

Redemption or when love conquered hate

By Phillip W. Weiss

A one-act play consisting of three scenes.

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Cast:

Jacob – A Polish Jewish man

Trudel – a Polish German woman

Fritz – an SS man

Hans – an SS man

Eric – an SS man

German internees

Guards

Scene 1 – A German dispensary, Warsaw Ghetto, late 1942

Scene 2 – An internment camp, Warsaw, September 1945

Scene 3 – Same as scene 2, next day.

This play is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to any person, living or dead, is purely coincidental and no similarities should be inferred.

Scene 1

Time: Late 1942

Place: The Warsaw Ghetto

Setting: a waiting room in a medical dispensary for SS personnel. Three SS guards wearing their uniforms are sitting in the room waiting to see a doctor. Two are in the early 20s, the third one, in his early 30s. They are goldbricking.

SS MAN

So, Fritz, how are things?

FRITZ

(the older man)

Not so good, Hans. I've been feeling under the weather for the past week. And you?

HANS

I got a letter from my girl back home. She says that Cologne was completely destroyed.

FRITZ

Why those lousy Brits! If I ever get my hands on one of those limeys I'll tear their heart out, bunch of stinking terrorists! Eric, aren't you from Cologne?

ERIC

No, I'm from up north, near Cuxhaven.

HANS

I'm from Cologne. I spent a summer in Cuxhaven when I was a kid. We had a lot of fun. I liked going to the beach.

FRITZ

Well, that's in the past now. Here I am stuck in this cesspool, guarding these disgusting, thieving, degenerate Jews.

ERIC

It's better than being on the front.

FRITZ

What would you know about the front? I was injured on the front.

ERIC

I served in France.

FRITZ

France was a cake walk compared to Russia. One thing about those Russkies, they're brutes.

HANS

Well, that's not surprising. They're sub-humans.

ERIC

You really believe that?

FRITZ

Not only do I believe it, I witnessed it first hand. After we kicked their asses in Kiev, I was assigned to guard a bunch of them at this POW camp. Boy, were they disgusting. They smelled to high heaven, wouldn't even bathe, fought like animals for food and could barely talk.

ERIC

Maybe that's because we weren't treating them right.

HANS

Hey, says you.

FRITZ

That's right, smart-ass, says you. They're uncivilized brutes who understand only one thing, brute force.

ERIC

Has it ever occurred to you two gentlemen that maybe we may not win this war?

FRITZ

Screw you! You must be drunk.

HANS

You better can that kind of talk, now, Eric. I don't know what's gotten into you but that kind of defeatist crap can get all of us into deep trouble.

FRITZ

Have you been talking to any Jews? I know you have a real soft spot for them.

ERIC

Why don't you shut up? I don't coddle any Jews and you know it. Hey, we're fighting the three biggest countries on this planet and if we don't watch it, we could find ourselves behind the eight ball before we know it.

FRITZ

Listen Eric, I lived in America for five years and let me tell you, what I saw there did not impress me.

ERIC

Don't underestimate the Americans.

FRITZ

The Americans are a bunch of mixed-race rabble who have been ruined by the Jews and when they wise up, they'll come over to our side faster than you could down a glass of schnapps.

HANS

(to Eric)

You don't coddle Jews? That's not what I saw when you caught that Jew boy smuggling food.

ERIC

What do you mean? I kicked his butt and told him to get lost. What's wrong with that?

FRITZ

I saw it too and frankly I was not impressed. You let him off too easily.

ERIC

I gave him a good whacking and sent him on his way. He learned his lesson. What was I supposed to do? Shoot him?

FRITZ

You said it, pal. Shoot him. If it were me I would have shot that bastard straightaway.

HANS

Really? You would have killed the guy?

FRITZ

Of course. He was stealing and was breaking the law.

ERIC

Don't you think that's a bit extreme?

FRITZ

For a Jew? Not at all. They are degenerates, the scum of the earth, the reason we are in this god-forsaken place and the cause of every cursed problem on this planet.

HANS

I agree with Fritz. Once you show a Jew a little mercy, he'll take advantage of it to the hilt and then when he can, he'll turn on you, just like they did in 1918.

ERIC

I wasn't even born then, so I wouldn't know.

FRITZ

Didn't you study your history lessons? The Jews infiltrated the government and then tried to weasel their way into power from within but our veterans stopped them dead in their tracks and showed them who's boss.

ERIC

I heard that a lot of Jews served in the army during the war.

HANS

Yeah? What of it? They were just a bunch of paper pushing goldbricks. Look at 'em here. They're lazy, shiftless, stupid, utterly worthless. They'll do anything to avoid doing real work.

FRITZ

Eric, I just don't understand you anymore. What's gotten over you? You used to be such an exemplary person.

ERIC

Listen, fellas, I'm still the same ol' Eric. It just bothers me that a lot of the kids here look like they're starving.

FRITZ

Well, whose fault is that? The Jews are allotted more than enough food. We can't help it if they won't feed their own kids, and besides, who cares? They're Jews, remember? Let 'em starve for all I care.

HANS

Look, I don't like being here either but orders are orders and we could find ourselves in places a lot worse.

ERIC

Like where for instance?

HANS

A concentration camp.

FRITZ

What's wrong with concentration camps?

HANS

I heard rumors that some really nasty things go on in those camps.

FRITZ

Don't believe those stories, pure rubbish. My cousin was a guard at Dachau and he told me that as long as the inmates followed regulations and didn't make trouble, they were well treated. It's the same thing here. If the Jews behave themselves, nothing will happen to them but they're always up to no good, always testing us, always trying to squeeze a favor out of you, utterly shameless and completely lacking in pride. They don't even protect their own kids. They disgust me.

ERIC

Where you from, Fritz?

FRITZ

From a small town outside of Munich. Why do you ask?

ERIC

It just occurred to me that we really don't know that much about each other.

HANS

Why is that important? We're here to do a job, period, not to form a social club. I don't want to know anybody. After all, we're SS soldiers, not school boys.

FRITZ

That's right, Hans. Imagine, every Friday the entire detachment retiring to town for tea, like the Brits?

