



Old Ghosts

drama by

Christian Lanciai (2007)

The characters:

John
Magnus
Doctor Singh
Magda
an officer
Benny
Mona
Michael
Thor

more officers

Arnold Schönfeld, officer in the SS

Wladyslaw Szpilman, pianist

Wolf Lieberman, spy
Max and
Voytek, polish jews
the rabbi
Witold, alias Gottfried Schwarzkopf
Angelika Potowska, artist
Martin, boy
Polish partisans
Russians
A doctor

The action is in modern times in the Himalayas
with flashbacks to the 60s in Sweden,
Hungary and the Warsaw ghetto in the Second World War
and Moscow.

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Scene 1.

John My friend, you have risked your life.
Magnus Pardon me, but I was desperate.
John We thought we had lost you. You were completely gone.
Magnus I know.
John Why did you do it?
Magnus I couldn't bear it any longer. I have suffered from this insomnia all my life, John, and I have never been able to sleep without nightmares.
John It sounds like some exaggeration. You sometimes remember strong dreams but never when you slept well.
Magnus I don't have any such memory.
John That's what I mean. So you thought you could cure yourself by worsening and doubling the symptoms.
Magnus It was worth a try.
John You are being visited, Magnus.
Magnus By whom? Am I possessed? Is there some demon playing tricks with me?
John A third of mankind suffers from insomnia, and that's no wonder the way humanity behaves. But that third will soon be half.
Magnus You mean that what I suffer from is completely normal?
John No, it's extremely individual, but I recognize the symptoms from other similar cases.
Magnus Tell me.
John I don't know if you can take it, but the risk is that you are being haunted by memories from a previous life. It's more common than you think.
Magnus Can it be remedied?
John It depends on you.
Magnus I want to. That's why I took the drug.
John Do you remember your dreams? Did you hallucinate? Did you meet someone? Did you feel something?
Magnus Too much.
John Tell me.
Magnus Everything was alien to me but still so very familiar. All the people were strangers, and yet I knew them so well.

John Go on.

Magnus Everything was whirling, and it was as if I had been thrown into a well.

John Did you reach the bottom?

Magnus No.

John Typical. You never reach the bottom in such cases.

Magnus I know there are people who are aware of their previous lives. Are you one of them?

John Yes.

Magnus Are you sure?

John Positively.

Magnus Perhaps we have known each other in a previous life.

John It's not impossible. Old souls tend to stay in touch.

Magnus Can you tell me? Do you dare?

John Of course. I was in an east European country and belonged to the resistance first against Hitler and then against Stalin and died in Gulag 1952.

Magnus Do you remember any details?

John It's not about remembering. Everything the soul ever experienced is stored in its unlimited subconscious archive of emotions. Among the strongest emotions are always losses especially of people you loved. If for example you see someone you love get murdered the soul will be marked and scarred forever. That's why soulmates look up each other again in new lives to compensate their losses. The natural thing for a healthy soul is to always go on and never look back. That's why there are so very few who remember previous lives. By death they made a cleansweep of their passed life but preserve its lessons and impressions to make better in next life, which you always can do. But sometimes there are disturbances left from untreated traumas and unfinished undertakings, like for instance if you were murdered or suddenly interrupted in the flower of your youth by some accident or perished without anyone having been able to bear witness of the incident and notify the family. Such cases easily become so called ghosts that sooner or later are located by spiritualists who can help them with their problems.

Magnus Were you someone who got interrupted in your life and murdered?

John All Europe was replenished with such after the Second World War, when Europe including Russia was more or less reduced to a ruined cemetery of unblest spirits.

Magnus Were you disturbed?

John I was very much disturbed. That's why I became what I am.

Magnus And what are you?

John I am an asocial rootless pariah.

Magnus With a high education.

John That's another issue. I did what I could to get my life straight.

Magnus And how did you get straight with your earlier life? Were you aware of it from the start?

John Not at all. The West has all since the establishment of Christianity tried to eliminate all discussions about previous lives. It was not until here in India that my eyes were opened to the unlimited archives and resources of the subconscious.

Magnus By drugs?

John Only partly. Mostly by teachings, therapy and studies.

Magnus I know a good friend at home who took LSD every day to get in touch with his subconscious and previous lives.

John For how long?

Magnus Three years.

John And he is still alive?

Magnus Yes.

John And he has no brain damages after such exaggerations?
Magnus No, actually not.
John Was that why you took the mortally dangerous drug?
Magnus I was always curious about it. Here I could have it for nothing.
John It could have ended badly. You should never experiment with drugs without guidance and company.
Magnus Pardon me, but at least I came back alive.
John It didn't look that way at first.
Magnus Did you have any guidance into your subconscious?
John You will meet him. It's a wise old man who knows all about human nature.
Magnus Hindu?
John Yes.
Magnus Name?
John Doctor Singh.
Magnus Let me see him as soon as possible.

Scene 2.

Singh I understand that you have problems with your sleep.
Magnus Unfathomable ones.
Singh Who hasn't?
Magnus I understood from John that you could help me.
Singh Not with your sleep. That's a physical matter. Only with your dreams. But are you really willing to take such risks? According to John you have problems with your subconscious and wish to get at them. That's a more difficult and more painful and could be a more fatal operation than a biopsy of the brain.
Magnus You only make it sound more tempting.
Singh Do you know anything?
Magnus About what?
Singh About what you suffer from.
Magnus No, I just feel the pain of it.
Singh Very well, we shall make an experiment, which only could be fruitful if you cooperate to a hundred percent.
Magnus I will cooperate to a hundred percent.
Singh I need your absolute allowance without reservations.
Magnus You have my absolute allowance without reservations.
Singh I will subject you to a drug which will put you completely naked to your subconscious. It will be entirely on your own responsibility. I will not be responsible for the consequences, but it's you yourself that have to sort out your subconscious. I will guarantee though that the drug will not harm your brains, in contrast to LSD, which I was terrified to hear that you had tried in your desperation. How long the drug will keep you under its influence is very individual, but according to my experience the patient himself could decide how long he wishes to remain in his trance. Even though the drug has ceased to work you could remain as long as you please in your subconscious, but you could also any moment recall yourself back to the physical reality.
Magnus What kind of a wonderful drug is it?
Singh It's a herb growing remotely in the highest Himalaya. Only Tibetans can identify it, handle it, prepare it and understand it. Madame Blavatsky used it but recklessly.
Magnus So was everything she wrote material from her subconscious?
Singh On the whole, – yes.

Magnus That explains a great deal.
Singh Are you ready?
Magnus Any time.
Singh Then lie comfortably down, like on a sofa at a psychologist's. Rest. Relax. I will give you something to drink. It will not taste much but somewhat acid. Whatever you do, don't get frightened, but just keep calm to yourself. Are you ready?
Magnus What are you waiting for, doctor?
Singh Please, help yourself. (*gives him what looks like an ordinary glass of water.*
Magnus drinks avidly. Blackout.)

Scene 3.

Magnus (cries out in the darkness) Magda! Magda!
Magda (a young beauty, appears in spotlight) Here I am, my love. You have found me. Thanks for coming back.
Magnus Where are you?
Magda Here. I am always with you, although you have forgotten me.
Magnus It was not my fault that I forgot you. I was forced to.
Magda I know. I forgive you. We were all forced. Injustice defeated us. History drove us over, and we were transported to the endless somewhat unblessed crowd of forgotten victims.
Magnus What will become of us, when the world never again will find its right course?
Magda We will have to go on faltering in the dark. There at least we can always find each other again.
Magnus I never want to let you go, Magda, now when I at last have found you again.
Magda That's how it always is.
Magnus Were you the one who found me or I the one who found you?
Magda You called for me.
Magnus From the depth of my despair.
Magda Maybe you lost me once too much.
Magnus For how many lifetimes have we known each other?
Magda Uncountable.
Magnus Is it always the same story?
Magda I am afraid so. But I will always live as long as you love me, Magnus.
Magnus Where are you now?
Magda Here with you.
Magnus Yes, I can see that, but I mean in the physical reality.
Magda That is of secondary importance. You will see. You will always find me again.
Magnus Don't leave me, Magda!
Magda Never. I always stay and live in your heart. (*vanishes*)
Magnus Why did I lose her? Why did I leave her? Was it my own fault? At least it wasn't hers.
John You will always find her again, Magnus. You are two souls who will always find each other.
Magnus Are you here with me in the darkness, John?
John Yes, I am here to guide you under the careful supervision of doctor Singh.
Magnus Have you had the same drug?
John Yes, Magnus, to be able to follow you and present explanations when needed.
Magnus I thank you. What do you know about Magda?

John Nothing, but it seems as if she was tortured to death while you forced to watch it.

Magnus By what scoundrels?

John By the superiority. There were many such before we were born. It doesn't matter if it was the Gestapo or the KGB.

Magnus But it is politically important.

John Not any more. Think of your soul and its release from your past to reach freedom and wholesomeness, Magnus. That's the only important thing.

Magnus I am overwhelmed by my traumas.

John Let them overwhelm you, so that you can deal with them.

Magnus I see a small child being raped.

John It's yourself in an earlier lifetime.

