



The Rabbi

The Rabbi

drama from the days of the Warsaw ghetto in five acts

by Christian Lanciai (2001)

The characters:

The rabbi
Rebecca, his daughter
Max, his son
Colonel Wörgl
Sergeant Böll, his aide
Captain Balmy, soldier
Joseph
Mordechai
Benjamin
Esther
Reuben
Yaakov
Judith
Rosa
a Jew
a Jewish woman
a Jewish mother
an elder of the Jewish council

Germans and Jews

The action takes place in Warsaw during winter and spring 1943.

The drama is based on actual events and people, but all names are fictitious.

Copyright © Christian Lanciai 2001

The Rabbi

Act I scene 1.

A spacious but horribly decayed room. The Rabbi lies in his bed sleeping heavily when the daughter brings him a cup of hot tea.

daughter Father! Father! Wake up! We have to attend!
rabbi Mmmmm.... (*has some difficulty in waking up*)
daughter Father, it's not so cold today. I warmed some tea for you.
rabbi Don't tell me it is true.
daughter What did you say?
rabbi (*wakes up*) It is true! Another day! We have to survive yet another day, my daughter.
daughter It's soon time to stand up for attention. We must not be late.
rabbi Always the same. Day after day. Waiting for death which never arrives. Every day the same miracle: death postponed yet another day. But my dreams are lovely, my daughter. There is still a better reality waiting for us. That's why I so desire every night that I won't have to wake up any more.
daughter Drink your tea, father, while it is hot.
rabbi You have heard it before, haven't you, Rebecca?
daughter What?
rabbi That my constant favourite dream is to never have to wake up any more?
daughter That's what we all dream every night, if we sleep at all. Or else we just think it. But the rest of us need you, father. We are still many who need you. Many are grateful that you still have the power to endure and go on surviving a little more. It inspires everyone who knows you with power to survive.
rabbi Who can survive this hell except such crazy old Jews like us?
daughter You said yourself, that we Jews always have to take the hardest blows so that all the others then can follow suit.
rabbi Yes, my daughter. The Jews are the spearhead of humanity. God sends us forth, we take the onslaught, and humanity follows behind and hate us for it, since they are not willing to join our historical blows. But they don't see that we are not the ones who launch the fateful spear of history but God.
daughter Drink up your tea quickly. The others are waiting for us.
rabbi Is it still snowing?
daughter Yes, it is still snowing, but it is less cold.
rabbi Is it below zero it's still always mortally cold.
daughter We'll manage. We are always well supplied with wood.
rabbi Yes, soon the entire ghetto will be just demolition houses. But soon no one will be left to tear down all stairwells and wood panels.

daughter Hope always remains, father. We always have our hope left to live for in spite of all from one day to the next.

rabbi But God knows, that for every day, each day feels more like the very last one.

daughter Father, you are well, and I am well. Even the typhoid has spared us.

rabbi Yes, that's the only thing missing – and life.

daughter And freedom. And nature. And safety.

rabbi Mention something we don't lack, my daughter.

(sirens and signals from the outside)

daughter (gets hurried) They have come.

rabbi Yes, we must not keep them waiting. *(They both fret to get in order.)*

Scene 2. The street outside.

Only ramshackle sheds and dilapidated houses around the street.

A group of worn and torn and half dead Jews have arrived
to stand attention in the dirt and mud of the street.

It is bitter cold. Enter a German officer with a long baton.

officer Wörgl Cheer up, you dismal creatures! You are privileged! Those of you who we select will come to paradise in comparison with your condition here! If you knew how good you would have it you would all ask for coming along to the Umschlagplatz!

a Jew Same story every morning.

Wörgl Quiet over there, you dirty dogs! Still you persist in rather staying here to perish and freeze to death among your lice and Jewish parasites! Only incorrigible Jewish freaks could show such stupidity! Well! Any volunteers? *(No one says a word.)* So we'll have to make our selection again. *(walks among the Jews and marks the chosen ones with his baton.)* You look as if coming along was the last thing you wished for. *(to another)* What do you have to be afraid of? Come along! *(marks him. To a wife:)* You look all too good to remain in this lice plant. *(to another)* We'll take you as well. *(to the rabbi)* Oh no, we don't need any rabbi. You'll stay on here with the damned. *(to his daughter)* And you are too young. *(to a woman)* You are ripe enough. *(marks her)*

the woman But my child! I can't leave my child!

Wörgl Let the child follow also. *(aside, to his aid)* They will both be gassed at once. What a waste! *(marks some others)* You, you and you. We'll take you along as well. There. That's enough for this street. The rest of you may return home to your rat's nests.

(The selected are brought up on a truck and taken away. The Germans vanish efficiently.)

Joseph Sometimes I envy those who are taken away.

Mordechai We have nothing to envy them.

Joseph So! How can you then talk shit if you don't live?

rabbi We don't know what awaits them who are taken away, and we don't know what awaits us who are left. Mordechai is right. It will probably make no difference.

Benjamin Rabbi, you are here to comfort us, not to curse us.

rabbi I curse no one. But all my capacity for comfort is consumed. I am getting old.

Esther Rabbi, my son has disappeared. I don't know where he has gone.

rabbi I know. I will make enquiries about him at the council. But why are we all standing out here in the snow freezing? The danger is over, the Germans have left us in peace, and we have another long and difficult day ahead of us.

Benjamin Rabbi, do you think this will ever be over?

rabbi What? Life?

Benjamin No. This situation.

rabbi We don't know, Benjamin. It is a test. That's all we know. The chances are slim that we will come out of it alive, but life itself as long as it lasts is the very indomitability of hope itself. The trial is so extreme that it has to have some meaning.

Reuben I know the meaning of it. This. (*shows a home-made bomb under his cloak.*)

rabbi Violence, Reuben?

Reuben No, resistance.

rabbi Resistance? To throw a snowball in hell?

Reuben We are stockpiling and getting more each day. I should have thrown this at the Germans now.

rabbi I am glad you didn't. Half of your brothers and sisters would have been done for. And the Germans would have shot down the rest. That is violence, Reuben. For everyone accountable who is murdered, a hundred innocents are sacrificed.

Reuben But we are forced into a corner. We will soon have no other choice.

rabbi There is always a way out, Reuben. There are always alternatives. There is always a back door.

Reuben You have to reason like that, rabbi, since you are a rabbi. But in the end it is not realistic. This is reality. (*demonstrates the bomb*)

rabbi You have no patience, Reuben.

Reuben No, I have no patience any more to watch the Germans exterminating us. Our children starve and freeze to death shut up in the ghetto, our wives are taken away and prostituted, our parents are left to die from malnutrition, and they allow us to rot away in this over-populated closed up hell of infections and lack of food and hygienics! Yes, rabbi! I can't accept the constantly increasing humiliation any longer!

rabbi You sound exactly like my son.

Reuben Is he still alive?

rabbi We don't know. We hope so.

Reuben As an officer in the Polish army he should be in the resistance movement.

rabbi We think so.

Reuben He would be welcome and of great service here.

rabbi As a suicide candidate?

Reuben As one of us determined to speak out.

rabbi No, Reuben. It is doomed to fail. Only patience can prevail at length. Violence is self-destructive and can only be overcome by patience.

Reuben Yes, conquer the führer's madness with your patience! Stand up to the German tanks and stop them with your patience! Put an end to all massacres and the second world war with your patience!

rabbi You don't understand. All that will destroy itself at length.

Reuben Yes, but we the innocents perish in the process! And we must do something about it!

rabbi Do you know what the best possible results would be that you could achieve?

Reuben What do you think?

rabbi That a few of you might survive to tell the story.

Reuben Rather that than perish in silence.

rabbi Our voices will never grow silent, Reuben. They will resound forever.

Reuben Even all the voices quieted in Treblinka and Auschwitz and all the other death camps that we know nothing about, since all who were brought there never return or even are allowed to live to even whisper any word of a tale?

rabbi They especially. Their voices will cry out forever, and humanity will never be able to shut down their cries.

Reuben We are in the same line, rabbi, although we have opposite standpoints.

rabbi Where two Jews are arguing there are at least three different standpoints. Go home with your bomb, Reuben and hide it.

Reuben We have petrol and raw materials. The most difficult to get is empty bottles.

rabbi I can't help you.

daughter Father, you are getting cold out here. We have to return inside.

rabbi All the ghetto demands my presence. There is more to do here than in all the rest of the world.

daughter That's precisely why we have to go inside.

Yaakov Rabbi, I have found some nice books for you. (*moves a broken pram with books*)

rabbi I haven't been able to buy books for a very long time, Yaakov.

Yaakov I have better prices than ever, just for you.

rabbi (curious) What have you come across, Yaakov?

Yaakov Lessing. Sienkiewicz. Stefan Zweig. Remarque.

rabbi Those are rare books, Yaakov.

Yaakov I know. I have a nose for books the Germans love to burn.

rabbi Hide and protect them well. They belong to the future.

Yaakov And to you, rabbi.

rabbi That issue is for later. (*gunfire far away*)
We are getting trouble again.

daughter Come, father. (*they go inside. All vanish from the street. The gunfire continues.*)

Joseph Just a moment, rabbi!
rabbi What is it, Joseph?
Joseph I have done some business. (*produces a bag from a hiding place*)
rabbi Have you been outside the ghetto?
Joseph Have I been outside! (*shows his loot, can by can*) Russian caviar. Sardines. Cheese. Even some butter. But what about this? (*shows a bottle with shining eyes*)
rabbi (*examines the bottle*) Real stuff?
Joseph Bottled here. The Poles sell it to the Germans for millions. All Poland lives on the profits of bootlegging and home distillation for the Germans.
rabbi This is enough for a whole week or at least a full party.
Joseph Be my guest! Let's make it at once, rabbi!
rabbi Come!

(*The gunfire continues.*)

Scene 3. The rabbi's premises.

rabbi You can't guess, Rebecca, what you can find if you like Joseph go fishing in the sewers. He has had catches all day, and the sardines and the caviar are even already canned!
daughter Nowadays you always get catches in the sewers, father.
rabbi There you are, Joseph. There are always solutions. There is always an alternative and a way out.
Joseph Of course. That's why we survive. Only those perish who shut out their possibilities themselves.
rabbi But this bottle alone is worth more than its weight in gold.
Joseph It's not worth saving, since no one knows if he will still be alive tomorrow. Rather a decent party for the moment than promises for tomorrow that have to be broken.
rabbi Joseph is a true philosopher, Rebecca.
daughter He is not just keeping us alive. He provides for the entire eastern ghetto.
Joseph At least the Mila street and a few other blocks. But I am not alone. We are an entire army of underground rats in the sewers stealing from the masters to feed their slaves.
rabbi But you also provide for the masters.
Joseph Only with secret and forbidden provisions.
rabbi That's why the masters survive.
Joseph Perhaps. At least the Poles survive that way and we.
rabbi No, everyone. All humanity has lived by forbidden fruits since it came into existence. It is curiosity and the interest in the forbidden that has brought humanity forward. Or else it would just immediately go to waste by boredom.
Joseph (*to Rebecca*) The rabbi knows a lot about man.

