

WAR STORIES

Act I takes place in 1941-'42. Act 2 takes place in 1943 -'46.

Characters:

Ruth Abramowicz	20 (Act 1), a student
Nat Cohen	21 (Act I), a student
Myra Abramowicz	mid 20's (Act 1), Ruth's sister-in-law
Joe Abramowicz	mid 20's, Ruth's brother
Eduardo Pagan	late 20's, a faculty member
Spenser Cox	21 (Act 1), Nat's roommate
Murray Gluck	40ish, a union man
Passerby #3/Oscar Burns/Doctor/ Ruth's Father	middle aged
Nannie Knight	Union worker, mid 50's

Notes

Act 1 Scene 1 and Act 2 Scene 1 requires use of actors in named roles. One male actor plays several parts (as indicated above.)

The passage of time is marked by projected newspaper headlines and articles.

Act 1 Scene 5 Uses selection from FDR fireside chats: April 28, 1942, *On our national economic policy*, or October 12, 1942, *Report on the home front*.

Photographs or footage from "The Good War and Those Who Refused to Fight It" (Ehrlich and Tejada-Flores, Paradigm Productions) and other footage of conscientious objectors during World War 2 runs in Act 2.

Projections are used, as noted, to create settings.

Music

Act 1 Scene 1: *Union Maid*

Act 1 scene 2: *The Crazy Woman* (poem by Gwendolyn Brooks)

Act I scene 8:

'41 Blues – Peter J. Leighton (Doctor Clayton)

As time goes by – Rudy Vallee

So long it's been good to know you – Woody Guthrie

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0v1Lj5E_nVE

Act 2 scene 2: *In my dreams* (original)

Act 2 scene 4 *The Mill Was Made of Marble* :

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0FP5NzDBxdA>

[*Solidarity Forever*](#)

Act I Scene 6

MYRA and JOE's apartment. Saturday evening. Blackout curtains are down.

RUTH and NAT are lying undressed on the couch.

RUTH

Come on, come on. Time to get up.

RUTH props herself up, turns on the light, checks the time.

NAT

A little longer.

RUTH

The movie house is practically around the corner.

RUTH gets up, puts on underwear.

RUTH (cont'd)

Jesus it's cold. It was a lot warmer this afternoon.

NAT

Come back and I'll warm you up.

RUTH

It might be a good idea if you had your clothes on when you meet my brother.

NAT

What are they seeing?

RUTH

Grapes of Wrath.

NAT

Predictable.

RUTH

How's that?

NAT

Socialists sucked into the fold of Rooseveltian war-mongering. Eat that kind of thing right up. Heart-warming government propaganda.

RUTH

I intend to see it.

NAT

Well then, I intend to go with you.

RUTH

Time to get up.

NAT

We've got time. First they'll run the newsreels to whip people into a frenzy of support for the great imperialistic war to end all wars such that no one will ever have to kill/anyone ever again.

RUTH

(irritated) We're stopping Hitler's fascist aggression. We're protecting England from being demolished. England isn't an "imperialistic" nation.

NAT

Really? What's your definition of imperialism?

RUTH

I know what imperialism is. For your information, England has been very helpful to Jews in getting them to Palestine.

NAT

Come on. Ruth. The English are well known anti-Semites. You have to know that England, Great Britain, heads the largest empire in history; it controls a quarter of the earth's landmass. Places they send their products to, places they get cheap resources back from. Germany needs some land to control to get its economy back rolling and Britain worries it's going to lose its grip. Bingo. War. That's what it's about.

RUTH

That's not all it's about. (angry) I have family over there. Nothing theoretical about that.

NAT

Of course not.

He pulls her close.

NAT (cont'd)

I understand.

RUTH

I don't think you do. There are laws in Germany that stop Jews from holding certain jobs, laws that say where we can live, where we can go to school. Whether we can buy flowers. (pointed) Who we have sex with.

NAT

Yeah, and you think this country is a day in the park for anyone who isn't the right religion or skin color. What do you think happens to Negroes? Except for Spenser and two others in my year, I don't see Negroes on campus. Why do you think that is?

RUTH

That's your school. A school for rich boys/whose parents can

NAT

You're being naïve. I'm saying that it's capitalism that fans anti-Semitism. All types of prejudice. You see that, right? Capitalism requires scapegoats. Prejudice only dies when humanity as a whole gains socialist liberation.

RUTH

Exactly what problem does that solve now, right this minute, when Jews are under attack.

NAT

You can't divide people by religion. It separates people, and when people get separated they think it's okay to kill each other. No. This is about putting down workers. Everywhere.

RUTH

Great, Nat. Spout away from the sidelines. (chilly) We need to get dressed.