Magnus The boy is defenceless against the rough villain.

John That could happen to anyone.

Magnus Have you happened to it?

John Yes, by my own stepfather, when he was drunk.

Magnus What kind of monsters are we humans really?

John Unfortunately the human monsters never pose that question to themselves.

Magnus What is the worst human monster I have happened to?

John And you ask me?

Magnus Can't you dig him up from my subconscious?

John You can only do that for yourself.

Magnus I just want to escape and vanish and get away from myself most of all. All my life has really been just an escape from myself, but I have never succeeded. What is it that keeps me stuck in myself?

John Your responsibility.

Magnus For what?

John For everyone you have ever known.

Magnus Even those I couldn't love?

John Yes.

Magnus Do you mean to say that I am myself responsible for my own worst oppressors?

John The criminals are responsible for their own crimes, but you are responsible for having allowed yourself to be oppressed by them.

Magnus With no fault of mine?

John You can always avoid what isn't wholesome, if you are only wise enough. But if you are a soul and aware of it, you are wise.

Magnus I don't know if I can agree. My experience tells me something different.

John Let me see it.

Magnus I don't know if I can.

John It's just to abandon yourself to the deep.
(The scene shows Magda with an officer.)

Officer You will get everything if only I get you.

Magda Then give me the information I need.

Officer Anything. You can't anyway do anything about that we occupy your country and extirpate all resistance. But you may not fool me.

Magda How could I fool you? How could we fool anyone of our occupiers? Every promise you give us you just break, and all friendliness from your side is just lies that turn to the contrary in contrived cruelty.

Officer How beautiful you are when you are angry.

Magda Tell me when you plan to launch the offensive.

Officer Wednesday at noon. Then it will not be interrupted until all resistance is broken. Now remove your panties.

Magda There is no hurry.
Officer I am hungry!
Magda I am not a meal for you to devour.
Officer No, you are better than that!
Magda Stop it!
Officer But you promised!
Magda But not so hard!
Officer I am a military, Magda. (*rapes her*)
Magnus (enters) Magda!
Officer (disturbed) Who is that?
Magda My husband.
Officer Your husband be damned. (*carries on*)
Magnus Magda! You promised!
Magda It will pass, Magnus. It will pass.
Officer (pulls his gun) Get out, you creep, or I will shoot both you down in self defence.
Magnus (unarmed) No! (*escapes*)
Officer There. Now we can get busy. (*carries on even harder*)
Magnus There are things that you just can't suffer once too much.
John I understand. Take a break. Take up something else.
Magnus I can't. I am too upset.
John You had a shock.
Magnus I am afraid so.
John Return to your own life. Take up something you remember clearly and don't feel uneasy about but which still has something to do with your problem.
Magnus When my sleeping problems started?
John For an example.
Magnus Then I have to go to some very old friends.

Scene 4. The joint.

Benny Welcome, Magnus!
Mona We knew you wouldn't let us down! We have just turned on!
Michael You were the only one missing!
Magnus How long have you been at it?
Mona How long have we been at it?
Benny I seem to remember that we started yesterday.
Michael Romanticism is timeless and never ends.
Benny That's also why it has no beginning.
Thor We were just sitting here trying to analyse each other's present hallucinations. We arrived at the conclusion that we probably have come across a previous life.
Benny It's actually not as unusual as it sounds.
Mona And we are all positive that we have known each other in previous lifetimes.
Michael What about that? (*offers a pipe, and Magnus takes a seat and shares it*)
Magnus I know nothing about such things.
Thor Then it's about time you get initiated.
Michael Indeed. You have an entirely new world to discover.
Thor The geographical world is already chartered, exploited and wasted, but there will never be any end to the inner infinity.

Benny But we must not forget or neglect the mundane reality. We have much to do. In order to pacify the world and end all wars and get all nuclear weapons dismantled and scrapped we must first redeem all the world by cannabis.

Mona Love first of all, free love without limits.

Michael Love and beauty and truth. All lies must be exposed, all hypocrisy must be abolished, and all secrets must be revealed.

Mona For instance the military conspiracy that murdered Kennedy.

Benny Exactly. He wanted to end the Vietnam war before it had started, and that's why he was assassinated by the militaries.

Thor Which has been proved.

Magnus How do you know?

Thor We have seen it in our visions. We have seen it through. We have realized it by ourselves. There is no other possible motive.

Michael True.

Magnus And so America goes war crazy polarizing all mad war powers and autocracies making them even more nervous at their firing stations, and thus violence, war, barbarity, ignorance and the universal human madness just keeps on growing.

Benny You are a wise one.

Michael But as a contrast there was the hippie movement.

Benny Which just keeps multiplying all the time in new global idealistic movements like for the environment like Greenpeace, the green revolution and the rainbow movement.

Thor We have only just begun.

Magnus But is drugs really the right method?

Benny The most efficient.

Thor If all politicians were put on LSD trips and forced to face their own subconscious, they would immediately shift gear and in most cases drop out of politics altogether.

Michael Yes, they would be cured of the vanity and megalomania of power.

Mona The only thing politicians mind and care about is to maintain their positions with their fat salaries and defend them at any price against all liberalization and reforms with stability for an excuse.

Benny Yes, they only think of their own stability. All politicians are directed in one way conservative only. Every demand of reforms and renewal they experience as a personal threat to themselves.

Michael That's why the only right thing is to drive them over, which has to be done, if the planet is to be saved from human exploitation to death and global irrevocable deadly destruction of the environment for the whole planet.

Benny Exactly.

Mona This pipe is finished, boys. Let's make another.

Magda (enters, stays in the background) What are you doing among the addicts, Magnus?

Magnus Pardon me, but they are old friends of mine. I just couldn't deny them or desert them, could I?

Magda But they are using drugs. They are self-destructive. They poison themselves. That's a wrong way. Instead of saving the world they perish themselves.

Benny There's no risk as long as we may last. The party is never over, Magnus. Sit down and join the gang.

Magnus (breaks up) I am sorry, fellows, but I have to go on. Thanks for the relaxation. I must go back to work.

Benny Don't tell me you are working!

Magnus The global destruction of the environment is just one of my worries. The personal troubles are always worse than all the world's, and that's where we have to begin.

Benny Pull yourself together, Magnus. Stay on and relax.

Thor Take a trip, and you'll find the heart of the matter.

Magnus Just one then.

Thor You'll never regret it. Your whole life will open up to you.

Magda Then you will be stuck for the rest of your life.

Thor I myself take LSD trips every day, just like the Beatles, and enjoy it.

Benny Carry on and save the party!

Magnus All roads lead to you, Magda. *(takes the trip. Blackout.)*

John Was that where it started?

Magnus There the abyss opened up.

John You started early.

Magnus I always dreamed about her and always longed for her and always searched for her, and in the drugs I found her, but each time more detached from me at the same time by the circumstances.

John She is to you an unfinished chapter.

Magnus And I have no idea what it is about, why it was interrupted, how it ended or even what happened.

John You must confront it.

Magnus I know. That's why I looked you up. Help me.

John No, Magnus, you have to do it yourself. You must yourself put your head into your own shit. I am only here to show you the way to the shit.

Magnus If you knew what kind of a shit it was, you wouldn't be so hard and ruthless.

John You asked for it. I am only helping you as well as I can at your own request.

Magnus The problem is that I don't know myself what the shit is all about.

John Find out about it then.

Magnus That is what I am trying.

John Yes, I can see that. Nothing happens.

Magnus Damn, John, I am in a state of collapse!

Magda (appears again) What is it, Magnus? What are you complaining of?

Magnus All your lovers.

Magda I have no lovers and not even you. May I not be free? You are free yourself, you know. We aren't even married.

Magnus No, but everyone who knows us still regards us as an inseparable couple.

Magda I know, and I haven't separated from you.

Magnus No, you don't turn anyone down. You encourage anyone. You grant anyone else any liberties but not me.

Magda Magnus, you forget the times we are living in. The social network is vital. It's true that I encouraged many in the enemy camp but only to get information. Perhaps they will shoot me for it one day.

Magnus No, they will never do that. You are too beautiful. No one could harm you, even if someone would want to.

Magda And you least of all.

Magnus Yes.

Magda That's why you are my best friend, for you are the only one to respect me.

Magnus But all your boys make me so frightfully jealous.

Magda I know. You are a self-tormentor. You imagine things and dramatise them and wallow in your sufferings in your self-pity.

Magnus It's not self-pity. It's worries.

Magda You should relax. I sleep as bad as you and worse every night as long as the situation keeps worsening for all of us.

Magnus We are innocent, Magda. That's why we are suffering.

Magda Yes. But we are not defenceless and could strike back against the superior force, and we must do so, by all means, by stealth and cunning, audacity and obstinacy and never give up. That's why I keep flirting with our mortal enemies.

Magnus But that could bring you into trouble.

Magda We shall see about that when it happens.

Magnus If you get arrested no one can help you.

Magda I know, and you don't have to think about it. You shall never be obliged to defend me, Magnus. I am outwardly a defenceless woman, but you are weaker inside even than a woman. Trust me and stay away and take no chances. Let me take the chances. Stay in the background as my moral support and my basis.

