

The Helpers

Updated 4/30/20

A play by Maggie Lou Rader

“I don't want to be considered a hero.... Imagine young people would grow up with the feeling that you have to be a hero to do your human duty. I am afraid nobody would ever help other people, because who is a hero? I was not. I was just an ordinary housewife and secretary.”

— Miep Gies

CHARACTERS

MIEP GIES- (1909-2010) Housewife, secretary, immigrant, helper. In charge of every room she enters. Measured, yet impulsive. Driven by fire deep in her soul, but not always on her face.

JAN GIES- (1905-1993) Her husband. A social worker and helper. Measured and always thoughtful. Chivalrous and dashing of heart. Wheels always turning.

OTTO FRANK- (1889-1980) The embodiment of kindness with a bit of a nervous disposition. The leader of the Annex and father of Anne and Margot Frank.

MRS. STOPPELMAN- (1915-2005) The Gies' landlord and housemate. A Jewish mother and grandmother with idioms for days. Lives on another plane, a charming one.

JO KOOPHUIS (Johannes Kleiman)- (1896-1959) Mr. Frank's partner at Opekta. A curmudgeon, and yet, damn delightful soul.

ELLI VOSSEN (Bep Voskuijl)- (1919-1983) Quiet, not shy. Always watching and listening. Smart as a whip. She may be wrong occasionally, but this writer's not seen it.

ADALWOLFA- Chipper, bubbly, lethal. Member of a Nazi girl's group. We don't like her.

ALFIE COHEN- Mrs. Stoppelman's grandson. A dear 6-year-old boy.

STRANGER- A good hearted bystander. Historically a woman, could be anyone.

MR. RICHTER- Buyer of the building which houses the Opekta Company.

KARL SILBERBAUER- (1911-1972) Arresting officer of the residents of the Secret Annex. Austrian. Nazi.

This play can be doubled to be done with six actors

SETTING

Amsterdam, June 1940-September 1945.

ACT ONE

SCENE 1:

(Lights up on a small, yet cozy apartment in Amsterdam. Afternoon. The sounds of the streets fill the world outside. Chatter, laughter, three shadows pass outside the windows. MIEP unlocks the front door and walks inside. JAN and OTTO follow.)

MIEP:

It's enormous! That floor? Jan, look at that ceiling!

OTTO:

I'm glad it will satisfy.

(MIEP walks exaggaratingly to measure dimensions, demonstrating how big the room is)

MIEP:

I need a train ticket to get to the kitchen.

JAN:

It will more than satisfy Mr. Frank, this is-

MIEP:

The kitchen!

OTTO:

It's shared.

JAN:

Splendid indeed.

MIEP:

(From the kitchen) JAAAN!

JAN:

Dear?

(MIEP comes to the door)

MIEP:

The lazy susan, is the tallest, shelfiest, laziest susan I've ever seen.

OTTO:

I'm glad you're pleased, Miep.

JAN:

After a year of looking, anything would have pleased, but this?

MIEP:

And to be this close to you and Edith-

OTTO:

We'll be no trouble; completely out of your hair.

MIEP:

Don't you dare. I insist on weekly visits.

JAN:

How can we ever thank you, Mr. Frank?

OTTO:

No need. I heard a rumor, I enquired. No trouble.

MIEP:

What's the landlady called again?

OTTO:

Mrs. Stoppelman. She'll be home around 8:00 and wants to check in on you.

MIEP:

So dear. Charming, sweet-

JAN:

If not a bit odd.

MIEP:

Eccentric.

OTTO:

Her adages are unique.

MIEP:

When she dropped off the key, what did she say?

JAN:

A proverb?

MIEP:

Directions to a deli.

OTTO:

“Haven’t *you* learned where Abraham gets his mustard!” (*beat*) She was saying how clever you were to have acquired the apartment.

MIEP:

Adorable!

JAN:

Confusing.

MIEP:

Delightful.

JAN:

I don’t like mustard.

OTTO:

(*reaching into bag to pull out some Jenever and a few paper cups*) You’ll be speaking Stoppelman in no time, and speaking of congratulations-

JAN:

You’ve done so much already.

