

What If?

By Pete Malicki

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Cast

Adolf Hitler – Hitler when he was 20. Petulant and demanding. Strong South German accent

Mutter – Hitler's mother. Dotes on her son.

Heinrich Himmler – Himmler when he was 20. Tall, skinny, glasses. Gay.

Herr Stolengeld – the Jewish curator. Stereotypical early twentieth-century Jew; long nose, pompous, tight-fisted.

Set

The Hitlers' living room. There is a couch with a blanket on it, and Hitler has a canvas on an easel. There are two exits: one to outside, one to the kitchen.

Play

Adolf is sitting alone in his living room, musing over a canvas that sits on his easel. He calls offstage to his mother.

Adolf: Mutter!

Mutter: *(offstage)* Ja?

Adolf: What's for dinner?

Mutter: *(entering)* Sauerkraut und fries, my little poopie.

Adolf: Nein! You know I hate fries. Make something else.

Mutter: No, Schatzie. Your friend Heinrich is coming, remember? He loves fries.

Adolf: Well I hate them. I order you to make something else.

Mutter: *(tussling Adolf's hair)* Oh Schatzie. You can't give me orders like some kind of dictator. The world doesn't work that way. But what I *can* do is give Heinrich all of your fries and you can have as much sauerkraut as your little heart wishes.

Adolf: ...Okay.

Mutter kisses Adolf on the head and walks offstage.

Adolf: Ich liebe dich, Mutter.

Adolf sizes up his canvas again, measuring it visually and concentrating hard on what he might do with it. Mutter enters shortly after with some mail.

Mutter: Schatzie! It's for you. It's from the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna.

Adolf: Mein Gott. Open it! Schnell!

Mutter: Don't you want to have the honour of...

Adolf: *(interrupting)* Nein. Open it and read it to me immediately. I command you.

Mutter: Well, okay. *(opens envelope; reads letter)* “Liebe Herr Hitler. Thank you for your recent application. The Academy of Fine Arts Vienna is... *(excited)* pleased to announce that your application has been successful!!!”

Adolf: *(jumping and shouting)* Hooray! Oh ja! I can’t believe it. All my dreams will finally come true. I will be the most famous artist in the world.

Mutter: But of course, schatzie. You will be so famous people will know your name in one hundred years’ time.

Adolf: Oh, Mutter. I think I was going to do something horrible if they rejected me a second time.

Mutter: Nonsense. Why would they reject a man of such passion and commitment? Come. I’ll make you extra sauerkraut.

Adolf: Awesome.

Adolf and Mutter leave the stage via the kitchen exit. Herr Stolengeld enters with some mail.

Herr S: Phone bill. Stockbroker. Financial advisor. Client. Tenants. More tenants. Even more tenants. *(pauses; frowns)* Herr Hitler? *(opens letter)* “Liebe Herr Hitler. Thank you for your recent application. The Academy of Fine Arts Vienna takes no satisfaction in telling you that you are ‘unfit for painting’.” Why have I received this? *(takes out mobile phone and dials)* Barbara? Why have I received a rejection letter meant for one of our applicants? *(pause)* How should I know? *(pause)* Well, I’m using Windows BC. *(pause)* Seriously? *(pause)* Okay, thank you. *(disconnects call)* Fucking mail merge.

Herr Stolengeld dials another number off the letter. Hitler enters stage. His phone is ringing and he answers it.

Adolf: Hallo?

Herr S: Yes, hello. Is this Herr Hitler?

Adolf: Ja.

Herr S: Herr Hitler, this is Herr Stolengeld from the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. Are you with Vodafone?

Adolf: Vodafone?

Herr S: Yes. It’s much cheaper if we’re both Vodafone, otherwise it costs like seventy-three cents per... well, never mind. I’ll make it quick. Herr Hitler, I’m afraid there’s been a terrible mistake. My secretary sent you the wrong letter. The fact is that your application was actually unsuccessful. We can’t have you at our school.

Adolf: Nein. Nein nein nein nein nein. That is *not* possible. I have the letter of acceptance right here.

Herr S: Well I'm terribly sorry, but it simply isn't possible...

Adolf: NEIN! Dass ist unfair! Dass ist einfach unglaublich! I have been accepted and I *will* be attending your school. I command it.

Herr S: (*head in hand*) Okay, look. I will come around to your home and look at some of your paintings. If they are good, I will accept your application. Okay?

Adolf: Ja. Okay. I will prove it to you. You will see how good I am.

Herr S: (*leaving stage*) Very well, Herr Hitler. I hope you are right.

Herr Stolengeld hangs up his phone and leaves the stage.

Adolf: Sheisse! No, okay. This is okay. I just need to paint a masterpiece in like five minutes. (*thinks to self; paces, then gasps*) I know! Perfect! This will be brilliant. (*takes out phone*) Pick up, Heinrich. Schnell.

There is a loud thump from offstage. Heinrich enters, dusting himself off.

Heinrich: Hi Adolf.

Adolf: That was quick.

Heinrich: Ja. I was just climbing some trees for fun and I happened to be in the one outside your bathroom window.

Adolf: O...okay. Listen, Heinrich, I need a favour. I need to paint you.

Heinrich: (*points at face*) Can you make me into a beaver?

Adolf: No, I mean a portrait. I need a masterpiece to be accepted into the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. I need to paint you... naked.

Heinrich starts undressing immediately, excited.

Adolf: Nein. It must be done with some good taste and style. Throw this blanket around yourself.

Adolf hands Heinrich a blanket. Heinrich wraps it around himself, undresses, then stands with his back to the audience. He holds the blanket wide open. Adolf goes to his canvas and takes a brush. He double-takes when he sees Heinrich.

Adolf: Mein Gott. Your Schwanz is enormous!¹

Heinrich: Ja.