Magnus I'll do anything for you, Magda.

Magda I know. Go home now and take it easy. (*disappears*)

Magnus I went home and took it easy but only grew more worried and only slept worse. I could only think of her, John, and I still do. Everyone was after her. Everyone wanted her. Everyone wanted to separate me from her. They laughed at me when I never proved myself as her man, and tried to make me get other girls so that they could have her for themselves. She never refused me, but I never forced my love on her. Therefore our relationship was perhaps ideal, until...

John Until what?

Magnus I still don't know today whether she fell or not, but she was reported and arrested. The one who reported her was one of our own, and he had never done so if he hadn't hated her, which he only could have done if something serious had happened in some relationship. In a resistance movement you don't report one of your own unless you have been betrayed yourself or let down by her.

John Or deceived. It wasn't you who reported her, was it?

Magnus Not for anything in the world. It was one of her many lovers.
(*Magnus is brought in for interrogation.*)

Officer We wish you no harm. We only want to ask a few questions. If you cooperate, nothing will happen.

Magnus I will gladly answer to whatever I *could* answer to.

Officer That sounds good. We have taken in your friend Magda for interrogation. She is suspected for involvement with the resistance movement. Since she has had intimate contact with many high officers among us it is serious if she only used them to get information. We wish you to make a list of all her friends.

Magnus You must know them all by herself. She must have given you the names of all those officers among you she has known.

Officer We mean her civil friends.

Magnus She knows all the town, and all the town knows her.

Officer We mean her intimate friends.

Magnus She only has one.

Officer And that is?

Magnus Myself.

Officer Don't make us smile at you, Mr Magnus. Everyone has fucked her. You have only been her hen-pecked chaperon. Regard it as your chance to report all her lovers, and you will get rid of them.

Magnus She has not had any lover besides me.

Officer Are you such a naïve self-deceiver that you believe yourself what you are saying?

Magnus Ask all your officers. She went to bed with them but never let herself be fucked by them. She could always interrupt an intercourse before it was too late.

That's why everyone went crazy about her. She never let anyone enter her, not even me.

Officer We want the names of all resistance men she knew.

Magnus Only she can give them if she knows them.

Officer We would prefer not to torture her not to ruin her beauty.

Magnus Then torture me instead.

Officer We want the names by her or by you. Well, we shall torture both of you and at the same time. We will let our worst thugs and sadists rape her pinioned and bound before your eyes. You will stand bound and gagged and watch while she is being fucked to death.

Magnus Then you will just have her killed and lose her.

Officer (to a soldier) Let Mr Magnus go. He has nothing to tell us. (*Magnus is released, and the scene is ended.*)

John (after a pause) Was she fucked to death?

Magnus I don't know.

John Then find it out.

Magnus I don't know if I dare.

John So we are back there again.

Magnus I am sorry, John, that I have to bring you into this.

John You are only exposing yourself to this, and I am trying to help you with it, so that you could get it over with.

Magnus I never will. It's hopeless, John. All I can see is an unending abyss of despair with no bottom leading away to infinity.

John Then give your despair some expression.

Magnus What?

John Express it. Take charge of it. Scream! It could be your road to salvation, since it's obviously your only way on.

Magnus (rises, walks straight challenging straight into a military canteen, screaming) What have you done to Magda, you damned torturers!

Officer Another mad resistance member asking for his execution.

An SS Officer No, I know him. He is a civilian. Let me handle him.

Officer Magda is a finished chapter.

SS Officer I know, but not to him. – Come with me, my friend. We are actually gentlemen sometimes, especially when ladies are involved.

Magnus Is Magda alive?

SS Officer Of course she is alive.

Magnus Where is she?

SS Officer That's what I want to tell you, if you'll just calm down your nerves to a reasonable level. (*takes him aside*)

You must be extremely in love with her to dare to enter our circle of werewolves and practically ask for your own execution. Lucky for you that I was here.

Magnus What is your business with Magda?

SS Officer I know all about her. It was I who arranged her transfer. I actually saved her life. Here she would have been tortured to death, for the officers were crazy about her. Everyone wanted her. No one could control himself. I have never seen a woman having such a fatal influence even on the coldest officer. And I have never met such a calculating woman. They say that a woman's cunning can outdo all human sense, but she enslaved it. She used everyone. She agreed to a relationship only if she could take advantage of it. When an officer no longer could serve her with valuable information, she dropped him. That's how we found her out.

Magnus What did you do to her? Did you torture her?

SS Officer None of us wanted to do that. She was too beautiful. No one wanted to humiliate and reduce her to an ordinary soldier's whore either, and the only officer who did was murdered.

Magnus Is Heinrich Prütz dead?

SS Officer Yes, executed by his own in a way that only proved suicide. But we all know how it happened. That sort of thing happens all the time, and if one officer is missing it's hardly even noticed. But back to Magda. We reached an agreement. No one wanted to harm her, but we couldn't let her go on undermining our activities here in Budapest. She was left in peace and intact with her safety guaranteed on the condition that she left Hungary and never returned as long as the war went on.

Magnus (benumbed by surprise) She could have notified me.

SS Officer We didn't allow her to tell anyone. She was to choose between Czechoslovakia and Poland. She chose Poland. We sent her there with an escort and should be there now carrying on her conspiracies and undermining activities with new friends in the Warsaw ghetto. We found out that she was Jewish.

Magnus Weiss is a German name.

SS Officer No, Jewish.

Magnus (thoughtful) So you saved her life.

SS Officer Only I could establish her Jewish origin. Our entire Nazi Jewish circus is absurd and threatens to sabotage our war. We can't afford another war within our borders devouring our resources and obstructing the traffic on our railroads. None of us wanted to take any responsibility for her death. I discovered her Jewish ancestry, although she never practised nor even had any faith. I then chose to take responsibility for her life and am now free from the responsibility.

Magnus I only live for her. I don't have a drop of Jewry in me but still want to help them and stand by their side. I heard about the terrors in the Warsaw ghetto. Could you help me get there?

SS Officer It's just to take the train. It's on your own responsibility. You are not compromised, and you are not a suspect in any way. Nothing can stop you. Good luck.

Magnus (rises eagerly and leaves)

The overwhelming flood of emotions of memories is more powerful than any flood in history. What is the course of the entire world against the universe of one single individual's different emotional lives? Emotions and feelings is everything in life, only they make you feel alive, and it's the feelings and emotions of the soul, not sensual sensations that will pass. I stifle in these overwhelming oceans of feelings of the past and risk drowning in them if I don't get hold of a straw of rush. And the only straw could be Magda, a unique orchid in the darkest hell of the abysses of human misery in the Warsaw ghetto.

Scene 5. A very shabby provisional café.

Magda Thanks for coming, Magnus. I almost thought you would.

Magnus I had no choice, Magda. You were here. I couldn't remain there.

Magda No sentimentality please.

Magnus It's a fact. It was a physical impossibility.

Magda You are the only one who can make me laugh. All other men only raise my disdain and disgust.

Magnus But you never show it.

Magda No. Then I could not survive. A woman's feelings can only remain intact and survive if she conceals them.

Magnus You could never conceal them to me.

Magda No.

Magnus So what can I do for you?

Magda Let me be perfectly clear, Magnus. I am not here because I am a Jewess. My family was quite assimilated and had nothing to do with anything Jewish for generations. The Jewish cause never touched me. I was completely indifferent but not to our case in Hungary under the oppression of fascists and Nazis. And then suddenly one day I have a Nazi SS officer in front of me who tells me straight: "You are a Jewess. You will die for that if you don't cooperate." In that moment I became a Jewess – hundred percent, full blood, just because an infernal SS officer with who knows how many beastly murders on his conscience accuses me of being a Jewess, as if that was a crime. I always took sides with the innocent. If Jews in the world are accused of being Jews and brought to trial for that, then no one in the world could be more innocent than they.

Magnus And that's why you came here.

Magda It was a compromise. I promised to cooperate with the Nazis and give them reports about what is going on here. That's another way of cooperating. I give them regular reports that don't reveal anything about the real underground activities, while at the same time I do everything to help them, with the smuggling traffic, with contacts outside, with morals and Molotov cocktails and the preparations for a rebellion. I know Polish, you know, which you know as well. You also know Russian. That could be of great help to us. You come like a godsend, for we need contacts with the partisans, the resistance and the Russians.

Magnus So I will become a Pole, change name, am not even Jewish, and will be your messenger.

Magda Exactly. You will get false identification papers. Do the Germans in Budapest know that you are here?

Magnus Only your SS officer.

Magda He thought he saved my life in exchange of my becoming his spy. All men who think they know something are deceiving themselves.

Magnus I think I love you.

Magda Love is the only thing you never can deceive yourself with, for it is always and can never be anything but genuine and sincere.

Magnus Thanks for that.

Magda I am the one to thank you.

Magnus (*says nothing but takes her hand across the table. She answers him. They understand each other.*)

(*The Warsaw concerto resounds with cannons and bombs for an accompaniment. The Warsaw concerto then goes on playing continuously in the background to grow into a dominating volume only in the pauses.*)

Magnus (*in darkness*) I love you, Magda.

