

“ ZOLA!”

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The Subterfuge

The Office of the General Staff

The General Staff (a group of officers charged with maintaining the integrity of the French military), unable to uncover the spy when it is discovered that military secrets were found in the trash bin of the German embassy, finds itself in a panic.

The new chief of the General Staff, Major Du Paty de Clam, aware of the consequences now that this has become public knowledge, suggests they create a scapegoat to assuage the public's growing distrust in the military's ability to protect the nation.

Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a Jew, born in German-occupied French territory, is brought in and interviewed, unaware that this is an interrogation. Finally, armed with the flimsiest circumstantial and manipulated evidence, the General Staff confidently deems Dreyfus the spy.

Prologue 1

1910, Eight Years after the Death of Emile Zola

The Academy of Arts and Letters

After a short speech about Emile Zola, considered the greatest living writer in all of France at the time of his death, the president of the Academy of Arts and Letters introduces Zola's widow, Alexandrine. Taking the podium, after brief pleasantries, she shakes a worn newspaper towards the audience of dignitaries as she says, "It was this letter to the President of France that set into motion the events that led to the death of my husband."

Act 1 Scene 1

Preparing their home for a visit by Zola's publisher, Alexandrine picks up a crumpled page from the floor and reads it to herself: "...And I accuse the general staff of..." ("**And We'll Ask for 1000 Francs**") Awakening Zola with a start she reminds him the Publisher will arrive early in the afternoon. Alarmed he has overslept, he tells her they must get to the parade ground for the sentencing of Dreyfus whom Zola intuitively knows to be innocent. Alexandrine protests as he grabs his coat and runs out the door. Alexandrine follows.

Act 1 Scene 2

At the Parade Ground

The sun is still rising as Zola and Alexandrine make their way to the Parade Ground. Along the way they encounter two merchants arguing amongst themselves as they open their shops. One is a Dreyfusard (those who support the innocence of Dreyfus), the other a Royalist (those who support the military in this matter). As they arrive at the Parade Ground both sides, separated by a fence, are yelling at one another. As the two enter the seating area, Zola encounters Major de Clam. They share a few tense words while at the same time a lone woman enters the grounds. It is Lucie Dreyfus, the wife of Alfred Dreyfus. Looking lost, Zola and Alexandrine rush to her and together they join the Dreyfusards.

A Sargent at Arms calls for quiet as the judge of the tribunal enters. Dreyfus is led to the center of the grounds. The judge reads the sentence as he strips Dreyfus of his medals. As Dreyfus proclaims his innocence (**“Would I Not Give My Very Life?”**) he is cruelly slapped in the face by the judge. Zola, who has been struggling to maintain his composure, can no longer contain himself. Shouting loudly, he attacks the tribunal as a fraud. (**“It Is a Crime”**) When he proclaims how he shall prove Dreyfus’s innocence the guards can no longer contain the angry Royalists as they leap onto the bleachers towards Zola. Fearing for the safety of Zola, Alexandrine and Lucie, fellow Dreyfusards whisk them away as the Royalists attack the remaining Dreyfusards. (**“We the People Rule”**)

Act 1 Scene 3

Inside the Zola Home

The Zolas and Mrs. Dreyfus arrive safely at their apartment. When the Publisher arrives Zola hands him a manuscript, which he reads in silence. Expecting the latest installment of Zola’s novel, he tosses the manuscript onto his desk proclaiming he cannot publish it. The manuscript was, in fact, an open letter to the president of France in which Zola accuses the government of a great injustice. When Zola demands to know why, the publisher explains that he will not accept the risk of being attacked by an enraged public. (**“Why Should I Risk It?”**) Zola calls the publisher a coward and threatens to withhold any future works from him. After the Publisher leaves Zola grabs his coat and tells Alexandrine he is headed for the cafe to join his friends.

With Zola out of the house, both Alexandrine and Lucy look at one another and almost at the same time, sighing, “Men!” They go on to talk about what their husbands have done to put their lives into such tenuous positions. (**“The Things**

That Men Will Do”) Mrs. Dreyfus exclaims that all through the Court Marshall her husband had complete faith in the military, and Alexandrine goes on to say that

her husband somehow believes that as long as he is exposing the truth, their lives are not in danger. They also agree that their husbands are oblivious as to how their actions affect the well being of their families. It is late. Alexandrine summons a carriage for Lucie then walks to the cafe to join her husband.