¹ Pronounced "Schvunts"

Adolf: I mean, that must be the biggest Schwanz I've ever seen in my life!

Heinrich: Do you... like my Schwanz?

Adolf stares for a moment, then starts painting bashfully.

Adolf: Can you perhaps do something a little more suggestive for me?

Heinrich poses lewdly.

Adolf: Oh Gott! Ein little less suggestive than that.

Heinrich moves again. He is obscured from the audience by the blanket.

Adolf: Okay, perfect. Oh, actually, can you move your Schwanz a little bit more to the left? That's better.

Adolf paints silently. It is awkward.

Heinrich: How's your Mutter?

Adolf: Ja. She's good. *(pause)* She's the best.

Heinrich: That's good. *(pause)* How's your goldfish?

Adolf: Hermann ist fine.

Heinrich: You look very nice today, Adolf.

Adolf: Can you be quiet please? It's very difficult to concentrate. *(shakes head)* Maybe I should've called Goebbels.

Adolf paints for a few moments, then drops his brush.

Adolf: Heinrich Himmler! What is happening to your Schwanz?

Heinrich covers up.

Heinrich: Oh man. I'm so embarrassed.

Adolf: Well, *I* have to paint my masterpiece. Please open the blanket.

Heinrich opens the blanket again. Adolf picks up his brush and continues painting, then slowly stops. They look at each other. Adolf slowly walks over, making constant eye contact. Just as they are about to kiss, there is a noise from outside. Adolf rushes back to his easel. Heinrich covers up as Mutter enters.

Mutter: Hallo, Schatzie. Ooh, hallo Heinrich. I wasn't expecting you here so soon.

Heinrich: *(mumbling)* Hello Frau Hitler.

Mutter: I was just going to stir the sauerkraut. You boys have fun.

Mutter leaves via the kitchen exit. Adolf and Heinrich both look uncomfortable for a long moment.

Adolf: I really need to finish this. Please get dressed.

Heinrich: But... we were...

Adolf: Please, Heinrich. My Mutter is here. I can't paint my masterpiece with any distractions. Can you get dressed for me and let my imagination fill the blanks?

Heinrich: Fine.

Heinrich gathers his things and leaves the stage, still covered by the blanket. Adolf paints for another long moment, then there is a knock on the door. He looks up. Herr Stolengeld barges in.

Herr S: Hello. My name is Savehard Stolengeld. You must be young Herr Hitler.

Adolf: Ja.

Herr S: I like your little apartment. Very retro. Very nineteenth century.

Adolf: Thank...

Herr S: Before I go on, I'd just like to let you know that I am extremely receptive to bribery. Five thousand dollars and a hot meal would almost certainly get you into the school.

Adolf: We don't have much money, Herr Stolengeld.

Mutter enters, shortly followed by a dressed Heinrich.

Herr S: *(to Mutter)* Hello. I'm Savehard, from the Academy of Fine Arts. You must be Frau Hitler. I'm delighted to meet such an illuminating lady.

Mutter: *(coy)* Thank you.

Herr S: Well, why don't we get straight to it, hmm? Herr Hitler, can you fetch one of your paintings?

Adolf nods, then walks over to his canvas.

Heinrich: "Hello there, young man. My name's Savehard. It's a pleasure to meet you too."

Adolf: Here it is, Herr Stolengeld. This is my masterpiece.

Adolf shows the painting to Herr Stolengeld. Ideally the actor will have painted it during the performance, but if this is not possible it can stay with its back to the audience.

Herr S: This is it, is it? Hmm, let's see. This is a nude, am I right?

Adolf: Ja.

Herr S: Well...

Herr Stolengeld peruses the painting for a long, tense moment. Adolf is getting jittery.

Herr S: Well... I like the way the canvas is all straight around the edges.

Adolf and Heinrich exchange a look, worried.

Herr S: Herr Hitler, as I asserted when you first applied for my school and I rejected you, you have no talent as an artist. None whatsoever. This looks like a couple of epileptic squirrels got covered in paint and tried to kill each other on your canvas. I mean, the figure barely resembles a human. Is it a human?

Adolf: I...

Herr S: It looks more like a nude *cow*, Herr Hitler. Just how many limbs do you think a person has? Let me show you. One, two, three, four. This has at least seven. Or is that the torso? I can't even... oh my god, that's his Schwanz! Herr Hitler, that is an unrealistically large Schwanz.

Listen, if we gave you a ruler you might have some ability as an architect but there is no way you can ever be an artist. I am rejecting your application for the second and last time.

Adolf: Nein. Nein! Fuck you Stolengeld, you filthy... *Jew*! You know what? I will kill you before I let you reject me.

Mutter: Schatzie...

Adolf: You know what, Mutter? Fuck you too! I'm sick of all this "Schatzie, Schatzie, Schatzie." Stolengeld, I am giving you one last chance to do the right thing.

Herr S: I'm afraid I have, Herr Hitler.

Adolf: Nein! You will regret this, you greedy bastard.

Mutter: It's not the end of the world, Adolf.

Adolf: Oh yes it is, Mutter. I will kill Herr Stolengeld and every other Jew in the entire world! You just wait and see. And you know what? Your Blutwurst is so bad I'm going to become a vegetarian!

Heinrich: (*approaching Adolf*) Adolf, my dear friend. Forget about art school. We can have fun together. Why don't we move to Poland and start a disco band? We can call it Glitzkrieg.

Adolf: You know what, Heinrich? The gays can die too.

Adolf stalks off stage, enraged. The others look at each other.

Heinrich: Scheisse.

Herr S: That was quite the reaction. Do you think he meant all that?

Mutter: No. Not my Adolf.

They all turn to face the audience.

Mutter: He wouldn't hurt a fly.