Magda We will all perish here. Against the Germans everyone will fight to the last man, those who survive.

Magnus We will survive.

Magda Are you crazy? 90% of us will be taken away and gassed to death, just because we are Jews. They have already started that procedure in Treblinka.

Magnus Neither you nor I are Jews. We can make it.

Magda The chances are very small. This war will reduce Warsaw to a smoking inferno of only ruins.

Magnus It does not concern us. We will survive.

Magda At least until tomorrow. Then we'll see. Haven't you seen how people are dying in the streets every day? It's ordinary people. They haven't done anything. They just received a stamp and were shut up in here because of the stamp.

Magnus It will pass. Everything will pass. One day they will all be exonerated. There are millions of Germans organizing themselves against Hitler.

Magda I know. The White Rose. Most of them get murdered.

Magnus There have been many assassination attempts against Hitler, and one day they will succeed.

Magda I don't understand why Göring, Goebbels, Dönitz, Canaris, Rudolf Hess or Albert Speer just don't shoot him down. They are after all not stupid and must realize that Hitler is a raving psychopath. No dictator has any human right to live, since no dictator can be a dictator without abusing and trampling down all human rights.

Magnus Yes, if anything would deserve a capital punishment, it would be every form of dictatorship.

Magda We know that who are oppressed.

Magnus Everyone knows it who is oppressed.

Magda While the dictators themselves don't give a damn and let as many as possible die as long as they themselves may live until they leave the world in peace hated forever as constantly worse mass murderers.

Magnus Stalin has made the statement that a murder is a murder but a million murders is just statistics. Do you think he could be worse than Hitler?

Magda We don't know, but we have to wage on him, since only he can rescue us from Hitler, since all assassination attempts seem to constantly fail. If they go on like that it will end by that he will find no other option but to take his own life, like that madman Nero.

Magnus Nero, Caligula, Djenghis Khan, Tamerlane, Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, Hitler, Stalin – when will we ever be rid of them?

Magda When we are dead.

Magnus I doubt it.

Magda The irony is that perhaps only Stalin, the worst of all, could save us.

Magnus Would even he be able to?

Magda If he arrives in time. We will probably have to start the rebellion before the Russians even are in Poland, but the Polish resistance can help us, and it could be supported by the Russians. If that would work out we could be saved. That will be your mission, Magnus, to get the Russians here as soon as possible, before our rebellion is buried in fire, and before the Polish resistance manages to get what's left of Warsaw to rise against the Germans.

Magnus I will do my best.

Magda I think you can make it. You are fast and lithe and not easily caught, since you easily merge in your environment and with the people you move along. You could be taken both for a Pole, Russian and Jew.

Magnus For you I will gladly be a chameleon.

Magda After the war, Magnus, we will make love. Until then we must fight.

Magnus For love against the war.

Magda The only sensible war.

Magnus I love you so sincerely but am poor, we have no home nor even any refuge, you are just as impoverished, and we are naked to the reality of the war.

Magda The reality of the Warsaw ghetto is even worse, but we can make it, for here love is alive, and it always prevails.

Magnus You almost make me believe in what you are saying.

Magda That's intentional, for I mean it, and it is true.

Magnus After the war, Magda, we shall live.

Magda Even if we die.

Magnus We will not die, Magda. We will survive and show the terrorist leaders of the war that we survive better than they do. We owe that to the future.

Magda Do you believe in a future?

Magnus There is always a future.

Magda I was always happy enough with the present. Come, Magnus. It's time for you to meet my friends.
(Suddenly the whole café is lighted up, showing an exceptional vivacity – it is full and crowded with life and movement very busy everywhere.)

Magda You are early today, Wladyslaw.

Szpilman I thought that I for once would get ahead of the rush, but it always gets started ahead of me.

Magda Meet Wladyslaw Szpilman, Magnus, our foremost pianist.

Magnus Are you playing here at the café?

Szpilman Every day.

Magda He is above all a specialist on Chopin but has landed here among us because of what he is.

Szpilman I am actually a concert pianist.

Magnus I thought the Germans knew how to appreciate your kind.

Szpilman I was not established and lived with my family, so I followed my family.

Magnus Don't you miss the great world, the concert halls and the freedom?

Szpilman There will still be music after the war with everything appertaining to it. This is not altogether an uninspiring environment. I am working on a moody emotional Warsaw destiny concerto for the piano and full orchestra, but there might be someone else to perform it after the war. (*moves towards the piano*)

Magda This is one of our most important contacts, Wolf Lieberman from Abwehr in direct touch with admiral Canaris.

Magnus Are you also spying here like Magda?

Lieberman We are colleagues.

Magda Canaris has also been here once and summed up his impressions of the ghetto by stating that the war would be determined here to the disadvantage of Germany.

Lieberman Anyone who sees what we Germans have accomplished here should be able to arrive at the same conclusion. Admiral Canaris is not alone.

Magda What about Rommel?

Lieberman He is honest and knows everything but does not take part in conspiracies. Others do it the more instead, like the mayor Goerdeler of Leipzig and conservative noblemen and veterans like von Stauffenberg.

Magda We don't know him.

Lieberman He will be well known one day.

Max Who is with you, Magda?

Magda A newcomer.

Max A greenhorn. Welcome to hell, Greenhorn. You will never get out here alive again, so you might as well make yourself as much at home as possible.

Voytek Don't make jokes with a virgin, Max. Don't scare him off in advance. You never know how useful he can make himself.

Max The sooner he escapes from here, the better for him. I don't even think he shares any guilt in our race.

Voytek So he can make it. So he can help us.

Max Yes. When we perish he can tell the world about it afterwards. He might even be able to document the bolting racing merry-go-round towards death here.

Voytek We are all lambs directed down into a trap of wolves, stranger. Be neither a wolf nor a lamb, and you will manage.

Max (to Magda) What is he doing?

Magda Writes.

Max Splendid!

Voytek What kind of?

Magnus Poetry.

Max What a waste! You have come wrong, my friend. Here there is not even any gutter poetry, only indifference of corpses in the gutter.

Magnus No one can remain indifferent to what is going on here.

Max Yes, you will be as a corpse – and laugh at it forever by your rigid death skull grin. It is the most hollow laughter in the world, and it reverberates in deafening silence here from every sewer and gutter, for the corpses are never carried away. Everything dying here stays here, like in a constantly growing constipation.

Rabbi Is Max at it again showing off?

Voytek He is just trying to be funny.

Magda This is our rabbi, Magnus. This is my colleague Magnus from Budapest.

Rabbi Hardly a Jew, I would say?

Max Just you wait. Here you become one. That dirt can not be washed away anywhere here but will spread like fleas biting into you and staying there forever.

Magnus You are a greater poet than I, Max.

Max No, I am no poet at all. I am a realist.

Rabbi Was it you who got him here, Magda?

Magnus No, I came entirely on my own but for Magda's sake.

Rabbi Did you know what you were getting into?

Magnus It was enough for me to know that Magda must have known what she was getting into.

Magda He speaks both Russian and Polish fluently.

Max What we need is someone who can make the Americans here to bomb all the concentration camps that keep coming up like mushrooms all around us as some kind of a cure for the Warsaw ghetto.

Voytek The English are already bombing all German towns to hell.

Max That's right. They have the wrong target. They are missing the target as long as Treblinka and Sobibor are allowed to remain intact.

Rabbi (takes Magnus' hand) Welcome here, Magnus. This is no full pension paradise, but with some effort you can at least try to survive. *(walks on)*

Max Next stop the Auschwitz pension, with all final comforts. There you'll like it so much that you'll stay forever.

Voytek Don't listen to him. He is insane.

Magnus Yes, he is sane, for he is joking and knows more than we want to know.

Magda (catches sight of a blond man by a table) You must meet Witold, Magnus.

Magnus He looks like a Nazi.

Magda He is perhaps our most important friend. He is a Jew but officer in the SS and belongs to one of the foremost families of musicians in Germany. His father forced him to make a military career to be able to protect the family if necessary, and he was trained by Reinhard Heydrich.

Magnus What is he doing here?

Magda His brother is here and one of us. He is here incognito. Witold is his code name.

Magnus A double and super spy?

Magda Something in that way. He is a good friend of my SS-saviour in Budapest.

Witold As beautiful as ever, Magda, if not even more beautiful. Any message from our mutual friend in Budapest?

Magda No, but my friend here is coming from him. Meet Magnus, my best childhood friend. He knows Russian.

Witold You only find and enlist the best of talents, Magda. Nice to meet you, brother. Call me Witold, just one out of thousands of spies in the Warsaw ghetto.

Magnus Why do the Germans keep the ghetto under such strict surveillance, and why do they send so many spies here?

Witold They want to make sure that the Jews never will try anything. Just because of that the Jews will try something.

Max (intervenes) We always try something but never succeed with anything. What is really the matter with us? The most persecuted and abused people in the world, always made to an exception, and when we assimilate and become perfect Germans, the Germans launch an operation to extirpate all Jews just to provide the factories in Auschwitz with more fuel. Man is hysterical and has always been, but we were not the ones who started. Everything we did was to accept some responsibility in trying to economise the hysteria.