(All three laugh.)

HANS

(mock British accent)

Would care for some crumpets my dear Eric?

ERIC
(laughing)

Why thank you, my dear sir.

FRITZ
(laughing)

Oh, by the way, my dear boys, how many cities have we bombed out this week?

(Laughter stops)

ERIC
Yes, how many have they bombed out?

FRITZ
Well, that doesn't matter because we'll teach those warmongers a lesson after we're through with the Russians.

HANS
That's right, we sure will, and then we'll see who's laughing the loudest.

ERIC
I have an aunt who lives in Chicago.

FRITZ
Really. Do you write to her?

ERIC
Not since the war started. She left Germany right after the last war. I think she married a Jewish guy.

FRITZ
Ugh! How could she do that? That's disgusting!

HANS
Hey, Fritz, lay off Eric.

ERIC
(to Hans)

I can take care of myself, thank you. *(to Fritz)* Fritz, you're an idiot.

FRITZ

Oh, so now you're calling me names!? You have an uncle who's a Jew and now you have the nerve to get on MY case?! How dare you, Jew lover! No wonder you're soft on the Jews. Maybe you ARE a Jew!

HANS

That's enough now, fellas!

ERIC

If I were a Jew so what?

FRITZ

So what!? Then you'd be the enemy, that's what.

HANS

Hey guys, cool it already. Eric is no more a Jew than I am. Let's stop this talk now.

FRITZ

He brought it up. I joined the SS when you guys were still little kids and being in the SS means more to me than anything, including my own family, and if anybody says anything that denigrates the oath we all took to serve the Fuhrer, than that makes him the lower than spit and utterly undeserving of respect or trust.

ERIC

Yes, I took that oath and I've been faithful to it to the letter, but that doesn't mean we have to be brutal.

FRITZ

Oh boy, are you way off base. The Jews are being treated exactly the way they deserve, period, and if you feel differently then maybe we should inform the commandant.

HANS

Hey, let's not go that far.

FRITZ

The Jews are cunning. They will wait to exploit any weakness, that's why we have to be hard and strong. Otherwise they will turn the tables on us and kill us. Don't you understand that?

ERIC

What I see is a bunch of beaten down people who are struggling to stay alive.

HANS

Yes, but whose fault is that, Eric? We didn't start this war; they and their Bolshevik cronies did and if we don't deal with them now, Germany will be destroyed.

FRITZ

The Jews are beaten down you say? That's what the Jews want us to think. You see, they want to appeal to our sympathy in order to get us to let down our guard, but we can't afford to do that. Not for one second. The whole world is counting on us to keep the Jewish-Bolshevik rabble out of Europe and break that grip the Jews have on the world. If we ease off on them before completing the job, the Jews will win and Germany will cease to exist.

ERIC

But we do give some of them breaks. Look at those rich Jews who live outside the ghetto.

HANS

That's because they're useful to us and we can keep a closer watch on them.

FRITZ

The bottom line is this: The Jews are without a doubt or exception the lowest, most slippery and most untrustworthy race on this planet. Everything about them is sinister: their gibberish language, their weird religious services, the way they dress, the way they speak, everything. They are foreign, evil, and must be eliminated.

ERIC

They're the foreigners? Aren't we occupying their country?

FRITZ

Poland was a rump state that rightfully belongs to Germany. All we've done is take what was torn away from us by those "gentlemen" at Versailles. Creating Poland was a joke that was played on Germany but the joke's over.

ERIC

Well, the Poles seem to feel differently.

HANS

Of course they do. An entire country was handed to them, at Germany's expense, so why should they want to give it up? But they're lucky that we're here. Now we can take care of their Jewish problem for them. Do you know that they even let Jews serve in their army as commanders?

FRITZ

Pathetic it, isn't it? The Polish rabble proved beyond any doubt that they were completely incapable of governing themselves. If it wasn't for us the Jews would be running roughshod over them, over us and over everybody else but we're putting an end to that.

ERIC

I hope you're right.

FRITZ

I know I'm right. By the way, any word when that the wall around the ghetto will be finished?

HANS

I hope it's soon because the Jews are getting more and more brazen with their smuggling and no matter how much we fine them, beat them and shoot them, they keep breaking the law.

ERIC

So what if they smuggle a little food.

FRITZ

(alarmed)

So what!? You want to get us killed?

HANS

Eric, listen, we got to stop this smuggling because today it may be food but tomorrow it could be guns or bombs, and there are just a few of us and a lot of them.

ERIC

That's a laugh. Who the hell is gonna smuggle arms to the Jews? Even the Poles want nothing to do with the Jews, so what's the worry?

FRITZ

Eric, my friend, you are a simpleton. Here we are trying to contain four hundred thousand Jews, none of whom have any love for us and most of whom would just as soon see us dead, and you're asking why we have to control the smuggling?

ERIC

Then who's helping them?

FRITZ

Partisan bandits but I'm sure the Reichsfuhrer has a plan in mind that will solve that problem once and for all.

HANS

He'll teach these Jews a lesson they will never forget. Watch.

FRITZ

That's right, Hans, I'm sure the Reichsfuhrer is putting together a plan that will destroy the Jewish threat for all time. I'll tell you this: any SS soldier who fails to do his job is committing treason. It's us or the Jews. We gotta stay strong.

ERIC

Does that include little killing little kids and babies too?

FRITZ

Hey, ding dong, nobody's killed any kids. I have three kids of my own! *(pause)* What the hell is your problem anyway, Eric? Why are you so concerned about Jewish kids? This is exactly what I've been talking about. The Jews use their kids to appeal to our weakness and we can't afford to respond to that. It's all a ploy on their part to get over on us. Well, screw them! They were lording over us after the last war, now it's our turn. While we were doing all the dirty work and being taxed to the hilt to pay off that outrageous indemnity to the French and English, the Jews were cleaning up like the bandits they are. All we want is what's rightfully ours.

HANS

The Fuhrer's right about the Jews, how they weasel their way into a country and then try to take it over.

