

DOKTOR WERBEL

It's nothing to be ashamed of, anyone with a gun can kill someone in the service of one's country.

FRITZ

They're clearly deranged.

DOKTOR WERBEL

Actually, killers are usually not psychotic and may appear to be quite normal and often charming.

(beat)

Every human mind harbors a latent compulsion to murder. Guilt and innocence walk a fine line. We are all potential killers needing only the flick of a mental trigger to send us before a jury of our peers.

FRITZ

Do you mind if I show you something, Doktor.

Fritz removes the POISON PEN letter from his pocket.

FRITZ

I understand that you specialize in handwriting analysis. This is a letter from the *Monster of Dusseldorf* himself.

DOKTOR WERBEL

How did you obtain it?

FRITZ

Trust me, it comes from high up.

DOKTOR WERBEL

Whatever I say stays in this room.

THEA (V.O.)

Those were his words?

CUT TO:

INT. FRITZ'S HOUSE, STUDY -- AFTERNOON

Thea enters for her study, rubbing her tired fingers.

THEA

"Whatever I say stays in this room"?

FRITZ

Yes.

Frau Nussbaum shuffles in with a tray of tea and sandwiches.

THEA

What are you having?

FRITZ

Turkey on rye.

FRAU NUSSBAUM

Hardly believe what I found this morning in the garden patch.

THEA

The suspense is killing me.

FRAU NUSSBAUM

My own knitting needles, sticking out of the geraniums like Excalibar's sword.

Mumbling as she shuffles out of the room --

FRAU NUSSBAUM

Strange goings on in the house of the dead.

FRITZ

What is she talking about?

THEA

Frau Nussbaum is convinced that the house is haunted. Last week she found her reading glasses on the bridge.

FRITZ

The bridge --

THEA

-- of her nose.

(smiles)

Mustard?

FRITZ

Yes.

THEA

The Doktor didn't ask you where you got the poison pen letter?

FRITZ

No.

THEA
He doesn't think you wrote it?

FRITZ
I wrote it...?

THEA
Well, did you?

FRITZ
No, of course not.

Refining the typed manuscript with his BLUE PENCIL, Fritz turns over the last page.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. DOKTOR WERBEL'S OFFICE -- CONTINUOUS

Using a magnifier, Doktor Werbel considers the poison pen letter written in BLUE PENCIL, with a keen medical eye.

DOKTOR WERBEL
Fractured personality. Feelings of inadequacy. Humiliation stemming from childhood. Pressures of socioeconomic status. By his own admission, he derives heightened sexual gratification by the conquest of woman, but he feels trapped by them as well.
(beat)
Most likely has a cultivated exterior. Dresses impeccably, reads widely, behaves properly in civilization.

FRITZ
A two natured human being.

DOKTOR WERBEL
Estranged to himself. Disconnected from his deeds. Losing touch with the human side.

FRITZ
How do you see it, Doktor?

DOKTOR WERBEL
The repressed looping. The word choice. The blue pencil. It's like looking through the eye-piece of a microscope, the tangled mind exposed, laid flat on the slide.

Doktor Werbel tilts a scrutinizing eye at Fritz.

DOKTOR WERBEL
It's your handwriting, isn't it?

Fritz stiffens.

FRITZ
What, no.

DOKTOR WERBEL
Takes one of like mind to do the
unthinkable.

FRITZ
You've misunderstood my purpose.

DOKTOR WERBEL
You think it's easy being committed
instead of taking the big ax?

FRITZ
I'm not a patient here.

DOKTOR WERBEL
Then who are you?

Fritz thinks hard about the question. His concentration
snaps off with the sound of a RING!

On the desk a black telephone with no dial. Doktor Werbel
hesitates, then--

DOKTOR WERBEL
(into phone)
Yes.

Long beat. He hangs it up.

DOKTOR WERBEL
Seems a resident of our institute is
missing.

FRITZ
Missing?

DOKTOR WERBEL
I need to end our meeting now.

Doktor Werbel escorts Fritz out of the office.

TWO ORDERLIES race up the corridor behind Doktor Werbel,
tussling him to the ground.

PATIENTS holler from their cells, aroused by the commotion.

The nurse hurries into Doktor Werbel's office, slides the
steel plate away from the diamond shaped observation window.

NURSE
Ohmygod, Doktor Werbel!

She unlocks the steel door and liberates him.

NURSE
Doktor Werbel, are you all right?

CLOSE ON Fritz through the staggering chaos as he comprehends that the bona fide Doktor Werbel was locked inside the padded cell. Fritz communing the entire time with a madman who turned his family into sausages.

CUT TO:

INT. THEA'S STUDY -- DAY

Thea at the Underwood, takes a finished page out of the carriage and places it face down on the stack to her right. Feeds in a new page. Begins typing --

EXTREME CLOSE SHOT: ONIONSKIN PAPER

The keys crashing down to form the words:

THE MURDERER AMONG US

She rips the paper out of the carriage. Brings it into Fritz, who affixes his monocle in anticipation.

As she hands it over --

THEA
Darn, it smudged.

EXTREME CLOSE SHOT FRITZ'S POV:

The ink on the **"M"** in the word **MURDERER** bleeding, misshapen.

Fritz bewitched by the distorted letter, can't take his eyes off it.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM -- EVENING

Fritz at the mirror, buttoning a crisp white tuxedo shirt.

Thea comes up behind him, helping him with his bow tie. Evening dress sparkling, she's never looked more radiant.

He kisses her tenderly. Their fingers mingling together. He's never been more in love than this fleeting moment.

INT. LOBBY, FRIEDRICHSTADT-PALAST THEATER -- NIGHT

Booming down on the opening night gala reception for the theatrical production of "Spring Awakening".

Fritz and Thea are with a group of patrons discussing current events. DR. JOSEPH GOEBBELS joins them.

THEA

Fritz, I'd like to introduce you to
Dr. Paul Joseph Goebbels.

As they shake hands --

GOEBBELS

Pleasure.

FRITZ

Likewise. A Doctor...?

GOEBBELS

I did my doctoral thesis on 18th
century romantic literature.

Fritz glances his NAZI ARMBAND.

FRITZ

Age of Enlightenment.

GOEBBELS

My interests in the arts have taken
root in another direction.

FRITZ

Politics.

GOEBBELS

Adolf Hitler and I are big fans.
The magistery of "Metropolis" caused
the Fuhrer to break down and weep.
He said and I quote: "Here is a man
who will give us great Nazi films!"

Fritz stunned, nearly speechless.

FRITZ

You humble me.

(beat)

Excuse me, I could do with a drink.

GOEBBELS

The bar's over there.

FRITZ

I can find my way.

Fritz heads for the bar, could vomit.

Runs into his old chum Joe May nursing a Martini.

FRITZ
Joe May, been awhile.

JOE MAY
This is a historic occasion, Fritz
and Thea are the toast of the town.

FRITZ
You saw the pictures?

JOE MAY
Afraid I don't get out as often as I
would like these days.

FRITZ
You want to insult me, fair enough.
But you can't envy me at the same
time.

Joe May shrugs, downs his drink.

JOE MAY
Recently came into an authenticated
armoire from the Capethian dynasty.

FRITZ
Thinking of leaving Berlin?

JOE MAY
Thirty thousands marks.

FRITZ
Why the reduction?

JOE MAY
Too big to smuggle out.

FRITZ
Who is he?

Joe May grins good-naturedly.

JOE MAY
Bit personal.

FRITZ
Over there, with my wife.

Joe May flicks his gaze to Thea now flanked by three tuxedos:
Rudolf Klein-Rogge, Dr. Joseph Goebbels, and a dashing young
INDIAN GENTLEMAN.