Voytek No, we always lived and thrived on it and took advantage of it! What else is humanity than a pack of ruthless predators parasitizing on nature in consuming and wasting it? And we Jews were always the first to do it. We were the ones who God commanded to control, take charge of and rule over nature! He did not know what he was doing in that moment.

Max Don't get God mixed up in this. He has nothing to do with the Warsaw ghetto.

Voytek Why are we here then?

Max Because we ended up here.

Voytek How did we end up here?

Max The eternal dilemma of all humanity, and still no one was ever to blame for all the dreadful situations of humanity but only humanity. Put your question to the Germans. They pose the same question.

Magda Don't mind them. They are just freaking out.

Magnus But they are not entirely wrong.

Witold My name is Gottfried Schwarzkopf and am free to move here at large as brother of the pianist Wolfgang Schwarzkopf, a very close friend to the pianist at the piano.

Magnus What can I do for you?

Witold A great deal. You know Russian and can pass as both Russian, Pole, German or Jew, since your looks are entirely neutral. I can but regard you as the ideal potential messenger. I am in constant touch with Magda's protector Arnold Schönfeld in Budapest, who like me and many others would welcome the removal of Hitler, since otherwise we have to lose the war.

Magnus Do you want it to go on?

Witold On the contrary, we want peace, first of all with the Russians, since they are closest. If you could speed up their progress against Europe the war could be concluded more quickly. You could urge them on by telling them about what the Germans are busy with in their backyard.

Magnus The Warsaw ghetto?

Witold For example. Unfortunately there are many. Theresienstadt is another Potemkin racket. Max here seems to know something about Auschwitz.

Max The reality of the promised land for all Jews at last! Entertainment all around the clock with clothes collections, mattress stuffing, fires burning constantly in the workshop and a perpetual smoke out of the chimneys that would immediately ruin all the perfume factories of France in competition...

Voytek He is crazy.

Max Prove it!

Voytek Prove that you are right!

Max Go there and look for yourself! The problem is that the evidence is constantly going up in smoke.

Magnus (serious) You are joking about serious and unpleasant things, Max.

Max That's intentional. People take them far too seriously. It's just a parenthesis in history, like all other pogroms, which will cease until they start again. Ask Pharaoh why he was so anxious at first to keep us and then so eager to get rid of us. It's off and on all the time.

Voytek Pharaoh is dead, you blockhead.

Max Don't you think I know? They are all dead who know the right answers. And God has done nothing but kept his silence ever since he first launched us.

Voytek Keep God out of this.

Max You were the one who tried to get him into the Warsaw ghetto.

Magda (to Witold) Magnus is ready at any moment.

Witold Good. We must of course try him first. Both his Polish and Russian have to be faultless. Then we'll launch him as a courier, agent and diplomat on special missions. Some coffee, my friends?

Magnus Do you serve coffee here?

Max It's black and looks like coffee but is anything except coffee.

Magnus It will do.

Witold It's not quite as poisonous as coffee but tastes better than their tea.

Magda It will go down, Magnus, I promise.

Magnus I can take anything.

Witold Yes, you do, if you survive the Warsaw ghetto. *(calls for a waiter, who serves immediately. The scene is continuously relaxed.)*

Angelika (appears, sees Witold and Magda) Who have you now dragged into the ghetto, Magda? Another spy? Another collaborator with the Germans like yourself?

Magnus Who is it?

Witold Angelika Potowski, sister of Peter and Henryk Potowski of the Jewish theatre.

Magda Don't be so judgemental and prejudiced, Angelika.

Angelika Don't you think I can see what kind of person he is? Who is he?

Magda A poet from Budapest, completely innocent, neither Jewish nor German, our becoming contact with the Russians.

Angelika You flirt with everyone, Magda, and they will all be our destruction. How can you think any good of any living person? How can you have anything to do with that one, *(indicates Witold,)* a representative of the superior race with the ambition to extirpate all minor races and using us Jews just to see if it could work?

Witold (to Magnus) I am used to her, Magnus. She is honest. *(to Angelika)* That's exactly why I am here, Angelika, to act against them and help you against them.

Angelika You blue-eyed buffoon, you will be murdered by them like everyone else.

Max Don't scare him off, Angelika. Although he is German, he actually has good intentions. We as an exceptional people should respect other exceptions, shouldn't we?

Angelika He comes here as a sadist just to make assessment of our misery and observe how we are all dying in the streets, to catch a glimpse of a dying people before they are all brought to the scaffold. Are you enjoying our typhoid epidemics, the dying old people, the beggars and the children in the streets, the vermin in every home, that we neither have water nor electricity nor any heating, in brief, that it is totally unnecessary to have us executed since we are dying by ourselves by your ingenious bureaucratic system annihilating all civilisation and us Jews, its most ancient advocates, first of all?

Magnus She is furious.

Witold Don't you think I can see it?

Magda Go home, Angelika, or leave the ghetto and go back to England where you belong. Why did you come back here when you had a career abroad? How could you be so stupid?

Angelika Because I felt solidarity with my family and my people when the Jewish theatre was closed and banished to the ghetto! And now I can't go back to England because there is a war. Don't you know?

Magda Don't shout it all out, Angelika. You are ruining the atmosphere.

Angelika Germany ruined the whole world atmosphere when it crowned Hitler its dictator! Before that it was ruined by Italy by giving way to Mussolini as a dictator! And before that Russia showed the way to universal destruction of the world atmosphere by establishing a mortal dictatorship with the extermination of the individual for a goal, the Russia that you place your hopes in and believe that will save you, the Russia that will drive you all over and all your countries like a worse steam-roller than it ever was in the first world war!

Magda Only the Russians can save us from the Germans, Angelika.

Angelika And do you think they will? No, they will wait until the Germans have destroyed us and Poland. Then they will march in and take charge of the ruins and introduce the same extermination system here.

Voytek You are just painting the devil on the wall, Angelika, for no purpose.

Angelika You don't want to see reality. I see it. You can't stand it. I try to get used to it to be able to endure it. And I promise you, no matter how you wish to avoid it, that it will constantly grow worse. If anyone in here will survive to be able to tell all about it, no one outside will believe him. If you survive their annihilation you will be accused of lies, Zionist propaganda and falsification of history by the future, just for the fact that we experienced what we did experience.

Max You are not much fun, Angelika.

Angelika Neither are you, if you think you are.

Magnus Angelika, you are just spewing venom. Do you think it could make the situation better for any of us?

Angelika And you greenhorn of an outsider, how do you think you could make it better?

Magnus By poetry. I will stay on and sit here if everything turns to ruins and write the truth about you, of the Warsaw ghetto, of all the artists and creative spirits here and let the individual triumph over history.

Angelika Do you think the Russians and the Germans will care as long as they keep fighting? No, they will bury you alive, like all the young poets that perished by the western front in the former world war.

Magnus Even if I am buried alive, my poetry and its truth shall live.

Szpilman As a musician I must agree with Magnus. Art survives everything and especially death. If he wants to eternalize the Warsaw ghetto, so let him.

Angelika It's nothing to eternalize.

Max It's just a vanishing parenthesis in history.

Voytek On the contrary, it is already eternalized. If we all will die we already belong to eternity, and nothing can harm us. We are in that case on the stage of history now and forever. We are unforgettable. We live, Angelika, you are right, but you are wrong. You disregard the fact, that no matter how consistently the individual has been exterminated by history, by the destroyers of the Antiquities, by the barbarian storms by Germans and Goths, Huns and Vandals, Islamists, Turks and Mongols, by witchhunts and persecution of heretics, by eternal wars and the pogroms against free-thinkers and others with minds of their own, the individual has always returned in greater glory in his integrity than ever, and don't forget, that he is the one who writes history, who has the right to forever condemn idiots like Tamerlane, Djengis Khan, Nero and Caligula, Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great, Hitler and Stalin as dishonourable mass murderers forever. Magnus is right. Wladyslaw is also right, they show the way, and so should you, Angelika.

Angelika (somewhat sad) My muse is reduced to silence, overruled by the din of the war, that drowned her in blood. The beauty that I represented is quiet as long as the ugliness of the war will drown the world in noise.

Magnus (to Magda) Who was her muse?

Magda She is a singer. She used to sing at the Covent Garden.

Witold As a German I wish I was a Pole. I am ashamed of my people. Already Goethe felt ashamed for what he saw us Germans capable of in the matter of voluntary psychoses. Already fools like Fichte, Hegel and Karl Marx were symptoms of the racist madness, like Wagner and Nietzsche. I hereby apologise for my people. I know it will not help, but when I behold the world conflagration that we originated to our own destruction most of all, I beg you to remember, that it was no Erasmus, no Walter Gropius, no Simplicissimus, no Goethe or Schiller, no Bach or Handel, no Beethoven or Brahms, no Mendelssohn or Schumann, no Rudolf Steiner or Albert Einstein who started it, who all represented the German culture and humanism, which always will live on, but not the German politics, which is such a parenthesis that you wish to make of the Warsaw ghetto, which isn't that. Voytek is right with Wladyslaw and Magnus. No one of us will die because of what the Germans did with the Warsaw ghetto.