Rebecca Father knows everything.
rabbi No, my daughter. Most things are not known to any man and least of all to me. I am actually just a simple pocket idiot of an ordinary rabbi.
Joseph We need the simplicity of the rabbis to be able to believe in them and in man's better self. And that's why the rabbis survive, to be able to carry on the self-deceit of man's innocent simplicity.
rabbi Now you start to sound like a rabbi.
Joseph I had no intention to. Cheers! (*raises his glass*)
rabbi We have to have something to drink to. Only sacred thoughts justify sacred drinks. I know. A toast to absent friends, all the lost ones, whom we don't know where they are. Cheers for your brother, Rebecca.
Rebecca I feel that he is alive.
rabbi If there is anything in this world that I trust, it is female intuition.
Rebecca I am just a girl.
rabbi That exalts the intuition.
Joseph Cheers to Max! And may he soon be back!
rabbi No, he had better keep away from here. I hope he is in the Polish resistance. (*the sound of a door*) Who is it?
Max (bloody and badly hurt) I am back.
rabbi (rises at once) Max!
daughter (does the same) Max! You are bloody! Are you hurt?
Joseph (remains seated) You are just in time to celebrate your homecoming, Max.
rabbi Max, my son! (*embraces him*)
Max (indicates Joseph) What is *he* doing here?
rabbi He is one of us, Max! He just brought us some liquor and herrings, butter and caviar and even a bottle of schnaps, as if you knew you were coming home!
Max He is not one of us. He belongs to the other side. He makes business with the Germans and provides them with tarts. He is a reckless profiteer.
rabbi Max, as long as we live we are all just reckless profiteers and parasites on life. Sit down with us now and let us celebrate you!
Rebecca Let me wash and dress your wound.
Max They are just scratches.
Rebecca Why did you come back?
Max They surprised us. Almost all my companions were killed. They came in the night. We had no chance. There is nothing more murderous than the inhuman efficiency of the Germans. I thought there was nothing left for me to do in life than to get back here and die.
(*The sound of sirens and engine noises outside with gunfire and megaphones screaming "Achtung! Achtung!" and things like that in unintelligible military German.*)
Joseph Here we go again.
rabbi There is sure to be some house search. Hide everything away quickly! No trace must be left.

Max It's me they are after.

loudspeaker (outside) Some Polish deserters have escaped into the ghetto. Anyone protecting them will be shot at once.

Max We were a group finding our way in here. Our mission was to organize and instruct a rebellion from inside the Warsaw ghetto.

rabbi And get the whole remaining population of the ghetto murdered?

Max Father, we are all dead already. Try at last to become a bit realistic.

Rebecka Max, you must also hide.

rabbi Get behind this wall. We have hiding-places everywhere. The Germans never bother to search.

Joseph We'll carry on with the party when the Germans are gone.

Max There will be no party for me until all Germans are exterminated.

rabbi He has grown hard.

Rebecca But he still belongs to us.

rabbi It's the very last thing I would wish for any man, my daughter, that he grows hard. Man is born with a heart. Without a heart you have no *raison d'être*, and hardness buries and stifles the heart, until it has withered and there is nothing left but a monstrous shell like of a dead insect, as with the case of the German SS troupes.

angry voices (outside) Aufmachen! (*Germans brutally barge in with guns and Wörgl leading them.*)

Wörgl Search! (*The Germans bustle around and are efficient.*)

(*Wörgl slowly passes around, and his well trimmed falcon's eye observes everything of interest. He arrives at the rabbi's decrepit bookshelf.*) Books, rabbi, here, in these times?

rabbi Books are for all times.

Wörgl (*observes a few titles*) Schiller. Nietzsche. Simplicissimus. You read German rabbi?

rabbi I am German.

Wörgl No, rabbi, you are a Jew. (*comes up to the daughter*)
Your daughter? (*takes her chin like as if to inspect the mouth of a horse*)

rabbi Yes.

Wörgl Name?

rabbi Rebecca.

Wörgl Age?

rabbi Seventeen years.

Wörgl She looks older. (*observes the son's photo*) Your son?

Rabbi Yes.

Wörgl A Polish officer. It's unusual for a Jew to come up in the Polish army. Such ones are the ones we are looking for. He doesn't happen to have come home for some reason?

rabbi (after some brief hesitation) Don't ask me.

Wörgl Who shall I ask then?

rabbi Ask them who know. Here in the Warsaw ghetto no one knows anything any more.

Wörgl And why would a Polish Jewish officer enter the quarters of death and the extreme human misery without end in the Warsaw ghetto? Do you have any idea, rabbi?

rabbi You are right. There could be no reason.

Wörgl I didn't say there was no reason. I asked for the reason.

rabbi And I maintain there is no reason.

Wörgl At least you are not lying, rabbi. (*roars an order*) Clear the premises! Search everything!

Joseph I can vouch for the rabbi here. There is no one here.

Wörgl And who are you?

Joseph Joseph. A Pole.

Wörgl I recognize you. Are you not the one who...

Josef Yes.

Wörgl A brilliant businessman. Profits from both Jews and Germans. What has he sold to you, rabbi?

Rabbi Nothing. We have no money.

Wörgl No, of course. But he must have been paid something? Perhaps he is marketing your daughter with our officers in their pavilions?

rabbi Joseph is an old childhood friend and a class mate of my son's. He has grown up with us and with my daughter. Even Jews are still allowed to have friends.

Wörgl Yes, among the Poles, but not among us Germans.

Joseph You choose your friends but not always your enemies.

Wörgl (ice cold) Polish impertinence?

rabbi He is just trying to be funny.

Wörgl (to Joseph) Do you have any more funny jokes?

Joseph Life isn't always that funny.

Wörgl Funny man. Why aren't you laughing, rabbi?

rabbi He is right. It isn't funny.

Wörgl What isn't funny?

rabbi You.

Wörgl Humour is always nothing but nonsense. At best it is offensive. To the point! Do you know anything about weapons in the Warsaw ghetto, rabbi?

rabbi You ask the wrong person.

Wörgl I know. That's why I do it. For you always speak the truth. That's your profession and your duty as a rabbi. That's all you are good for.

rabbi Even if there were weapons in the Warsaw ghetto, against whom could anyone use them?

Wörgl That's what you never know until they have been used, and then it is too late. You have to take the gun from the child before it has time to get harmed by it, don't you think, rabbi?

rabbi There are no children playing with guns here.

Wörgl Not even your son?

rabbi My son is lost since Poland surrendered.

Wörgl I know. He is one of many lost and wanted Polish officers.
 rabbi Why do you want them? Poland did surrender, you know.
 Wörgl Don't forget that it was Poland who started the second world war. We have every reason to search and punish those accountable.
 rabbi I thought your version of the second world war was that we the Jews had started it.
 Wörgl *(with venom)* Rabbi, don't provoke a German officer.
 Joseph He only tried to be funny.
 Wörgl He failed. Böll, come here! *(enter the Aide)* Beat up this devil!
 Böll He is an old man, herr Oberst.
 Wörgl Don't you think I can see he is an old man? Beat him up!
 Böll *(has to obey orders, does it unwillingly, gives the rabbi a slap, almost like a caress)*
 Wörgl Too bad, Böll! Have you no training? What are you doing in the war? *(gives the rabbi a violent blow flooring the rabbi. The daughter hurries up to take care of her father.)* When a German officer commands you to strike, Böll, you strike and hard!
 Böll *(stiff)* Yes, Herr Oberst.
 Wörgl That's enough. We'll be back some other time. Heraus!
(the Germans march out, Wörgl and Böll as the last ones.)
 rabbi Nothing, my daughter. They have beaten me up before and harder.
 Joseph That blow could have struck down a bull.
 rabbi It did strike down a bull. *(rises)* The Germans have left. Where is the party? Where is my son?
 Joseph That's the spirit!
(Rebecca produces the bottle and the victuals. Max reappears from his hiding-place.)
 rabbi It's all clear for the moment, my son.
 Max You managed well, father, as usual. Not one lie, and not one true word.
 rabbi That's what they call diplomacy.
 Joseph But you risked it by trying to be funny.
 rabbi I *was* funny, Joseph. That was the trigger. If you say something funny to make someone angry, then it really was funny.
 Rebecca But you made us worried.
 rabbi Don't double the fun now. Join the party!
(they sit down at the table with candles lighted)
 So, to our restored prodigal son and his future! *(raises his glass)*
 Max And to the future of all of us, even if it will only bring death.
 rabbi You know too well, Max, that death is all there is in the end.
 Joseph Don't start arguing now, but drink and eat while there still is any life left!
 Rebecca For the age of miracles never to reach an end!
 Max As long as we live they are never likely to leave us in peace.
 Joseph The miracles?
 Max Yes. We might even win the war.
 rabbi Of course we'll win the war, Max. It's just a matter of time.

Wörgl No, Walter, he was just an old Jew. You must distinguish between humans and Jews. It is your duty to your fatherland and your führer. Haven't you learned that lesson?

Böll I was brought up to treat all men like men.

Wörgl That sounds too humanistic to have taken place in Germany. Where did you grow up? In Austria?

Böll No, Switzerland.

Wörgl That explains it. Basel?

Böll Yes.

Wörgl The city of Erasmus. And what did you do before the war?

Böll Studying.

Wörgl What?

Böll Philosophy and history.

Wörgl And how on earth did you then get into the SS?

Böll It would be good for the family. A relative demanded it for the sake of the family. It would be a safe career.

Wörgl Until the war started.

Böll Yes.

Wörgl And here we sit like watch dogs barking at Warsaw and the ghetto while the entire Russian front is collapsing. Then hell will start for us, Böll.

Böll If you say so, Herr Oberst.

Wörgl Excuse me. I forgot myself. You could be shot or hanged for defeatism if you by any word mention what is going on at Moscow and Stalingrad. If you say we have lost the war you are a traitor and not more of a man any longer than any dying Jew. So you must not tell the truth, Böll. All cruelties are allowed in a dictatorship except telling the truth. Have some more, Böll.

Böll Thank you, Herr Oberst, but I don't think I can take any more at the moment.

Wörgl Then it is wise to break it off. You have developed some beer sense, Böll. You can be trusted. I want you for a mission.

Böll Yes, Herr Oberst.

Wörgl I need some change. Or else boredom will kill me. Get me that virgin daughter of that ghost of a rabbi.

Böll Now, Herr Oberst?

Wörgl Yes, just now.

Böll It is late.