JOE MAY

Armband is Dr. Paul Joseph Goebbels,
soon to be appointed Reich Minister of
Public Enlightenment and Propaganda.
And one of Adolf Hitler's closest
associates.

FRITZ

We've been introduced.

JOE MAY

You know Klein-Rogge, rumor has it
he's slamming morphine with a cabaret
dancer.

Thea reaches out and touches the Indian Gentleman's hand.
Fritz's lips forming a straight line.

JOE MAY

Ayi Tendulkar. Doctor from India.

FRITZ

(sotto)
India.

JOE MAY

He beds the wives of influential
Berliners. They take pleasure in
sleeping with foreigners, it's like
travel: Candlelit dinners. Little
presents. Clean sheets.

FRITZ

You're enjoying this?

JOE MAY

The truth tortures.

FRITZ

At last, we're getting somewhere.

JOE MAY

They're *greifers*.

FRITZ

Greifers?

JOE MAY

Grabbers of Jews.

(beat)

It's very simple. Either you're
with them or you're not. And your
wife is more Prussian than you're
monocle.

The theater bell rings signaling it's time to take their seats.

FRITZ
I'll come see the armoire.

JOE MAY
Be careful, Goebbels stalks Jews
like hunters stalk deer over the
mountains. And Thea Von Harbou is a
ten point antlered beauty.

Fritz's eyes widen, realizing that Joe May's words echo
Lohmann's --

FRITZ
What did you say?

-- but Joe May's already heading inside the auditorium with
the other patrons.

INT. AUDITORIUM, FRIEDRICHSTADT-PALAST -- LATER

Well into the dreadful play.

ON STAGE: The ACTOR delivering Moritz's monologue is a short
odious piglet of a man with a moon-shaped face, sad bulging
eyes, and low pitched purr of a voice.

ACTOR PLAYING MORITZ
It's as if I were hearing my dead
Grandmother tell the story of the
Queen without a head. She was a
perfectly beautiful queen, fair as
the sun, lovelier than all the maidens
in the land, only she had come into
the world, alas! Without a head.

Laughter from the audience. The actor throwing off more
nervous energy than a caged snake.

Fritz and Thea watch from their box seats in the balcony.

Fritz scans the audience with opera glasses. Locates Goebbels
in the Orchestra section scribbling in a notebook with a
NAZI SWASTIKA on its cover. Ayi Tendulkar seated next to
him.

Fritz looks back at Thea. Suspicious. Pained.

Heckles from the audience. The actor stammers, it clearly
throws him off.

ACTOR PLAYING MORITZ
Err...err...err confounded rot! I
haven't been able to get the Headless
Queen out of my head!

The actor moves to the top of the proscenium arch. A loud chorus of BOOS from the audience.

Fritz lingers on the actor, sympathizing with the vile creature on stage, drawn to him. He glances at the playbill, Moritz played by: **Peter Lorre**.

INT. BACKSTAGE (INTERMISSION) -- LATER

Stage hands, actors, understudies, in the wings.

Fritz finds Peter Lorre's name on a door, enters.

INT. DRESSING ROOM, BACKSTAGE -- CONTINUOUS

A box of exposed hot water pipes and cracked plaster.

In costume, hair drawn back tightly to fit under a wig cap, PETER LORRE is seated at the dressing table. Bottle of Scotch on the table nearly empty.

PETER LORRE

Do you have the tabasco sauce?

FRITZ

No.

PETER LORRE

Did they send you to fire me?

FRITZ

What, no.

PETER LORRE

It's still early.

FRITZ

I'm a director.

PETER LORRE

Plays?

FRITZ

Motion pictures. That's why I'm here, I have a role looming.

PETER LORRE

Loooooooooming?

FRITZ

I'd like to offer the role to you.

PETER LORRE
 Err...err...err...me?
 (suspicious)
 What kind of part?

FRITZ
 Leading part.

PETER LORRE
 Is this a joke?

FRITZ
 Mr. Lorre, I'm offering you the
 opportunity to act in a film.

PETER LORRE
 Err...err...err have you seen the
 show tonight?

FRITZ
 I'm quite a fan.

PETER LORRE
 You heard them out there -- their
 reaction?

FRITZ
 You provoked them. Nobody else could
 have played that role. It would be
 like doing *Macbeth* without *Macbeth*.

PETER LORRE
 It never occurred to me that my puss
 could be photographed.

A STAGEHAND enters with a bottle.

STAGEHAND
 Here's the Tabasco, Mr. Lorre.

PETER LORRE
 Err...err...err...bring it here.

Lorre dabs the Tabasco sauce on two cotton balls, places
 them on his puffy froggy-eyes.

STAGE HAND
 It's how he gets into character.

FRITZ
 Outstanding.

INT. FRITZ'S STUDY -- LATE NIGHT

Fritz at his desk contemplating production design drawings, storyboards, and script pages for "M". The pages crowded with his blue-penciled notations.

He reaches for across the desk for one of his signature pencils, but the holder is empty. He angrily brushes the work aside.

The telephone on Fritz desk rings. He answers.

FRITZ

(phone)

Hello.

LOHMANN (O.S.)

Quite a meat grinder you're caught in, Lang. Couldn't pen a better scenario if you tried.

FRITZ

(phone)

Lohmann.

Fritz goes to the window, spots Lohmann in a TELEPHONE KIOSK across the street.

Meanwhile downstairs...

KITCHEN

Frau Nussbaum preparing a tea tray when she encounters PENCIL SHAVINGS on the counter -- smudging her finger tips BLUE.

Overhearing bits of conversation upstairs, she gingerly picks up the downstairs telephone. Eavesdrops on Fritz's conversation while she retrieves the tea tin from the cabinet.

She pulls off the tin lid and to her shock, finds a heap of BLUE PENCILS inside, while simultaneously grasping that Fritz's voice is the ONLY VOICE on the other line.

FRITZ'S STUDY

Fritz eyes Thea's locked study door as Lohmann speaks.

LOHMANN (O.S.)

You didn't go to the after party.
She must me wondering where you are?

FRITZ

(phone)

I had a headache.

LOHMANN (O.S.)
 Right. Her dance card is probably
 full anyway.

FRITZ
 (phone)
 Leave it.

LOHMANN (O.S.)
 Don't say you didn't see it coming.

Fritz takes a heavy breath, ready to talk --

FRITZ
 (phone)
 Lohmann wait, don't hang up,
 I want to talk --

CLICK.

Fritz looks out the window, the telephone kiosk now empty.
 He slams the phone down.

FRITZ
 Bastard!

Fritz removes a SWITCHBLADE from his top drawer. Goes to
 Thea's door, wedges the blade into the lock.

SNAP.

Fritz stands in silence at threshold of her inner sanctum.
 Turns on the lights. Hesitates before he steps inside.

THEA'S STUDY

Fritz topples drawers, leafs through personal journals and
 private letters, searching for traces of an affair. Sickened
 by his own behavior, he stops. Then his eyes lock on the
 bookshelf with Thea's published novels.

He removes one book in particular, opens a cover --

Blossoming Lotus written by Thea von Harbou.

Below it reads -- ***For A.T.***

FRITZ
 (sotto)
 A. T. -- Ayi Tendulkar

He stares at it, bewildered. Stunned. Confused.

Turns to see Thea now standing in the doorway, still dressed
 in her gown.

THEA
How's your headache?

FRITZ
Worse.

THEA
I left the party. I was concerned
about you.

FRITZ
Concern for me?

THEA
Did you find what you were looking for?

FRITZ
I wanted answers.

THEA
By breaking in and devouring my
personal papers like Silverfish?

FRITZ
You've been with him?

THEA
The truth has a price, Fritz.

FRITZ
Has it been the entire time?

THEA
Only when I needed it to be.

