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Friedrich Duerrenmatt:  
**DER METEOR**

## Synopsis

### Act I

The play opens in the atelier of Hugo Nyffenschwander. He is busy painting his lovely wife Auguste in all her glory. While happily occupied, the pair is made aware through a radio broadcast, of Nobel Prize-winning author Wolfgang Schwitter's recent death. You can imagine their surprise when the deceased himself bursts in through their door, alive and kicking. It seems that not only is he not dead, but the atelier where the pair is currently living is where Schwitter got his start in life. He has decided to return there and wait for his impending death, of course paying a small fee for this favor.

Schwitter expects to die at any moment. Auguste and Hugo decide to do their very best to make the imminent demise of Schwitter as comfortable as possible. To this effect, they lay him in their bed, close the curtains, and light candles just as Schwitter instructs. Then they wait. And wait. It seems at last that Schwitter has died. As they ponder what they should do now, the indomitable Schwitter opens his eyes and begins to comment on the artwork. It appears that he is not dead after all.

The kindly Minister Lutz enters. He was the attending minister at Schwitter's deathbed and believes that Schwitter has been resurrected from the dead. He has tracked down Schwitter so as to join him in praising God in all his glory. Unfortunately for him, Schwitter does not believe in any of it. He is just waiting to die. To add to Lutz's bafflement, Schwitter asks him to help him burn all his savings, a total of over a million marks. It all becomes too much for the poor man, and he is forced to lie down. Schwitter sits in a chair near him and once again closes his eyes.

Auguste and Nyffenschwander return to check up on Schwitter. They see him sitting in a chair, apparently dead. As they go to investigate closer, Glauser, the superintendent of the building enters too. They notice Lutz lying on the bed. He has died. Schwitter, on the other hand, has not. He gets up and demands the right to lie in the bed he has rented. That means the body of poor Lutz needs to be moved. With all four of them grabbing on, the corpse is carried and set down in front of the door. Schwitter then demands privacy yet again.

The grand Muheim, a rich and old developer who owns the building, disturbs Schwitter's privacy this time. The two begin a conversation in which we learn that Schwitter had had an affair with Muheim's wife back when he was a poor artist living in the atelier. Muheim is stricken to learn this, having loved his wife very much and believing that she had always been faithful to him. Schwitter interrupts their talk and informs Nyffenschwander that he wants to buy all of his paintings. They are to be removed and burned. Muheim cannot seem to forget what Schwitter has told him, and continuously returns to the subject.

The two men are interrupted again, this time by Schwitter's fourth wife, Olga, a former call girl. She is amazed to see that Schwitter is still alive, especially since she has been mourning his passing. It turns out she really loves him and feels that if he dies again she will have to die too. Schwitter thinks this is nonsense and tries to persuade her not to. Salvation Army Major Friedli enters briefly and bursts into religious song at the apparent resurrection. The couple is interrupted

again soon, this time by Schwitter's son Jochen, who has come searching not only for his father, but also for the money his father has. He is angry because it is no longer in the bank. Schwitter advises Jochen to check in the stove. There Jochen sees the ashes and realizes that he can no longer pay back his debts. He leaves and is followed shortly after by Olga.

Auguste enters. She has come to check up on Schwitter and see if he needs anything. Schwitter does need something Auguste. He seduces her while her husband bangs on the door and complains that Schwitter's check has bounced.

## Act II

As the act opens, Schwitter is dead. Everyone has gathered around his deathbed to hear the eulogy given by Friedrich Georgen. He speaks of both Schwitter himself and his work. As the service ends, Schwitters publisher Koppe comments on the service and all the invited guests exit. Auguste reveals to Nyffenschwander that she slept with Schwitter right before he died. She is now leaving him. Nyffenschwander cannot believe it. As Auguste exits for the final time, Schwitter sits up. He has returned from the dead yet again. He wants the room rearranged so that everything looks exactly the way it did when he lived there. Nyffenschwander is amazed at how Schwitter disregards the chaos he has caused.

Enter Muheim. He is still furious about his wife. He and Nyffenschwander begin to fight over who has the right to kill Schwitter. Muheim becomes so enraged that he forces Nyffenschwander through the door and pushes him down the stairs. It seems Muheim came back to look at Schwitters dead body and was quite upset to discover that he is not dead. Muheim begins to complain about his unfaithful wife and how much he had loved her. Schwitter sits back and listens until he realizes that he had mixed up Muheim's wife with someone else. He never slept with her.

Schlatter bursts into the room. He is the doctor who pronounced Schwitter dead both times and he cannot believe that Schwitter won't stay dead. Schafroth and another police officer follow him. Glauser found the dead body of Nyffenschwander at the bottom of the steps and called the police. As they take Muheim out, he asks Schwitter for the truth. Schwitter suddenly remembers that the episode never happened at all; it was all from a novel he wrote. Muheim is crushed.

Schlatter takes over and begins to examine Schwitter. It seems that he is in perfect health. Schwitter is disturbed to hear this because he is waiting to die. Koppe returns and is also surprised to see Schwitter is not dead. He begins to comment on how wonderful the funeral was and how amazed he is to see Schwitter still alive. He leaves after disparaging Schlatter's medical skills.

Schlatter continues to examine Schwitter. According to him, Schwitter should be long dead. He mentions how he almost killed Schwitter himself, though out of mercy and not hatred. Schwitter asks him to do just that. Schlatter refuses and begs Schwitter to return to the clinic, but he refuses in turn. Schlatter sees his reputation is ruined forever due to Schwitter's refusal to cooperate. He begins to threaten Schwitter. Enter Frau Nomsen, restroom custodian and madam. She came to see the dead body and is upset that there isn't one. It turns out that she is Olga's mother and Olga was her elite prostitute. She and Schwitter begin to talk as Schlatter leaves. Frau Nomsen has led an interesting life on the other side of the law and Schwitter is intrigued by her. She tells him that Olga has killed herself after hearing that he had died. Schwitter pours out to her his feelings about his life and about death. He is gratified by her silence and convinced he has found a kindred soul until he realizes that she too is dead.

Jochen returns. He too has come to see a dead body only to be confronted with his father,

very much alive. Schwitter admits that he is afraid that he will never die. Jochen cannot handle this and collapses. Major Friedli enters with a choir. He is praising God and his miracles. Schwitter can't take it and strangles him. The choir continues to sing and Schwitter continues to live.

End

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