Wörgl Yes, it is late.

Böll Is that an order?

Wörgl Yes, it is an order.

Böll *(rises, salutes, and departs with a shadow of a hint at reluctance.)*

Wörgl He is a perfect virgin. How could they let such a weak greenhorn into the SS? His relative must have some high position in the machinery. He stands no chance against the war. Che sará, sará. *(Drinks.)*

Scene 2. The rabbi's quarters.

(Max and Rebecca by the table.)

Rebecca Have you come here only to make trouble, Max

Max You must understand, sister. We have no choice. We have to show the Germans that we will not be massacred and extirpated without resistance. As long as we don't make any resistance we are indeed the second rate people they want to make of us. But if we suddenly fight back they might think again.

Rebecca You risk the lives of everyone who is still in the ghetto.

Max We have nothing to lose. We have to start reacting. We have to demonstrate that we are alive. We have to show the world outside that the Jews have the right to live and to call themselves men. And we have the opportunity, for the Germans don't think we can fight. We can provide them with their first defeat right here in the middle of the Warsaw ghetto.

Rebecca You are father's direct contrary. Everything he always worked for was peace at any price, but you always wanted to fight and use violence at any price.

Max We complement each other. And where do you stand? Can you understand me at all and our urge for resistance?

Joseph (breaking in) Germans are on their way here. You have to hide, Max.

Max One day every German in my way shall have disturbed his last Jew.
(*vanishes*)

Rebecca What do they want this time?

Josef I don't know.

Rebecca Is it that horrible officer again?

Josef No, they come without him. It's just his aide.

Rebecca Then they must have forgotten something. (*enter the Germans*)

Böll Rebecca Lilienthal?

Rebecca Yes. What do you want?

Böll Where is your father?

Rebecca He is out on errands.

Böll I have orders to bring you to colonel Wörgl.

Rebecca What does he want of me?

Böll I don't know.

Joseph Of course you know, you pimp.

Böll No, I actually don't know. Don't imagine I am doing this voluntarily.

Joseph Hopefully, Rebecca, he wishes you no harm. You may perhaps come back afterwards.

Böll He was drunk when he gave his orders. Perhaps he has fallen asleep when we reach him. I just obey orders.

Rebecca I am coming. Tell our friend, Joseph, that I will be back.

Joseph I will do so.

Rebecca (buttons her coat) I am ready.

Böll (showing the way out without a word and leaves after Rebecca. In the doorway to Joseph:) Tell the rabbi that I will do what I can.

Joseph You are unusually human to be German, captain.

Böll Although we are Germans we are humans. (*leaves*)

Joseph (despairing) No! No! No!

Max (comes out) What is it? Where is Rebecca?

Joseph They have taken Rebecca!

Max Where? Why?

Joseph That aide of the colonel's came and fetched her. He didn't know himself what the colonel wanted.

Max It can only mean one thing. She is lost.

Joseph No, she said she would be back.

Max Then she will be back. But in what condition?

Joseph (hiding his face in his hands) Alas, I don't want to think of it!

Max We are lucky that father isn't here. Perhaps she will be back before he returns.

Joseph It will break his heart!

Max Time is running out for all of us. I must alert my friends. It's time for us to launch our rebellion *now!*

Joseph And how could that help your sister?

Max We can't help anyone, Joseph. The only thing left for us to do is to take revenge. (*rushes out*)

Joseph Alas, these passionate poor Jewish maniacs! They can love and murder and live passionately enough to recklessness, but they can never do anything sensible!

Scene 3.

rabbi But what do you want me to do? Should I perhaps raise your son from the dead?

mother If only you could, rabbi!

rabbi I can't, dear Frau Ewigkeit.

mother Oh, what shall I then do with my life! They don't even want me in the Umschlagplatz!

Rabbi We are all doomed to live as long as we live, Frau Ewigkeit, even if it might seem the most unendurable and unjust of all punishments.

mother Alas, my son, my son!

rabbi I am very sorry, dear madam. But cry. It might help.

mother There are no tears left in the Warsaw ghetto to cry out.

rabbi There you spoke a true word. The sources have been overused and run dry. Only the snow can still cry in the Warsaw ghetto, if ever it melts.

Yaakov Rabbi, you promised to look at my books.

rabbi Have you found something new?
Jakov Both Thomas and Heinrich Mann.
rabbi Nice work.
Yaakov You will have them at a good price, rabbi.
rabbi Later, Yaakov. First we must mind the living that haven't yet been burned by the Germans. Your books will remain, for no Germans burn books any more in the Warsaw ghetto.
Yaakov No, until they burn down the entire ghetto.
rabbi It is not yet imminent, Yaakov.
Judith Rabbi, my son has disappeared!
rabbi What do you want me to do?
Judith Search for him. Make enquiries at the Jewish council.
rabbi There are so many lost ones, Judith. Every day more people are reported lost than the day before. Not even our Jewish council can keep track of all the hundreds that are lost every day.
Judith Ask them anyway, for the sake of hope!
rabbi Of course I will do so, Judith.

(Enter a mad mother carrying her dead infant.)

But what is this? How did Rosa's child die, Judith? Do you know what has happened?

Judith A German soldier threw the child out of the window.
rabbi But why? What did the child do to the soldier?
Judith It cried when the soldier entered to rape her.
rabbi The child didn't even know the soldier's intentions. Perhaps it cried for hunger.
Judith There are worse things happening every day, rabbi. How long do we have to put with this inhuman oppression by constantly increasing violations? Only those are happy who get the privilege of freezing to death.
rabbi Dear Judith, let the other patients through who wish to speak with me.
a man Rabbi, where is my son?
a woman My daughter was ravished tonight by a German soldier, and he doesn't even want to bury her!
a girl My brother is lost.
rabbi Dear friends, if they are only lost there is always hope they have managed to escape. Only if you come across their corpses all hope is lost. But where are you going, Rosa? You look wondrously happy, and you have even put on some make up and fine clothes. Where are you going?
Rosa Rabbi, they promised us bread and jam free of charge if we turn up at the Umschlagplatz. They have promised us work. They wouldn't offer us jam free of charge just to fool us, would they?
rabbi Rosa, I beg you, don't go there. You don't know what's expecting you at the end of the line.

Rosa Could it be worse than this? Work and jam! That's paradise! How could I turn it down? It's an opportunity which never might turn up again!

rabbi Dear Rosa, I can only advise you. I can't stop you.

Rosa Come along, rabbi! You will surely be needed over there as well!

rabbi I am always most needed where I am, Rosa, and at the moment I am here and will remain here as long as I am needed here.

Rosa Farewell, rabbi! I will wait for you over there! With jam!

rabbi Farewell, dear Rosa.

Reuben Rabbi, I think you should go home.

Rabbi How so? What has happened?

Reuben The Germans have returned and taken your daughter.

Rabbi Why?

Reuben No one knows.

rabbi But I have a mission to the Jewish council now. I can't neglect that. They probably just want some information from her.

Reuben I hope so, rabbi.

rabbi Let's go on living on our hopes, Reuben. I will come as soon as I can.

Reuben Good luck, rabbi. (*The rabbi leaves.*) But not even the Jewish council could hardly be able to do anything more now for the rabbi's own daughter.

Scene 4. Wörgl's officer's premises.

Wörgl (with his glass of brandy) Where is that dumbbell Böll? He hasn't been affected by moral considerations or bungled his petty mission, has he? It doesn't happen every day that you get the opportunity to violate a virgin daughter of a rabbi. Jews exist only to be violated, the boxing pad and doormat of humanity, for everyone to always wipe their feet on. Who will provide that service when all the Jews are wasted? The gipsies? The slavs? The Catholics? (*a knock*)

Well, at last. (*goes to open with his glass in his hand. Böll is outside with Rebecca.*)

That's good, Böll. You may leave. You have made your delivery. (*Böll leaves.*)

Come in, my friend. (*Rebecca enters, frozen and afraid.*)

Rebecca What did you want of me?

Wörgl Be not afraid. I was simply bored.

Rebecca Are you not going to question me?

Wörgl No, I am not going to question you.

Rebecca What will you do then? Are you going to kill me?

Wörgl Don't be so afraid. I wish you absolutely no harm. But you are cold. Have some brandy. (*pours her a drink, which he offers her.*) Drink.

Rebecca (takes a very small sip) I am not used to it.

Wörgl I know. Drink. (*raises the glass base, compelling her to drink*)

Rebecca It is strong.

Wörgl Does it feel better now?

Rebecca At least it feels warming.
Wörgl That's the intention. Have a seat. Relax. You are here on my invitation. I have no hostile intentions.
Rebecca (calmer) I thought you would question me about my father.
Wörgl Your father and such likes don't interest me at all. A scholar is absolutely harmless. But your brother is of interest to me. What do you know about him?
Rebecca Nothing. He is lost.
Wörgl Yes, all Polish freedom fighters are lost. They have to be lost in order to do their job. Your brother is somewhere out there underground engaged in underground activities like sabotage. That's the only thing he knows. But I don't think he is in the ghetto, for he can do less damage here than outside.
Rebecca I also don't think he is in the ghetto.
Wörgl No, because if he was you would know about it, wouldn't you?
Rebecca Maybe. Not even we Jews can know about everything happening in the ghetto.
Wörgl Is there so much happening?
Rebecca No one can follow everything that happens. My father works from morning till night and sometimes around the clock.
Wörgl Only with pastoral care?
Rebecca Yes.
Wörgl And what about you? What are you doing?
Rebecca I am helping him. I am really a seamstress. I work with that when I get the time.
Wörgl More brandy?
Rebecca Thank you, it warmed nicely.
Wörgl You are so pale. Not even brandy can colour your cheeks.
Rebecca It is the winter.
Wörgl But I know where we can bring some colour.
Rebecca What do you mean?
Wörgl Do you know what this is?
Rebecca (shivers) A lipstick.
Wörgl Use it.
Rebecca I can't.
Wörgl Then let me do it. (*She resists in vain when he uses force on her.*) There is no resistance left in you, baby. You are all wasted in the Warsaw ghetto. That is why you are all going to die. But the course is too slow. That is why we are taking you away. Soon the ghetto will be cleared of everyone who could ever make any resistance. Only old wrecks and ghosts and whores like you and your old demented father will remain. No, don't pass out! Damn it! She fainted! How could I get anything out of her as unconscious! (*pours himself more brandy*) Damn it! Delayed arrival! (*drinks*)

Scene 5. The Jewish council.

Everything is chaos. The old members of the council are frantically worried by desperate Jews in throngs all talking over each other.

Council elder No more now! We have no time for all of you! Go home and come back tomorrow! We have to close up now!

a man Here comes the rabbi.

Council elder That's all we wanted.

rabbi (has made his way up) I have a list.