FRITZ

In Munich there were loads of Jews who tried to pass themselves off as being German but it was so phony. They dressed like Germans, spoke like Germans, waved the German flag, joined German social organizations, sent their kids to German schools, even joined the Reichswehr, yet **THEY WERE NOT GERMANS! NO WAY!**

ERIC

They weren't? Then what were they?

FRITZ

They were infiltrators, saboteurs, degenerates, and imposters. Most of the criminal element was Jewish, all a bunch of gangsters and racketeers, and I don't need to tell you how they covet our women, do I?

HANS

There weren't too many Jews where I grew up but the ones who were there seemed okay.

FRITZ

That was just a smoke screen to lull you into complacency. They have their secret networks, just like here in the ghetto. Ordering the creation of the ghetto was the best thing the Reichsfuhrer could have done. That way we can keep close watch on them and prevent them from making trouble.

A young man pushing a bucket and mop enters the room. He is handsome. A large Jewish star is affixed to his jacket. The young man looks at the SS men and bows and doffs his cap.

JEW

Excuse me, sirs. I have been assigned to clean this room.

FRITZ

Well, do your job and make it snappy. *(The Jew starts moving around chairs and mopping the room)(pause)* As I was saying, these Jews must be carefully monitored so they don't make trouble.

HANS

(lowering his voice)

Don't you think it might be better to clam up while he's here?

FRITZ

No. Why?

ERIC

(sarcastic)

We wouldn't want to give away any secrets now, would we?

FRITZ

(whispering, excited)

You're right! He's probably a spy so maybe it's better if we talk about the weather or something. *(pause)* *(Louder)* Boy, the weather here stinks, doesn't it? It's either too cold or too hot.

HANS

Today the weather's been okay.

ERIC

For a change. I wonder how the Jews are coping?

FRITZ

Didn't we agree not to mention them while he's here? (*glances at the Jew*)

ERIC

Hey, we're just talking about the weather, right? What's the big deal?

HANS

Maybe Eric is right and besides he doesn't seem to be listening.

FRITZ

You can't be too careful with them. That's exactly when they're at their most dangerous. (*To the Jew*) Hey, Jew, are you listening to us?

JEW

(*stops mopping*)

No sir, I'm just mopping.

FRITZ

Okay then, just mind your own business. (*To Hans and Eric*) He's lying of course but why should we take chances?

(*The Jew continues mopping and as he does he moves closer to where the SS men are seated*).

HANS

I got a letter from my parents. They've moved in with my aunt. You know, they were bombed out a couple of months ago and things have been rough for them since.

FRITZ

Those stinking Brits. They started the carpet bombing, not us. I heard that Churchill's scientific adviser is a Jew. It shows just how deeply the Jewish infection has spread in Britain. *(pause) (to the Jew)* Hey you, Jew, come over here.

JEW

(stops mopping, puts down the mop and faces Fritz)
Yes, sir?

FRITZ

I said come over here or are you hard of hearing?

The Jew walks over to where the SS men are seated.

FRITZ

How come you Jews are such troublemakers? What the hell did we ever do to you to make you hate us so much?

JEW

I don't know what you are talking about, sir.

FRITZ

Don't you play dummy with me, Jew. Remember, we're on to you now, so just tell the truth.

JEW

Sir, please, I just want to do my job.

FRITZ

Are you playing me for stupid or what, yeshiva-boy? How come all you Jews are so arrogant? You think you're better than us but you're not, not in the least. You smell, your women are whores, your whole religion is a fraud, you connive, you steal, you sabotage, you muck up the world.

JEW

Please, sir, let me continue working. I have many more rooms to clean.

HANS

Stop it, Fritz.

FRITZ

Are you coming to this Jew's defense? Is he a friend of yours?

ERIC

Fritz, enough already. Have your fun somewhere else.

FRITZ

(to Eric)

And why don't you be quiet! You're a Jew-lover anyway. I don't even know why you're even in the SS.

HANS

Hey, there's no call for that kind of talk.

FRITZ

(to the Jew)

See what you've done now, you bastard? You got us arguing. I bet that makes you feel real good, doesn't it.

JEW

I said nothing, sir.

FRITZ

(incensed)

How dare you contradict me? How dare you! You stinking parasite, you filthy lump of clay, you shameless whore monger, you lecherous bastard, I'm gonna teach you a lesson you'll never forget!

Fritz stands up, grabs his truncheon and attempts to hit the Jew on his head. Fritz misses but with a follow-up swing hits the Jew hard on the upper arm. The Jew falls backward on to a chair. He is holding his arm and is loudly moaning in pain.

FRITZ

Bastard, I'll finish you off now!

Fritz is about to hit the Jew again when a young woman enters the room. She is a nurse. She is young, pretty, in her early 20s. She is annoyed.

NURSE

What is going on here?

FRITZ

(puts down his truncheon)

Nothing, Schwester. The Jew was causing trouble, that's all.

HANS

Trudel, there's nothing to worry about.

ERIC

(surprised)

You know her?

HANS

We've met before; we're just friends.

TRUDEL

Disturbances are not permitted here, gentlemen. If this happens again I will have to report your behavior to your superiors. Is that clear? Hans, please try to control your friends.

HANS

We're sorry, Trudel.

FRITZ

(to Hans)

Can that talk, will you?. *(to Trudel)* You have no cause for concern, Schwester. The Jew was causing trouble. Instead of complaining, you should be thanking us for protecting you from the likes of him.

ERIC

(laughs, glancing at Trudel)

Yes, a nice, warm thank you would do the trick indeed.

TRUDEL

(to Hans)

You ought to be ashamed of yourself. What would your mother say if she knew about this?

FRITZ

Oh great. Now we have a momma's boy here. Next thing I'll be hearing is that I'm cavorting with Jews. You know that some Jews are so cunning that they'll even try to pass themselves off as Aryan? Some even try to join the SS.

ERIC

You want to check me out? I'll show you what I got right now.

FRITZ

Keep your pants on. Both of you guys are fruitcakes.

HANS

Trudel, really, nothing happened here.

