

GAMES

A Fencing Mask is spotlighted on the stage. The rest is darkness. From the dark, Fencer HELENE MAYER speaks.

MAYER

Put on the mask,
if we must fight.
Let me fight your mesh of steel.
Rather than your mask of flesh,
With its delusions of race, and age and beauty.
Confront me with a metal visage
Shorn of features, and the deceptions of expression.
And on the strip we will fight as equals,
I can parry, I can riposte. I can compete.
So give me the masks of mesh,
Emotionless and plain as a fly's eye.

ON GUARD!

The fight begins.

[Lights up]

MAYER

Dust motes dancing through the window; plimsols yelping on the gym floor.
I'm 10. Standing in Offenbach fencing club, my Father's hand on my shoulder.
'My daughter has a talent, Master. She wants to fence with the Best. Will you take her on?'
The Master, before us, Obstructive. He has been teaching the boys to parry.
'Ladies classes? Thursdays.'
Ladies classes are a social event, not a sport. 'Sir, I practice with my brothers the whole time. Can't I learn with them?'
[SHAKING HIS HEAD] 'Girls aren't as strong. It's Nature.'
He flicks us towards the benches. We can watch.
My father apologetic, takes a seat.
I don't.
I will conceal my tears of frustration in the toilet.
In the changing room, see the clothes I would have been wearing.
The jacket, the breeches, the mask...
The Mask!
In the mask. I can be anyone. A Woman A Man A Boy A Girl A Squirrel. Face hidden, I run into the Salle, waving apology.
'You, Boy, are LATE!!! We are learning the parry... Perhaps YOU would help me demonstrate.'
The students snigger.
I must stand before him. A ten year-old before The Master.
'Come at me!'
I take my stance.
The tip of my sword drawing tiny half circles round his blade.
I feint,

he parries from the high line to the low line, ripostes. I am ready.
Counterriposte. Coule-one-two-double degage-coupe.

The satisfying bend of my foil on his chest.

The students gasp.

'Touche,' says the Master.

He lays his foil at my feet; turns to the students.

'In Fencing, honour is everything. If you are defeated, you salute your
opponent. This is our code.'

I remove the mask.

He gasps: 'You're the girl??'

'I am not a girl. I am not a boy. I am Helene Mayer, and I am a fencer.'

'Welcome to Offenbach Fencing Club'.

Age 13, I, Helene Mayer, am German champion.

Age 17. I, Helene Mayer, am Olympic Gold medallist.

I am atop the podium. Alone. Unique.

BERGMANN

Back then, I never identified as Jewish.

All I wanted to do was to play sport. To compete.

Would skip Synagogue Saturdays to play football with the boys.

Was the only girl in a class of 14.

They made no concessions for my sex.

I didn't need any.

I could beat them all.

.

BERGMANN

I grew up in Laupheim, down the road from Friedrichshafen, where they built
the zeppelins. They used to do test flights over our village. Using the straight
lines of our streets as a navigation aid.

A source of vicarious pride for a blond-haired boy called Markus, whose father
works in the factory.

He chases them down the street, waving frantically – pretending to know the
pilots.

He runs back to us.

'This is what Germany can achieve. The Aryan-Germany free from Jew
blood.'

'Fuck you, Markus. You can tell your father to fly his zeppelins up your arse.'

'The Jews could not create such a thing.'

'That lumbering monstrosity? We can walk faster.'

He laughs. 'You can walk at 125 mph???'
'I can beat it.'
His friends chuckle at my bravado.

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And so a race is arranged. The next time one flies over, I will chase it the length of the Hauptstrasse.
If I reach the mile-post first – I will be declared the winner.

They will wait at the end. They promise to judge fairly.
And I will run.
And run...

And so, at the top of the street.
I wait, until the huge silver whale growls breathlessly overhead. Go.
Sharp air in my throat.
Taste of blood.
Sound of my breath.
Loud.
And am faster.
Faster.
Ahead..
And my lungs.
My lungs.
Pressing my ribs.
In shadow.
The deep dark shadow.
Of the growling monster.
And yet.
And yet. I keep. Pace.
My friends screaming: 'Go ON GRETEL!!!'
And just when the end is in sight.
Markus sticks his foot out and I trip and I am tumbling.
And he is laughing.
'Shitty Jew.'
As the zeppelin grumbles over the finish line. Uncontested.

BERGMANN

That night, My father is reading the Juedische Allgemeine, and roars with laughter.
'This is what one of the Berlin papers said about this Helene Mayer. "Behold this Helene, she could be of Troy, defeating the world in fencer's guise. Behold the blond braids, the German Skull: a sculptural beauty of the Rheinland, who dances on the strip like a butterfly, then lunges like the devil."' My Mother tutts. 'These Nazis emit more dung than the pig farm.' My Father interrupts. 'I'm not finished - this is what the Allgemeine replied, 'We whole heatedly agree with your assessment of Helene Mayer as an example of a master race. For her Father is Dr Mayer of Offenbach, a Jewish physician.'

He roars with laughter.

He turns to me. 'That could be you, you know. Another Helene Mayer. To shut these fools up: you be the Best.'

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Soon after, he bought the statue, which we placed on the mantelpiece. Of a young girl, in a classical pose.

'Who is it?' Complains my mother.

'The Little Hay: Helene Mayer.'