FRITZ
That's it -- that's all you have to
say to me?

THEA
My life is my own.

FRITZ
You're my wife!

THEA
You made sure of that.

FRITZ
I sacrificed everything for you.

THEA
I never asked you to.

FRITZ

Is this how it's going to be --
coming at each other guns blazing?

THEA

The difference is mine isn't loaded.

He backs her up against the window. She's paralyzed.

FRITZ

You have no idea what I'm capable of.

THEA

Just like that -- like you blue
penciled your first wife out of the
final draft?

FRITZ

Did you ever love me?

THEA

I do still --

Fritz catches his distorted reflection in the window.

THEA

-- even when the monsters are close.

Fritz lets her go. Immobilized, he drifts to the floor.

EXT. AIRFIELD -- DAY

Large industrial hangar along the outskirts of Berlin.

INT. ZEPPELIN HANGAR -- CONTINUOUS

The structure housing a sleekly designed AIRSHIP with a
prominent Nazi Swastika symbol on its fin.

Fritz and the Nero-Film Investors stride past the massive
rudder as they survey the space as a potential stage.

The interior MORPHING into an exterior tenement building.

INT. MURDERER'S ROOM, TENEMENT BUILDING -- NIGHT

The MURDERER sits at a windowsill, his back to us, writing a
poison pen letter. As we slowly PUSH IN on his back --

-- Peter Lorre, dressed in Hans Beckert's trademark overcoat,
spins around, stares directly into the lens and says --

PETER LORRE
I can't do it.

A scaffold above leads to Fritz, seated beside a camera on tripod operated by WAGNER, the photographer.

FRITZ
Cut! Cut! Cut!

PULL BACK to reveal the tenement building is a set for "M".

INT. "M" SET, NERO-FILM STUDIO -- MOMENTS LATER

Peter Lorre and Fritz standing off to the side near wardrobe and props.

PETER LORRE
I can't do it.

FRITZ
It's a black box. Think of it as
the audience.

PETER LORRE
No, I can't --

FRITZ
What?

PETER LORRE
Whistle. I can't whistle.

FRITZ
You never said anything.

PETER LORRE
You never asked.

FRITZ
Don't be ridiculous, put your lips
together like this --

Fritz whistles a few bars of the Gynt tune.

Peter Lorre blows and blows, nothing but air.

FRITZ
Stop! It's torture. You could
inflate the Graf Zeppelin with all
that hot air.

PETER LORRE
I'm sorry, Fritzzy.

FRITZ

Actors fence, ride horses, charm snakes, but you can't whistle.

PETER LORRE

I err...err...err...fence.

FRITZ

Nevermind, just stand on your mark and try saying your line without spitting.

PETER LORRE

(stirred)

Err...err...you never said I would be playing a compulsive murderer of children.

FRITZ

It's a sympathetic role.

PETER LORRE

Sympathetic? Rape. Murder.

FRITZ

It's a crime which he resents very much afterwards.

PETER LORRE

My heart's bleeding for him, but I'm the one who has to get under the skin of a psychopath.

FRITZ

Hans Beckert is a murderer, Peter Lorre is a matinee idol.

PETER LORRE

I don't know if I can do it.

FRITZ

Pathos. Catharsis. Channel it.

Peter, issuing one of his hesitant smiles.

PETER LORRE

I could have spent the morning tending to my roses.

Fritz looks around to the crew, angrily announces --

FRITZ

That's an hour for lunch.

Peter Lorre scuttles off to his trailer. Fritz waves a production assistant over.

FRITZ

Keep him docile. No matter what it takes. I can't afford to lose the day.

Production designers KARL VOLLBRECHT and EMIL HASLER approach.

KARL

We looked over your renderings for the final scene.

FRITZ

It's important that the kangaroo court look absolutely authentic, you understand.

EMIL

I'll draw up some blueprints.

Fritz spots something from the corner of his eye --

FRITZ

Lohmann.

He marches across the stage towards Lohmann, now camouflaged behind a cookaloris.

FRITZ

What the hell are you doing here?

A MAN with similar stature to Lohmann, cowers.

FRITZ

You're not Lohmann.

MAN

I didn't mean to inter --

FRITZ

Did Lohmann send you?

MAN

Lohmann?

FRITZ

What do you want?

MAN

Nothing, sir.

FRITZ

Who let you in here, huh?

MAN

We haven't worked together. I'm Adolf Jansen your sound --

FRITZ

Sound?

MAN

Recordist, sir.

PETER LORRE'S DRESSING ROOM

Peter Lorre makes terrible faces in the mirror trying to get into character.

KNOCK at the door.

PETER LORRE

Err...err, yes --

A MAN with a MEDICINE BAG enters.

PETER LORRE

I didn't ask for a physician.

MAN

I'm not a physician.

He opens the bag and removes a syringe and vile of MORPHINE.

PETER LORRE

Who are you?

MAN

The gardener.

He fills the syringe with fluid and injects the needle in Peter Lorre's arm vein.

PETER LORRE

What are you doing!

THE GARDENER

Tending to the roses.

Peter Lorre's head lolls back. His eyelids flutter and then amplify to unveil blossoming irises.

His pupil morphing into a hypnotic spinning spirals --

INT. "M" SET, NERO-FILM STUDIO -- LATER

-- PULL OUT to reveal that the hypnotic spinning spiral is a display hanging in a BOOKSHOP window next to a huge arrow phallicly bobbing up and down.

A YOUNG GIRL stares, fascinated by the continual motion.

The blood-thirsty Hans Beckert/Peter Lorre sets off after the vulnerable girl.

The girl runs to her mother. We FOLLOW them along the pavement, arms around each other, as they pass the Hans Beckert, who has ducked inside the bookshop doorway.

Eyes drooping, mouth hanging open, Hans Beckert sways in a nervous fit. Puts his hands on his chest, nervously scratching them.

Fritz next to the camera.

FRITZ

Cut!

(beat)

That was brilliant, Peter.

PETER LORRE

You really liked it, Fritzzy.

FRITZ

Absolutely believable.

Peter Lorre's not acting, he's doped up. Staggering away --

PETER LORRE

By the pricking of my thumbs,
something wicked this way comes.

FRITZ

Macbeth.

PETER LORRE

Err...err...Macbeth.

Fritz waves Wagner over.

FRITZ

Get the film to the lab. I want to
see rushes first thing tomorrow.

INT. "M" SET, NERO-FILM STUDIO -- LATER

Most of the crew have wrapped. Fritz in front of a microphone recording the Gynt whistle himself (Peter Lorre's famous whistle in "M").

BOOM OPERATOR wearing headphones, listens to a crude wireless transmitter, trying to stay awake. His eyes snap open.

BOOM OPERATOR

They caught him. They caught him!

He tunes the antenna, turns up the crackling volume --

RADIO NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)
 This is a special announcement from
 Radio Berlin: the Monster of Dusseldorf
 has been apprehended. The murderer,
 identified as 48 year-old Peter Kurten,
 has confessed to 79 offenses including
 sex crimes and murders and if found
 guilty will be sentenced to death by
 guillotine. Kurten told police that
 he urged his wife to turn him in for
 the reward money. He was according to
 friends, a most unlikely murderer. We
 repeat...

The blood drains from Fritz's face.

EXT. PRISON, ALEXANDERPLATZ -- DAY

Cold stratum of guard towers and well-fortified gates.

A throng of citizens surround a prison bus stopped outside
 the iron-barred entrance. Fritz amongst them, vacillating
 in the tumultuous motion.

The bus door opens and a PRISON GUARD shouts --

PRISON GUARD
 Prisoner eins-sieben-null-null-eins.