The Jew starts moaning louder. He tries to get up but can't and collapses back onto the chair.

FRITZ

It serves him right. He shouldn't have made trouble.

TRUDEL

(goes over to the Jew)

Are you alright?

The Jew winces in pain but doesn't reply.

TRUDEL
(looking at the SS men)

What did you do to him?

HANS

Nothing, really.

FRITZ

I hit him with my truncheon. I was doing my duty.

ERIC

Schwester, it's just part of a day's work.

JEW

I was minding my business, Schwester, doing my work when they started up with me.

FRITZ

SHUT UP, JEW! Nobody asked you. *(to Trudel)* The Jew is lying, Schwester. He was causing trouble. Are you going to believe me or this Jew?

TRUDEL

I don't know who to believe and I don't care. All I know is that there's been a commotion and you will have to come back some other time.

HANS

Come back? I've been waiting here an hour to see the doctor.

FRITZ

Aw, let's get out of here. This place is beginning to smell; too many Jew-lovers.

TRUDEL

Excuse me, sir? My father is a colonel in the Wehrmacht so I would appreciate it if you would watch what you say.

FRITZ

I don't care if your father is the Reichsmarshall himself. I still think you're a Jew-lover. Pamper a Jew and the next thing he's stealing your job or maybe even a woman's virtue.

TRUDEL
(offended)

How dare you? Please leave now! This matter will be reported to the commandant.

ERIC
(to Fritz)

Now see what you've done? You've gotten us all into trouble. Stupid!

FRITZ

Who cares? Let her squawk all she wants. Let's go and get a drink. I gotta get out of here.

HANS

Trudel, I really need to see the doctor.

TRUDEL

You should have thought about before you made trouble.

HANS

I didn't do anything.

ERIC
(to Hans)

Aw stop your complaining already. *(To Trudel)*: We'll be back later. Let's go, fellas.

FRITZ
(to Eric)

Leaving her alone with that Jew is revolting. Now I really need a drink. (to the Jew): I won't forget you, you hear? Damn Jew. The Fuhrer was absolutely right when he warned us about you. YOU are vermin. You are everything I can't stand. What did the German people do to deserve the likes of you? Even now you look down on us, laugh at us, mock us, and then you wonder why we hate you and want to get rid of all of you. Nothing's too low for you. You even use your own little kids to weasel favors from us, appealing to our sense of humanity for a bit more food when in fact you waste, hoard or sell everything we give you. Now our cities are being bombed by countries who you have bamboozled into fighting for you. How do you people do it? How do you work this kind of magic? You're pure evil. We would have won the last war if it weren't for the likes of you. You stabbed us in the back, ruined our economy, tried to suck us dry, and then had the nerve to claim that you were being victimized. But we're the victims, not you. You're the problem but now we have the solution which will remove the problem once and for all and make the world a much better place, no thanks to you. (to Hans and Eric) Let's go.

(The SS men leave)

TRUDEL goes over to the JEW.

TRUDEL

Let me look at your arm.

The Jew moves away.

TRUDEL

I won't hurt you, I promise. (pause) What's your name?

JEW

Jacob, Schwester.

TRUDEL

My name is Trudel. I'm the nurse in charge.

JACOB

I don't know why they wanted to beat me. I was just doing what I was told to do and if I don't finish then I'm going to be in big trouble.

Jacob tries to get up but slumps back onto the chair, in pain.

JACOB

Now I'm in real trouble.

TRUDEL

Don't worry. Now just try to relax while I look at your arm.

JACOB

Why are you being so nice to me?

TRUDEL

I have my reasons.

JACOB

If I can't work then it's all over for me and for my family.

TRUDEL

Who do you live with?

JACOB

My parents and younger sister. We're sharing two apartments with three other families. We barely have enough food now and if I can't work then I don't know how we'll survive.

TRUDEL

Doesn't the council distribute food?

JACOB

Yes, for a price.

TRUDEL

That's outrageous! I didn't know that.

JACOB

Well, that's the way it is. Nothing's for free. You German's sure know how to play people off against each other.

TRUDEL

Listen, Jacob, I have nothing to do with that.

JACOB

No disrespect, Schwester, but you are German, aren't you?

TRUDEL

Yes, I am, but that doesn't mean we all hate Jews.

JACOB

Oh, so you're one of those good Germans?

TRUDEL

I don't know what that means, "good German," but if it will make you feel better than maybe I am a good German.

JACOB

You know of course that helping a Jew can get you into a lot of trouble.

TRUDEL

Who said anything about helping a Jew? I'm just treating a man whose been injured.

JACOB

Oh, so you do acknowledge that I'm a man? That's reassuring.

TRUDEL

Well, aren't you?

JACOB

According to your Fuhrer I am subhuman, vermin, meant to be squashed and discarded. Don't you agree with your Fuhrer?

TRUDEL

On some things he is right, on others, well, I'm not so sure.

JACOB

I like you, Schwester, so let me tell you: talk like that can get you into a lot of trouble.

TRUDEL

Are you going to inform on me? (*giggles*)

JACOB

That's not funny. You must be more careful.

TRUDEL

Why Jacob, you seem to care about me.

JACOB

You seem nice, for a German.

TRUDEL

Tell me about yourself.

JACOB

Well, I grew up in Warsaw and went to public school and after I graduated from the gymnasium I attended two years of secondary school, specializing in business administration. My father owned a clothing store and when I was off from school I would work for him. Then in 1938 I found myself in the Polish Army.

TRUDEL:

Why did you join the army?

JACOB

I didn't exactly join, I was drafted.

TRUDEL

Then what happened?

JACOB

Things were quiet for a while, then the war broke out and before we knew it we were surrounded by the German army. I was taken prisoner and after the Germans found out I was Jewish they dumped into the ghetto and I've been scrounging ever since to survive.

TRUDEL

Were you an officer?

JACOB

No. I was a senior sergeant in an infantry regiment. My commanding officer was Jewish. After we surrendered he was taken away with all the other officers and I never saw him again.

TRUDEL

That sounds so cruel.