Jewish. Respected on a thousand mantelpieces.

That's when I knew. I had to win the Olympics.

MAYER

All I want is to be a fencer.

But being Olympic champion, everyone wants me to be theirs. They make me the nation's sweetheart.

They call me the Little Hay.

When my train arrives back from Amsterdam, there are a thousand fans screaming my name at the station.

They carry me shoulder high, there are torchlit parades.

Interviews, fan mail. Portraits.

Requests for endorsements.

'Will you smoke Trammier cigarettes, The Healthy Smoke for sportsmen?'

No. I am a fencer,

'Will you endorse the Social Democrats and speak out against the Nazis?', No. I am a fencer,

'Will you accept the Honor Medal from President Hindenberg?', No I am a- Yes.

And now a question begins to follow me.

'Are you Jewish, or are you Aryan?'

'My father is Jewish, my mother's Aryan. I? I am a fencer.

My father shakes his head. 'It's the Nazis. Filling people's heads with rubbish... I had a patient come into my surgery; wanted me to measure his skull because he was worried it was "Too Jewish." Told him it wasn't the shape of his head which was the problem, but the vacuum inside.' 'So what am I?'

'Sport is beautiful, Helene. In Sport labels mean nothing. No-one can say they're better than you, when you're on top of the podium.' He passes my kit bag, looks me in the eye.

'As long as you are Little Hay. You make your own label.'

He makes sure I train. Every day. To stay a fencer.

BERGMANN [COMMENTING]

One day, my Headmaster announces: 'Children. We're going to have a very special visitor to the School. The Olympic champion, Helene Mayer... Gretel,

as our best athlete – I'm choosing you to greet her, and present her with a gift on behalf of the school... '

Helene Mayer!!!! Me!!!

I can't believe it! I will stay cool! And calm!

Mustn't mention the fact my family has a statue of her on our mantelpiece.

Mustn't mention...

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She floats into the school, and the first thing I say:

BERGMANN

Hello. My family has a statue of you on our mantelpiece... Shit. Sorry. The Headmaster chose me for this job because he thought I'd keep my cool.

MAYER

Why didn't he do it himself?

BERGMANN

Because he was worried he'd mention that he has a statue of you on his mantelpiece. I'm Gretel Bergmann.

MAYER

Ah.

So you're the 'school sports star.' What's your sport?

BERGMANN

High jump, 100 meters, 200, shot, Javelin...

MAYER

Choose one. Focus. Then one day I might have a statue of YOU on MY mantelpiece.

BERGMANN

Hahahahaha. Why have you come to Laupheim?

MAYER

To inspire you. The government are sponsoring me to go to college in California for a few years, so I can be acclimatized for the L.A. Games. In return, I have to inspire the Youth. So: you inspired yet?

BERGMANN

Yeah, yeah, I mean yeah, because I'm Jewish too -

MAYER

[SUDDENLY COLD]

I am not a Jew.

BERGMANN

But I heard your Father-?

MAYER

What business is it of yours?

BERGMANN

Kind of everybody's, round here, Fascism is everywhere.. posters... The Election.

MAYER

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Sportsmen have no business with Politics, nor Politics with Sport.

BERGMANN

Right. Yes. I'm sorry, this hasn't been the best meeting has it? Can I at least give you the gift? The headmaster made it for you – because he heard you were light on the strip, like a butterfly.

MAYER [COMMENTING]

She offers me a case. Full of butterflies.

Neatly pinned in lines on a board. Under each one, a Label. Handwritten.

Describing each insect in three words.

According to its species.

BERGMANN

The Headmaster wrote the labels himself.

MAYER

[HER STRONG REACTION BELIES HER WORDS]

...No. Thank you. But no.

BERGMANN

He wants you to have it.

MAYER

I don't want this, I can't accept this.

BERGMANN

But you have to take it.

BERGMANN [COMMENTING]

But she doesn't.

Her butterflies labeled, unwanted. I must carry them home with me.

BERGMANN

I could choose any of the sports.

I will drop the shot putt, and will be lighter.

I will leave the track.

I won't scurry along the ground.
I will make my ambitions lofty.
I will rise. I will jump.

MAYER

I was training for the Games in Californian sunshine.

Whilst my father is cycling through the town.
On his journey, he sees unemployed war victims.

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With begging tins. Limbless.
He sees giant, simple posters.
A face on a black background.
The only word 'Hitler.'
He sees thugs in brown shirts spitting at old ladies in the street
He sees graffiti on the side of the shop
'Danger: Jews'.
He sees hatred.
And then he sees nothing.
His bicycle wobbles.
He clutches his chest.
He falls.
The fair-minded doctor, the man who healed the town, lies dying.
And as he is consumed by darkness.
The final thing he sees, is the twisted bicycle on its side.
Its wheel. Still spinning. Wildly.
Unsteered.

My friends tell me to take time off. But I train and train harder.
Practising the block, the parry, over and over.

I didn't see him buried. I didn't see him die.
I can convince myself it hasn't happened.
Hold onto the unreality.
He wouldn't want to ruin my chances.
He'd want me to win.
He'd want me dwelling in the beauty of sport.

I am solid. I am a wall. Unassailable.

BERGMANN

Ulm is an ambitious city.
It stretches higher towards the Heavens than any
other. For it has the tallest church on the planet.
Its Sports club too aims high.
The Ulm Fussball Verein is perfect for a girl who would defy gravity.

