

Sean Dorgan
From *The Escape Wheel*

In this excerpt from the full-length play, Rosenzweig, a Jewish doctor in 1938 Austria, has been unexpectedly called on by Menger, who wishes to ask about an unspecified medical condition.

ROSENZWEIG

A consultation, you say. What's the complaint?
(noting the clutched collar)
Have you been experiencing chills?

MENGER

Eczema.

ROSENZWEIG

Eczema?

MENGER

It's nothing entirely new. As a boy I used to get it under my arm. And here, in the crook of my elbow. Lately it's resurfaced. I've been under a lot of strain at the office and I hear that pressure can excite it. The itching's been keeping me awake at night. I just thought I'd come in and be rid of it once and for all.

ROSENZWEIG

Yes, well ... it's the "once and for all" that has eluded medical science. But I believe I can find a few minutes to spare. Take off your coat.

MENGER

Er, now?

ROSENZWEIG

Yes, yes, now.

MENGER

I wasn't really expecting to see you today. My intention was to set up an appointment. I assumed I'd talk to a receptionist or something.

ROSENZWEIG

A receptionist. Not anymore, I'm afraid.

MENGER

Just thought I'd pop in and pop out. I was on my way home and ... sort of came in on the spur of the moment.

ROSENZWEIG

Well, are you available or not? You might as well seize the hour. Save yourself a return trip.

(After some hesitation MENGER removes his trench coat to reveal the black uniform and swastika armband of the SS.)

ROSENZWEIG (cont'd)

(coldly, after a pause)

Bare your arm, please.

(MENGER sheds his jacket, unbuttons his cuff, and rolls up his sleeve to reveal an extensive rash.)

ROSENZWEIG (cont'd)
(while examining the patient's arm)
I'm no expert in these matters, but shouldn't you have a cap?

MENGER
It's in my bag.

ROSENZWEIG
(pushing the sleeve further and further up)
Good God, where does it end?

MENGER
It has been spreading a bit.

ROSENZWEIG
Take off your shirt.

(MENGER removes his shirt. His torso is covered with rashes.)

ROSENZWEIG (cont'd)
You have it all over.

MENGER
Er, yes -- I suppose that's why I came in. I'm not usually very quick to see a doctor. As I said, the itching's been keeping me awake at night. I've been under a lot of pressure at the office.

ROSENZWEIG
(drily)
Ah, yes. It's palpable.

MENGER
And then I thought, well, if the junior Rosenzweig is as reliable as the senior...

ROSENZWEIG
(calmly but bluntly)
You don't have to do that.

MENGER
Do what?

ROSENZWEIG
Ingratiate yourself.

(ROSENZWEIG proceeds to consult various cabinets and drawers, from which he will eventually gather a tourniquet, a bottle of alcohol, a few wads of cotton, and a syringe.)

ROSENZWEIG (cont'd)
I'd like to run a few tests, if you don't mind. Just a matter of routine. Will you allow me to draw some blood?

MENGER

As you see fit. These tests you speak of -- I presume you'll be conducting them yourself.

ROSENZWEIG

I'm afraid I don't have the facilities for conducting the sort of analysis we'll require.

MENGER

(indicating the worktable)

But you have a microscope.

ROSENZWEIG

Yes, well, be that as it may ... I'll need to send your blood sample to a laboratory.

MENGER

Could you submit it under a pseudonym? A pseudonym for me. I'd really prefer it.

ROSENZWEIG

I suppose I could do so, yes.

(ROSENZWEIG ties the tourniquet around MENGER's arm.)

MENGER

Hmm. I was afraid of that. Needles. As I said, I'm not accustomed to seeing doctors. I haven't had blood drawn in years. Is this going to hurt much?

ROSENZWEIG

You'll withstand it, I assure you. You can look away if you like.

(dabbing the patient's arm with alcohol)

You seem awfully nervous. For an SS man. With a wealth of blood.

MENGER

Yes. I suppose you're the one who should be nervous.

(There passes an awkward silence as ROSENZWEIG discards the cotton and takes up the syringe.)

MENGER (cont'd)

I'm sorry. That was a joke. You Jews are known for your sense of humor.

ROSENZWEIG

Ah yes.

(ROSENZWEIG inserts the needle. MENGER squirms and sucks in his breath.)

ROSENZWEIG (cont'd)

I find it indispensable. Don't you?