PETER KURTEN (Monster of Dusseldorf), meek and hardly
 dangerous looking, is ushered off the bus by flanking guards
 and paraded along the crowd.

Shackled to steel collar and chains, Kurten is forced to
 take baby steps, flinching under the barrage of shouts and
 jeers. Above, tower guards CLACK and train their rifles.

Fritz is pulled along by the current of the crowd, almost
 dragging him under, until cresting right in front of Kurten.
 Fritz close to his ear, discreetly mutters --

FRITZ
 How do you live with what you've
 done? I need to know.

Peter Kurten stops. Processes it.

As he's pulled away, Kurten turns to Fritz, offering a glimpse
 into the monster --

PETER KURTEN
 It's going to snow.

A SIREN BLASTS from the tower, followed a loud THRUM as the
 iron doors swallow Kurten.

Fritz shoots his eyes to the sky, it's never more clear.

EXT. FRITZ'S HOUSE -- DAY

Fritz climbs out of a taxicab, returning home. A group of neighborhood children are playing soccer the street.

Relieved that they're safe from the monster, Fritz kicks the ball around with them, when a SHADOW passes over his eyes. Looks up at something that stops him dead --

-- a titan FLAG of Third Reich support above his door, stirred by the wind.

Fritz eyes fill with sadness. Emotional.

Behind him, a dark car squeals to a halt at the curb. TWO DETECTIVES inside. The one behind the wheel pokes his head out the window --

DETECTIVE

Get in, Lang.

INT. HOLDING ROOM, ALEX -- LATER

The detectives and their POLICE CHIEF COMMANDER, scrutinize Fritz like a mannequin on display.

POLICE CHIEF COMMANDER

We know you struck a deal with the Herr Ott in exchange for your own neck.

FRITZ

That's an outrageous lie.

POLICE CHIEF COMMANDER

Really, then why is that yid prick and his cronies on the payroll for your picture -- would you like to see the ledger?

FRITZ

Extras.

POLICE CHIEF COMMANDER

Extras?

FRITZ

What's the harm, they're just ordinary citizens in need of a little money for their families and struggling businesses.

POLICE CHIEF COMMANDER
They're pick-pockets, con-men,
burglars, and safe-breakers.

FRITZ
Sure, now that you don't need them.
Now that you've caught your monster.

POLICE CHIEF COMMANDER
I've heard you're arrogant.

FRITZ
Lohmann footnote, no doubt.
(shouting)
I know you're listening Lohmann!

The detectives look at each other puzzled.

POLICE CHIEF COMMANDER
You have blood on your hands,
Mr. Lang. So listen carefully,
last day of shooting at the blimp
hangar, when those low-life scum
have gathered for your big climactic
scene --

FRITZ
Who told you that?

POLICE CHIEF COMMANDER
-- we're going to dispatch a force
to systematically take the Berlin
underground down.

FRITZ
Why come to me? Wait, you don't
expect me to play along?

POLICE CHIEF COMMANDER
You're one of the most beloved figures
in Germany. Above suspicion.

FRITZ
You know what they do to snitches.
I'll be exterminated -- my corpse
plucked from the Blue Danube.

POLICE CHIEF COMMANDER
So you won't help us?

FRITZ
I would rather plummet from Golden
Lizzy's wings.

POLICE CHIEF COMMANDER
(to Detectives)
Throw him in the clinker.

FRITZ
On what charge?

POLICE CHIEF COMMANDER
Failure to aid a police investigation.
Colluding with criminal elements.
You'll get two years, longer if I'm
inclined to reopen the investigation
into your first wife's murder.

FRITZ
You mean suicide.

POLICE CHIEF COMMANDER
Murder, self-murder -- same guilt.

FRITZ
I want to speak to Lohmann, right now.

POLICE CHIEF COMMANDER
Lohmann's dead.

FRITZ
What?

POLICE CHIEF COMMANDER
Working the Monster of Dusseldorf
case nearly drove him mad before his
ticker gave.

FRITZ
That's impossible.

POLICE CHIEF COMMANDER
I don't know what fantasy world you're
living in, Lang -- but trust me,
prison's no fairy story.

Fritz trying to process it. The Chief Commander nods to the
detectives who pull handcuffs.

FRITZ
Wait a minute!

POLICE CHIEF COMMANDER
Leave a man alone in a cell for a
couple of days and a lot comes back
to him that he couldn't remember
before.

Fritz turns to the window, eyebrows furrowing. It's SNOWING.

INT. HALLWAY, ALEX -- LATER

Cops with snow on their boots and jackets pass by Fritz as he heads for the door. Before exiting, Fritz glimpses a photograph of Lohmann mounted on the wall.

PUSH IN on the caption underneath:

IN MEMORIAL CHIEF INSPECTOR LOHMANN 1880 - 1925

Fritz jolted. His mind churning. Puts on his hat and disappears into the hypnotic falling snow.

EXT. HIGH ABOVE BERLIN -- EVENING

Snow assaulting the city like mortar shells.

INT. BEDROOM, FRITZ'S HOUSE -- LATER

Fritz enters to find Thea is in bed, nearly asleep.

THEA
It's snowing.

FRITZ
I know.

THEA
You look pale, like you've seen a spook.

FRITZ
You weren't at the studio today.

THEA
I had an engagement.

Fritz bends down, kisses her on the cheek.

FRITZ
Cocktails with the Minister of
Propaganda, no doubt?

THEA
You're obviously upset.

FRITZ
Why are you in bed?

THEA
I took a sleeping tablet.

FRITZ
You never do that.

THEA

I fell.

FRITZ

Fell?

THEA

Mmmm, stairs. I'm always tripping up.

FRITZ

Sure it wasn't while you were hanging that gigantic flag of party support above the door?

THEA

I'm just an errand boy. It's you they want.

FRITZ

(re. ankle)

It's swollen, you need a doctor.

THEA

You can't sleepwalk forever, Friedel. Berlin is changing.

His worst fears confirmed.

FRITZ

You joined the party.

Ayi Tendulkar comes through the door with a cold compress. Fritz a deer caught in the headlights.

THEA

Ayi's a doctor. I asked him to come.

AYI TENDULKAR

It's nice to meet you. Regrettable that it's under these circumstances.

FRITZ

(seething beneath)

Truly, regrettable.

AYI TENDULKAR

Our girl sprained her ankle. I've given her something for the pain. Couple of days, she'll be back to climbing mountains.

FRITZ

Kilimanjaro, perhaps.

AYI TENDULKAR

Perhaps. Well, I should go.

THEA

You'll catch your death in this, let me
send for a car.

AYI TENDULKAR

I enjoy the walk. Good-night.

Ayi leaves. Fritz looks to Thea for help in understanding.

FRITZ

How much do they know, Thea?

THEA

Fritz...

FRITZ

How much?

THEA

I have nothing to hide.

FRITZ

Did you give them the manuscript?

THEA

They've liked what they've seen so
far, very much.

FRITZ

They've watched it?

THEA

Roughly assembled footage, that's all.

FRITZ

They'll destroy it.

THEA

They can help us.

FRITZ

They'll take the scissors to it.
Make it an example and then proudly
parade it as part of their propaganda
machine.

THEA

Please, with your professional pity.

FRITZ

You have no idea what they're capable
of, they're probably in the neighbors
toilet listening to us right now.

THEA

Are you really that deluded?

FRITZ
You deceived me.

THEA
No, I saved you!

FRITZ
Who's deluded, now?
(beat)
I've never loved anyone as I loved you.

THEA
I'm sorry, this is difficult for me?

FRITZ
You've always had trouble writing
endings.

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. FRITZ'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

CLOSE on the Nazi flag waving above the door, the **SWASTIKA**
morphing into --

INT. "**M**" SET, NERO-FILM STUDIO -- DAY

-- "**M**", Hans Beckert's trademark letter on the back shoulder
of his jacket as WARDROBE presents it for Fritz's approval.