INTERLUDE

On the way to the cafe Alexandrine encounters Maj. de Clam. He does not, at first, recognize her until she reminds him that they share a long history. De Clam exclaims that her husband cannot win. She counters by saying Zola will stand strong. When de Clam asks how she can be so certain she replies with a powerful confidence not revealed until now. "Because I was given to him!"

Act 1 Scene 4

In the Cafe

Arriving at the Cafe Zola's friends gather around asking about the "Letter." As he finishes explaining why it will not be published, Mr. Vaughn, the publisher of a small newspaper, having overheard the conversation, asks to see the letter. As Vaughn and Zola find a corner of the café, Alexandrine arrives. Zola's friends attempt to dissuade her from interrupting the conversation between Vaughn and her husband. She tries to reason with them, asking their help in convincing her husband that what he is attempting endangers both their lives. (**"You Have Both Known Emile"**)

They remind her that once her husband is aware of an injustice he becomes unmovable. Alexandrine accuses his friends of giving lip service to Zola's ideals without accepting the risks themselves. Vaughn's voice explodes from the back of the cafe; "What you have written is a thunderbolt!" Agreeing to publish the letter, now titled "J'Accuse," by the following morning, Vaughn exits. With this news the cafe, filled with artists, writers, musicians--all Dreyfusards, erupts into celebration. (**"The Artist's Anthem"**) Everyone sings how art, music and literature can be a weapon against tyranny and injustice. Finally Zola bids his friends goodnight and, with a very somber Alexandrine, walks home.

Act 2 Scene 1

The Morning After in the Office of the General Staff

The General Staff are seated around a long table, each with a copy of the morning's paper. They read excerpts of "J'Accuse" to one another in anger and

horror. Each member of the General Staff is mentioned by name. They all agree

that Zola must be silenced. In the corner of the room a man in a white coat is fiddling with a machine with hoses that lead to a windowed box. Gen. Boisdeffre is holding a puppy on his lap. As the Generals discuss what must be done about Zola, Colonel Piquart rushes into the office bearing proof of Dreyfus's innocence. Rather than look like fools, they take the evidence and hide it away in a briefcase, threatening Piquart with a post in the far off desert should such evidence become known. Piquart leaves. In their arrogance the generals don't seem alarmed and do not believe he will do anything about it.

When the discussion moves toward how Zola should be silenced one General cries out, "Is not what you're suggesting murder?" At that instant at the far end of the table Major de Clam, who has remained silent, stands up. He is larger than life. Smoke appears all around him as he sprouts horns and a tail. He is Satan. All of this happens in the blink of an eye and just as quickly he is a man again. He bellows loudly that this is not murder. This is sacrifice. (**"We Are Frenchmen"**) He explains that God has given mankind a religious imperative that allows him to sacrifice his fellow man as a scapegoat for mankind's greater security and that ultimately Zola must be "sacrificed" as well. The other generals agree to follow this logic. De Clam explains that since the days of Adam he has been creating just this kind of conflict. In ecstasy the General Staff sing a hymn to de Clam. As the Hymn reaches its climax de Clam asks how Zola is to be killed. At that moment the man in the white coat asks Gen. Boisdeffre for the puppy, places it in the "box" and starts a small motor. Some of the officers gasp in horror!

Act 3 Scene 1

Zola's Workroom

Alone in his workroom, Zola prepares for an evening of writing. He begins with a ritual. He puts on an artist's smock, sharpens the quills of his pens. He lights a lamp and fills his wine glass. He writes a page, crumples it up and tosses it onto the floor. This happens a few times until he is satisfied with what he has written. While pacing the floor he reads it. (**"The Legend of the Wolf Cave"**) The page describes a time in Mankind's primordial past when a clan, trapped in a cave by a ferocious beast, must decide whether to sacrifice one of their own to feed the hungry beast so the rest of the clan can escape, or do they remain safe in the cave and starve? When Zola has completed reading to himself, Alexandrine enters his workroom telling him it's time for bed. It's apparent this happens often. Zola expresses his irritation and asks not to be interrupted.