Voytek It sounds like a pledge.

Witold It is a pledge, which I don't think anyone needs to keep, since it will probably come true by itself.

Max So why complain, Angelika, if we all will perish anyway? Obviously we shall all live anyway.

Voytek Compose something, Magnus, so that we'll hear if you will do as our poet laureate.

Magnus It will be an arduous task to make poetry of the dying children in the gutter, the smugglers in the sewers, the starving old people, the lice and the bedbugs, of the agues and dysentery, of this absurd reality which not even Kafka could ever imagine, of the constant terror with the clatter of machine guns every day, of the constant house searches with ruined homes and gunned down innocents, of the hell in the Pawiak prison where the hair-raising screams of torture always lead to the quietest possible death in a traceless disappearance, of the stench and the dirt, of the perpetual humiliating harassments...

Angelika That's enough, Magnus. We believe you.

Voytek You learn quickly.

Magnus I am afraid though that this atrociously unreasonable reality must be out of rhyme.

Max That's fair and reasonable. You are almost as funny as I, but your humour is even less compatible and out of rhyme with reality.

Voytek Try not to be funny.

Magnus I did not even try to be funny.

Martin (a boy, enters) The Germans are here.

Max The Germans are always here. And they are always funnier than ever.

Martin They command all Jews to immediately leave the ghetto to get a new promised land in the form of a working paradise.

Max The ultimate happiness. Now it has arrived. We don't have to be tortured any more. We will have a working place where we will stay until we die with a blissful smile of eternal happiness on our lips, until we'll be grinning forever, unless our bones are grinded down for recycling in gelatine.

Voytek Please, Max, take a break at last. You are never funny.

Max No, for I am the only one to keep pace with the Germans.

Magda (to Martin) What else have you heard?

Martin Special trains are offered at our disposal, everything to make it as comfortable for us as possible.

Voytek What is the name of this working paradise?

Martin Auschwitz.

Max I knew it. Our Austerlitz but even better.

Angelika It must be better than Treblinka, for it couldn't be worse.

Voytek What do you mean?

Angelika I am just resigning. You will all buy it and swallow it, like you took the trains to Treblinka. No one returned, and even fewer will return from Auschwitz.

Voytek Most of those who went to Treblinka went there because it couldn't be worse than here.

Angelika That's how the Germans want you to accept it. They make it as hellish as possible here to make you believe that anything could be better, and so you will all go there.

Magnus How was it that king Lear said? "It's not at its worst when you can say, 'Now is the very worst of it,' for then it will only get even worse."

Voytek Will you then remain here, Angelika, in the throng, in the dirt, in the starvation, the typhus and humiliation?

Angelika Those who stay will stay to fight. All others will perish.

Voytek Even those who fight will perish. Can't you see, Angelika? A snowball in hell has greater chances to manage and survive than a Jewish insurrection in the Warsaw ghetto against the Germans.

Angelika You talk about snow against fire. I talk about fire against fire, hatred against hatred, about striking hard against what is hard, about life against death.

Magda I am with you, Angelika.

Angelika You German slut I will never be able to believe in you.

Witold (breaking up) Angelika is right. You have to fight. It's your only chance. I have to go. Don't give up. In spite of all you have friends even in the German army.

Angelika (cries after him) How soon will you finish off Hitler?

Witold As soon as possible. *(leaves)*

(A German loudspeaker is heard outside: "Achtung! Achtung!" and "Umschlagplatz" are the only words that can be identified. The rest drowns in noises, crackling and bad articulation.)

Max The signal. Departure. Emigration. Emancipation. Freedom. Liberation and work. The infallible mirages of paradise.

Voytek Come then and let's get on the train before it is too late.

Max It is too late already.

Voytek How so?

Max We are already sitting in the train.

(General break-up. The lights leave again only Magda and Magnus visible.)

Magnus It's over, Magda. We have no chance. Angelika is right.

Magda I know. Armed resistance is our only way out.

Magnus No, love is our only way out.

Magda What do you mean?

Magnus We have to love while we can. Then it will be too late.

Magda Don't talk with me about love when the world is perishing in war.

Magnus The more important it is that we do.

Magda Do what?

Magnus Make love.

Magda Give us one night, Magnus, and let it last forever.

Magnus Exactly. That's what redeemed Goethe and Faust. Mephistopheles thought he had him hooked by the promise never to tell the moment: "Remain, for you are so lovely." He knew that Faust once would say it, and Faust finally said it quite deliberately, but the point is that he said it out of love. Therefore he was saved

for eternity since that moment became his eternity, no matter what crimes he had committed earlier.

Magda But it will not be our eternity. For us it will be our last moment of happiness and love before we have to engage in the struggle with death.

Magnus "Work, as if you were to live forever, but live, as if you had to die today."

Magda That suits us. Let us live to work until we die.

Magnus Let us never let go of each other.

Magda My love, come into me and stay there.

Magnus With pleasure. *(They go out together. The music culminates but is overruled by bombs and explosions, machine gun fire and cannon booms.)*

Magnus (finds John) I can't take any more. It is too much.

John Make it short then, but make it end.

Magnus All ends are bitter, and nothing was more bitter than that.

John Don't say so. All ends are happy, if you get through to the other side.

Magnus That's what we never did.

John Try.

(A group of Polish partisans appear.)

Magnus Voytek! Are you here?

Voytek I was never more than just an ordinary Pole.

Magnus Still you must understand that we can't leave the last Jews in there to die without giving them any help?

Voytek We have no resources, Magnus. The Russians are too far off, and we ourselves are not yet ready and armed for an insurrection. But the Jews in the ghetto are doing well, and we do what we can, smuggling weapons and victuals.

Magnus The Germans are methodically burning down the ghetto block by block and house by house with all people who are remaining inside.

Voytek You don't have to remind us. We know. But it's the first defeat for the Germans. They never expected that a few Jews could rise in rebellion against them. They were taken aback and shocked by it if not even morally devastated.

Magnus If you don't help them the risk is that Warsaw will be completely run out of Jews.

Voytek That's what Stroop and Frank and Müller wants. But they don't realize that a Warsaw with no Jews left will be the same as a Warsaw with no people left. The way the Germans are operating, there will soon be no people at all left in the city, except us and the last Jews who can't do anything else than go on undermining their existence and fight them to the last man. Warsaw will be a cemetery of nameless burnt out ruins.

Magnus So you can't help them?

Voytek I am sorry. When the Russians arrive we can make rebellion ourselves with their backup, but until they are here we can't do anything. Is Magda in there fighting?

Magnus With machine gun and beret just like Angelika and all other veterans, who refused to let themselves be fooled to Auschwitz.

Voytek (embraces him) I am sorry, Magnus. *(All the Poles want to come forward and embrace him in their turn.)*

Magnus No one is more sorry than I, and we who are still left in the ghetto fighting have no tears or blood left to cry with.

Voytek Are you on your way to the Russian lines?

Magnus Yes. The partisans want to help me get through Lithuania.

Voytek You need more help than by the partisans, and we will give it to you.

Magnus Thanks, boys. *(is taken care of by the resistance fighters.)*

Magda (appears alone with machine gun, beret, torn clothes and gunsmoke in her face)

It's over. All are dead except a few unhappy exceptions. We were burned alive in a whole town area by the Germans who didn't dare to fight but who hid behind flamethrowers and mortars. Never in history has there been a greater display of cowardice than in the absolutely senseless and atrocious extermination war against the Jews by the Germans, an unarmed people of dreamers and philosophers. But we are not finished yet. The worst are still alive among Jews and Germans while, like in all wars, only innocents have been sacrificed. But I don't want to be in it any more. I am as tired and burnt out as the entire Warsaw ghetto. Magnus, I can't bear it any longer.

Magnus Just a little bit more. The Russians will soon be here, and then the Poles will rebel in all Warsaw, and then at last we will be set free and have peace.

Magda (incredulous) Do you think so?

Magnus I know it. I am dealing with them. We can't lose, Magda. We haven't fought in vain.

Magda We don't know that until we are dead.

Magnus Until then we have something to fight for.

Magda Go to the Russians, Magnus. Make sure they will come before it's too late. The Poles must not fail in their insurrection.

Magnus They will not fail. I will make sure of it.

Magda Do so, Magnus, and I will believe in you. *(throws herself in a heap on the floor aside.)*

Martin (enters, comes up to her, touches her as if to wake her up) We are alive, Magda, we are alive.

Magda (tired) Are we? When all are dead? When all those who have survived have lost all their families? We are a handful who have survived out of half a million, Martin.

Martin It doesn't matter. We are alive, and we are responsible for life and must live on with our responsibility for all life that is left.

Magda (embraces him) You are right, Martin. *(embraces him and lulls him like a little brother)*

Magnus How far do you intend to press me on?

John Until you are through it all.

Magnus The worst remains.

John The worst always remains. Our present life is just an introduction to an unbearable eternity.

Magnus You mean that life always must remain nothing but hell?

John Sometimes it is, often it is, but even if it always has to be so, you can always make the best of it.

Magnus We couldn't towards the end of the war.