Council elder More than a hundred are reported missing every day, rabbi. What can we do?

rabbi Emil Schnabel misses his daughter.

Council elder And how many more are on your list, rabbi? A Hundred? Two hundred?

rabbi At least make a note of their names! I promised them as much.

Council elder Our unsolved mystery lists are as many as their names.

rabbi Make a note of their names! Samuel Schwarzkopf! Ruben Schnabel!

a German soldier (armed) That's enough. The office is closing.

rabbi Jeschua Weiser! Meinhold Gaebler!

soldier Didn't you hear, rabbi?

rabbi The situation is intolerable! We have an epidemic of typhoid in the ghetto, and you don't allow us even food and blankets, medication even less!

soldier It's not our fault. You are spreading the epidemic.

rabbi We don't even get water to drink!

soldier You have the sewers! Drink snow! All you Jewish parasites are good for is complaining, complaining, complaining! You should have considered the consequences before starting the second world war!

rabbi (can't believe his ears but collects himself) Are we then not all human beings? Have we not the right to ask for a little compassion for the sake of working together for survival? Can we afford to make life even harder for each other than it already is?

soldier You are crazy, old man. Go home.

rabbi We are dying, soldier! And only the German supremacy is accountable for the entire war situation with all its miseries in the whole world!

soldier (in dangerous control) Go home, rabbi, before I shoot you.

Council elder Rabbi, leave your list with us. We will do what we can.

rabbi That's all I ask for, Shlomo.

Council elder Go now, before it gets worse.

soldier Everybody out! The council is closed for today! (*drives everybody out*)

rabbi (meets Joseph, breathless) Joseph! What is it?

Joseph Hurry home, rabbi.

rabbi (takes his arm) Is it Max?

Joseph No, it is Rebecca.

rabbi I now. She was taken for interrogation.

Joseph Rabbi, if she comes back at all she will need you.
rabbi Come, Joseph. Let us run. (*they disappear.*)

Act III scene 1. The rabbi's quarters.

Max (*alone*) Who could ever bring the Germans to trial? How could they ever make amends for what they have done? Their crime is too outrageous to ever be able to stand definition. And that's why they are getting away with it. So we have to take the law into our own hands and become terrorists by all divine and natural and human rights. We have no choice. It is our only way out.

rabbi (*enters with Joseph*) Max! Where is Rebecca?

Max With the Germans.

rabbi She hasn't come back?

Max No. But she said she would be back and seemed positive about it.

rabbi But what did they want of her?

Max Question her about me or you, I presume, probably about us both.

Joseph The Germans don't pick up young single Jewesses for interrogation.

Max I know. That's why I try to imagine it was just for interrogation.

rabbi Yes, let's hope so, Max. Was it the Gestapo or the SS?

Max It was the SS.

Joseph But it was not colonel Wörgl. He had sent his servant.

Max Let us be realistic. If she wasn't taken for questioning, I hope for her own sake that she never comes back.

rabbi Max!

Max What do you think they will do with her if they don't question her, father?

rabbi Stop it!

Joseph They may invite her for dinner.

Max If you are invited for a German dinner, Joseph, you will never recover from it.

(*a knock. All fall silent.*)

rabbi Germans don't knock. (*loud*) Come in!

(*Böll appears with Rebecca. She is grossly painted all over her mouth and thereby marked as a prostitute.*)

(*Rebecca walks in to the men. Böll takes a few steps.*)

Max (*roars*) What do you want?

rabbi (*has risen and embraces his daughter*) Max, I think this German soldier is innocent.

Max (*roars*) No German soldier is innocent!

Joseph (*apologetically to Böll*) He is just an ordinary mad Jew.

rabbi Come, my girl. It's all right now. You are back. All you need is rest.

Max (*wild*) Yes, everything is all right now! It is over! The rape is over! What more do you want, father? Aren't you going to thank the Germans for their grace?

rabbi Max, calm down. (*walks with Rebecca to the bed.*)

Böll (to Joseph) I can't say how sorry I am.

Max Yes, just stand there and excuse all Germany! You just obeyed orders, didn't you?

Böll Yes, I just obeyed orders.

Joseph He just obeyed orders, Max. Or else he would have been shot. We are all in the same boat under the same compulsion.

rabbi (puts his daughter to bed) Is it better now, my girl?

Rebecca I was not willing, father.

rabbi Of course not.

Rebecca I wasn't even conscious. He made me drunk.

rabbi It's all right now, my girl.

Rebecca I don't know what he did, except that he painted me with his lipstick. He must have been angry with me.

Joseph (understands) He was angry with you for being unconscious. You were lucky to get away alive.

Rebecca Lucky?

Böll (breaks down) I can't say how sorry I am!

rabbi (observes him) My son, your tears make my heart melt.

Max Those are German tears, father! They are poison! Crocodile tears! He was her pimp!

rabbi (has approached Böll, who is crying against his knees) No, Max, he is just a victim to the universal madness, like all of us. Guilt never cries, and only innocence feels guilt.

Max Your daughter has been violated by an unman, and you preach forgiveness!

rabbi No, Max, compassion, just compassion.

Böll If only I could atone for anything of all this!

Joseph (sees an opportunity) He is on our side.

Max Throw out that damned gigolo then for hell's sake, or do I have to do it myself!

rabbi You had better leave, my son. But you are welcome to return later to visit my daughter. Perhaps you could do something for her.

Böll Thanks, rabbi. (*rises. He has taken the hint and leaves promptly.*)

Joseph Even Germans are sometimes human.

Max No, Joseph, they are just pretending, like you are pretending to be on our side.

Joseph I am on the side of humanity against Germanism.

rabbi Well said, Joseph. You could become a real rabbi with time. But we now have a convalescent to take care of. We should be happy and grateful, Max, that she came back at all.

Max From the claws of an uncircumcised pervert in the SS? She can never get clean again.

rabbi Max, you are going too far!

Max Am I? And who is forcing me? Who forces everyone to go too far by marching themselves all the way too far into hell in their beastly arbitrariness?

rabbi Here we go again. Just because the world is so full of barbarity it is the more important for those who are not barbarians to stick to the contrary.

Max You preach to empty synagogues and deaf ears, father. The world nowadays only listens to bombs and roars of violence.

rabbi Still just a whisper of the most quiet and timid sort will drown all the inhuman noises of the world, if that lonesome whispered word only is spoken of love.

Max (rises, furious) Father, our kind are freezing to death in their beds! They suffocate in the vomit of their typhus and shit to death in their dysenteries! They starve to death, and their infants are thrown by Germans out of the window! The ghetto is struck with mass deportations every day! Hundreds of thousands are brought away every day to never come back and never again give any sign of life! And your only daughter is ravished by a German SS bully! And you dare speak about love!

rabbi Max, don't press me any further. We have nothing but ruins left. Let me at least care about *them*.

Max Father, the Germans are enjoying trampling your ruins to dust!

rabbi (quietly) We have a convalescent in the house. Consider her at least, Max.

Joseph (to Max) What is your point?

Max The only possible solution! Resistance! Violence! Bombs! Snipers! Sabotage! Attacks! Anything that does the Germans any harm! That's the only way to any future at all! (*rushes out in fury*)

rabbi My own son is becoming a terrorist.

Joseph He is not altogether wrong, rabbi.

rabbi The worst thing is that I am not all wrong either. So we do have something in common. Why can't we meet then?

Joseph Because you are father and son. You stand too close.

rabbi You mean that the bloodline doesn't have to necessitate that we agree?

Joseph Something like that.

rabbi That's some comfort too. (*goes to sit with his daughter*)
How is it, my dear?

Rebecca That German soldier. Will he be back?

rabbi I think so.

Rebecca He is innocent.

rabbi I know.

Rebecca He saw Max but did not arrest him.

rabbi Joseph says he has crossed over to our side.

Joseph All Germans would cross over to our side if they had the same experience as that soldier.

rabbi The true rabbi has spoken.

Rebecca Let me sleep now.

rabbi Certainly, my dearest. I will never let you down again. (*caresses her hair*)
I will still be sitting here by your side when you wake up again.
Joseph She will probably manage.
rabbi Human nature never ceases to surprise me, Joseph. The harder you
press it, the more genuine and noble it grows, while at the same time its power of
resistance just increases.
Joseph That's the power of resistance we need, not terrorists with bombs.
rabbi That's what I believe also, Joseph.

Scene 2. Wörgl's officer's premises.

Wörgl (to a soldier) I want Böll here to give a report as soon as he comes back.
soldier I think he just came back, Herr Oberst.
Wörgl Splendid! Send him in! (*exit soldier*)
This is almost getting funny. With some luck I might use Böll both as a pimp and a
spy.
Böll (enters and salutes) Herr Oberst!
Wörgl Have you brought the girl home?
Böll Yes, Herr Oberst.
Wörgl Was the rabbi there?
Böll Yes.
Wörgl Who else?
Böll That merchant.
Wörgl Joseph the profiteer?
Böll Yes.
Wörgl You didn't notice anything special?
Böll No.
Wörgl (rises) It's getting time to liquidate the entire ghetto, Böll. The Jews have been
left in peace there far too long, spreading their poisonous tentacles by the sewers all
around Warsaw, which swarms with their henchmen, rebels and saboteurs. I have
had directions from general Strop. Warsaw must be purged from all Jews. But the
ghetto must not know what we are doing, while we must know what the ghetto is
doing and how much they know. To begin with we must accelerate the pace of the
transports from the Umschlagplatz. We shall empty the ghetto the civilized way by
peaceful means as far as possible. Then we'll find out how to deal with the rest of the
ruins.
Böll Yes, Herr Oberst.
Wörgl I suggest that you keep yourself informed of the situation. Perhaps you
can achieve some good standing with the rabbi and his daughter. You could for
example tell them that you are sorry for what I did. That will make the rabbi give
you his blessing.
Böll Yes, Herr Oberst.

Wörgl Find out as much as possible. Try to learn something about the rabbi's son. Spy out the ghetto. And send that profiteer Joseph to me. I think I will question him.

Böll Yes, Herr Oberst.

Wörgl Do it! (*Böll salutes and leaves.*)

I am more ingenious than I thought. With Böll as a trusted errand boy with the rabbi we could keep closely informed about the criminal activities of the ghetto. Stroop will be delighted. (*sits down with his glass of brandy*)

Scene 3. The rabbi's quarters, like before.

The rabbi sits with his daughter. There is a knock.

Joseph That must be the German boy.

rabbi Come in! (*enter Böll*)

Böll I bring some bad news.

Joseph All news are bad if they come from the Germans.

Böll The ghetto will be demolished but not yet. First everyone shall be taken away by the Umschlagplatz.

rabbi I was expecting something like that.

Böll And my superior wants to interrogate you, Joseph.

Joseph Me?

Böll Yes.