FRITZ
It's Hans Beckert's badge of shame.
His scarlet letter. Larger.

PETER LORRE'S DRESSING ROOM

The Gardener arrives with his medicine bag. Peter Lorre
ushers him inside, closing the door behind them.

STAGE

Fritz going over his shot list, when Herr Ott approaches.

HERR OTT
Excuse, please.

Herr Ott hands Fritz a bottle of gin.

HERR OTT
Go ahead, we're toasting.

FRITZ
I'm not going to have a seizure and
drop dead am I?

HERR OTT
It's safe, but you drink first just
in case.

FRITZ
What are we toasting to?

HERR OTT
To clear conscience or poor memory, eh?

Fritz almost chokes as he knocks it back.

A CLANG OF STEEL as the hangar doors are hoisted and a swarm
of UNDERGROUND CRIMINALS flood into the studio.

FRITZ
My god, how many are there?

HERR OTT
Hundred, maybe more.

FRITZ
We agreed on twenty five.

HERR OTT
Take this lot to nab the monster.

FRITZ
It's a picture.

HERR OTT
Your picture.

Clearly doped up, Peter Lorre exits his dressing room. Herr
Ott sizes up the human cartoon caricature approaching --

HERR OTT
We'll make him squeal like a pig
stuck under a gate.

Herr Ott joins his cronies as Peter Lorre reaches Fritz.

PETER LORRE
Fritzy, I want to talk to you about
my motivation in the finale scene.

Fritz nods the angry mob that Herr Ott is rousing.

FRITZ
Don't worry, they'll help you find it.

PETER LORRE
They look like a rough bunch.

FRITZ
Extras.

PETER LORRE
Err...what are they playing?

FRITZ
Themselves.

INT. "M" SET, NERO-FILM STUDIO -- LATER

CAMERA PULLS BACK WIDE revealing the catacomb set for the climatic kangaroo courtroom scene in "M".

Fritz behind the camera, adjusts his monocle.

FRITZ
Quite please. Camera. Sound. Speed.
Aaaaand action.

CAMERA PANS across the faces of Herr Ott, Udo, and other mob members as Peter Lorre/Hans Beckert is shoved down the steps for trial (the mob treating him like they've caught the real monster).

Fritz comprehends that he's lost control of his film to the real mob, but it doesn't matter because what he's getting is better than he imagined.

Morphine fueled and genuinely frightened by his fellow actors, Peter Lorre sweats, pants, pleads and squeals his way through Hans Beckert's writhing and primal confession --

PETER LORRE/HANS BECKERT
I can't help myself! I haven't any control over this evil thing that's inside me -- the fire, the voices, the torment! Always...always, there's this evil force inside me. Silently, but I can feel it there. It's me, pursuing myself. I want to escape... to escape from myself, but it's impossible. I can't. I can't escape. I have to obey it. I have to run...run...streets...endless streets. I want to escape. I want to get away. And I am pursued by ghosts. Ghosts of mothers. And those children. They never leave me.

Fritz mouthing the lines along with Lorre when he spots a hauntingly familiar face in the mob --

-- L, his dead wife. How can this be? He looks back again, but the ghost is gone.

Unbeknownst to Fritz, Thea is in the studio listening to every word of dialogue.

Her face pained as it slowly sinks in that she's hearing Fritz's self-confession.

PETER LORRE/HANS BECKERT
 I see the posters and I read what
 I've done. I read...and...and read.
 Did I do that? But I can't remember
 anything about it, but who will believe
 me? Who knows what it feels like to
 be me? How I'm forced to act...
 (eyes close to ecstasy)
 How I must...don't want to, but must.
 And then a voice screams...I can't
 bear to hear it. I can't...I can't
 go on. Can't go on...can't go on.
 Can't go on...

The crew and cast turn to Fritz, wait breathlessly --

FRITZ
 Cut! Brilliant!

WAGNER
 Do you want to go again?

Fritz nervously checks his watch.

FRITZ
 Brilliant. Print it. That was your
 finest moment, Peter.

Peter Lorre stomps up to Fritz and takes a swing. He ducks just in time.

FRITZ
 What was that for?

PETER LORRE
 That wasn't acting. That was real.
 You saw them, they practically
 crucified me.
 (beat)
 It was good, wasn't it.

Peter Lorre issues a hesitant smile as two stage hands restrain him and escort him off the stage. En route to his waiting car, Peter Lorre passes by Thea --

PETER LORRE
 Powerful words.

THEA
 I didn't write them.

Thea looks at Fritz one last time before exiting the stage doors forever. Fritz never aware that she was ever there.

The lights power down and the crew begin packing equipment.

Fritz races over to Herr Ott and his cronies, who are ambling through the studio preparing to leave. Fritz trying to warn them --

FRITZ

You should go now. All of you.

Fritz and Herr Ott trade a look.

Suddenly the carbon-arc lights bump on in sequence.

POLICE ON BULLHORN (O.S.)

This is the police. This is a raid.

Nobody move. Get your papers ready.

MOB WOMAN

Coppers!

POLICE WHISTLES as OFFICERS burst through, storming the stage.

Entrances and exits blocked. Cops draw batons. The mob prepare for a fight.

Heavy breathing bellowing, Fritz not sure whether to run or hide as Herr Ott's stare digs into him.

HERR OTT

They can't hold us on trumped charges
for long, Lang. When we come for
you, it will be from all sides, like
Mosquitoes at a picnic.

CRANE UP, the place goes nuts.

INT. FRITZ'S HOME -- DAY

Fritz enters the particularly quiet house calling out for --

FRITZ

Thea!

Frau Nussbaum shuffles down the stairs.

FRAU NUSSBAUM

She's gone, Mr. Fritz.

FRITZ

Gone for the evening?

FRAU NUSSBAUM

Gone for good.

FRITZ

What?

FRAU NUSSBAUM

She went to the studio to tell you.
Said someone would come round for
the rest of her things.

Fritz heads for the door, prepared to find her.

FRITZ

Where is she?

FRAU NUSSBAUM

India.

EXT. STREET, APARTMENT BUILDING -- EVENING

Neighborhood of upscale walk-ups.

Waiting Taxicab idles in the street.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING -- CONTINUOUS

Fritz, carrying a briefcase, climbs the angular staircase to
the upper level. A radio, somewhere, is suddenly silenced.

Fritz finds the door, knocks...

INT. JOE MAY'S APARTMENT -- DAY

Several knocks bring Joe May to the door. He looks through
peephole. Opens the door a crack.

FRITZ

Sorry, I know it's late.

JOE MAY

Do you want to see the armoire?

FRITZ

Yes.

Joe May removes the door chain, leads Fritz inside.

JOE MAY

Follow me.

The walls festooned with nail holes and faint outlines where
paintings and tapestries once hung. Apartment in shambles,
Joe May has fallen on hard times.

FRITZ
What happened to your flat?

JOE MAY
Put out cheese, the mice come. You look
awful by the way.

Joe May's lover FREDERICK, an strapping Aryan wearing a silk kimono, hurriedly retreats to another room.

JOE MAY
The armoire is there.

Fritz hands Joe May an ENVELOPE. He fans through a lump of banknotes.

JOE MAY
This far surpasses the price we agreed
on.

Fritz spots Joe's identical photograph of the two of them traveling abroad, youth and optimism on their side.

FRITZ
Do you ever think about that time in
the harbor? The Manhattan skyline.

JOE MAY
I think about it.

FRITZ
They wouldn't let us off the boat.

JOE MAY
They were misguided.

FRITZ
Time passes quickly, perhaps that's
good.