OTTO:

Before you say no, it’s Anne who suggested the Jenever. To celebrate our new neighbors.

MIEP:

And if Anne suggested it-

OTTO:

Who would dare say no? As we say, “God knows all-”

ALL:

“Anne knows better.”

OTTO:

Exactly. So. To our dear friends. Love knows no country, and family isn’t dictated by blood alone. Thank you for years of friendship, and here’s to many more.
Prost.

MIEP AND JAN:

Prost.

MIEP:

Thank you. And Anne too.

OTTO:

(nods) With that, I leave you.

JAN:

No need to rush.

OTTO:

I promised Edith I'd be home by 6:00. Enjoy the Jenever. And say hello to Mrs. Stoppelman for me.

MIEP:

We will. Good-bye, Mr. Frank.

OTTO:

Oh, expect a ring around 7:00, and make sure you answer the door.

MIEP:

I thought Mrs. Stoppelman was coming around 8:00.

OTTO:

She is. At 7:00, there will be a delivery man.

MIEP:

Delivering what?

OTTO:

Not much. An old bed frame. A mattress. A few side tables we had in storage.

JAN:

Mr. Frank!

OTTO:

Anne insisted.

MIEP:

No she didn't.

OTTO:

Edith?

MIEP:

Doubtful.

OTTO:

Well then, I confess. It was Saint Nicholas.

MIEP:

It's June and you're Jewish.

OTTO:

The off-season, and not a very good one. Good evening Miep, Jan.

MIEP:

Thank you.

OTTO:

Welcome home.

(OTTO leaves)

JAN:

He's giving us a bed?

MIEP:

Yes.

JAN:

And a mattress.

MIEP:

Uh-huh.

JAN:

And side tables.

MIEP:

Apparently.

JAN:

Why?

MIEP:

Because we can't afford them.

JAN:

He's not wrong.

MIEP:

And once his mind is made up, it's not likely to change.

JAN:

Like someone else I know?

MIEP:

What? *Who?* (*smile*)

JAN:

In any case, I'm glad not to be spending the night on the floor.

MIEP:

Me too.

JAN:

And that we have the rest of this Jenever.

MIEP:

Me too.

JAN:

And that we get to dance in *our* apartment, before it's filled with furniture.

MIEP:

How big are expecting these side tables to be?

(JAN holds her hand and pulls her in to dance)

JAN:

Why risk it?

(They dance)

MIEP:

I'm so happy, Mr. Gies.

JAN:

As am I, Miss Santrouschitz.

MIEP:

As far as anyone in this building is concerned, it's Mrs. Gies.

JAN:

Right, right. Speaking of which, *Mrs. Gies-*

MIEP:

Well done.

JAN:

We've been engaged for a year. When are you making an honest man out of me?

MIEP:

When we've saved enough to get married.

(rapid fire)

JAN:

But-

MIEP:

Weddings are expensive.

JAN:

Not that expensive.

MIEP:

I'm a secretary / who-

JAN:

And I'm a social wor/ker.

MIEP:

Who talks to housewives /all day.

JAN:

We're never going to be rich.

MIEP:

About jam-making troubles.

JAN:

I'm worried. *(beat)* What's happening to the Czechs-

MIEP:

Won't happen here. The Dutch stayed neutral before, and will again.

JAN:

Citizenship means safety, and you're-

MIEP:

Actively working on it.

JAN:

Miep-

MIEP:

What's happening outside that door can't come in. So dance with me. Please?

JAN:

Yes, ma'm.

(Knock at door)

JAN:

An early delivery service?

MIEP:

A Christmas miracle!

JAN:

It's June.

MIEP:

Haven't you heard? St. Nick is coming early this year.

(JAN opens the door. On the other side is a small, very chipper, very blonde woman with a sugary smile)

ADALWOLFA:

Hello! I'm looking for Miss Santrouschitz? Is she here?

JAN:

Oh I'm afraid the lady of the house is called Mrs. Gies, isn't that right dear?

ADALWOLFA:

I just left her parents. They said she would be here.

MIEP:

I'm Miss Santrouschitz.

ADALWOLFA:

Nice to meet you. *(to JAN)* And you are?

(JAN looks at MIEP? 'Am I your fiancé? Husband? Gay best friend?')