Joseph Why? I am neither Jew nor German nor traitor nor communist. What could a German possibly want from a Pole?

Böll Just information.

Joseph He turns to the worst possible source. I can only serve them with disinformation.

Böll Make it convincing, and he will believe you.

Joseph Should I go there myself?

Böll You will be let through everywhere. Just tell them I sent you.

Joseph I am running. Anything to fool the Germans! (*out*)

Böll Rabbi, I have a plan.

rabbi Let's hear it.

Böll Let me bring your daughter in safety and freedom out of the ghetto.

rabbi Do you intend to desert?

Böll Yes, to the Poles and the communists.

rabbi Are you serious?

Böll To the highest degree. And it can be done. There is a way of escape through the sewers. So far it is open, but the Germans might discover it and close it any time.

rabbi Your proposition is very generous and bold indeed. But the matter can of course only be decided by my daughter.

Böll Of course.

rabbi Rebecca, did you hear?

Rebecca I heard, father.

rabbi What do you think about it?

Rebecca Walter, come here. (*Böll comes over to sit by her bed.*)

rabbi I will let you speak alone with him. (*leaves prudently.*)

Rebecca (*takes Böll's hand*) I believe in you, Walter, but you have come too late.

Böll It is never too late to do something good, Rebecca.

Rebecca You should have come when the sun was shining, while the birds were singing, when spring was coming in with bursting flowers and there still was a future. Now everything has withered and died, the fields are frozen, there are no birds singing any more, and the spring has changed into eternal winter.

Böll Come with me, Rebecca. It's your only chance.

Rebecca And leave my father? Never.

Böll He could also come with us.

Rebecca He could never leave the ghetto.

Böll Rabbi, we want you to come with us.

rabbi Impossible. I am needed here.

Böll The ghetto is doomed. Only those who escape could survive.

rabbi Escape then and survive.

Rebecca Not without you, father.

rabbi Don't be childish, my girl. I am old and will soon be withering. By this young man you have suddenly received life as a gift and with a future into the bargain. The case is clear. I order you to go through with it.

Rebecca No matter what my brother says?

rabbi He has nothing to say in this matter.

Rebecca (*to Böll*) Just give me a few days to recover. Then I will follow you down and out.

Böll You make me happy. (*kisses her on her cheek*)

Rebecca No, Walter. You make all of us happy.

rabbi The matter is settled. At last we have something to live for.

Böll (*rises*) I had better return to order. They are expecting me at headquarters.

rabbi It's good that neither Joseph nor Max know about this secret.

Rebecca They shall never know about it.

rabbi I hope so, my girl. I hope so.

Böll I will be back. (*blows a kiss to Rebecca and leaves.*)

rabbi I call that a godsend.

Rebecca I don't want to leave you, father.

rabbi And I don't want to leave you. But we must. This is actually a matter of life and death.

Rebecca I will obey you, father, for you always know what is best.

rabbi All we can do about the situation, my daughter, is to just make the best of it. (*sits with his daughter again, takes her hand and does not let it go.*)

Scene 4. Wörgl's officer's quarters.

soldier Herr Oberst, a Pole has reported as being sent by sergeant Böll.

Wörgl That was fast action. Send him in.

soldier Here, Herr Oberst?

Wörgl Where else if not here?

soldier Yes, Herr Oberst. (*lets Joseph in*)

Wörgl Welcome, Joseph.

Joseph Welcome yourself to Warsaw.

Wörgl Your knowledge is of interest to me. You know the conditions in the ghetto and the movements there, and you know everything about the black market.

Joseph No, Sir, I know nothing.

Wörgl Don't talk nonsense. You know everything. You sell the worst liquor of Poland to the German army and the best to the Jews in the ghetto.

Joseph Quite right, but the contrary.

Wörgl Don't you try.

Joseph I make my best business with the Germans and the worst with the Jews. You always make only bad business with Jews, for they are always mean. Now they are meaner than ever, for they have no money left. Why would I then sell my best liquor at the lowest prices and the worst to the most generous?

Wörgl Is there something going on in the ghetto?

Joseph Not to my knowledge, except that people die night and day. They always did. Only those who go to the Umschlagplatz don't die, but instead they disappear to Auschwitz and Treblinka.

Wörgl Auschwitz and Treblinka? How do you know?

Joseph Every Jew knows. They think they will get work there, but no one has ever been able to confirm that someone really got a job there.

Wörgl I assure you, Joseph, that there are industries there going warm every day and night. You can assure the entire ghetto of that fact.

Joseph Obviously those industries are in constant need of more workers. But do they get any salary?

Wörgl In Auschwitz everyone gets the salary he deserves.

Joseph How much is that?

Wörgl I ask the questions, Joseph. What do you know about the presence of weapons in the ghetto?

Joseph Nothing. The only shooters there are the Germans.

Wörgl Of course. We have to defend ourselves. But I have heard rumours about underground bomb industries.

Joseph Are you joking? All bombs come from the other direction, from heaven, from England and America.

Wörgl I mean underground bombs.

Joseph There are only bombs above ground coming from above and hitting German towns. Bombs are not being dropped from below and upwards.

Wörgl Molotov cocktails. Home made bombs.
Joseph Molotov lives in Russia. Ask him.
Wörgl Joseph, you are impossible.
Joseph No, I am quite possible.
Wörgl You just turn everything into a joke, but we Germans have no sense of humour.
Joseph No, I have noticed that
Wörgl And we have even less patience. I therefore intend to turn you over to the Gestapo.
Joseph And what can I do for the Gestapo?
Wörgl Stop joking and tell me what you know.
Joseph I did. I know nothing. That is no joke.
Wörgl You have fooled too many Germans, Joseph. You are overrun by your colleagues.
Joseph I have none. I am unique and indispensable. Who would then be able to deliver only good liquor and strumpets to your quarters?
Wörgl You must cooperate. We need you as a spy in the ghetto.
Joseph I shall be delighted. It's the simplest job in the world. Nothing there is secret. Everyone dies in the open in the streets.
Wörgl We want to know what the living are doing.
Joseph They live.
Wörgl That's good, Joseph. Get lost.
Joseph What will be my salary?
Wörgl The same as in Auschwitz. It will come with the final bill.
Joseph It will be cheaper if you pay in advance.
Wörgl We could always come to an agreement, Joseph. You have goods to deliver, in cash. Write your bill, and we will consider it.
Joseph (rises, salutes) Herr Oberst!
Wörgl You are no soldier, Joseph. Forget all that.
Joseph It is gratifying that there is still some sense left in the world. Everyone has something to gain by cooperation, both Germans and Jews and Poles.
Wörgl But we make the terms.
Joseph Of course, Herr Oberst, since you have all the guns. *(leaves)*
Wörgl He knows everything but says nothing. An evident case for Pawiak and the Gestapo. *(lifts a telephone and dials a number.)*

Scene 5. The rabbi's quarters.

The rabbi is still sitting with his daughter, and they speak softly, when Max enters abruptly.

Max Is it true?
rabbi Yes, it is all true.
Max That Rebecca will leave together with a German soldier?

rabbi (turning to him) It's the only way out for them to life, Max.

Max That soldier brought her to her rapist!

rabbi Max, against his will. He wants to atone for it!

Max It can never be atoned for!

rabbi Of course, but atonement is so rare in these times, that even the smallest effort must be encouraged as a way to better times.

Max How can you, a Jewish rabbi, agree to it?

rabbi It's simple. I want to save the life of my daughter. Don't be stupid now, Max. Think a little beyond the reach of your Jewish nose. There is a world outside the ghetto and beyond us Jews. You must consider it.

Max Outside the ghetto there is only the German world of terror, and you want to sacrifice Rebecca to it.

rabbi The German who wants to save her is a renegade and deserter. He intends to bring her into safety with your own Polish liberation and maybe even to the communists. Give them that chance, Max.

Max I intend to die here in the ghetto after having gunned down and burned and bombed as many Germans as possible. We have no other chance. There is no other chance.

rabbi So you wish to bring Rebecca down with you in the destruction.

Max Martyrdom is all we have left, father.

rabbi You are desperate. How about letting Rebecca decide for herself?

Rebecca I don't want to leave you, father.

rabbi You have to. It's the only way to life.

Max So you want to force her.

rabbi Max, this concerns her, not me. Who knows. Perhaps I will decide to follow her in the last minute.

Max You decide for yourselves. But if I may decide you will both remain in the ghetto. And I can promise you one thing: when we have started our insurrection, no German will be let out alive from the ghetto! (*leaves, banging the door behind*)

rabbi He is desperate.

Rebecca Could he stop us, father?

rabbi He could try, but he could not succeed.

Rebecca Come with us, father.

rabbi I can't. My community is here.

Rebecca It's true what Max says. In the ghetto you are all doomed.

rabbi That is a later issue.

(*A prudent knock.*)

Rebecca It's Walter.

rabbi Enter!

Böll (enters) Everything is ready. Could you make it tonight. Rebecca?

Rebecca (rises a little from the bed) Yes.

Böll (sits down tenderly with Rebecca on the other side of the bed) And you, rabbi? Will you come with us?

rabbi It's too short notice. We'll see.
Böll We would like to have you with us.
rabbi The most important thing is that you get out alive.
Böll You are most welcome to hang on.
rabbi I will carefully consider it.
Rebecca I will persuade him, Walter.
Böll Good. I must go. See you. (*leaves*)
rabbi He works on the side of the angels. Imagine that there actually are such Germans also.
Rebecca Don't forget about the White Rose.
rabbi Five million opponents against Hitler, and they were not only Catholics.
Rebecca It's not just we Jews who are martyrs.
rabbi No, and we must never forget all the others. (*hugs her*)
(gunfire outside)
Rebecca They are firing at us again.
rabbi Unless it was Max who shot a German.
Yaakov (enters) Rabbi!
rabbi What is the matter, Yaakov?
Yaakov Something terrible has happened.
rabbi To whom?
Yaakov Joseph.
rabbi Joseph? What has happened to him?
Jakov Come quickly. He is still alive.
rabbi (leaves Rebecca) It's always a matter of life and death, Rebecca.
Rebecca Yes, father. (*The rabbi leaves with Yaakov.*)
 Nort Joseph! He was neither German nor Jew! He was just one of us, a friend of all humanity! (*falls back*)

Act IV scene 1. The street outside.

Joseph lying bleeding in the dirt of the street with a placard.

rabbi Joseph!
Joseph (with effort) As long as there is life, there is hope, rabbi.
rabbi What have they done to you?
Joseph They tried to learn everything I knew. They learned everything I knew. I knew nothing.
rabbi What kind of placard is this?
Yaakov (reads) "He cheated both us and you."
Joseph Don't tell me the Germans have no sense of humour.
rabbi Joseph, this is too much. But you are alive. We have to get you inside.
Joseph They shot me in the belly.
Yaakov (suggests with a glance to the rabbi that Joseph has no chance)

Joseph Do you know what they said? After having tortured me in the Pawiak until I was more dead than alive they said: "Now we know that he didn't know anything." Then they shot my tyres. Isn't it ridiculous?

rabbi We can't let you bleed to death here in the middle of the street, Joseph.