John Yes, you could for you survived even the Warsaw ghetto.

Magnus Which we at times had reasons to bitterly regret.

John Why?

Magnus You force me to it. You force me back into the deepest shit. You drown me again in my traumas.

John It will only do you good.

Magnus Do you think so?

John I know it from my own experience.

Magnus Burst open then, all you locks and dams to my extreme despair, and let loose all the extremest powers of evil again which instead of rewarding us for what we had gone through annihilated us the more thoroughly, like some kind of a punishment for just our involuntary ordeals. Welcome back, my torturers and hangmen and deadly adversaries with your murderous stone faces!

Russian 1 I am sorry, but we can't help you.

Magnus (astounded and shocked) What?

Russian 1 We have our orders.

Magnus Don't you get it? The Poles are rebelling in Warsaw just because you are here on the other side of the river! Without your presence they would never have started it!

Russian 1 We get it, but we have our orders.

Magnus You can't let them down now! You can't let the Germans annihilate them like they annihilated the Warsaw ghetto because there was no one to help them! You must help them! You have guns and flamethrowers, armies and tanks, you only need to give a signal, and the Germans will be driven out of Warsaw and the Poles get their capital back before it is totally destroyed! You can't just stand there looking on and letting it happen!

Russian 1 I am sorry, but we have our orders.

Magnus Who in such total incompetence and ignorance issued that order?

Russian 1 Generalissimus himself. We can't go against him.

Magnus What does he mean? What is he thinking?

Russian 1 No one knows how comrade Stalin thinks except himself. All we can do is to obey.

Magnus You don't mean to say that Stalin is aware of the Warsaw insurrection and let the Poles sacrifice themselves without lifting finger to help them?

Russian 1 Comrade, I don't know how our great Koba thinks, but I can speculate in it better than you, since I know my Soviet Union. Like Lenin got rid of all officers in the Russian army, comrade Stalin would like to see all Polish, Czech, Hungarian and Balkan officers out of the way when he marches on Berlin, so that all eastern Europe then will be easier for us to take over.

Magnus Total cynicism in other words.

Russian 1 Comrade Stalin is a strategist. And I advise you to continue cooperating with us like so far.

Magnus (done for) What more can I do, after the annihilation of the Warsaw ghetto, when I can't help the last rebellion of the Warsaw Poles?

Russian 1 You can give us the names of those who cooperated with the Germans in the Warsaw ghetto.

Magnus What the devil do you mean?

Russian 1 The ghetto would never have lost the fight if it hadn't been betrayed from inside.

Magnus It was not betrayed from inside. The Germans attacked it from outside and burned it down block by block with mortars and flamethrowers house by house.

Russian 1 There were Germans in the Warsaw ghetto.

Magnus Yes, our rabbi was a German. There were one or other German defector but no traitor.

Russian 1 That's what I mean. The Germans in the Warsaw ghetto did not betray Germany but helped it by espionage and information.

Magnus On the contrary. They helped us.

Russian 1 They had to make it look like they helped you to be able to carry on their activity. Without their information the Germans could never have been so prepared for the Warsaw ghetto insurrection as they were, and the same traitors had without doubt also betrayed the rebellion of the Warsaw Poles in advance.

Magnus You have got it all wrong.

Russian 1 On the contrary. We know whom we talk about, and we know them. Comrade Beria knows everything. We would especially like to know everything you know about a certain Jewess from Budapest called Magda.

Magnus You can't think anything bad about her. She was fighting in the front line in the ghetto and is fighting still now for Warsaw!

Russian 1 She had German contacts.

Magnus With Hitler's murderers.

Russian 1 Hitler has not been murdered.

Magnus Not yet.

Russian 1 The way he has managed for twenty years and survived many assassination attempts, he is not likely to be either. He has trained the Gestapo and SS all too thoroughly.

Magnus I don't think I know anything about Magda that you don't know.

Russian 1 You grew up together. You followed her here from Budapest after the Germans had placed her here as their spy.

Magnus It is a lie!

Russian 1 So you don't want to cooperate any more. Corporal! Arrest him! (*Magnus is arrested by guards.*)

Magnus I have to get back to Warsaw!

Russian 1 That is not necessary. Our betrayal should be obvious enough to the poor suicidal Poles anyway. We will detain you and intend to use you to get hold of Magda.

Magnus You will never get her!

Russian 1 I didn't think you were so naïve, comrade Magnus. Take him out! (*Magnus is brought out by force and against hysterical protests.*)

Stalin and Beria know what they want, and in contrast to the hysterical Hitler they commit no mistakes.

(*to a guard*) When we get Magda, let her and comrade Magnus meet and confer. They could have something to tell us before we question her, and his company will soften her for the interrogation.

Russian 2 Yes, comrade colonel.

Magnus (in a cell with Magda) How shall we convince them, Magda?

Magda They will not be convinced. They are bureaucrats. They dare not think by themselves. All they dare is to blindly obey orders.

Magnus But they have to be made to understand! They are after all human!

Magda Not with that terror background, brought up by the brainwash of a dictatorship.

Magnus What if they hear what we say?

Magda They will be sure to hear it.

Magnus I set no trap, Magda. I walked into the trap myself with no idea that they intended to keep me here.

Magda They saw you as a bit of cheese to tempt the rat with, and the rat naturally walked into the trap, but she has no teeth, knows nothing and has nothing to deliver. Instead of realizing this simple fact they take for granted that I must harbour and hide the more interesting information.

Magnus That was also how Gestapo always worked.

Magda But I don't think they will torture me. They did after all not torture you.

Magnus Not yet.

Magda What did you tell them?

Magnus Everything I know.

Magda That equals nothing. And I know even less.

Magnus Do you know what happened to them? Witold, Schönfeld, Schwarzkopf and whatever they were called?

Magda They all disappeared after the failed assassination attempt on the 20th of July. No one knows anything about them. Hitler appears to have executed half the

general staff including Rommel. Everyone had wished good riddance to Hitler, but it turned out the opposite. Only half went down, though.

Russian 1 (enters with guards) That's enough. Take Magnus out of here. I want a private conversation with the girl. *(Magnus is taken away.)*

Magda What do you want from me?

Russian 1 All your German contacts.

Magda All my German contacts were potential murderers of Hitler.

Russian 1 We can't believe that, since Hitler is still alive.

Magda But you must know about the assassination attempt.

Russian 1 None of your contacts knew the officers that were executed.

Magda If you already know my contacts I have nothing more to tell you.

Russian 1 We want to know everything you know about your friend Witold.

Magda You already know all that.

Russian 1 And Gottfried Schönfeld in Budapest.

Magda I haven't seen him since Budapest.

Russian 1 But you met him there.

Magda Yes.

Russian 1 He discovered that you were a Jewess and placed you as a spy for SS in Warsaw. What was your mission?

Magda None at all. He gave me the connection to Witold, who was a secret opponent to Hitler like himself. Schönfeld worked for a peaceful conclusion of the war as soon as Hitler would be out of the way.

Russian 1 And you want us to believe that?

Magda It's the truth.

Russian 1 No, it's the myth you used as a cover for your real mission in Warsaw.

Magda You are then a hopeless case who only believes your own paranoid distortions of what should be obvious in simple logics. Are all communists like that?

Russian 1 Don't be offensive. It will not serve you.

Magda I am not offensive, but you get offended for nothing. If you go on like that you will be offended by whatever I say.

Russian 1 So you are not willing to cooperate?

Magda Pardon me, but you are nothing to cooperate with, since you don't get whatever I say.

Russian 1 Then we must send you to Moscow as a suspect of counter espionage.

Magda I have heard that Stalin executes whoever for the mere suspicion. I hardly expected anything else.

Russian 1 We have an infallible system that takes care of all information we want and sorts out individuals who are not useful to the system. When we have obtained all the information we want from you, you will be free.

Magda And you want me to believe that?

Russian 1 You only get one chance. Cooperation – or Moscow.

Magda I have nothing more to tell you. *(lower)* May Magnus follow me?

Russian 1 If he pleases.

Magda That's the first sign of humanity you have shown me, comrade.

Russian 1 Unfortunately it will probably also be the last. I regret your obstinacy, comrade Magda. If you knew what was expecting you, you would be more humble.

Magda It's the one way only of the limitation of your hardness that is the problem, not my humility, which can't be more humble after having survived the Warsaw ghetto, which I now start regretting that I did.

Russian 1 If you persist in refusing to cooperate, they will in Moscow break you down piece by piece until there is nothing left of you but a vegetable, at best, to be locked up for preservation in a mental hospital for hopeless chronics.

Magda If that is your system, then the whole system is a mental hospital for those hopeless chronics who believe in it.

Russian 1 I deplore your case, comrade.

Magda I decline being called a comrade by someone who is just the opposite.

Russian 1 (*leaves without a word further*)

Magda I am afraid that even the Nazis of Budapest were better than these hearts of stone.

Singh (*to John*) Aren't you going a bit far, John? Will he make it?

John We shall see, doctor Singh.

Singh You are putting his mental health at risk. He could have brain damage and permanent psychosis.

John No risk. I know him.

Singh I am just worried about my patient.