JOE MAY
Does Thea know you're here?

FRITZ
Thea's gone.

JOE MAY
The money's not for the armoire?

FRITZ
No.

Fritz sets the briefcase in front of Joe May.

FRITZ
Open it.

JOE MAY
You're giving me heart palpitations.

Joe may hesitates.

FRITZ
Open it, Joe.

JOE MAY
Oh, Christ...

He lifts the briefcase lid. Inside TWO FILM REEL CANISTERS.

FRITZ
It's the negative for "M". I want
you to smuggle it out.

JOE MAY
Sorry, the price for that is too high.

Suddenly the bedroom door snaps open and Frederick, now
dressed a NAZI MILITARY UNIFORM steps out. He nods to
Joe May before leaving.

JOE MAY
An enemy is an enemy until they're
you're friend.

FRITZ
One has to keep their ear to the
ground.

JOE MAY
What kind of trouble are you in?

FRITZ
The police. Berlin Underground.
And Goebbels knocks at my door.

JOE MAY
This city is covered with a net of
informers. Every square mile under
surveillance. They will assemble
themselves. They're like the Queen,
able to navigate the board in any
direction. You won't be able to
move without causing a stir.

FRITZ
I know it doesn't change things
between us, Joe. But I ask for your
forgiveness.

JOE MAY
It doesn't work like that, Fritz.
The past doesn't change for anyone.

SILENCE. Long beat.

JOE MAY
Sit down.

INT. FRITZ'S HOME -- DAY

A persistent doorbell rings through the house.

BATHROOM

Depressed by Thea's departure, Fritz soaks in the bathtub with a pitcher of martinis. His monocle streamed up.

The doorbell again. Yelling to Frau Nussbaum downstairs --

FRITZ
Frau Nussbaum, are you going to get
that?

KITCHEN

Frau Nussbaum collects milk bottles from the dairyman at the back door.

FRAU NUSSBAUM
Where's dairyman Schmidt?

We recognize Udo in disguise by the tattoo on his chin, he's been released from jail.

UDO
Retired. Two marks, ma'am.

As she hands over the money, Udo gets a good look inside, casing the house before the door closes.

The decisive doorbell again.

FRAU NUSSBAUM
I'm coming...I'm coming.

Frau Nussbaum unties her apron as she heads for the front door this time, leaving a pot of eggs boiling on the stove.

LIVING ROOM

HAMMERING AT THE DOOR

Frau Nussbaum opens the door to find SS OFFICER KRAUSE and THREE NAZI STORMTROOPERS waiting on the stoop. They invade the house with authority.

Fritz races down the stairs wearing a bathrobe.

FRITZ
What's the meaning of this?

SS OFFICER KRAUSE
Herr Lang we have orders to confiscate
the film negative for "M" and
immediately accompany you to the
Reichspropagandaministers office.

Fritz's eyes dart nervously around the room.

FRITZ
Confiscate the film, why?

SS OFFICER KRAUSE
We have our orders.

FRITZ
I'm afraid the film negative is at
the lab. Composites are being printed
for its release.

The Stormtroopers look at one another in confusion, not sure
what to do.

SS OFFICER KRAUSE
(to Fritz)
Get dressed.

The Stormtroopers search room-to-room as Fritz heads upstairs.

BEDROOM

Fritz rushes into the wardrobe and grabs a trouser and jacket
with stiff collar.

He picks up the telephone and begins dialing when he realizes
that he can't get a dial tone. Grasping that someone
downstairs is listening in, he slowly replaces the phone to
its cradle, stands there looking at it.

Fritz slides open the bureau drawer and stares at his trusty
Browning. Slams the drawer closed.

As he dresses, he quickly scribbles something onto stationary,
folds it in half.

LIVING ROOM

SS Officer Krause stares at Frau Nussbaum in a motionless
rage, her Jewishness unmistakable to him.

SS OFFICER KRAUSE
Where's the mistress of the house?

As Fritz descends the stairway --

FRITZ
 Trekking Mount Kilimanjaro with her
 Indian lover. I'll get my hat.

Handing Frau Nussbaum the note.

FRITZ
 Few things needed at market.

Frau Nussbaum's eyes widen.

FRAU NUSSBAUM
 Right away, Mister Fritz.

Frau Nussbaum grabs her coat and heads for the front door,
 but SS Officer Krause blocks her in the doorway. Seizes the
 note in her hand.

CLOSE ON note: Eggs, milk, sausage, sweets.

SS Officer Krause folds the note and hands it back.

FRAU NUSSBAUM
 Almost forgot the basket.

Frau Nussbaum retrieves the shopping basket near Fritz before
 leaving.

The Nazi's turn their gaze to Fritz.

CLOSE ON the eggs in the pot in the kitchen. They roil under
 the intense heat.

INT. KAISER WILHELM CHURCH -- LATER

A priest performing Mass to a few scattered parishioners.

Joe May and a couple of BLACK MARKET HAWKERS are staggered
 in pews doing business.

HAWKER #1
 Old man Goldberg succumbed. China,
 some silver, and a rare cartography
 collection.

JOE MAY
 Wedgwood candlesticks?

HAWKER #2
 Counterfeit.

JOE MAY
 It'll be our little secret.

Joe May crosses out a note scribbled in a little pad.

JOE MAY

Saffron.

HAWKER #3

Gem?

JOE MAY

Spice. Chef at the Excelsior will
pay top dollar.

Joe May flips the pad closed, crosses himself as he gets up.
Frau Nussbaum standing in the aisle. She hands him a note
from Fritz.

FRAU NUSSBAUM

Mr. Fritz put it in the basket. Did
all the shopping before I found it.

The shopping basket falls and eggs break open at their feet.

EXT. MINISTRY OF PROPAGANDA -- CONTINUOUS

A monster of stone and concrete on Wilhelmsplatz, across
from the Chancellery and Hotel Kaiserhof.

The library on the corner is being ransacked and an organized
book burning conducted on the pavement.

INT. MINISTRY OF PROPAGANDA -- CONTINUOUS

Massive, echoing. Fritz and his escorts make there way down
a seemingly endless corridor. SA Brownshirts with guns pass.

SS OFFICER KRAUSE

(to Fritz)

Wait here.

Classic paintings hang in the corridor. At the end,
Rembrandt's final portrait.

EXT. STREET -- LATER

An old Mercedes haphazardly parked.

Joe May hurriedly loads the briefcase with the film canisters
with the negative for "M" into the trunk.

INT. MINISTRY OF PROPAGANDA -- LATER

Fritz anxiously awaiting his meeting with Propaganda Minister
Goebbels, when there's a bustle of activity outside his door.

GOEBBELS WIFE and SEVEN CHILDREN have arrived with a lunch basket and are ushered into the Propaganda Ministers office.

Fritz checks his watch, idles.

EXT. GERMAN COUNTRYSIDE -- LATER

AERIAL SHOT follows Joe May's Mercedes on a icy serpentine route, running through woods.

INT. MINISTRY OF PROPAGANDA -- LATER

Fritz looks pensively at his reflection in the window.

INT. JOE MAY'S MERCEDES (MOVING) -- LATER

Fat snow flakes pelt the window and as the windshield wipers drag them away, a boarder check point comes into view.

SS BOARDER GUARD exits the guardshack, raising his arm for the driver to stop.

Joe May nervous until spotting Frederick, his lover and inside contact, in the guardshack. Relieved, Joe May rolls down the window.

SS BOARDER GUARD

Passport.

JOE MAY

Here you are.

But Frederick will not make eye contact with Joe May, in fact he turns up the radio in the guardshack.

Another SS BOARDER GUARD comes from behind, checking under the car with a mirror and a DOG that sniffs for bombs.

The dog nears the trunk. The dog starts barking.