They see my potential. Take me on. Sport used to be fun. It used to be Games.
But now I target the sky.
I begin to soar.
I follow the arrow of the steeple.
By sixteen I am the third highest jumper in Germany.
No, no, not enough.
I must go higher.

MAYER

Los Angeles, the Olympic Games. 1932.
I adjust my headband: Ready.

Games 210618 7

Better prepared than Amsterdam. More experienced. Stronger.
Look round the dressing rooms; stare down my opponents.
No-one dares meet my gaze.
They are beaten already.
I swish the foil, whip the air.
Tonight, Helene Mayer will be two-time Olympic champion.

Eyes forward. Focussed.
Going to the Salle. My pre-tournament ritual: to touch the four corners of the room with my foil. For luck.
'Helene?'
It's Karolina. One of my rivals on the team - a passionate Nazi - holding a paper.
'There's been a telegram.'
Face grave.
'Can it wait?'
'Not sure. Don't know what's the right thing to do...'
It's two hours before the Games.
I want to wave her away.
But not knowing: is going to pique and pique; mess with my preparations. 'You can't NOT tell me, now.'
'It's your boyfriend. There's been a shipping accident. He's... He's Dead.'

My foil drops to the floor.
I am defenceless.
As Death's scaly face is upon me, screaming with bold voice.
Impossible to deny.
My boyfriend my father my boyfriend my father, a mix, a blend. The nerves, the fear, the anxiety of the contest..
My father has died. My father.

Ellen Preis didn't defeat me at L.A. It was Death. Death that stopped me touching the four corners of the Salle.

4.16, I was the Little Hay.

4.17 – I wasn't. There are no interviews, no press, for the athlete who comes fifth in the Olympics..
Who am I now??

I want my medal back.
I want my medal.

BERGMANN

That summer was the summer of Hitler.
Hitler: A ridiculous man; who talks about Supremacy, despite being a gnome in a comedian's moustache.
He promises to drain the swamp of Weimar.
He promises to make Germany great again.
No-one can take him seriously. Surely.
The People will see through him.

Games 210618 8

And yet the posters keep appearing. 'No Dogs No Jews.'
And his thugs, his militia.
We must cross the road.

Who would choose this.
Who?

Germany -
The home of Beethoven, Brahms, Bach, Goethe, Guttenberg, Luther, Marx and Schiller -
Germany chooses him.

What has happened to my country. Where has it come from? This Nazi stain?
Rising from the earth, thick like oil, clinging to everything.
What do you do when the vote goes against you? Do you go along with it?
Just shrug? Say it is the will of the people and the people have spoken? Even though they have spoken ill?
Or do you fight? And fight harder?

MAYER

I am still at college in California, when I hear the news.
'Just stay in America,' writes my Mother.
'Just keep your head down. It'll all blow over. We change governments every five minutes, here. He'll be gone in six months.'

BERGMANN

At first, nothing much happens.
Maybe things won't be as bad as we first feared. Maybe in power, Hitler has been found out.
Maybe someone will assassinate him.
Maybe.
And then, the new racial Laws.
Banned from the cinema, the park, the swimming pool.

MAYER
And then the letters.

BERGMANN &
'Dear Miss Bergmann'

MAYER
'Dear Miss Mayer,'

BERGMANN
'We regret'

MAYER
'To inform you'

BERGMANN

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'That because of the new racial laws, your membership of'

MAYER
'The Offenbach Fencing Club'

BERGMANN
'The Ulm Fussball Verein.'

MAYER
'Has been withdrawn.'

BERGMANN
We're banned competing with Aryans.
We can only train in our own, Jewish sports clubs.
We can only compete with ourselves.

I never felt Jewish before. But now, the label controls everything.

The day of the Wuerttemberg championships I'm at home, because of my blood. Last year, I would have been competing.

Now I must stay, under the heavy shadow of the zeppelins. Cursing my heritage.

My father, thoughtful, watches me train in the back garden.

My equipment fashioned from garden canes.

'No energy.' He chastises.

My jumps are half-hearted. I keep hitting the crossbar with my heels. 'What's the point?'

'You're going to let them do this to you?' says my father.

'I can't compete.'

'You MUST compete.'

'I'm not ALLOWED to.'

'Not HERE. You're going to college in London.'

He picks up the crossbar. Raises it higher.

MAYER

I'm training harder than ever to win my medal back. Working my anger on my opponents.

But Berlin seems more than 9,000 kilometres away.

For the whisper has started: 'The Games. The Games. Boycott the Games.'

I'm on my way to the gymnasium, when a stranger runs across the quad. 'Miss Mayer? Miss Mayer?'

He's a journalist. 'Will you be boycotting the Games?'

I'm startled, but recover quickly.

'I won't comment. I'm a sportsman. There can be no politics in sport.' 'But as a Jew...?'

'No comment.'

Boycott??

I have spent my life. Becoming a fencer.

Games 210618 10

And because the politicians have failed to do their job. Why should I sacrifice mine?

BERGMANN

London is big and dirty and the food is awful.

But no-one bothers me. No-one tells me what shops I can go into, what movies I can watch. I am free to be who I want.

So long as I don't talk to anybody on public transport. And queue politely.

London Polytechnic welcomes me warmly.