NAT

I'll go to jail for what I believe in, Ruth. That'll have to be my way of getting off the sidelines. (beat) You have to accept that. (beat) Anyway, I don't want us to argue. I don't care that we disagree about this. I love you.

RUTH

You need to get up.

NAT

Let me warm you up a little more. "Come lay with me and be/ my love"

RUTH

Live/ with me

NAT
"Live with me and be my love and we shall all the pleasures share."

RUTH
"Prove". "Pleasures prove."

RUTH returns to him.

RUTH (cont'd)
For a minute.

NAT
Heartless.

He is caressing her.

RUTH
Warming purposes only. That's the deal. (shivers) I never can get warm enough.
My father used to cover me up with a pile of coats when I was little.

NAT
Don't be cold.

He rubs her to warm her.

RUTH
Mmmm. That's nice.

They snuggle.

NAT
I love you. I'd keep you warm always.

RUTH is uneasy.

RUTH
I'll bet there was plenty of heat in your family's townhouse.

NAT
We grew up different, Ruth. There are other ways to feel cold.

NAT pulls her down.

NAT (cont'd)
Do you love me?

Uh huh.

RUTH

Uh huh? What does that mean?

NAT

She sits back up.

RUTH (cont'd)

A little warming. That was the deal. Come on. Get up. Get up. Get up.

She throws him his clothing and finishes dressing. She takes a sheet off the couch.

Help me fold.

RUTH (cont'd)

They fold. NAT is zipping up his pants when there's a key in the door.

Shit. Shit. Shit. Get your shoes on.

RUTH

RUTH covers the sheet with cushions. NAT gets socks, but no shoes on. MYRA and JOE enter.

Hi.

RUTH

Hello.

MYRA

Myra, Joe, this is Nat. Nat, this is my brother Joe. And my sister-in-law, Myra.

RUTH

Pleased to meet you.

NAT

JOE notes NAT's absent foot attire.

(curt) How do you do.

JOE

It's good to meet you, Nat. We've been hearing a lot about you.

MYRA

NAT smiles.

How was the movie?

RUTH

Very powerful. Don't you think, Joe?

MYRA

Yes.

JOE

I hear they sweetened things up from the book. Made it seem like government was the peoples' best friend/and that the

NAT

The acting was good?

RUTH

Yeah. Fonda was terrific.

MYRA

And that, what?

JOE

and that the government actually cares about working people.

NAT

And Roosevelt doesn't, huh?

JOE

If he did, you think all our capital would be flowing to the fat cats who are getting richer and richer building the war machine? And the minimum wage is two bits?

NAT

(peace-making) It's better than it was before he signed the National Labor Relations Act. It's a 40 hour work week.

MYRA

Right.

RUTH

For unionized white workers. Everyone else still get the shaft whenever they can get away with it.

NAT

JOE

That's not correct. There are protections now. There's a war on, my friend.

MYRA

It's late at night for politics.

RUTH signals NAT to let up.

NAT

(back-pedaling) Sure. Right you are.

JOE

(not mollified) The New Deal needs to be on hold for a little while, Nate/while Roosevelt

NAT

Nat.

JOE

Roosevelt knows what he's doing. He's been figuring a way in for a long time.

RUTH

(to Myra) Nat and I are planning to see it. We loved the book. Right, Nat?

NAT

Yeah. (to Joe) Anyway, Roosevelt's a smart guy, I'll give you that. War rallies nations, it puts the unemployed back to work. Trotsky said "war is the method by which capitalism, at the climax of its development seeks to solve its insoluble contradictions."

NAT and JOE are glaring at each other.

MYRA

How was your evening?

RUTH

Good! Right, Nat?

NAT

Yeah. I'm sorry I missed dinner. I hear you make a great stuffed cabbage.

MYRA

It's my mother-in-laws recipe. I've pretty much nailed it. I think?

RUTH

Yeah. I think so!

An awkward silence.

RUTH (cont'd)

We got some studying in.

JOE again looks pointedly at NAT's feet.

JOE

Did you. (beat) I thought you were going to do the dishes.

RUTH

Right! I'll do them now.

MYRA

Don't worry about it. You should get her home, Nat.

JOE

I'm going to bed.

RUTH

Good night.

JOE exits. RUTH is distressed.

RUTH

That went well.

MYRA

You know how he feels about this.

NAT

Thank you for... everything.

RUTH brings their coats.

MYRA

Good to meet you Nat.

MYRA picks up his shoes and hands them to him.

NAT

Yeah. Thanks. Sorry about the late-night politics.

Stick to socialism next time.

MYRA

Sure. Okay. That's what Ruth likes too.

NAT

I owe you some dish washing.

RUTH

Among other things.

MYRA

RUTH and NAT exit. MYRA takes the sheet and straightens the cushions.

End Scene 6