The tail lights and tailpipe exhaust pierce the cold.

INT. MINISTRY OF PROPAGANDA -- LATER

Fritz stares at the inscription on an accommodation plaque:

"Reichspropagandaminister Dr. Paul Joseph Goebbels"

Goebbels voice startles him --

GOEBBELS (O.S.)

Sixteen vowels.

Goebbels, dressed in his party uniform, raises his hand in salute. Fritz nervously reciprocates.

GOEBBELS

Come this way, Mr. Lang.

Fritz follows Goebbels as he limps back to his office. Goebbels seven children swarm them as they enter.

GOEBBELS

My wife Magda and my children.

FRITZ

Pleasure.

GOEBBELS

Children, this is Fritz Lang.
The most famous film director in
all of Germany.

The children sheepishly grin. Goebbels digs in his pocket --

GOEBBELS

Little mice, what do we have here...

-- pulls out handful of chocolates.

GOEBBELS

Sweets for my sweethearts. Harald,
Helga, Hildegard, Helmut, Hegwig,
Holdine, Heidrun.

Goebbels pecks Magda on the cheek.

GOEBBELS

Run along now with your mother now
children.

INT. GOEBBELS OFFICE -- CONTINUOUS

A sizable and nearly empty office, at the end Goebbels desk. Fritz stands uncomfortably in front of Goebbels like a child in need of reprimanding.

GOEBBELS

Have a seat.

FRITZ

There is no chair.

GOEBBELS

Did you read Brecht's quote in this
mornings newspaper?

FRITZ

"Where one burns books, one eventually
burns people."

GOEBBELS

It's true Germany's artist and
intellectuals are waking up late in
the day, but they are waking up.

SS Officer Krause enters with TWO WING-BACKED CHAIRS, setting
them in front of Goebbels desk before leaving.

GOEBBELS

Please...

Fritz takes a seat, stares at the third chair.

FRITZ

Will someone be joining us?

Goebbels drags his club foot around the desk and opens his
diary to a particular entry. Reads his notation:

GOEBBELS

Thursday, May 21st, 1933 -- Magda
and I saw the rough assembly for "M".
Fantastic! Against humanitarian
soppines for the death penalty.
Well made. Fritz Lang will be our
director one day.

FRITZ

You flatter me, Herr Minister.

GOEBBELS

I saw a dreadful picture last night.
American. A man in a loin cloth
running around with monkeys. It
won't see the light of day in Germany.
(beat)

Look, I am terribly sorry but we
have to confiscate your film.

FRITZ

Confiscate, why?

GOEBBELS

I assure you it's just the ending we
didn't like. It lacked the ideals
to save it from a perverted and
inconclusive ending.

FRITZ

I don't understand.

GOEBBELS
The Fuhrer despised it.

FRITZ
The Fuhrer watched it?

GOEBBELS
Found the influence of America's
cultural invasion on the motion
picture bothersome.

FRITZ
It's a German picture.

GOEBBELS
"Metropolis" and "Die Nibelungen",
are German films.
(beat)
Hitler wants you to serve as the
architect of a new agency supervising
motion picture production in the
Third Reich.

FRITZ
My father wanted me to be an architect.

GOEBBELS
Nazi's Fuhrer of film.

Hearing it gives Fritz pause, he suddenly realizes the depth
of trouble he is in.

FRITZ
Again, you flatter me.

GOEBBELS
Not everyone is qualified for culture.

FRITZ
I assure you that I take your offer
very seriously and intend to weigh
it carefully.

There's no hiding Goebbels displeasure.

GOEBBELS
It does not go unnoticed that a
banner of party approval is raised
over your house.
(beat)
Do you consider yourself a Catholic?

Goebbels, tapping into what haunts Fritz. Mustering a curt
riposte...

FRITZ

I assure you, you won't find any
atheists in the trenches.

GOEBBELS

What is your creed?

FRITZ

I consider myself a German patriot.
(beat)
And a Catholic.

GOEBBELS

It comes through the mother, one's
being or not being a Jew.

FRITZ

There was a conversion. Catholic.
There are records.

GOEBBELS

Priest for marriage, Rabbi for dying.

Fritz accepts the comment as someone aware of their fate.

GOEBBELS

Irony of ironies, the man with the
monocle is virtually blind.

(beat)

Truth is you're only half. We know
all about the 'flaw' you have.
Setting aside your family, and
naturally along with them your own
Jewish heritage.

(beat)

This of course can be overlooked in
light of your service during the
Great War and contribution to Cinema.
You see, we decide who is Jewish or
not, Herr Lang.

Fritz realizes that he can no longer sleepwalk -- it's 1933
and events will soon jar him awake.

GOEBBELS

You have twenty-four hours. Tic-toc.
Oh, Herr Lang --

FRITZ

Yes.

Pointing to the empty chair --

GOEBBELS

The empty chair in the room is always
Germany's interest.

A clock ticks somewhere in the room. The hands on the clock ticking toward a fateful hour.

EXT. MINISTRY OF PROPAGANDA -- CONTINUOUS

Fritz explodes through the doors and into the city square teeming with Berliners returning from factory jobs, lugging shopping, and pushing baby prams.

INT. GOEBBELS OFFICE -- CONTINUOUS

SS Officer Krause enters and repossesses the two chairs.

GOEBBELS

Wait.

SS OFFICER KRAUSE

Sir?

Krause balancing the chairs in his hands like a scale. Goebbels considers them as if trying to deliberate a question.

GOEBBELS

He's going to run.

SS OFFICER KRAUSE

Sir?

GOEBBELS

Go after him. I want Fritz Lang arrested immediately.

EXT. CITY SQUARE -- CONTINUOUS

HIGH ANGLE of the Victory Column, Fritz crosses underneath Golden Lizzy's wings.

An UNDERGROUND MOB MEMBER following Fritz, opens the hatch door on a cage and releases a PIGEON into the air --

INT. UNDERGROUND MOB LAIR -- MOMENTS LATER

-- the PIGEON flies into its designated stall. Then a second later, another PIGEON flies into a stall.

Herr Ott draws the corresponding line on the map, tracking Fritz's movements.

HERR OTT

Smoke him out.

Underground mob members study the map, contemplating.

INT. KITCHEN, FRITZ'S HOUSE -- LATER

Frau Nussbaum chanting a Kiddush prayer, ceases the ritual at the sound of a key turning in the lock.

As Fritz enters --

FRITZ
Did you find Joe May?

FRAU NUSSBAUM
Jah, gave him letter.

FRITZ
Good.

FRAU NUSSBAUM
What did they do to you, Mr. Fritz?

Fritz looks at the poor man's Seder on the table and hand-embroidered Star of David on the sash around her neck.

FRAU NUSSBAUM
Seder, day of the Exodus.

FRITZ
I remember. Go on, we drink together.

Touched, Frau Nussbaum pours the wine into two glasses.

FRAU NUSSBAUM
To rid the nightmares.

FRITZ
(toasting)
Day of the Exodus.

Frau Nussbaum lowers her glass, intuitively knowing --

FRAU NUSSBAUM
You're leaving.

FRITZ
I could send for you in a few months.
Come work for me once I'm settled.

FRAU NUSSBAUM
Where?

FRITZ
Paris. London. United States. I
don't know.

FRAU NUSSBAUM
I could never leave my home.

FRITZ

Black clouds are amassing over this
country. Soon there will be no home.

FRAU NUSSBAUM

I'm German. It's in my bones.

Suddenly, POUNDING on the front door.

FRITZ

Promise me you'll get out.

Frau Nussbaum blows out the candle. HOLD ON the black smoke
rising.

Fritz races upstairs to the bedroom. Unlocks the combination
wall safe and hurls the money inside into a suitcase.