I was the third best High Jumper in Germany.

They give me all their facilities all their training.

And I get better and better. Until I will take part in The British National Championships.

As part of a team.

Herne Hill. The British Women's High Jump.

Britain is supposed to be a nation of fog and rain.

But today is the hottest day on record.

The competition is wilting.

But I'm jumping as if I can feel the fire under my feet.

Watched by my father. Who's here on a surprise business trip.

I'm up against the two-time British champion.

Matching her jump for jump.

But at 5 foot 1, she takes out the bar.

My last jump. Clear it: and I am champion.

I look across at my father. See him smiling, encouraging.

Suddenly old. Sad eyes.

For him, for him.

I mark out my run carefully.
Exactly.
And leap higher than any Briton has leapt before.
I smash the British record.
Now they can't write me out of history.
I am elated. Celebrating.
My father rushes up.
I'm covered in sweat, but he embraces me hard.
'They can't ignore me now!' I laugh.

His hug slackens.
'No... They can't.'
And suddenly in the midst of Joy he looks troubled.
'What's the matter?'
'They've noticed already. They want you back in Germany.' 'I'm never going back. I'm going to stay here. Try and get in the British team. I am English now. I am cricket and cream teas and a jolly good show.' 'We have had visitors from the Party. On our doorstep. And so has the local Jewish sports club.'
'Are you really here on business?'
'This is it. This is the business.'

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MAYER
The stance is everything in fencing.
You need to be light on your feet, bouncy. Quick to adapt.
My stance is unique. Fluid.
Like a dancer.

I need the boycotters to put pressure on the Nazis.
I need the anti-boycotters: to make sure the Games aren't cancelled. Everybody wants me to speak for them. But I won't.
No speaking.
Only dancing.

The Nazis declare: 'There is no discrimination in our team; we would pick Jews – only there aren't any of sufficient quality.'

I say nothing.
I enter the US championships. I dance and dance. And win it.
The best female foil fencer in all America.

The Boycotters notice.

I enter the men's open foil competition. The first woman to do so,
My sword elegant. Poetic. Lethal.
I dance and dance. I beat all the men.

And I have a platform.
I start giving interviews to anyone who wants them.

I'm not quite the 'Little Hay,' more a 'Teeny-Tiny Atom-Sized' Hay. But a Hay, at least.

And as my voice grows louder, I find allies.

A growing swelling chorus,

Who poke the Nazis in the chest, insisting: 'You say there aren't Jews of sufficient quality. Why isn't she in the team?'

Lunge and lunge forcing the Nazis to parry, to retreat,

BERGMANN

They say they want me to be available for the German team.

And so I am back.

But they make it impossible for me to compete. I am not given any facilities for training.

Cynical cynical bastards.

They don't want me to compete. They just don't want me embarrassing them.

And so I'm back in the garden at Laupheim. Training with garden canes.

I feel leaden. Heavy.

My father pats my shoulder.

'Come on. Let's go for a meal.'

Jews are only allowed in two restaurants in town. They're our social clubs.

Games 210618 12

I'm sulky, broody when we enter.

But suddenly there's a round of applause.

I look around to see what the applause is for.

Everyone's looking at me.

The applause is mine.

My father beaming.

Suddenly people I barely know are shaking my hand.

I am famous.

I am the Resistance.

I am the lie of racial supremacy.

I am a Champion.

One fellow shakes my hand, tears in his eyes. 'Show them. Show them.'

The weight of expectation and hope scares me.

'How can I? There aren't the facilities to train?'

'We'll find a way.'

'My brother runs the Jewish War Veterans' Sports Club in Stuttgart. You can train there.'

'Very kind – but it's 60 miles away.'

'You'll have to stay the night.'

'You can stay with my family.'

'With mine.'

'With mine.'

MAYER

The pressure is growing. The Nazis must crack.

But just when I think the fight is won:

They pass the Nuremberg Laws: Suddenly Jews have their citizenship revoked.

I am no longer German.

The Little Hay, the nation's sweetheart, is a foreigner.

I used to be a daughter.

I used to be a champion.

I used to be a German.

I used to be an Olympian.

Not now. Not now. I am their label, not mine.

I am a Jew.

Who are they to say who is German, and who is not?

Hitler isn't Germany.

This is my country too.

I want my Fatherland. I want my Father's Land.

The Germany before. The turning wheel.

BERGMANN

The Schild. The Jewish Veterans' Sports Club in Stuttgart.

The best facilities I can access.

Ageing Medicine balls. The leather, brown and cracked.

Games 210618 13

Nineteenth century dumbbells.

The staff jaded, worn down.

Their training methods outdated.

The bar of the high jump, bent and kinked. Difficult to judge how high you are ACTUALLY jumping. The bar is ten centimeters higher at its peak. Here, somehow, I must become a champion.

Whilst at the other end of town, the German Superwomen train with all the resources of the State.

I can't win.

I'm in a foul mood ready to quit.

On the late tram, I snatch an abandoned paper.

Turn straight to the sports pages, seeking news from the National Championships.

I smile with grim satisfaction. I'm still jumping at the level of their Superwomen.

But for how long?

The house that I'm staying at belongs to a milliner and his wife. The definition of 'faded grandeur.' Once, fine furniture: shabby now. The couple are elderly. Full of questions.

