

the beginning of

BERLIN PROMOTION (from **FOREIGN AFFAIRS**)

a short comedy by Rich Orloff

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Time: November 1989

Place: East Berlin

Characters: FRITZ, a mid-level bureaucrat
UMA, his wife
KARL, his friend, another bureaucrat
HELMUT, Fritz's boss

A small office in an East German government office building near the Berlin wall. Not much to look at, but then nobody ever comes here to look. As the play begins, FRITZ and his wife UMA enter. Fritz is a mild man who tries to stay out of people's way. Uma is a strong-willed woman who may be reincarnated as a tank.

UMA

Now do we need to go over this again?

FRITZ

No, darling.

UMA

That position won't be open forever.

FRITZ

I know.

UMA

Herr Klausner owes you many favors.

FRITZ

I know that and you know that, but I'm not sure Herr Klausner knows that.

UMA

Then it's your job to remind him.

FRITZ

I don't want to antagonize him.

UMA

You're such a worm.

FRITZ

The world needs worms. Without worms, all the early birds would starve to death.

UMA

We need the money, Fritz.

FRITZ

We live very comfortably. We have food on the table, five nights out of seven.

UMA

Fritz –

FRITZ

I'll talk to Herr Klausner, if he's in a good mood.

UMA

(firmly)

If he's not, then you put him in a good mood!

FRITZ

I should've seen this coming on our first date when you told me your favorite movie was TRIUMPH OF THE WILL.

UMA

(an accusation, not a question)

Why are you so afraid to talk to him?

FRITZ

My reputation is based on being a spineless toad, and I don't want to ruin it by appearing like I want something.

UMA

He knows you can handle that job.

FRITZ

Then why hasn't he given it to me already?

UMA

You know the pressure a man in his position is under. He has to make sure he's appointing someone who's not only skilled but also a loyal, dedicated member of the party.

FRITZ

That's me?

UMA

You attend all the meetings.

FRITZ

I have to. They count on me to take notes and then lose them.

UMA

Fritz, are you going to talk to Herr Klausner today or not?

FRITZ

Today's a very busy day, Uma.

UMA

I knew you were a worm, but I never thought you were a liar.

FRITZ

When have I lied to you?

UMA

Two years ago, I said, "Fritz, when are you going to make a man of yourself?" and you said, "By November, 1989."

FRITZ

The month isn't over yet.

UMA

I assumed you meant by November 1st.

FRITZ

No, I meant by the 30th.

UMA

I want you to talk to him today.

FRITZ

I'll see how busy he is.

UMA

Today.

FRITZ

But –

UMA

I'm tired of waiting! You talk to him *today*, or, or I'll withhold my favors.

FRITZ

But sugarprune –

UMA

I mean it. No more Olga the Dairy Maid.

FRITZ

No more Olga?

UMA

No more Ilsa the New Housekeeper.

FRITZ

No more Olga or Ilsa?

UMA

And no more Anna, the Elba River Nudist.

FRITZ

No more Olga, Ilsa or Anna on the Elba?
Okay, Uma, I'll talk to him.

UMA

Good. Now remember, all you have to do is assure him you're completely dedicated to those in power, and the promotion is yours.

FRITZ

Okay.

UMA

(about to go:)

Now give me a virile, passionate kiss.

FRITZ

Yes, dear.

Fritz kisses Uma. She responds. There's a lot of chemistry between them.

UMA

I'll wash my dairy maid uniform.
See you later, milkman.

FRITZ

See you later.

Uma leaves. Fritz is happily awash in Uma's sexual attention. Then he remembers what he promised and he's terrified. There's a knock at the door.

FRITZ (cont'd)

Come in.

KARL, another bureaucrat and Fritz's friend, enters, carrying papers.

KARL

I need your signature.

FRITZ

What is it?

KARL

A directive to reduce unnecessary red tape.

FRITZ

Sure.

KARL

You need to sign ten more times.

FRITZ

Okay.

KARL

What's the matter?

FRITZ

Karl, you think it's true that behind every great man, there's a woman nagging him to death?

KARL

Let me guess: Uma drove you to work today.

FRITZ

Yes. She's pushing me to ask Herr Klausner for a promotion.

KARL

I think you'd fill that position excellently.

FRITZ

Then why hasn't he hired me already?

KARL

Well, you know the pressure a man like that is under. With all the changes going on left and left, he has to make sure he chooses someone who's forward thinking and not tied to the old order.

FRITZ

What changes?

KARL

You don't know about the changes?

FRITZ

No.

KARL

Haven't you been paying attention to what's going on in Eastern Europe?

FRITZ

Oh, no. Uma says whenever I do, it affects my performance.

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