JAN:

I'm... worried I'll make a mistake so I'm going to the kitchen.

(JAN does)

MIEP:

That's my.. Jan. How do you do?

ADALWOLFA:

Just fine. If this is a bad time, I can ring back later.

MIEP:

Not at all. Please, come in. I'd offer you some tea; but we're without a kettle. Or teacups. Or tea, frankly, miss..?

ADALWOLFA:

How silly of me! Miss Schwarz, but call me Adalwolfa.

MIEP:

Adalwolfa. Miep.

ADALWOLFA:

Miep! How funny!

MIEP:

I'm Austrian.

ADALWOLFA:

It's like naming a kid 'Honey.'

MIEP:

I was brought here after the / war.

ADALWOLFA:

Or 'Sweetie.'

MIEP:

And Hermine is a big ask of the Dutch / tongue.

ADALWOLFA:

Or 'Buttercup.'

MIEP:

(That's enough) What do you want Adalwolfa?

ADALWOLFA:

I'm sure you're aware of the expanding boundaries of the German forces.

MIEP:

I am.

ADALWOLFA:

And of the big changes happening all across the world!

MIEP:

I am.

ADALWOLFA:

I'm here with an opportunity to be part of the excitement.

MIEP:

.. Alright.

ADALWOLFA:

I'm a member of a special group of young women on the forefront of progress here in Holland. I was given your name by the German Consulate, and because of your proud Aryan heritage, we knew you'd be a perfect fit.

MIEP:

/ Fit.

ADALWOLFA:

(Continuous) You'll attend group meetings / and-

MIEP:

What group? Exactly.

ADALWOLFA:

Oh! You better keep an eye on me! The newest chapter of the officially sanctioned Nazi Girls' Group for German nationals in Holland, just like you and me!

MIEP:

Just like you?

ADALWOLFA:

That's right!

MIEP:

And me.

ADALWOLFA:

The ideals of our club are those of our Fuhrer, and clubs just like ours are popping up all over Europe. So when you join-

MIEP:

When / I join?

ADALWOLFA:

You'll get this beautiful lapel pin which admits you to meetings, like a fun, secret password, and soon, we'll take a trip to the Fatherland for bonding activities with our Aryan sisters!

MIEP:

Stop Adalwolfa. I won't be joining your group.

ADALWOLFA:

... I'm sorry?

MIEP:

I will not be joining a Nazi Girls' Group.

ADALWOLFA:

... Why?

MIEP:

Look at what the Germans are doing to people, *children*, in your Fatherland-

ADALWOLFA:

But your family is-

MIEP:

Dutch. My passport may not be, but rest assured, I am Dutch. My family is Dutch. And they named me Miep. Not 'Honey' or 'Sweetie,' Miep. And I like it.

ADALWOLFA:

So, you're saying you won't join our *officially* sanctioned Nazi Girls' Group?

MIEP:

Among other things, yes.

ADALWOLFA:

I'm reporting back.

MIEP:

Do. And while you're at it, take a good look with your own eyes that some "Aryan" women will not be swept in by the Nazis. Good night.

ADALWOLFA:

Good night, Miep.

MIEP:

That's Miss Santrouschitz.

(MIEP pushes her out the door and slams it shut. JAN emerges from the kitchen. A moment.)

JAN:

What's happening outside that door, came in.

MIEP:

It did.

JAN:

Why was your name at the German consulate?

MIEP:

I was issued a German passport after the occupation of Austria.

JAN:

And you didn't tell me?

MIEP:

I didn't want you to worry.

JAN:

Nazis are asking for you, by name, at our door, but you didn't want me to worry?

MIEP:

It was Anne's idea?

JAN:

Miep..

MIEP:

Fine, it was Edith's.

JAN:

Stop. When were you going to tell me?

MIEP:

After we got married and I got my Dutch passport.

JAN:

I'm going to be your husband, Miep, you can't-

MIEP:

Yes, I can. I can, because secrets *can be* an act of love. Sometimes. So, while that war is still, mostly, outside that door, dance with me. In our new home.

JAN:

Okay, Mrs. Gies.

MIEP:

That's it.

(They dance)