'Are you going to the Olympics?', 'Do you think they'll let you compete?'

'How's the training going?'

I'm tired. I'm hungry. Can't be bothered to talk.

I grunt: 'Not going great.'

'We're about to have dinner. You hungry?'

'Yes.'

She emerges from the kitchen with plates; serves me a lamb chop. Smells delicious. I'm about to devour it..

When I see they're only eating cabbage.

'You not having any meat?'

'You're our guest; we want you to have it.'

'We have to share this.'

They won't look up from their plates. Chewing silently.

'Can't eat this. I'm not hungry.'

I push the plate aside.

She pushes it back, with a stubborn hand.

'You are an athlete. You need your strength.'

'We all need our strength,' I snap, and begin carving the chop into three pieces.

The old man takes me by the wrist, speaks gently.

'They stand outside my shop. In their uniforms. With placards, saying

"Germans defend yourselves. Do not buy from Jews."'

Just the ticking of the clock.

He lets go of my wrist.

'Beat them.'

Tick tock tick tock.

I eat the three pieces of meat.

MAYER

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The energy has gone from my training.

I wake up early. Stare at the ceiling.

Get up late.

A poll in the papers. 45% of Americans favour the boycott. The American Olympic Association vote on Wednesday; they're choosing whether to boycott or not.

They will decide what they will decide.

One of my fellow students bursts in my room.

'Helene – someone's just come from the German consulate. With a hand delivered letter.'

'Dear Miss Mayer'

BERGMANN

'Dear Miss Bergmann.'

MAYER

'As President of the German Olympic Committee,

BERGMANN

'I am writing to invite you'

MAYER

'to join the preliminary German Olympic Squad'

BERGMANN

'at the Ettlingen training camp.'

MAYER

'The final team will be chosen in the Spring of 1936, after test matches.'

BERGMANN

'Signed Von Tschammer und Osten. Minister for Sport.'

MAYER

And for one moment, for one moment, I can feel I am holding history in my hands.

If I turn down this invitation. The Americans will surely not come. The Games will fall apart. Hitler will be humiliated. The future is in my hands.

I who have lived to keep Politics out of Sport.

Will destroy everything that I am.

If I turn this down.

An impossible act of suicide.

The Games must go on.

BERGMANN

Our selection for the training camp is noisily announced in the papers.

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MAYER

Just in time for the American Olympic Association vote.

BERGMANN

48 Vote to Boycott.

MAYER

52 to go to Berlin. By such small margins hangs the world.

MAYER

I arrive on the boat from America.

I have saved their Games.

I'm expecting a big reception...

But when I step off the boat... there is no-one here to meet me. No journalists, no photographers.

It seems the Nazi press never mentioned me.

No-one knows I've come home.

But then a boy stops in his tracks, his eyes filled with wonder. 'Oh my god! Is it YOU?! Is it really you!?'

'Yes. Yes it is.'

'It's Jean Harlow!!'

A snowflake lands on my jacket. It clings there tenaciously. Before it melts into just another raindrop.

BERGMANN

I must join the team at the Ettlingen training camp... Everything is telling me not to go.

I will be handing myself over to their clutches.

Will they hurt me? Injure me?

How will my fellow competitors react to me? A Jew?

But I can't give into Fear.

They're trying to write us out of history. If we don't compete, he's got what he wants. A Jew-free games.

And if I must go, I must be the best. Humiliate him; expose the evil lie of his racial theories.

I am not Gretel Bergmann now.

I am much more.

I must be brave.

I will go to Ettlingen.

MAYER

Ettlingen. The elite athletes' training camp.

My arm is tired. I have been fighting and fighting – but no-one can touch me.

Now I am about to take a shower, when I'm stopped by girl who looks vaguely familiar.

BERGMANN

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Remember me Helene? ...You came to my school? I was the girl with the butterflies?

MAYER

Gretel? You on anybody's mantelpiece yet?

BERGMANN

Give me time... That is, if they pick us: I wouldn't put it past them to drop us, even now. You feeling the pressure?

MAYER

No more than usual.

BERGMANN

We're a small team, you and I.

MAYER

There are 500 of us?

BERGMANN

We're a team of two.

MAYER

I am my own team. Mine's an individual sport.

BERGMANN

Like it or not, you're a Jew, and –

MAYER

I never asked for this role.

BERGMANN

We have a responsibility Helene. We are fighting for something bigger than ourselves. Or are you so selfish, that you only fight for yourself? What are you fighting FOR Helene? Just for a medal? A piece of metal? Is that what you want?

MAYER

To be SOMEONE.

They have tried to destroy me; to take my sport, my nationality, my Self.

To make me Nothing: a phantom without a shadow.

But I will beat them.

I know what it means to be champion.

The World sees you, hears you: it doesn't tell you who and what you are. You tell it.

It's not the medal I want...

It's substance.

BERGMANN

Fine if you win. But if you lose, what are you left with?

Games 210618 17

MAYER

I'm a Sportsman. I don't play to lose.

BERGMANN

"I don't play to lose."

At the camp, the pressure never lets up. I can never have an off day,

They're looking for excuses to drop me.

The Nazis are sending more and more assessors to watch me train.

But I never falter.

After a particularly good jump, one hisses:

'It's all very well jumping high in training. But can you do it under pressure?' I laugh bitterly. I live my whole life under pressure.