JACOB

Schwester, it's war and in war nothing is fair. In fact, you and I are at war. Technically we are enemies.

TRUDEL

I don't feel that way at all, at least not about you.

JACOB

You've been quite kind to me.

TRUDEL

I'm going to do what I can to help you. I have connections.

JACOB

Please ... Schwester ... Trudel ... you have done more than enough already. Just by being kind to me you have done much more than you'll ever know.

TRUDEL

But Jacob, you need medical care and your family needs help too and I can't ignore that.

JACOB

Trudel, I don't want make trouble for you.

TRUDEL

No trouble at all. Now why don't you be a good boy and relax so I can try to fix up your arm.

*Jacob and Trudel look into each other's faces and smile.
Their hands touch.*

Lights fade. End of scene 1.

Scene 2

Time: September 1945

Place: A few miles outside of Warsaw.

Setting: An office in internment camp for Germans waiting to be deported to Germany. The camp houses mostly women and young children and a few injured German POWs. The office is crowded with women and children. They are complaining to a male guard.

WOMAN 1

My baby is sick!

WOMAN 2

I need to see the commandant at once! It's about my husband!

WOMAN 3

**My little boy is starving! If he doesn't get food soon he will die!
Please don't let him die!**

GUARD

Shut your faces, all of you! You're lucky to be alive.

WOMAN 1

But my baby is SICK! Please do something! Look at him!

She shows the guard an almost lifeless baby wrapped in a blanket.

GUARD

That's just too bad. If you keep making a ruckus you will all be thrown out of here!

WOMAN 2

Why are we being treated like this? I did nothing wrong and now we're being cast out of our own country. I lost everything! We were rounded up like criminals.

GUARD

You lost everything you say? Not from how I look at things. You have your children, your families and a place to go. It is I who has nothing. It was I who lost everything, not you. First my father's business was "aryanized," meaning it was stolen from us, then my entire family, my mother, my father, my little brother and sister, were deported to Auschwitz, where they were callously murdered by you German butchers. Now you're squealing like little pigs you are.

WOMAN 3

But we had nothing to do with that, sir, NOTHING! It is unfair to blame us for your misfortunes.

GUARD

You are to blame. All you Germans are to blame. You were acting so high and mighty when you're your Fuhrer was alive. You treated us like scum, humiliated us, tortured us, made us grovel, herded us in ghettos like we were cattle, then tried to kill us all, and now you tell me you had nothing to do with it. You're all just a bunch of Nazi whores and you're being treated exactly the way you all deserve.

WOMAN 2

Even the little ones? How cruel!

GUARD

Ha! Look how you use your children. You should be ashamed of yourselves. Jewish children died too, all because of the likes of you and now you're complaining. If it were up to me you'd all be rotting in the street and I'd spit on you all.

WOMAN 1

You are a nasty, mean man, you're a beast! If my husband were here ...

GUARD

Well he's not but if you know where he is, please tell me and I'll put 'im out of his misery, fast. I learned how to do that from you Nazis. You were great teachers, but stupid fools. Who asked you to invade Poland? Before the war I was living with my family, going to school, minding my own business and then you invaded and my life's been hell ever since. Now I'm here guarding you so please give me a reason to shoot you and I will.

WOMAN 1

Murderer!

GUARD

Slut! Bitch!

WOMAN 2
(to Woman 1)

Shut up! You're just making things worse for all of us.

GUARD

That's right, tramp. Listen to your friend.

WOMAN 3

Have you no compassion?

GUARD

I lost my compassion years ago when you Germans barged in here and then made my life hell. I was hiding in the woods, struggling to survive, and I have you to blame for that.

WOMAN 3

You were a partisan?

GUARD

Yeah, I was, what of it?

WOMAN 2

Then you ARE a murderer. You partisans were just a bunch of thieves and killers.

GUARD

You're wrong. We were patriots; you were the thieves and killers. You pigs terrorized an entire continent.

WOMAN 3
(placating)

Please, sir, whatever you say, I won't argue with you. You are right. Just let us speak with the commandant, please!

GUARD

Well, he's not here.

WOMAN 2

Not here! We've been waiting here for hours and now you tell us he's not here?

GUARD

That's right.

WOMAN 1

Is this some kind of cruel joke?

The women are becoming increasingly agitated. The guard grabs his rifle.

WOMAN 3

What are you going to do? Shoot defenseless women and children? Is that the best you can do?

GUARD

Clam up! NOW!

WOMAN 1 picks up an ash tray from a table.

GUARD

Put that ash tray down, NOW!

WOMEN 1,2,3

Pig! ... Brute! ... Murderer! ... Jew!

The tumult is getting louder and louder. Then a man enters the room. It's Jacob, wearing a military uniform and an officer's cap upon which is affixed a red star.

JACOB

What's going on here?

GUARD

These women are creating a disturbance, comrade commissar.

WOMAN 2

That's not so, sir. We've been waiting here for hours to meet with the commandant and this man has been taunting us.

GUARD

Ha! Let me take care of them now, comrade Commissar.

The Guard picks up his rifle and points it directly at the women who are now hysterical. Woman 2 throws the ash tray wildly at the guard and almost hits Jacob instead.

JACOB

(to the guard)

ENOUGH! Put down that rifle! *(to the women)*: BE QUIET! I AM THE COMMANDANT OF THIS CAMP! NOW, WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

WOMEN 1,2,3

(yelling out, still hysterical)

My child is sick ... We need food ... We're cold ... my husband is missing ... my son is missing ... I need to find my parents ... I don't want to be deported.

JACOB

I will listen to your complaints but first you must calm down.

The women begin calming down.

GUARD

I must protest, comrade commissar.

JACOB

(to the guard)

Be quiet and that's an order. *(To the women)*: Now that's better. Now talk and make it fast. I don't have all day.

WOMAN 1

My baby needs to see a doctor.

JACOB

I'll see what I can do about that. Leave your name with the guard.

WOMAN 2

We haven't had any decent food in days, just that slop which I can't eat and makes my children sick.

JACOB

I'll look into this matter, anything else?