Joseph Why not? It's the German law and its practice. You had better follow it. Let me be a warning example. Never fool a Jew!

rabbi Joseph! (*embraces him*)

Joseph I am sorry, rabbi, but it was fun while it lasted. (*drops off*)

rabbi It's like the hooligan trampling a rosebed just for the joy of destruction. Joseph was only constructive. But those who did this are only destructive.

Yaakov Come, rabbi. You should not be seen here in the middle of the street with one of the victims of Gestapo.

rabbi Get him then inside at least! Give us a hand! We owe him a Jizkor!

Yaakov Yes, rabbi. (*to some whoi have gathered quiet and frightened around them*) Give jus a hand! Reuben! Benjamin! Joseph is dead! He was our best friend! He helped us! We owe him the noblest of all deeds: a decent funeral.

Max (comes by) Who is it?

rabbi Joseph.

Max Who shot him?

Yaakov The Germans.

Max May his blood come over the Germans and their children unto their fourth generation.

several Amen.

rabbi Don't preach vengeance now, Max. This is too sad.

Max I don't preach. I state the facts. Preaching is your job, father.

rabbi I can not preach any more. I can only pray.

Max Pray then the more efficiently and invoke an eternal curde over all Germans! Or else others will do so.

rabbi Max, your hatred over the dead body of Joseph is blasphemy.

Max But it is reasonable!

rabbi Go home, Max. Let us bury the dead in peace. (*They carry him inside a place, which by the revolving scene displays as an old ruined synagogue.*)

rabbi This was once my synagogue, Yaakov.

Yaakov I know.

rabbi What cantors we had once! How they sang from morning till night on Yom Kippur! It was better than any opera performance! What a living culture the Germans have extirpated for no other reason than it was Jewish! Cantor Müller loved Puccini and was specialist on Italian operas, but not even that he was allowed to sing without the Germans having to cut out his tongue from his throat. And now this! An ordinary Pole! Just because they thought he knew something that he didn't

Joseph (opens one eye) Rabbi, you don't happen to have a draught?

rabbi Joseph! You want a drink now? In the synagogue?

Joseph Why not? The service is over.

Yaakov Joseph, you are shot in the belly. To drink something then would be death directly.

Joseph I know. That's why I am so outrageously thirsty. Some liquor couldn't do any harm, could it?

Yaakov (produces a small pocket-flask) With your permission, rabbi?

rabbi God gives his permission to anything that is well intended.

Yaakov Regard it as your funeral rites, Joseph. I hereby consign you to better happiness in your next life.

Joseph (drinks avidly) Thank you, Yaakov! Bless you!

rabbi It might even numb the pains.

Joseph More than that, rabbi. Now I can even laugh again at the Germans and all their absurd stupidities. (*dies*)

rabbi Jiskadal vjiskadash sh'merabo....

(all present participate in the prayer for the departed)

How many more, o Lord? When will you put a stop to it? When do you intend to show that you could also be good and not just evil?

Yaakov Rabbi, take it easy.

rabbi Pardon me, Yaakov. There is so much worrying me at the moment. Joseph's death is like the loss of all true joy of living in my whole world.

Yaakov You still have your books.

rabbi They make no jokes with me. They don't make me laugh. They don't present happy fancies. They don't suddenly offer surprise banquets and vodka.

Yaakov Here, rabbi. (*offers his flask*)

rabbi No, Yaakov, not while on duty.

Yaakov Joseph would have wished it.

rabbi But Joseph is dead, and I am miserable. And the most stupid thing you could do is to have a drink when you are unhappy. That will only turn your dark mood even blacker.

Yaakov You still have your son and a daughter.

rabbi They are both on their way to leave me. Rebecca will escape to life out of here, and my son will sacrifice his life in the insurrection of the Warsaw ghetto. What have I left then? Only meaningless corpses like Joseph to cry over without tears. We are bankrupt even of our sorrows, Yaakov.

Yaakov Still life will go on.

rabbi That's the question. Here in the ghetto everything is tried to the extreme and especially that axiom. Do you really think life could go on in such a place and under such circumstances like here in our uniquely accursed Warsaw ghetto?

Yaakov Rabbi, you know best. I just follow along.

rabbi What I know, Yaakov, is that we are in the middle of perhaps the most unsolvable problem in the history of the world. We have ended up in the inmost heart chamber of evil, and there is no way out.

Yaakov There is always a way out.

rabbi No, Yaakov, for the first time ever there is no way out. The Warsaw ghetto is God's own hopeless blind alley.

Yaakov Joseph would have known what to do.

rabbi That's why they killed him. We have no God any more, Yaakov. We have only death.

Yaakov (shaken by the rabbi's pessimism) We had better leave, rabbi. This ruined synagogue is no place for comfort.

Reuben Shall we leave Joseph here?

rabbi Yes, let him rest here, Reuben. He will freeze at night when the chill comes, and somehow my ruined synagogue will do well for his tomb, for the time being. We will return to the issue tomorrow. *(The rabbi takes care of the others and follow them out. When he leaves as the last man he turns around:)*

rabbi Thanks for this time, God, and welcome back some other time when you are in a better mood. I will probably never again set my foot in this synagogue, which was made my own, which I thought was yours, but which now only belongs to death. *(closes the door and leaves)*

Scen 2. Wörgl's officer's quarters.

Wörgl Is there anything more maddening than when something doesn't work as it should? The more thoroughly you have got used to perfect routines, the more intolerable it becomes when something doesn't work. How dares that idiot Böll remain absent all day? Böll! Get the man here for hell's sake!

soldier Herr Oberst, we haven't been able to locate sergeant Böll.

Wörgl But you have been searching for him all day, damn it! When was he last seen and where?

soldier When he entered the Warsaw ghetto.

Wörgl By all stillborn amoebas! Has something happened to him there, or has he deserted?

soldier Nobody knows. But there have been reports about weapons in the ghetto.

Wörgl Do you think Böll could have been taken as hostage?

soldier Herr Oberst, there is more than just weapons in the ghetto. They think they are manufacturing bombs. According to reports from Polish spies, they could be organizing some insurrection.

Wörgl Insurrection? What extreme nonsense is that? There are only Jews in the ghetto. Jews don't rebel.

soldier I only forward rumours.

Wörgl Rumours! Polish lunatic tall tales! They love to spread some panic! A rebellion in the ghetto is an absolute impossibility! Do you hear? It's the most impossible that could ever happen! No, Böll has either been taken as hostage or

joined them. And then I know where to find him. That sanctimonious rabbi! I will crucify him before I am finished with him!

soldier Any orders, Herr Oberst?

Wörgl And his daughter will be given over to the officers of Auschwitz for them to fuck her to death at their whores department. What?

soldier Any orders?

Wörgl Yes, find Böll, dead or alive!

soldier Yes, Herr Oberst! Heil Hitler! (*makes the Hitler salute*)

Wörgl Don't bother. Act! (*soldier leaves*)

If Böll has cheated us and deserted, nothing can save the rabbi or his whole damned ghetto from being liquidated and burned out block by block. But if there really should be an insurrection... Then it would be a more hurting miscalculation for the Third Reich than all Stalingrad.

Scene 3. Total darkness in the sewers. You can hear the dripping and trickling everywhere. Rebecca, Böll and the rabbi become visible.

rabbi Here but no further. His is the end of the road for me. You can manage by yourselves from here. It's just to carry on straight ahead now.

Rebecca Come with us, father.

rabbi I can't.

Böll Rabbi, staying on in the ghetto is suicide.

rabbi Don't try to scare me, Walter. I am not susceptible to threats.

Rebecca (stops) There is someone there.

Max (from the darkness) Rebecca, don't be afraid. It's me. (*appears with a loaded gun*)

rabbi Max! What do you want?

Max Just come along, Rebecca. Your road is open. But the German stays.

rabbi What do you mean, Max?

Max I mean exactly what I say.

rabbi You have no right, Max, to deny your sister a life in freedom with whoever she may choose.

Max In the same way no one has any right to stop me from shooting any German I want.

Böll Go, Rebecca. I will stay.

Rebecca No, Walter! Not without both you and father! (*clings to him and covers him*)

Max Move away from him, Rebecca. Or else I could shoot you with him.

Rebecca No!

rabbi Stop this meaningless madness, Max! Don't you see that by your intolerance you make yourself equal to a Nazi?

Max The right is on our side, father. How many Jews have you murdered, you German devil? Do you have any idea?

Böll I only know it's an unforgivable number.

Max No one knows the amount of their number, but it approaches 50% of all Jews in Europe! That's 75% of all Jews in Poland! So it's the main part of an entire people! N equal proportion of your people, you German soldier, would be about 30 million! Only if we could kill 30 million Germans your loss would be equal to the loss of our Jews. But you just go on all the time! You don't stop! You just carry on your criminal activity, like a bolting carousel constantly accelerating!

rabbi Max, come to your senses! Your sister's life is more vital than your private revenge! It's about life, not death!

Max Move away from him, Rebecca!

Rebecca (all in tears) No!

rabbi Max, don't force me to do what you would regret.

Max Father, you are sorted out. Your moral base does not work any more. We are at a new age of cold retaliation and objective justice! Rebecca, I will shoot if you don't move over!

rabbi Then fall, you damned lunatic! (*shoots Max. Max falls.*)

Rebecca Max! (*rushes up to him*)

He isn't dead.

rabbi I know. Run now, my children, run to life, save your lives! That's my last word to you.

Rebecca Father!

Böll Come, Rebecca! (*escapes with Rebecca and vanishes.*)

rabbi (devastated, falls down by the side of his son) Max, why did you have to start making trouble? You must understand that two lives are more important than one!

Max Father, you shot me!

rabbi Or else you would have shot your own sister.

Max No, never!

rabbi That's what you say now.

Max Father, I am hit and can't walk. Help me back to the ghetto.

rabbi Yes, I will help you back to the ghetto, my boy, so that we both may die there for the sake of your great folly. Do you know what you have done? You have started an insurrection, so that the Germans now will finds reasons to slaughter all the remaining Jewish population of the ghetto in the most brutal imaginable manner!

Max It's a historical turning point for our people.

rabbi Yes, like it was for the Germans when Hitler assumed power! A turning point to what? Only even worse follies! What you have done is the worst misdeed that could have been done to our Jewish people! You have launched Israel on a path to terrorism, cruelty and evil, so that we, when the Germans have been defeated, have to become their inheritors, carrying on their racism and force of violence!