They are becoming desperate. I am summoned to a meet in Stuttgart. I will compete against Aryans, At the Adolf Hitler stadium.

It's June 30th, 1936. In one month: the Games. This will be my last competition before Berlin.
Must perform at my best. Mustn't lose.

Entering the stadium, I feel nerves. I have spent so much of my life in Stuttgart.
Have never seen facilities like these.
Wealth and power declaring themselves in the freshly-painted track, in the neatly-mown lawns.
I am an intruder. Crossing the cinders.
The Nazis are watching me. I can feel their glares: the competitors, the officials, the Aryan crowd.
Must stay focused.
My eyes only for the high jump.

'Name?' Says an official with a clipboard. His face as lifeless as stone. He knows who I am.
'I am Gretel Bergmann.'
'Shitty Jew.'
Suddenly the nerves are gone. Only anger.
I look around. Confront the hostility. On all sides.
Blue eyes. Cold faces.
I will channel the electricity of their hatred. I will take their power,
'Bergmann?' I am ordered to jump.
My body shakes with energy. I am kicking out sparks.
My turn. My turn.
My eye unblinking on the bar.
The horizon I must conquer.
The officials, the crowd they fade away.
My enemy now is gravity.
Steady. I crouch. Blow blow.
Now. One-step-two-step-threestep-nine,

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Slam! My spikes stamp into the cinders, slamming on gravity with fierce foot.
And with an explosion of muscle and rage.
I am propelled.
As weightless as a butterfly.
Up up.
Carried by lambchops and milliners and a thousand defiant arms – lifting, soaring, rising towards the sun
And as I scissor over the bar
The Aryans are beneath. Far beneath.
20 centimetres beneath.
And I am looking down on their tiny blond heads, like a bird.
above all.
Uber alles.
And then I fall, tumble towards painful ground.

Gravity wins. Gravity always wins.
But not before I have jumped as high as any German or any European has
gone before.
And I am whooping, I am screaming,
They cannot drop me.

BERGMANN

Back at Laupheim. Exhilarated. Waiting for the Games. Two weeks to go. Two
weeks.

The Americans set off yesterday.

Too late to turn back.

The Games will go ahead.

I'm in my final preparations. Practising with canes in the
garden. Wanting more than to win – wanting the world record.

The breathless growl of a Zeppelin overhead.

Blocking the sun. Casting deep shadow.

Noisy, so noisy I never heard the postboy's motorbike. Never saw it coming.

'Gretel!?! A letter!'

Mother, from the kitchen.

On the table in front of her. Hitler's stamp and a swastika. An official letter.

Adrenaline surging. The nerves of competition.

I pick up the letter. Heavy.

Tear it open.

Scan down.

'Too inconsistent.' 'Mediocre performances. 'Couldn't possibly have
expected.' 'Heil Hitler.'

The letter drops from my fingers.

Gravity.

Gravity always wins.

MAYER:

Berlin. The eve of the Games. I'm at Unter Den Linden. Cafes on the streets.

Flower boxes.

Dust motes and the evening sun.

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Tourists, laughing. The clink of glasses.

My team mates, pouring drinks, nattering.

My mind is not here. My mind is in the future.

Tomorrow, the Games open. Tomorrow.

I am flapping like the lines of flags.

Must go to bed. Must rest.

Make my excuses.

I'm pushing through the crowds, making my way to the women's quarters at
the Reichsportsfeld. When I see her, pale.

Empty.

Lifeless.

A ghost.

(DIALOGUE) Gretel?

..That you? How come you're here? I heard you got injured.

BERGMANN

Is that what they told you?

MAYER

So are you injured or not?

BERGMANN

Much worse than you know.

It's you, now.

MAYER

What is? What am I?

BERGMANN

US. You are all of us now. Our sole representative.

MAYER

I represent myself.

BERGMANN

Not any more. You wanted to keep Politics out Sport, but now you, you are The Politics.

MAYER

You are no different from them.

I am not a Jew. I am not a German. I am not blond hair, nor blue eyes. Not Black, not White; not an Age, not a Colour, not a Race.

I am not yours to use.

That is the Nazis' game. The game of labels.

I am Helene Mayer.

If I sign up to your group, any group, I've lost.

No, no, I refuse to play.

I will not let you place me in a glass case, or skewer me with your pins. I choose. I.

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BERGMANN

Helene Mayer has already lost, don't you see?

They will never let you be 'The Little Hay.'

They will allow only one Fuhrer. You can only be one of the Volk.

....You can't win. You can only lose well.

MAYER

She disappears into the crowd, leaving me like the damned.

My friends at the table. 'Thought you were going back?'

'I just saw Bergmann.'

'You can't have. Bergmann's injured. She's gone. Long gone.'

MAYER

I'm shaken. Walking back to the village, Berlin wearing a beautiful face.
Everything clean and floral. For the tourists.
I take a shortcut down an alley.
See a poster they've forgotten to take down. No Dogs No Jews.

MAYER

I feel better for a good night's rest.
Feel the excitement.
Today, The Games. Begin.
I will join the procession of Athletes,
The German team walking the length of Unter Den Linden.
For the grandest Olympics that there has ever been.