WOMAN 3

My husband is missing and I must find him. I need to know if he's still alive.

JACOB

Lots of people are missing but if you leave me your husband's name I'll see what I can do. *(pause)* Now, any other complaints?

(Silence)

That being the case, I will thank you to now leave my office at once.

As the women are putting on their coats and collecting their children another guard enters the office, dragging with her a disheveled, young woman. The woman is Trudel.

Second GUARD

I found this woman sneaking around the fence trying to escape.

Trudel is struggling to free herself from the guard's grip.

TRUDEL

Let go of me!

JACOB

What's going on here?

Second GUARD

I found her sneaking around the gate, Comrade Commissar. I think she was trying to escape.

TRUDEL

(still struggling)

It's not true! I wasn't trying to escape.

JACOB

Then what were you doing near the gate?

Trudel looks up and immediately recognizes Jacob. She is shocked.

TRUDEL

It's YOU! Thank God! *(to the other women)* I know this man. He is a good person.

JACOB

(to the second guard)

Release her.

Second GUARD

Yes, sir.

The guard releases Trudel.

JACOB

Young lady, I don't know who you are but this one time I'll take your word for it that you weren't trying to escape.

TRUDEL

Jacob, don't you remember me?

JACOB

You are to address me as Herr Commissar or Commandant, is that clear?

TRUDEL

Yes, Herr Commissar.

JACOB

(speaking to the group of women)

What are you all still doing here? I told all of you to leave. **NOW!** Your concerns will be addressed. *(to the guards)*: See to it that this office is cleared out.

GUARDS:

Yes, sir. *(to the women)* Okay, sluts, everyone leave. Out!

(The women are gathering up their children and are leaving. Finally, the room is empty except for the guards.)

JACOB

(to the guards)

You may leave now.

BOTH GUARDS

Yes, comrade commissar.

(The guards salute and leave. Jacob and Trudel are alone.)

JACOB

What are you doing here?

TRUDEL

I can ask you the same question. I thought you were dead.

JACOB

Sometimes I wish I were. How long have you been in this camp?

TRUDEL

Four days. The local police picked me up and brought me here for relocation. They claimed that since I'm of German ancestry I belong in Germany even though I'm Polish.

JACOB

Yes, but you're Volksdeutsch Polish which means you are subject to deportation.

TRUDEL

It's really unfair. What am I gonna do in Germany? How will I live?

JACOB

How were you managing before?

TRUDEL

After we met, I spoke with some friends of mine about your case but it didn't work out.

JACOB

I figured that.

TRUDEL

I thought I could help but found out that the people who I thought were friends weren't. Anyway, a few days later the Gestapo summoned me to their district headquarters for questioning. They wanted to know why I was so interested in a particular Jew. So I told them about your situation. They told me in no uncertain terms that I was forbidden to have anything more to do with you or with any other Jews and if they received any further reports about me I would be thrown in prison or a concentration camp.

JACOB

I know you were trying to help but to tell you the truth it just made matters worse. After you patched me up, the Jewish police stopped by and told me they knew about me and you and warned me to stop seeing you. I told them to get lost. The next day they were literally pounding on the door angrily demanding money from my father, they called it a tax, and threatened him with physical harm if he didn't pay and my poor mother, may she rest in peace, was so distraught that she had a heart attack and died.

TRUDEL

I'm sorry to hear that. What happened to your little sister?

JACOB

I was getting to that. She was fifteen years old at the time and one day she was out late begging for food when she was attacked by a gang of men who beat her up badly. She didn't know who did it. They dumped her in front of the building where we lived. She was almost dead. My father almost killed himself right there. It was all so horrible and there was nothing I could do, nobody to turn to. It became too much for me, so one day, while my father was covering for me on a compulsory work detail, I decided to run away, like a little boy.

TRUDEL

Where could you run to?

JACOB

I did not know. All I knew was that I had to get away, fast. So in the middle of the night I managed to sneak past the guards at the gate of the ghetto and once I was outside laid low for a while and then made my way along a highway until finally I reached the forest area outside of Warsaw. By this time I was in really bad shape. Anyway, to make a long story short, I managed to hook up with a Soviet partisan group, participated in scores of operations against the Germans and their stooges, joined the Red Army political commissariat and here I am now, a commandant of this camp.

TRUDEL

What became of your father and sister?

JACOB

I don't know. After the war I went back Warsaw to find them but the house where we were staying was gone, destroyed during the liquidation of the ghetto, nothing but rubble, and nobody could tell me what happened to them. In fact, nobody even knew who they were. All the Jews were gone. I hope they're still alive, but I doubt it.

TRUDEL

Don't give up hope.

JACOB

It's hard not too and if I do find them, I won't know what to say. What could I say?

TRUDEL

Look, you did what you felt you had to do, period.

JACOB

I appreciate your kindness but it's not that simple. Now continue with your story.

TRUDEL

After my interrogation by the Gestapo I was transferred to another clinic inside Germany where I worked as a nurse for the Wehrmacht. My mother was still in Poland and I wrote to her as often as I could. My father was missing. I got involved with a German soldier who was on convalescent leave but it didn't work out. He was violent, especially when he drank. One night he came home drunk and beat me. After that I moved out and lived at the clinic. Conditions there weren't good but it was a lot better than being with that guy.

JACOB

So what brought you back here?

TRUDEL

Like I told you, my mother was still in Poland so after the war ended I decided to go home. I had no place else to go. The problem was I never made it back. I was picked up by the Polish police who threw me into jail, accused me of being a war criminal and threatened to put me on trial and execute me if I didn't tell them the whereabouts of other Nazis. I told them what I knew, which was nothing. They didn't believe me at first and even beat me but finally one of the interrogators, a female, who was a little more decent than the others, took pity on me and freed me from jail. She even gave me fifty zlotys. So I was wandering around, completely disoriented, then got arrested again for vagrancy and got dumped here with all the other Germans who are being deported. Meanwhile I have no idea what's happened to my parents. I was hoping to find my mother here but so far no luck.

JACOB

That's rough. The war was a disaster. Look what it did to us.

TRUDEL

It brought us together.