Max Have we then no right of self-defence?

rabbi Yes, but not to murder, like you intended to murder that young innocent soldier just now, who risked his life to save your sister!

Max Father, I don't understand anything any more.

rabbi No, neither do I. Can you move and stand at all?
Max I feel the blood leaving my body.
rabbi I had to shoot you down. You gave me no choice.
Max I never thought you could do anything like that.
rabbi To become as guncrazy as you? You taught me. I was never desperate before you turned that way. Come now. You'll survive. And you wouldn't want to miss the rebellion of the Warsaw ghetto, would you?
Max If I just may see that happen, I could die then.
rabbi They used to say, "See Naples and die." But you want to live only to see Warsaw perish.
Max I want to be able to scorn and laugh the Germans to their faces, father.
rabbi Even if it has to lead to the death of four hundred thousand Jews?
Max Yes, for the sake of the joy and triumph of just one single Jew.
rabbi Then you are crazy.
Max In that case, it is wonderful to be crazy.
rabbi Come now, you poor incorrigible waster.
(helps him out.)

Act V scene 1. The street.

Benjamin It is true! I promise!
Judith You are lying! You are crazy!
Benjamin No! I saw it with my own eyes! I felt the stench! No one must go to the Umschlagplatz any more!
Judith It's too late, Benjamin. The ghetto is almost drained.
Reuben (comes by) What is it?
Judith Benjamin has returned from Treblinka.
Reuben Well?
Judith Tell your story yourself, Benjamin.
Benjamin Treblinka is one great factory to convert Jews into soaps.
Reuben Soap?
Benjamin Women and children are gassed. Only able men are taken into use as workers and abused as such until they die.
Reuben Is that where we have sent the whole ghetto population?
Benjamin They thought they would get it better. Instead they were instantly executed. It is nothing but industrialized mass extinction.
Reuben And Auschwitz?
Benjamin The same thing but worse.
Reuben Everyone must know about this. The whole world must know about it.
Benjamin We have to cry it out in the whole world forever!
Judith Take it easy, Benjamin. How did you get out of it yourself?

Benjamin I was curious about what really went on over there. Where did they all go? What happened to them? I wanted to make a visit. I took a free ride in an open transport wagon. And what did I find? Factory chimneys spewing smoke and stench of corpses! Women and children immediately separated from the men, undressed naked and ushered into debugging shower rooms from which they were brought out as corpses to immediately be shovelled together and brought to furnaces for burning bodies. But first they removed and took well care of all gold teeth and rings and even their hair.

Judith What use would they make of their hair?

Benjamin Stuffing mattresses. German economy.

Reuben Could even Germans sleep well on such mattresses?

(enter the rabbi staggering with Max)

Judith Rabbi!

rabbi Give us a hand.

Reuben It is Max. He has been shot.

rabbi Yes, he is shot to death, and it's my own fault only, but he is still alive.

Reuben He has lost much blood.

Judith Carry him to the synagogue.

rabbi In my wrecked synagogue?

Judith Yes, rabbi. It has become our hospital. Many sick are there already. You can't bring him home. The Germans could visit you.

rabbi You are right, Judith.

Max (faintly) Father, I will have the great honour of dying in your own synagogue.

rabbi That's better than dying out in the street or in the sewers, Max. And I will now stay with you until the end.

Max I have only one more thing to ask of you, father.

rabbi What, my son?

Max Don't go mad.

rabbi My son, unfortunately I can't promise to grant you that wish.

Judith Get him in, quickly. We might perhaps save his life.

Reuben So few being left of world Jewry now, one single life becomes more valuable than the entire humanity.

Benjamin At least more than the entire German army.

Reuben You said it.

Judith Don't stand there fooling around but come on and help. *(They carry Max inside.)*

Scene 2. The synagogue.

Max Tell me again, Benjamin. What is happening?

Benjamin Majdanek, Treblinka, Auschwitz – they are all extermination camps, constructed only to eradicate Jews and Gypsies.

Max Did you hear that, father? Can you still defend the Germans?

rabbi Max, you and I are both as much Germans as all other Germans, but I have never defended us or the Germans. I have only defended life.

Judith Rabbi, where is Rebecca? She is not at home.

Max She has escaped to the Germans. She has become a whore of theirs.

rabbi You are lying, Max! She has escaped to the partisans, the Poles and the communists.

Judith Then she will manage. That's the main thing.

Max To the point! You all heard Benjamin's testimony. I knew it all the time. Do we have any other choice than armed resistance and fighting unto death?

Ruben No.

Judit No.

Max Could you as an old naïve Tolstoian defend the principles of non-violence, father, when the Germans are suppressing and imposing their dictatorship on all our world by force?

rabbi (is quiet)

Reuben You say nothing, rabbi.

rabbi I am old and tired and lay down my vote. I am finished here. I had promised never more to enter a synagogue. Now I am here and have to listen to the preaching of violence. No, I am not with you any more. I am no longer a rabbi to you. I am no more a Jew. I am just a miserable old man who views his life constantly more as just one big failure. Everything has gone wrong! You asked me not to go mad, Max. I am sorry, but I can't live up to that promise. You must grant me the only freedom remaining for me in life: to be allowed to go mad, the last escape and solution to all the problems of life for an old total failure of a man. Leave me alone with my madness! Devote yourselves to your own extinction as much as you want, but leave me in peace! My final madness is more sacred than all the religions in the world and surpasses God himself in holiness and purity!

Max Go home, father. You are sick.

Yaakov (has entered) No, he is sojnder than everyone else. He alone is still of sound amind.

rabbi They say, that when you get so old that you think the whole world is going mad, it's a sure sign that you are going mad yourself. I am not so sure of that any more. A mad dog has assumed power oin my own fatherland Germany and pushed it down to hell and set the whole world on fire just by the right of his own personal insanity, which has contaminated the entire German people, who allowed him to ravage freely and carry through his life's greatest wish: to extirpate all Jews. As a result we behold this wonderful Warsaw ghetto and my own holy synagogue in it transformed into a hospital and madhouse for the use of to die and for fools to preach violence. Still I know it is not the world that has gone crazy. At least it is not quite as mad as myself, who gives my daughter over to a German soldier and shoots my own son to death.

(Reuben, Benjamin, Judith an d the others are astonished.)

Max Go home, father. You are tired.

Reuben Is it true?

Benjamin He confesses it himself.

Max You need to sleep. Father. Leave the rest to us. You have done your work-

rabbi Yes, I have really done my work. Pardon me, my friends. Let Max take over. He is more dying than I, but he at least is wiser, since he at least is a martyr. *(leaves)*

Reuben He is all washed up. We have no rabbi any longer.

Max All that remains for us is guns and bombs.

Benjamin Every day is precious. We have to work day and night. Manufacturing bombs, increase the contraband traffic, expand the contacts with the resistance, all means are allowed in the only good purpose for us in this world: to destroy the German supremacy.

Max Benjamin is right. From now on, every German is less worth than a rat, and there is a reward of a million pounds for every murdered German!

Reuben Benjamin is our new preacher and rabbi.

Judith What are we waiting for? We have to get down to work!
(the healthy ones break up, leaving Yaakov with the sick.)

Yaakov Still they all go wrong while the rabbi alone is right in his madness. Go to your bombs and guns, your violence and your war. I go to the rabbi in his peaceful madness. *(leaves)*

Scene 3. Wörgl's officer's quarters.

Wörgl (with his glass of brandy) This is beginning to get on my nerves.

soldier (enters) Herr Oberst, sergeant Böll can not be located.

Wörgl That's what you have been saying the whole day, you miserable good-for-nothing. Your constant bad news are beginning to get monotonous.

soldier It's my duty to report them, Herr Oberst.

Wörgl Do you know the meaning of duty, captain Balmy?

soldier What must be done.

Wörgl No, the right definition of duty is according to an English scientist the excuse of a dumbbell to continue carrying on stupidities.

soldier I am just trying to fulfil my duties, Herr Oberst.

Wörgl Yes, and you are carrying on with it. Well, why are you still here? Do you have any more stupidities to report?

soldier Yes, unfortunately, Herr Oberst.

Wörgl Well. Let then the stupidity multiply.

soldier Herr Oberst, it has become difficult to enter the ghetto.

Wörgl So? Do the beggars throw stones at you? Then shoot them down.

soldier No. They are shooting us.

Wörgl They are shooting you?

soldier Yes, Herr Oberst. The Jews have started firing at us Germans.

Wörgl Any wounded?

soldier Sveral dead.

Wörgl It's the damned Polish resistance that has been arming them! Do the Poles then wish to be as extirpated as the Jews? They are asking for it! Well, after Warsaw has been freed of the Jewish vermin, we will then have to make Poland equally free from all Poles! We have a mission to perform! We will have to liberate one nation after the other from their own nationalities! It's a sacred mission!

soldier Herr Oberst, I am waiting for your orders.

Wörgl Enter the ghetto with tanks and gun them down!

soldier How many?

Wörgl As many as are needed. Shoot down everything that moves.

soldier We would require some armoured division.

Wörgl An entire division?

soldier Yes. They have bombs.

Wörgl It's all that damned rabbi's fault. He is doing this for a revenge on me. Make sure to bring his daughter here! I will tear her ovaries out of her with my bare hands! I will pinion her and gag her and fuck her with this bottle until her vagina is bleeding to death and her guts come pouring out of her arse!

(silence. Wörgl becomes aware of what he just said.)

Are you still there? Forget the last of it. But get me that girl!

soldier (uncertain) Herr Oberst, do you mean that we should send an armoured division to fetch a Jewish girl?

Wörgl Gegt me the girl first! Then send on the armoured division against the rabbi!

soldier Herr Oberst, with respect, Sir, but no German soldier dares to enter the ghetto any more. The Jews have become too dangerous.

Wörgl (doesn't believe his ears) What are you saying? Have you gone completely out of your mind? *(gets some strength with a deep sip)* Since when did any Jew become a danger to the German army?

soldier Herr Oberst, fifteen Germans have already been murdered or disappeared in the ghetto. It would be unwise to send any more.

Wörgl (to himself) This will drive Stroop and Müller mad. It must not be true. – Then I will have to take care of the matter myself. I will pay a visit to the rabbi, captain Balmy. I will need the armoured car.

soldier Yes, Herr Oberst.

Wörgl See to it! Dismiss! *(the soldier leaves)*

It will be our last meeting, my scholarly rabbi, but it will be a pleasure to settle with you.

(dons his uniform and tightens it to perfection.)

Scene 4. The synagogue.

Max (dying) Yaakov, my time is running out. Will you get my father the rabbi for me?

Yaakov Yes, Max. But I will not leave you. *(to a girl)* Would you go and tell the rabbi that Max is dying? *(The girl runs along.)*

Max I hear gunfire and explosions. Have we at last succeeded in waging a war against the Germans?