We're Six abreast.
I'm anonymous in the white uniform of the team.
Walking to the rhythms of His music.
Crowds ten deep. All raising salutes.
Cheering not us; but the notion of a nation.
Waving their flags.
There are Children. Seven years old, no longer boys, standing like soldiers. In uniforms.
Watching me blankly.
Swastikas from every window, every lamppost.
Heil, heil and heil.

'Helene! Helene!'

In the apartments above, a family leaning out of the window. Looking at me.
Only me. The flag of the Olympic rings fluttering from their window box.
They're not flying the swastika.
They're not allowed to.
They're Jews.
Waving at me...
Only me.

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I am a fencer, Just a fencer, I plead.
A fencer.
I look away.

Let the Games begin.

BERGMANN

Wednesday morning. I'm at home in Laupheim, listening to the grind of the airships.

Unsure whether I can follow the events in Berlin.
It's too painful.
But then I know... There's only one way, to drown out the sound of the zeppelins...

MAYER

I am touching the four corners of the Salle with my sword.
No-one can talk to me.
No-one interrupts.
There must be no deaths. Not this time. Not today.

BERGMANN

Jews across the country have been banned from using electrical equipment.
But we find a way.
Across the country there are millions of us, secretly turning on the radios...
Today, Helene, our resistance comes through you.
You wish to fight alone. But that's not your choice.
Not this time.
Not today.

MAYER

We are called from the locker room.
Down the corridor. I feel the heat of the crowd. Their simmering buzz.

And suddenly we're in the Arena and the applause is overwhelming.
People pointing, recognizing. Every day the Salle has only been half full. But today, the day of my final, The Stands are rammed.
The German people, the 56% who didn't vote for Hitler, the frightened majority: They have come for one reason. To see the Little Hay.

Nervous. Energized.
We take our seats on low-slung benches.
Electricity in the air. The buzz. The climax.

A brownshirt official stands before the noisy crowd.
He slices the air, for silence.
'RUHE BITTE!!'
[HE WAITS FOR CONTROL]
'The first elimination bout, please, between Abril Rodriguez of Argentina and Helene Mayer of Germany.'
Excited applause fiercely waved down.

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I must walk to the strip in controlled silence.
I can't hear my people.
But I can feel their eyes. Following me.
I will make them cheer. I will make them defy.

On Guard.
I bounce my foil this side, that.

Dance, lunge. Hit!

And suddenly a savage roar which expands and swells and nearly pushes me off my feet. I feel the power of the crowd.

BERGMANN

Impossible to hear the commentary when she fights. Every time she scores a hit: a boom, and a crackle of static.

But I can work out the score myself. I just count the bursts of sparks.

MAYER

I make the final eight with ease.

Then it comes down to this.

The deciding bout: against Ellen Preis. The woman who took my title in LA.

The woman who first stole my identity.

The best fencer there is.

The equation is simple: whoever wins – takes gold.

But if we Draw – Ilona Elek will take it, she has the most hits.

Tension from the crowd.

For them, this fight is entertainment, or a potential affirmation of national pride.

For me: it's my existence.

I lunge I overcommit. She hits.

Hits again.

She's faster, more agile than L.A.

Must clear my mind, strip everything away.

Leave nothing but instinct.

Blank and bleach.

Feint parry riposte Second intention.

The resistance in my wrist.

The judge with arm aloft.

The ROAR.

YES!

The ROAR again.

BERGMANN

First bout, 2-2.

Second bout. 3-3.

Even the lickspittle Nazi commentator is getting excited.

Helene Mayer, the Little Hay is the pride of the nation. As she is contesting the most dramatic battle in Olympic history.

MAYER

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Our final bout.

Preiss is small, but strong. Fighting like the possessed.

The crowd can scarce breathe, the tension is so great.

Choking on emotion.

Tied at 3-3.

Fifteen seconds to go. Fifteen seconds to decide my future. She's tiring.
I lunge.
ROAR.
4-3.
I did it!!! I DID IT! I'm ahead!
Only seconds left..
I'm going to be Olympic Champion.
Four years of fighting, every minute, every day, every night.
The campaign has been long, but the victory is mine.
Is MINE.
My throat spasming, tears in my eyes.

Five seconds left. Four.

And trapped beneath my mesh cage, the tears, the snot –

Three seconds. Two.

The chained emotions break their shackles.
Gasping gasping...

A sharp jab in my chest.
The bend of her foil striking above my heart.

HIT!

I am slain.

4-4. 4-4.

BERGMANN
Nothing. No Sound. Not even the Static.
Oblivion.

MAYER
Elek – elated.
Throws her arm around me, says: 'We did it. We did it.'
My smile hollow. I am dead. Empty. A shell.
'Gold, Silver, Bronze. ALL of us: Jews.'
Preis laughs off her bronze. 'Oh yeah! Ha ha! So much for his Master Race!'
Elek laughs too. 'WE are the Master Race. Juden Juden ueber alles!'

They are changed. Their voices fading down the corridor.

I'm left alone in the dressing room.
The lingering smell of sweat. The lockers stand empty.
One of the showers has been left on. The ice water bouncing hard off the

tiles.

I came second.

The person who comes second in a real sword fight dies bleeding.

The Little Hay is no more.

Just a snowflake melting in a puddle.

MAYER

Commotion in the corridor.

Heightened voices.

Heiling.

Hitler and his entourage. Touring the facilities. Shaking hands.