Frau Nussbaum shuffles into the room with Fritz's coat.

FRAU NUSSBAUM

Hurry, there's no time.

OUTSIDE

SS Officer Krause POUNDS on the front door, signals for some
stormtroopers to go around back.

INSIDE

Fritz backs away from the door, realizing that he's
surrounded.

FRAU NUSSBAUM

The roof, hurry!

Fritz races upstairs to the only exit left -- the bathroom,
where L died. Can barely bring himself to open the door.

BATHROOM

Fritz contemplates the spot where L lay in a pool of blood.

Goes to the slip-up window and hoists it open.

FRITZ'S STUDY

Frau Nussbaum peers over Fritz's desk reading a handwritten
letter bequeathing all his worldly possessions to her.

ROOFTOP

Fritz lifts himself onto the pitched roof. He's on the edge,
the only thing between him and an ugly drop is sheer
determination. The Ferris Wheel swirling behind him.

Bringing us back to the opener...

...only now it's from the PERSPECTIVE OF HIS PURSUERS.

ROOFTOP

From the ground, tucked in the shadows, Udo follows Fritz, leather suitcase in hand, maneuvering the steeply sloped shoal of chimneystacks.

FRITZ'S HOUSE

SS Officer Krause and the stormtroopers burst through the doors, systematically going room to room searching the house. Frau Nussbaum enters from the kitchen.

SS BOARDER GUARD
Where is he?

FRAU NUSSBAUM
Shul, Day of the Exodus.

The stormtroopers gather around Krause, confirming that Fritz is indeed gone.

Krause tilts his head, looking at her --

SS OFFICER KRAUSE
(to Stormtroopers)
I want a search of every train station.

INT. UNDERGROUND MOB LAIR -- CONTINUOUS

Several pigeons in their stalls now, Herr Ott scrutinizes the map dotted with pins.

HERR OTT
(to gang)
He's leaving Berlin.

The mob members grabbing their bats, knives, brass knuckles, and pickaxes before heading out.

EXT. CANAL -- LATER

A fog enshrouded TRESTLE BRIDGE.

BOOTS CLINK confidently on the iron bridgework. The man in the herringbone Trenchcoat slides a KNIFE from his pocket. Glinting light flickers off the serrated blade as it's unsheathed.

PAN-UP to reveal that it's Udo following Fritz. He increases his gait, trying to close the distance.

INT. ALEX -- CONTINUOUS

RING. Desk phone. Police Chief Commander, picks up.

POLICE CHIEF COMMANDER
(into phone)
Yeah.

Slams the phone down.

POLICE CHIEF COMMANDER
(to squad)
Lang was just spotted buying one way
ticket to Paris.

DETECTIVE
Paris?

POLICE CHIEF COMMANDER
Get the dogs.

INT. PLATFORM, RAILWAY STATION -- LATER

A MOB MEMBER opens up his birdcages as he spots Fritz going through the turnstile, heading towards the northbound line.

A FLOCK OF CARRIER PIGEONS explode high overhead.

The *Flying Hamburger* idles on the tracks. Steam billows from its undercarriage, like a fire breathing dragon awaiting flight. The 10-car chortling beast loads passengers.

Suddenly WHISTLES AND FLASHLIGHTS proceed POLICEMEN led by GERMAN SHEPHERDS invading the platform with authority. SS Officer Krause and his stormtroopers converging with Herr Ott and his cronies, everyone hunting Fritz.

Grimacing faces. Glaring eyeballs. Arms extended into accusing fingers as they spot Fritz.

But it's too late, Fritz blunders for the trains handrail, pulling himself inside the moving railcar and disappearing through the steam like a ghost.

The wheels grind and the train lurches forward on the rails then gains speed and rolls out of the station.

INT. COMPARTMENT, FLYING HAMBURGER TRAIN -- LATER

We hang on Fritz's haunted reflection in the traincar window.
The German countryside racing by.

LOHMANN (O.S.)
Training for our 36' Olympics,
Mr. Lang?

Fritz turns and see Lohmann sitting across from him, cigar
clenched in his teeth.

FRITZ
I thought you were dead?

LOHMANN
I don't want to wear out my welcome
and I can understand why you would
think that, but trust me I have only
your interests in mind.

Fritz looks at him carefully through the wafting smoke.

LOHMANN
Didn't figure you for the running type.

FRITZ
I was scared to death. They betrayed
me, what was I supposed to do?

LOHMANN
Whole country was betrayed, Fritz.

Fritz turns back to the window.

FRITZ
There's no god back there. Not in
Germany.

LOHMANN
It isn't the place of our youth.

FRITZ
They'll get away with it.

LOHMANN
Nobody gets away with anything,
that's my observation.

The car is plunged into darkness as the train bombs into a
tunnel. Fritz's BROWNING SERVICE REVOLVER is sitting between
them when the light returns.

LOHMANN

Look, I'm just asking you to meet me halfway. You can't refuse to admit reality in hope that it will go away. It doesn't work like that. We decide who we take to the dark.

FRITZ

What do you want?

LOHMANN

You know the answer to that question.

Car plunged into darkness as train bombs into the first of a quick chain of tunnels -- light returns.

LOHMANN

Bullet's in the chamber.

FRITZ

You want a confession? Well you're not going to get it.

LOHMANN

I didn't come here to discuss the terms.

Fritz eyes the BROWNING.

FRITZ

Simple shot to the head, isn't that what they taught us in the great war.

LOHMANN

Way I see it, it's just show business. Moment between ACTION and CUT, anything can happen.

Car is plunged into darkness as train bombs through another tunnel.

Sound of a GUNSHOT.

Light returns, the BROWNING is in Fritz's grip.

PAN OVER to a single BULLETHOLE dead center in the leather upholstery where Lohmann was seated opposite.

WIDE SHOT of compartment, Fritz sitting alone.

Fritz's face plunged into darkness as the train bombs into a tunnel.

A VOICE (V.O.)

The end of genius is sometimes
spectacular: A bomb's explosion. A
madman's gibbering. An orgasmic
suicide before a sell-out audience.
A Faustian pact with the Devil in
which nothing is left to chance.
Sometimes, more often to be sure,
it is lonely and most ordinary.

"MY PRIVATE LIFE HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH MY FILMS"*Fritz Lang*FRITZ LANG:

Fritz Lang escaped Germany for the constraints of the Hollywood Studio System and was later stigmatized by the communist hysteria of the McCarthy era. His visual style was simplified and he was forced to make American Studio pictures. His worldview became increasingly bleak and pessimistic. He died in 1976. Extremely secretive about his personal life, he never spoke about his Jewish heritage or his wife's death in public interviews. "M" is considered his masterpiece.

THEA VON HARBOU:

Thea Von Harbou became a Nazi in 1932. She married Ayi Tendulkar. After the war she was detained by British military and forced into unskilled labor. She wrote 75 screenplays, including several with a Nazi stigma. In 1954, one of her first films was shown at a retrospective in Berlin. She was the guest of honor and slipped when leaving the theater. She died as a result of that fall. "M" is considered her masterpiece.

PETER LORRE:

After the filming of "M" Peter Lorre was plagued with death threats and hostile public crowds. Misunderstood and disillusioned, he went to the United States, where the roles he had to play were rarely suited to his talent. He underwent many treatments for drug addiction but never fully recovered. Frustration hounded him to an early death. "M" made Lorre a star.

JOSEPH GOEBBELS:

Following Hitler's death, Goebbels served as Chancellor for one day. He ordered the cyanide poisoning of his six children before he and his wife committed suicide.

PAUL KURTEN "THE MONSTER OF DUSSELDORF":

Paul Kurten confessed to 79 crimes. He was beheaded six weeks after the premiere of "M".