Yaakov Yes, Max. And this time we are well grounded. In January we had neither enough weapons nor any organization.

Max Do you mean that we are successful?

Yaakov The Germans are withdrawing. They will need divisions to dare to enter the ghetto again.

Max I scent the flavour of freedom. They will have to mobilize. I think the Fuhrer must be shitting in his pants.

Yaakov I have some more news. The Russians have defeated them at Stalingrad.

Max It's the turning point. We shall prevail!

Yaakov Take it easy, Max. It isn't over yet. This is just the very first beginning of their defeat, and none of us will not survive it. We have no chance closed in as we are in the drain of Warsaw.

Max It's the way out, Yaakov. You can always escape by the sewers but not until the Germans have levelled the whole ghetto with the ground.

Yaakov The Germans will wait for us at the apertures.

Max No, Yaakov, there will always be some way of escape left. Never ever will all ways out be closed to man. There is always another solution.

Yaakov Yes, death.

Max No, life.

Yaakov You start to sound like your father.

Another dying Here he comes.

Max Father!

rabbi How is it, Max?

Max I am dying, father. I didn't want to die without you.

rabbi I will gladly die with you, my son. There is nothing more for me in life to do.

Max No, I didn't mean it that way. You live on, but I will die. You were right. You were always right. That's why I didn't want to die without your reconciliation.

rabbi You have nothing to reconcile with, my son. You are a martyr, and all crimes are reconciled by death.

Max So you forgive all my madness, all my fury, all my irge for violence and all my hard outbursts against you?

rabbi A father easily overlooks every whim of a son, for the father is always older. A son could never catch up with his age and older sense. And the father must always make a good example. Or else he is no father.

Max Father, forgive me!
rabbi For what?
Max For having myself to blame for having to leave you. (*dies*)
rabbi (does not let go of his son) In his death he took the blame for my having shot him.
(to Yaakov) Is that fair?
Yaakov Nothing is fair in our age and our world. Justice has become a non-existent luxury and an impossible utopia.
rabbi They have been firing all day. Has the insurrection really got started?
Yaakov No Germans dare enter the ghetto any more.
rabbi It's almost too good to be true. That must have transformed Max' dying moment into some splendid triumph. All he asked for was to at least be able to shoot down some German while still alive. It is as if he had succeeded in turning the whole world against them. El Alamein, Stalingrad, the Warsaw ghetto et är nästan för bra för att vara sant. Det måste ha omvandlat Max dödsstund till en strålande triumf. Allt han bad om var att åtminstone få skjuta ner någon tysk i livet. Det är som om han hade lyckats uppvigla hela världen emot dem. El Alamein, Stalingrad, Warszawaghattot – presumably all Berlin will soon be lying in ruins.
Yaakov Yes, rabbi.
rabbi Who could believe this just a week ago? The new mortal ice age has suddenly been afflicted by some spring cough and will pass away in a cold. How awkward for the invulnerable perfection of the German infallibility!
Judith (enters) There is a German armoured car with a white flag. They want to negotiate directly with the rabbi.
rabbi Why me?
Judith I don't know. But they won't talk with anyone else.
rabbi (gets a hunch) Who is the negotiator?
Judith A certain colonel Wörgl.
rabbi I know him. I will speak with him.
Reuben Do we have anything to speak with him about?
rabbi It is matter between him and me, Reuben.
Benjamin If he is a colonel we had better shoot him down promptly.
rabbi Leave this to me, Benjamin. No one who comes to a rabbi shall be refused to speak with him.
Yaakov Let him enter. Let him behold our synagogue hospital and his victims. Give him all our misery to cry for, if he could be moved to any compassion at all.
rabbi (to Judith) I could only receive him here with my dead son and my patients.
Judith I will tell him so.
rabbi (firmly) No weapons in here! (*Judith leaves.*)
Reuben Only if he comes without weapons himself.
rabbi Not even a German colonel would shoot the father of a daughter he had ravished. And I have good news for him. Let him come.
Captain Balmy (with machine gun, showing up at the entrance)
rabbi No weapons in here!

Yaakov This is a place of worship and a hospital.
captain (shaken by the sight) Mein Gott! (pulling out)

Yaakov They are more afraid of Jewish patients than of Jewish terrorists.

rabbi Nothing is more frightening and shocking, Yaakov, than the bareness of human misery. And we Jews always have to be the worst.

Wörgl (with a white flag, showing) Rabbi. (bows, reserved)

rabbi Come in, colonel. Meet my dead son, the most dangerous of all Jewish terrorists.

Wörgl Was he the one who started all this?

rabbi No, it started all by itself. No one was responsible, just like you were not responsible for the second world war.

Wörgl I have not come here to quarrel, rabbi.

rabbi Then why have you come? Germans don't usually negotiate with any member of the Jewish subspecies.

Wörgl Where is your daughter?

rabbi What do you want with her? She is not available.

Wörgl Is she dead?

rabbi No, she lives.

Wörgl I wanted to ask her if any of you knows anything about my vanished aide sergeant Böll.

rabbi We both know all about it.

Wörgl Well?

rabbi Your aide sergeant Böll has voluntarily joined the Polish resistance movement as a result of what you did to my daughter.

Wörgl Do you blame me for it?

rabbi For your aide's desertion? No. For what happened to my daughter? Yes. But you haven't answered my question. Why have you come? Might you have wished to apologize?

Wörgl No, I wanted to give you a chance.

rabbi Thereby you have given yourself a chance, but you haven't taken it.

Wörgl Call off the fighting, and you will be allowed to live in peace.

rabbi Who will be allowed to live in peace? These dying patients? Here you find typhoid, starvation, insanity, scurvy and all possible Jewish parasitic illnesses, which you have forced upon us by closing us up without food and hygienics and running water in the Warsaw ghetto. You have already taken all our lives. You no longer have the power to give it back. You have launched a bolting carousel of violence which you no longer can stop. You mock us by coming here at all.

Wörgl I wanted to give you a chance. If you don't take it, the entire ghetto will be levelled with the ground and all of you burnt alive.

rabbi By coming here you gave yourself a chance. You haven't taken it. I am human. You are not. You could have asked me to forgive you for my daughter. You have not. I am waiting. You have still not taken your chance. You did not give my daughter a chance. I have no right to give you any more than this one chance.

Wörgl You are demented.

Yaakov He has lost both his children. He hasn't slept for many nights and is tired and old.

rabbi Yes, I am demented, and you are not, because you give orders and are dressed in uniform. You had the right to rape my daughter. No one had any right to defend her, since she was a Jewess. How did it feel to rape a child, colonel? Perhaps you just obeyed orders? That's what you all say when you are faced with your crimes: a you just obeyed orders.

Wörgl Rabbi, you have nothing to negotiate. I am the one who has.

rabbi So? Could you give my son back to me? Could you return my daughter unharmed? Could you return life to the more than 400,000 Jews that were gassed to death in Auschwitz and Treblinka? Could you restore the world to the peace it enjoyed before 1939? No, and even if you could you would not, for you have no human feelings. You are the final end product of history: the completely dehumanized denaturalized human being, against whom the wildest beast appears as more civilized than the monster in uniform we have here in front of us.

Wörgl Rabbi, I came here to negotiate and not to less to your empty sermons.

rabbi Unfortunately I am a rabbi, and my work is to preach, and all I know is morals and rights. If you can't endure it you have come to the wrong dealer.

Wörgl I came to you since I thought you were the only one in the ghetto with whom one could speak.

rabbi In that case you have come right, for we are actually talking.

Wörgl But you are in no position to be able to accuse me.

rabbi Am I not? What about my daughter? By what right did you brand her as a whore?

Wörgl I can't speak with you. You are blinded by the madness of your fury. Pardon me for having disturbed you. The negotiations are over. *(rises and turns to leave.)*

rabbi Colonel!

Wörgl *(turns back)* Yes?

rabbi You have not apologized. *(shoots him down with a gun he always kept loaded, aimed and covered, the same gun with which he shot his son.)*

Wörgl *(still alive, looks surprised but can't say a word)*

rabbi Greetings from my son. And greetings from my daughter, who ran away with your aide to life. He is now a communist. And greetings from me, who regrets that you didn't take the chance to apologize, for I am a tolerant and liberal but just man.

(shoots him dead, and he dies.)

(Noise outside. The Germans have wakened and come straight rushing in with machine guns shooting wildly at everyone who moves.)

Yaakov Down, rabbi! Take cover!

(The fire is answered by Jewish partisans. Soon the Germans run off, and you hear the armoured car drive off.)

Reuben (assesses the situation) They have shot almost all the patients and dying to death.

Judith (enters) How is the rabbi?

Yaakov (rising, badly hurt) He lies over there. He was first to get hit. Help him!

Reuben Rabbi! Rabbi! (*helps him up. He is bleeding hard.*)

rabbi My children, I die happy in my own synagogue after having committed my first murder, and it was intentional and premeditated.

Benjamin How is he?

Reuben There isn't much left.

rabbi Bury me with my son in the ruins of the Warsaw ghetto. My children, time is getting short. They will attack the ghetto with armoured division, firethrowers and cannons. They will not give in until they have transformed the ghetto into a most sterile desert for only ravens and rats to wail in. You must try to save your lives. The ghetto has no chance and neither have you as long as you remain. Promise me to get out before it is too late.

Reuben We promise, rabbi.

rabbi Thank God for life. I tried to do my best to manage it well. Could I have done it better? Yes, you always can. Better luck next time. Farewell, my children. (*passes*)

Reuben His tale is over.

Yaakov He died too soon with too many books unread.

Judith Comrades, the Germans will soon be back with enforcements. We must prepare for the next fight.

Yaakov Leave me here with the rabbi and his son. But remove that soldier's corpse for God's sake. (*meaning the colonel*) He is out of place in a synagogue.

Benjamin He is right.

Reuben Take care of his uniform. We could make use of it. The rest we leave to the rats and ravens of the Warsaw ghetto.

Judith Come on! We have no time to lose! No sleep any more as long as the Warsaw ghetto remains to be defended! (*they carry out the colonel and disappear*)

Yaakov I am also dying, rabbi, with too many books unread. That they always should interrupt us in the middle of our studies! But the book of life will never end. Interrupt a chapter, and a new one will begin anyway. And it is all one and the same book that has no end. We are just episodes. I will follow you, rabbi, to turn up again in some other episode somewhere else together with you, for we the people of the book never die; for we really exist only in people's imaginations. Thus we always join eternity – but my brains are getting foggy. Get started, Warsaw ghetto, and fill up the whole world with your blaring death curtain of blood, and let its mined backdrops break down in a booming curtain drop, for this play is now over.

Curtain.

(Athens, 31.3.2001,
translated May-June 2023)