The dressing-room attendants, the staff,

simpering laughing excited,

Shaking his hand.

Asking for autographs.

I press forward,

thrust him my hand.

And suddenly the Beast is before me.

And the room fades away.

Just me. And him.

Our eyes meeting like the clash of blades.

His hand slips into mine.

and I must speak

but my voice is just a whisper

‘what is my name?’

My handshake firm

he tries to let go, but my wrists are strong.

The sharp grind of steel.

‘MY NAME?’

My fencer’s grip

crushing his fingers into a single claw.

His bones cracking.

Now three of his goons prising my fingers

and his knees are buckling.

and I squeeze, I squeeze, I SQUEEZE.

MY NAME.

Wrenching from his depths the words:

‘Helene Mayer!’

And suddenly I let go.

We are back in the room.

The flesh of his crushed fingers, paler than the dead.

And one of his goons smiles coldly: 'Do you have family, Ms Mayer?'

100,000 people in the bowl of the Olympic Stadium for the ceremony.

Preis steps up first. Then me. Then Elek, the gold medallist. Our flags raised before us:

Austria, Hungary.

The Flag of Germany: black-red-gold bestrode by a screaming eagle, its talons wide ready to tear flesh.

And now I will always be just another German.

One of the millions who is not Olympic champion. Now: just one of the Volk.

I thought I could make Germany come to me.

But now I must go to them.

Helene Mayer is dead. Sliced and diced by a thousand

labels. [HELENE RAISES THE HEIL HITLER SALUTE]

And seeing my arm aloft, the crowd roar their approval.

And for one moment, one glorious moment, I could be the Little Hay again. But I'm not that.

I am the body of the Little Hay.

Wearing a smiling mask of flesh.

Just another German.

My Games are over.

My fencing gear is packed away.

Am taking one final look at the colourless room.

The chambermaid knocks, clean sheets under her arm. Every morning we have chatted.

Today she won't look me in the eye.

I offer my hand, I say brightly. 'I'm leaving today. So this is goodbye.'

She says nothing. Won't meet my eye.

'I suppose you heard: I lost...'

I now see she has a Star of David on her lapel.

'...I tried to make them see me. And I lost.'

'Well. At least you got to compete...'

She throws the sheets back on her cart.

'...It's alright for you, with your prodigious ability. You get to contest the game of labels. But what about the rest of us? The ordinary people on whom the label sticks? Who are spat at, beaten, thrown on trains? What about us?' She leaves me, alone, in the empty room.

The blank imprint of my body on the bed.

Dirty linen, the room uncleaned.

And now I know. How badly I lost.

I have my label. 'The Betrayer of the Jews'.

BERGMANN

After the Games, I emigrate to America.
Change my profession, my nationality, my name.
It's difficult and easy to leave.

In 1946: I'm in New York. My athletics are long gone, but I still read the sports pages.

That's why I see the advert for the US National Fencing championships.
Helene is the star draw. Six times champion.

And so 17 years after we first met, I'm waiting outside the dressing rooms, like the fangirl I used to be. With a gift which I bought from Germany.

BERGMANN

I saw your name in the paper.

MAYER

Gretel!

BERGMANN

I'm Margaret now.

MAYER

You changed your name.

BERGMANN

'Margaret Lambert.' I'm 'American.'

MAYER

Me too. Helene Meyer. Changed the 'A' to an 'E'.

BERGMANN

Ha. We chose our labels.

MAYER

So you married?

BERGMANN

Kids, too. You?

MAYER

No.

BERGMANN

Figures.

MAYER

Got my statue on your mantelpiece any more?

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BERGMANN

I think it accidentally fell into the bonfire –

MAYER

- after the salute? [SHE HANGS HER HEAD IN SHAME] My brothers spent the war in a labour camp. My Uncle Georg died in Theresienstadt.

[A PAUSE WHILE THE HORROR SINKS IN]

BERGMANN

You ever played a team sport Helene?

MAYER

Not really.

BERGMANN

In Laupheim I used to play football all the time. In football you can have your star players. But if you don't play as a team, you can never win. It's all about the tactics Helene. The opposition are always trying to dismantle your moves. Getting you to play as individuals rather than a unit...

The Nazis played football.

It's what they do.

We should have never fought, you and I.

We were on the same team.

Playing different sports:

Individual sports.

They forced us to play their Games, their rules. And we lost.

MAYER

I was a fencer, Gretel.

BERGMANN

Do you know why I chose to jump? I wanted to take the species higher than its ever gone before. To reach the stars. But I needed - the team-mates in the dressing room.

MAYER

...I never felt Jewish.

BERGMANN

We were playing for a team bigger than that.

[HELENE IS SHAMED]

BERGMANN

So. This is it. This is goodbye. Before I forget, I have something for you.

MAYER

She bends. Produces a box in a sheet.

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Peels it back.

It's the familiar case.

BERGMANN

I haven't looked after them I'm afraid. They're a bit sun-damaged.

They were opposite a window, and...

MAYER

The butterflies.

Still beautiful, but the labels beneath: blank.

Bleached by sunlight.

Not even the impression of a nib.

Uncategorized.

BERGMANN

I was thinking I should write their name back on again. But then I thought, no.

MAYER

[Choking back tears] No. They're perfect.

MAYER

And I take them.

As she leaves me.

Alone. In the dark of history.

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