Alexandrine, rejected, goes back into their bedroom and reflects on a time when it was different between them. (**"Once He Would Sing to Me"**) She sings of a past when Zola was romantic, attentive and caring. But now all he seems to care

about is his writing and the “Rights of Man.” In frustration Zola enters the bedroom telling her that her crying is interrupting his work. She argues that his defense of “The Jew” is costing them their security. She complains that he has not completed his novel and they have no money. Zola explains to his wife he has no choice, how from his childhood on what he has witnessed has allowed him to see clearly the world around him and how events will unfold. At the height of their argument, outside, voices are heard as though a crowd is forming. A rock breaks a window. There is the sound of footsteps on the roof. Zola grabs a pistol from a drawer and calls out that he will shoot if they do not get down. He shoots. Gradually the mob’s voices diminish and footsteps get quieter as the assassins run off. Zola and Alexandrine embrace. The argument is forgotten. We also hear the humming sound of a small motor that fades in and out. Still in their embrace, they reaffirm their love for one another. (**“The Stars Surrounding Our Hearts”**) Zola can see that Alexandrine is exhausted and walks her to their bed near the broken window.

Act 3 Scene 2

Back in Zola’s Work Room

Going back to his writing, he vacillates between the Legend of the Wolf Cave and his anger over the Dreyfus Affair. He is drinking copiously and falling under the effect of poison gas (seen flowing into the room faintly) . He struggles to write, gives up and paces as he begins to imagine Dreyfus’s plight. (**“Why Must He Suffer Alone?”**) As he attempts to write he becomes more drunk and poisoned. The Legend of the Wolf Cave and the Dreyfus Affair become one thing. He paces, ranting at the General Staff until finally he collapses onto his desk, head down on his arms. Silence. As the transparent cloud of gas continues to enter the room, from the walls, phantoms of the General Staff appear challenging Zola’s accusations. (**“You Reveal Yourself”**) The judge of the tribunal also appears, offering Zola an argument in support of sacrificing Dreyfus. He claims there was peace until Zola reignited the mob with his accusations and that a scapegoat offers the country true peace at the cost of only one man. The officers dance around Zola menacingly. (**“No One Will Care What You Say”**) Mocking, they tell him, “No one will care what you say Mr. Zola, for Dreyfus is only a Jew!” Laughing insanely, they drift back into the walls.

Devastated, Zola is on the verge of surrendering. With his head in his hands another apparition appears. It is that of Dreyfus appearing filthy, in rags and half starved. The sight is too much for Zola as his feelings of compassion rise above his self-pity. Embracing Dreyfus, he tells him how there will be a new world and that good men shall make it so (**“There Shall Be a Home for the Homeless”**). Tenderly, Zola makes a bed for Dreyfus and one for himself as both men go to sleep. Silence and total darkness.

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Act 3 Scene 3

Zola's Apartment

It is early dawn. Col. Piquart, Cezanne and Maupassant are pounding on the door. It opens with a gentle shove. Excited, as though invited in, they cry out that members of the General Staff confessed, some have fled the country and one committed suicide and Dreyfus has been exonerated and is coming home. Now alerted, they rush into the bedroom and find Alexandrine groggily waking (the broken window is evident). As they're explaining the news to her they all rush into Zola's workroom where he lies on the floor, papers strewn everywhere. Cezanne rushes to Zola's side, puts his head to his chest and proclaims he dead. The men leave to allow Alexandrine time with her husband alone. She picks up some of the pages and reads excerpts from each one, each page revealing what Zola had experienced in his delirium. Finally she reads from a page, "...and there shall be a home for the homeless..." In her grief she collapses onto her husband's chest, sobbing quietly.

Epilogue

The Academy of Arts and Letters

Holding the "J'Accuse" headlined newspaper in her hand, Alexandrine concludes the story of her husband's part in the Dreyfus Affair. With a final rebuke to his "friends" she asks who was it that truly suffered during this affair, who really took the blows? She asks where they were while her husband accepted this responsibility? Finally she proclaims to the audience, "A great nation depends on a great people." The Academy begins to applaud when, for an instant, we see the flurry of angel's wings and a heavenly aura about her as she walks off the dais, leaving the audience in stunned silence.

Outside Alexandrine glances at a crumpled figure of a man, filthy, dressed in a ragged military uniform, sitting in the dirt with his back against a trash bin, mumbling incoherently. It is Major de Clam.

In the auditorium, one by one, the members of the Academy toast the memory of Zola, building into a great chorus. (**"Artist Anthem Reprieve"**)

THE END

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