John I take all the responsibility. Trust me.

Singh I wish I could.

John You simply have to, doctor Singh. Only I can get him back to reality. He is lost if we leave him there.

Singh I hope you know what you are doing.

John Of course I know what I am doing. Or else I would not do it.

Singh I follow but not without concern.

John Thank you, doctor Singh. Your forbearance is all I need to get through with it.

Magnus I will never let you go, Magda, whatever they may do to us.

Magda They can't harm us, Magnus. We are enough harmed already and can't be more harmed. The Soviet Union with its terror bureaucracy is a joke compared to Hitler's Germany and the Warsaw ghetto. The war is over, and we are alive.

Magnus Yes, and that's the only matter of importance. But if Soviet is supposed to be a joke, it's not a funny joke.

Magda No, it's a bad joke doomed to fail. But you have nothing to fear, Magnus. You just loved me.

Magnus Do you suggest that you have something to fear?

Magda I was the one who knew the SS men Schönfeld and Schwarzkopf and kept in touch with them. Therefore I am as much of a suspect as Raoul Wallenberg, who also seems to have been sent here to Moscow for closer examination. What a closer examination imports in the bureaucracy of Stalin, anyone can figure out: simply the same kind of traceless disappearance as the Germans tried to accomplish by their concentration camps for all Jews and gipsies. They failed. So far Stalin has succeeded.

Magnus It will probably not be for long. Stalin is old and mortal.

Magda But he has worked all his life on that his totalitarian society would work better than any human being in it.

Magnus That's why the system is doomed to collapse. It simply can't work in the long run.

Magda You will see but not I.

Magnus You are shockingly certain about it.

Magda I am waiting for my sentence. You have no sentence to expect.

Magnus Still I am not less stuck in the Gulag than you.
(*The cell opens. Enter guards and a doctor marching in.*)

Doctor Magda Weiss?

Magda Yes.

Doctor Take out the other one.
(*Magnus is brutally taken out.*)

Magnus Magda! Magda!

Magda (after him) There is no danger, Magnus. It will not hurt.

Doctor You will be brought to the ninth academy for psychiatric treatment against your sickly incapacity to cooperate.

Magda What will you do to me there? Subject me to forced medication and electro shock treatment until I have no functioning brain left?

Doctor Since you refuse to share your memories it's only fair that you yourself should have no memories left.

Magda I laugh at your childish dilettantism.

Doctor You will hardly do so after the treatment. Bring her out! *(The guards bring Magda out, and the cell is closed. Blackout.)*

Magnus I saw her, John. They showed her to me. A living carcass of soulless indifference. She didn't even recognize me. I touched her cheek like as if to caress it, and she didn't even react. They took her soul away from her. They thought they would thereby convince her that she didn't have any soul, that she was just a body at their mercy which they could do whatever they wanted with and even deprive of sense, memory and will, but then she died. No organism can live without her soul. They made the body useless to her, because they couldn't get anything out of her, and then she left it.

John Was it just by cruelty and sadism that they let you meet her in that condition?

Magnus I don't know. Perhaps they thought my presence could inspire some life in her. Perhaps they thought they had gone too far with her. But not even I could help her. Not the entire second world war was as terrible as that moment when I realized that I could never reach any contact with her any more although I had her in front of me. She was a living dead.

John And you?

Magnus I broke down. I had a complete breakdown and could only say: "What have you done to her!" during incessant screams and tears, until they sent me away. I was sent to a labour camp somewhere in the tundra where I soon voluntarily died like everyone else.

John How did you learn that she died?

Magnus I saw it on her. She was dying. I had it confirmed that she did not eat anything and that she quite naturally starved herself to death. No one cared. There were millions of such cases in the Soviet Union of Stalin.

John Thanks for telling me this and for going through it all once more.

Magnus Thanks for your engagement.

John I was engaged.

Magnus Do you mean that you knew her? Were you there?

John Guess who I was, Magnus.

Magnus Raoul Wallenberg?

John No. He did not die.

Magnus Witold?

John No.

Magnus Schönfeld?

John No.

Magnus Pole or Hungarian?

John No. Jew.

Magnus Rabbi?

John You knew me well, Magnus, so that when you lost touch with me it was such a hard trauma for you that you never could get over it, not even when you got into touch again.

Magnus (pales) Don't tell me that you were – Magda herself?

John Do you remember what we observed from the beginning? Old souls look each other up. We are very old souls, you and I.

Magnus Magda was extremely female but had a manly soul. You are very manly but still have a female soul.

John If I had been a man, Magnus, I could in the second world war have done much more for Hungary, the Jews, the ghetto and all freedom movements. The fact that I was a woman became my downfall since my manly soul thereby was severely blocked. Therefore I became a man in this life to be able to correct where I failed. And I succeeded. After the fall of the Berlin wall and the iron curtain and the upheaval of the Soviet Union I therefore went here to the Himalayas to carry on the same activity here against China and its satellite dictatorships of Burma, Pakistan and North Korea to serve the Tibetan cause. You are welcome to join me once more.

Magnus I am out of words. I am with you with all my heart, but what can I do?

John You can write, just like you could then. Leave the action to me, and you do the documentation for eternity. Let us carry on our quest as pair-horses for idealism, beauty, freedom and truth against all oppression that is just barbarity and ignorance.

Magnus Humanity is greater and more ignorant than ever, John.

John Yes. Regard it as a challenge, Magnus. We have so much to do. I speak to you now not as your colleague since many years nor as Magda, not as a hippie nor guru, but as what we always were to each other and appear to have been through all times – as a fellow traveller and friend. We have only succeeded in reconstructing one of our journeys together, and who knows how many more we have been through together? There is an eternity behind us to explore that probably stretches beyond the known history, look at Madame Blavatsky who by her experiments tried to reconstruct civilisations hundreds of thousands of years back in time here on earth, but it's the future we have to live for and concentrate on. We can't remake what has already been done, we can't make the history of yesterday any better, but we can create the tomorrow, and since we obviously to some degree have that capacity, it's our duty to do so and make the best of it for humanity, nature and all life. There is our mission and our challenge, to which there is no end. We always just got started.

Magnus I loved Magda, John.

John And that's why you lost her to find her again as a friend. She never lost her soul. They only ruined her body. There was much in the matter that I myself was not clear about, therefore I drove you so hard through all this, it was for me also an egoistic personal therapy, but we made it together. Now we don't have to return there any more.

Magnus Do you know anything about the others? Witold? Schönfeld? Szpilman? Potowski?

John Wladislaw Szpilman survived saved by a German. I think he is still playing and composing at an advanced age. He even married and had children. I don't know anything about the Germans. Canaris was murdered during Hitler's last days by hanging slowly in piano wire after the cruellest terrible prolonged torture. I don't know anything about the Potowskis. But do you remember the boy Martin, who first warned us about Treblinka and the Umschlagplatz?

Magnus Yes?

John He made it of course, and his story became a book and a film called "In the Name of My Own", one of the many classics about the Warsaw ghetto. Szpilman also wrote a book directly after the war which now has been reprinted in German.

Magnus But my poetry never appeared.

John It is somewhere, Magnus. One day it will appear. Literature has a strange ability to survive history.

Singh Welcome back. It would never have worked, John, if you hadn't followed all the way yourself.

John That's what I mean. That's why I was there. But it wouldn't have worked either without you, doctor Singh.

Singh Honestly I didn't think it would lead anywhere, but fortunately I was wrong.

John Take it as a compliment, and add it to your credit, doctor Singh.

Singh Thanks for the honour, which I did not deserve. Is there anything else I can do for you?

Magnus Stay on, doctor Singh. Don't leave us. Help us further on our way through the difficult thorny path of eternity.

Singh In Buddhism you search for a way out of there and believe you will find it. Honestly I prefer to stay on, since it must be very lonesome out there on the other side on your own in perfect emptiness, like in the dull paradise of you Christians, where according to your heavenly travelling guide Dante you just hang on clouds and play on harps. Sinners are much more interesting and stimulating, let alone challenging and tantalizing as company.

John Like always, you are right, doctor Singh.

Singh No, my friend, more often than not I am fortunately wrong.

*Phudong, 14.11.2007,
translated in October 2020.*

Something about the characterizations

Doktor Singh, Hindu, in his 60s but looks older, short-haired and shaved, dressed in plain white, reminds of an old Roman senator.

John, very long blond hair at least down to his waist and large earrings of silver, outwardly a classic hippie, middle aged but looks younger.

Magnus, a quite ordinary man.

Magda, dark hair, dark dress, hair no longer than to her shoulders. Please observe her development from the sweetest sort of woman to a fully fledged partisan in a beret with a machine gun.

The joint scene group of hippies are all explicit hippies – extravagant clothes and looks, the more so, the better.

The German officers are of course blond, short-haired, strict, clinically correct.

The ghetto people are all the more shabby, a tribe of beggars, with one exception:

Wladyslaw Szpilman, clean and pure.

Naturally John and Magda have to be acted by different players.

Like in all my plays, the set design should be as realistic as possible.

The original title of the play is "*Reskamraten*", which in Swedish means *The Fellow Traveller* or *Mentor*.