

ACT ONE

PROLOGUE

LIGHTS COME UP on ...

SOPHIE, alone on stage, a Book of Hours in her hands.

SOPHIE

Before the war.
Before the Germans marched into Belgium
What was I thinking of?
The beginning of school and wanting a new dress to wear
And not a made over one either.
My piano teacher who I have a ridiculous crush on.
The lessons, they say, are really a waste.
It is my sister who has talent.
Lucie with the long fingers.
Lucie may have talent but I, I have desire.

Before the war, my father promises an outing for my birthday.
A rowboat, the Sambre River, trout fishing. This is what we used to do, what we have
always done, and I am longing to tell him, but afraid to tell him that 15 is too old for the
rowboat and the quiet and the river.
I want to walk down the street in a new dress.
I want to look in the shop windows.
I want to hear my heels on the pavement.
I want to see and be seen.

Looking back, part of me thinks: How childish. What a luxury.

This is a book of hours.
Remarkable that it survived.

These are the hours left to us.
And what we did with them.
Or tried to do with them.

It is August 24th, 1914.
This hour. Here. Now.
This is where we begin.

WE HEAR the sound of thousands of refugees fleeing the city. Cart wheels turning, the
quiet tramp of feet, plodding horses, a baby crying, a lone dog barking.

SOPHIE EXITS as LIGHTS COME UP ON ...
ALBERT, alone in the library.

He is surrounded by wooden packing crates, their tops torn off.
Books are piled everywhere, on every available surface, on the floor, on chairs, on windowsills.

ALBERT moves among the crates, unpacking books, sorting them into piles.
Let this action establish, then ...

Albert

What a mess.
What a jumble.
Where is the Verlaine?
It was just here. Rimbaud, Valery ...
The 14th century illuminated text of
Why did we ever –
So foolish.
Foolhardy. Yes. Foolhardy.
Daring without using judgment.
Unwise.
Imprudent.
Rash.
Precipitate.
Reckless --

(LUCIE ENTERS with a bicycle and a
basket of pigeons)

Lucie
(taking in the mess)

What are you doing?
What have you done?!

(no answer)

Father –

Albert

Yes?

Lucie

You've unpacked them.

Albert

Yes.

Lucie

All our work –

Albert

You weren't that helpful, really.

Lucie

You send me on a fool's errand and then you –

Albert

An important errand, my dear. Essential. We must eat.

Lucie

We've been packing all day, Father. Why have you –

Albert

I didn't like the boxes –

Lucie

We agreed –

Albert

So obvious, boxes –

Lucie

We discussed this.

Albert

You enter a library. You find boxes. What will you think?

Ahh. Look there! Boxes of books.

Not clever. Not clever at all.

It could be interpreted –

Lucie

That we are hiding the books.

Albert

Exactly! A bad impression to make.

And then, of course, we've singled out the most important works, brought them all together tidily in one place and boxed them up. Perfect for transport –

Lucie

Yes! To a safe house –

Albert

And where might that be?

Lucie

--Father Septimus said –

Albert

-- There could be rain. Did you think of that? Did anyone think of that?

A disaster. Water. Damp. Rot. The principal enemies, excluding fire, of course.
I need a drink.

Lucie

This is our plan. It's a good plan.
We will move the most valuable manuscripts to --

Albert

-- We will be caught. Stealing our own books.
That's what it will look like. And then what?
They'll be burned or dumped in the river or transported to Germany --

Lucie

Father. We agreed. We all agreed --

Albert

No. Septimus insisted. You agreed.
And I kept my mouth shut.