JACOB

True, it did.

Trudel and Jacob look at each other and embrace.

TRUDEL

Now what?

JACOB

I have a job for you.

TRUDEL

Really? In this dump?

JACOB

Don't call it a dump. It's a detention center and I'm doing my best to run things smoothly. I need someone to run the clinic and I think you'd be perfect for the job.

TRUDEL

Do you have medical supplies?

JACOB

Not much, but I'll see what I could do to get some.

TRUDEL

After the way the Nazis treated you, why would you want to help any Germans, including me?

JACOB

I wanted to take revenge, badly, but soon that feeling passed. I've seen too much violence already. Anyway, I'm not a judge. I mean, I could go around beating up on Germans, denigrating them, humiliating them and abusing my authority but what would that accomplish? Maybe it would make me feel good for a little while but it wouldn't restore what I lost. Besides, the war is over. Germany is kaput. The Fuhrer is history and Nazism has been crushed. All this now is just a clean up operation. But don't get me wrong. If people defy my authority I will act decisively, without hesitation and without mercy, so please don't test me.

TRUDEL

Jacob, I'm on your side. People here need help, not hurt, and I'll do what I can to help you.

JACOB

I hope you're being sincere because I'm in no mood to play games and if you're trifling with me there will be trouble. Do you understand?

Trudel grabs Jacob's hand.

TRUDEL

Now, my commandant, what is it you want me to do?

Jacob kisses Trudel deeply and passionately as the lights fade.

End of Scene 2.

Scene 3

Time: Next day

Place: The camp dispensary. The room is packed with women and children. Standing at the door is a guard armed with a submachine gun with the safety button on "off." In the corner an injured soldier is laying in a bed. The sound of children crying and coughing resonates throughout the room. The women are yelling an ongoing litany of complaints at the guard.

WOMEN

"I need milk for my baby! ... I have a fever! ... My legs are swollen! ... My little girl fainted! ... My heart is failing! ... I don't want to die! ... Who will care for my little babies?" ... My hair is a mess! ... I'm covered with lice! ... Somebody stole my shoes! ... "WE'RE HUNGRY! ... WE'RE COLD! ... WE'RE THIRSTY! ... HELP US!"

GUARD

(surly)

What do you want from me? You're lucky we even let you live. In fact, you have some nerve demanding anything! Before the war my father was a respected professor but that didn't stop your kind from first humiliating him than murdering him ... in the street. Then you made my mother clean the streets with her finest linen while everyone looked and laughed. What I could never understand is why you Germans would insist on first humiliating us before murdering us. Sure, it was just a misunderstanding, right, just one big joke? Well, nobody's laughing now. You looted us, you stripped us of everything and now you want food? What did you do with all the loot you stole? As far as I'm concerned you can all starve for all I care.

WOMAN

(from the crowd)

Are all the guards in this place nasty like you?

GUARD

I'm nasty? If I am I learned it from YOU! For five years I was treated like dirt, had to grovel, bite my tongue, bide my time and now it's my turn. You see, I'm a Jew and a communist and have absolutely no use for the likes of you. Your kiddies are sick? So what? I lost three children during the war. I watched them die from starvation in the ghetto. My wife killed herself. I watched my two brothers and two sisters get beat up and then deported. And there was nothing I could do about it except hide like a coward.

WOMAN

(from the crowd)

You poor man.

GUARD

SHUT UP, SLUT! I don't need your sympathy. You brought your problems on yourself. What happened to me was your fault. You are all guilty! *(The guard is becoming increasingly agitated).* You know, maybe it's about time I taught some of you Krauts a lesson. *(The guard grabs his sub-machine gun and loudly locks and loads the chamber. Everyone is now screaming hysterically.)*

WOMEN

(hysterical)

AAAAAAHHHHHHH! HE'S GOING TO MURDER US! ... SAVE MY CHILDREN! ... PLEASE DON'T HURT MY BABIES!

Jacob and Trudel enter the room.

JACOB

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS?

GUARD

(The guard is pointing his weapon directly at the women.)
The prisoners are rebelling, comrade commissar!

JACOB

(to the Guard)

Put down your weapon, NOW!

The guard hesitates.

JACOB

I SAID PUT DOWN THAT WEAPON NOW OR I WILL PERSONALLY SHOOT YOU!

Jacob reaches for his pistol. The guard slowly puts down his weapon.

JACOB

EVERYONE QUIET!

The women begin to slowly calm down.

JACOB:

THAT'S RIGHT. EVERYONE BE QUIET!

Except for sounds of babies crying, soon the room is quiet.

JACOB

Now, what's going on here?

WOMAN 1

This man (*points at the guard*) was about to murder us for nothing, taunting us, blaming us for things we didn't do.

JACOB

(*to the Guard*):

Is this true what she said?

GUARD

Comrade commissar, they're just Germans. You can't believe them.

JACOB

(*to the Guard*)

I'll speak to you later. In the meantime I want to introduce you to the new chief of medical services. Her name is Trudel and she will be in charge of this clinic.

GUARD

(*shocked*)

You're putting a German in charge of this clinic? I'll have to take orders from her?

JACOB

No. You will still report directly to me but while Trudel is in charge of the clinic you will afford her respect and help ensure that there is order so that she can do her job. Is that clear?

GUARD

Yes, Comrade Commissar, I'll obey but wish to file a protest.

JACOB

File a protest? I'm the final authority in this camp so your protest is duly noted and denied. Insubordination will not be tolerated. Is that clear?

GUARD

Yes, Comrade Commissar, quite clear.

JACOB

(to the Guard)

Good. That's settled. Trudel and I will now inspect the clinic. You will return to your post at the door. If I need you I will summon you.

GUARD

Yes, Comrade Commissar.

The Guard returns to his post.

Trudel and Jacob start walking down the main isle which separate two rows of beds. The beds are crammed with patients, mostly young children, many of whom are moaning from pain and hunger. Trudel and Jacob stop at each bed. As they proceed down the isle, they are followed by a crowd of women who repeatedly call out:

WOMEN

What about my child? ... Who's gonna feed my baby? ... My son is coughing up blood! ... When will we get more food? ... My little girl is starving! ... My children have a fever!

