



## 1934

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### Characters Discussed

Lucio (lew-CHEE-oh), the narrator, a young intellectual and writer. Lucio is in the middle of an existential crisis, and he is considering whether “it is possible to live in desperation without wishing to die.” Lucio is anti-Fascist and anti-Nazi but does not allow his political ideas to threaten his life; it is his very aloofness, however, that makes his life not worth living. In the end, he realizes that “one must live his desperation, not die from it.”

Beate/Trude Müller (BAY- tay/TREW-day MIL-luhr), a young, blonde, married actress. As Beate, she appears to be romantic to the point of suicide, wishing for a lover willing to consecrate their love and their desperation with a final tragic action. As Trude (supposedly Beate’s twin sister), she loves life as much as Beate hates it and makes every effort possible to teach Lucio how to do so as well.

Alois Müller (AH-loh- ees), her middle-aged husband. Beate/Trude loves her husband, though Lucio never suspects the depth of her feelings; indeed, Lucio thinks that her feelings for Alois are those of hatred rather than love. It is Beate/Trude and Alois’ idea to play a trick on Lucio to teach him a lesson about vanity. Alois is killed by the Nazis; his death precipitates the double suicide of Beate/Trude and Paula.

Paula, an actress who is Beate/Trude’s lover. Paula cares so much for Beate/Trude that she willingly joins in suicide with her when Beate/Trude decides that death is preferable to life without Alois. Paula’s role is to pretend that she is Beate/Trude’s mother when actually she is her lover, thereby implying an incestuous homosexual relationship symbolic of the ambiguous historical period and the confusion and instability of the men living during that time.

Shapiro, an English art collector. Shapiro no longer sees the beauty in what he collects; his goal is to make money through art, not to find spiritual comfort in it.

Sonia, a Russian émigré and Shapiro’s assistant. Sonia is disillusioned by politics, love, and life in general. Realizing that she has been betrayed by both her ideology and her lover, Sonia also realizes that there is nothing left for her emotionally; she is dead even though physically alive.

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