When they reach the end of the isle, Trudel and Jacob go to the bed occupied by the soldier; he is missing his right leg. The man is Fritz.

FRITZ

Why hello Comrade Commissar. Remember me?

JACOB

Who are you?

FRITZ

Don't play games with me, Mister Commissar. You remember me.

JACOB

Yes, I remember you now. You're the Nazi pig who tried to kill me.

FRITZ

That's right, Herr Commissar, the same guy. I guess I didn't do a very good job of it.

JACOB

It was good enough. Now, how can I help you?

FRITZ

(angry)

Don't patronize me, Jew. I don't care if you're Joseph Stalin himself! You're still a Jew, still a wimp.

Jacob doesn't reply.

FRITZ

(loudly taunting)

Cat got your tongue, Jew? What's the matter? Can't get the best of a one-legged man? *(to the crowd of women)* See this? He's nothing but a Jew with a fancy uniform as if that's supposed to impress us. Well, it doesn't, not in the least. No matter how you dress up a Jew he's still a Jew. I could smell him a mile away. These Jews are so oily, act so cock sure of themselves, but I know better, and he knows better too. Oh, yes he does. I'm more of a man with one leg than he is with two and if you pull down his pants then you'll really see what I'm talking about.

The guard, hearing the yelling, runs over to the bed.

GUARD

Comrade Commissar, is this prisoner giving you trouble?

JACOB

No, he's not. He's just talking.

FRITZ

Ha, just talking! You're just a coward. You don't have the guts to deal with me. I got the better of you and you know it. Look at you! Sweating like the pig you are, you pretentious clown. You have the backbone of a jelly fish and the brain of a canary. The only reason why you're alive is because I let you live. I really didn't want to kill you, but that's where I made my mistake because now here you are and your presence disgusts me. And now you're prancing around with that Jew-loving slut. It's racial contamination.

GUARD

Sir, let me shoot this Nazi and put him out of his misery.

FRITZ

Your guard has more guts in his little pinky than you do in your whole body. You are a disgrace to your uniform. *(to the women)* See how weak he is! He is a fraud, a fake, don't believe anything he or his female baggage say. **HE'S A JEW!**

WOMEN

(incited, calling out)

Maybe he's right! ... The commandant is really a Jew? ... Can we trust this Jew with our children? ... Don't Jews kill Christian children? ... I just want food! ... We need medicines! ... My babies are starving! ... I need milk! ... I need warm clothing for my little ones! ... Help us! Help us! **HELP US!**

FRITZ

Scream all you want, ladies. This Jew won't help. He hates us all and he and his Jew loving girlfriend are gonna kill us!

The screaming and noise are getting louder and louder. The guard is yelling too.

GUARD

THIS IS OPEN REBELLION, COMRADE COMMISSAR! PLEASE GIVE ME PERMISSION TO SHOOT THAT NAZI DOG!

Jacob does not reply. The crescendo of noise builds up until it overwhelms all the other senses. Within the din can be heard complaints, pleas, insults, accusations and slurs. Jacob covers his ears with his hands to try to blot out the noise but the noise level is too high. Jacob's face is turning blue; the veins his neck now plainly visible. He looks like he is going to collapse.

JACOB

(screams)

GOD, HELP ME! I WILL NOT MURDER THAT MAN! *(to the guard)* SEE TO IT THAT THIS MAN *(points to Fritz)* IS NOT HARMED! I AM NOT A NAZI AND DO NOT PLAN TO START ACTING LIKE ONE NOW!

FRITZ

Don't do me any favors, Jew!

JACOB

(voice trembling with suppressed rage):

I'm not doing this as a favor to you. I am doing this to prove that I am better than you, that I will not lower myself to your level.

FRITZ

Save your sermonizing for your Jewish friends! You're just a weakling!

WOMAN

(to Fritz)

Shut up, will you? He wants to help us.

JACOB

(to the crowd)

That's right! I want to help you all. I want the children to be happy, I want everyone to be happy! Be Happy! *(begins screaming obsessively):* BE HAPPY! BE HAPPY! BE HAPPY! DAMN IT, BE HAPPY!

(Jacob begins to weep uncontrollably.)

TRUDEL *grabs Jacob by the arm and then turns to the crowd.*

TRUDEL

Make room for the commandant.

Trudel leads Jacob him through the crowd which parts to make a path for them. They go outside and stand underneath a large tree. Jacob is still weeping.

JACOB

Oh, I really blew it, big time. I'm such a weakling. Maybe Fritz is right. How can I ever face them again?

TRUDEL

(looking at Jacob with admiration)

No, Jacob, you are not a weakling. Not to shoot that Nazi took incredible strength and courage. You were brilliant, humane and strong. The people inside there saw it. They will listen to you because they know you're strong. *(pause)* I want to tell you something.

JACOB

What?

TRUDEL

I love you.

JACOB

And I love you too. You saved my life twice.

Jacob faces east and chants:

*Yit-ga-dal ve-yit-ca-dach she-may rah-bor
Vee-aw-le-more deev-raw kir-roo-tay
Vee-am-leak mal-koo-tay
Ve-chai-yay-kom youv-yoh-may-kom oov-chai-yay
De-kall base yis-raw-ale,
Bah-ah-gaw-law oo-biz-mahn kor-reev,
Ve-eem-ma-roo aw-main.*

TRUDEL

That was beautiful. What is it?

JACOB

It's a Jewish prayer for the dead. I haven't recited it since I was a boy. It's about time I honored those who have died.

TRUDEL

One day you'll teach me that prayer.

JACOB

I will and sooner than you think.

Trudel and Jacob embrace and kiss. Jacob has regained his composure.

JACOB

I did say that I wanted everyone to be happy, didn't I?

TRUDEL

Yes, you did.

JACOB

Well, what are we doing standing here? Let's get to work!

Trudel and Jacob laugh, hug and start walking back to the clinic, holding each other tightly as the lights go out.

The end.

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