

TRASH STORY

by Magda Fertacz

Translated by Benjamin Paloff

Our destinies are determined by the deeds of others, and our actions and inaction are part of theirs. Whether we are aware of this or not, we carry a responsibility for what happens to us all.

Zygmunt Bauman

There are no characters, only freedoms that have fallen into a trap, and the way out of it is human value.

Jean-Paul Sartre

SON, about 19 years old.

MOTHER, 58.

FATHER, 60.

WIDOW, 35.

URSULA, 10.

PROLOGUE

By the river. Before drowning.

BROTHER

Mother, with a capital "M." O Motherland.

To your health. I drink. I kiss your feet.

Its skin grown thick and hard.

You didn't say. The word I wanted to hear. Not even the usual lie.

Is it too much to ask?

You had only one word for me: Duty.

The only light in your house is a memorial candle.

Candles.

An unctuous flame shrouded in the tatters of memory.

I grew up to kill.

When are you grown up enough for that? Well, doctor?

The doctor!

The doctor said my brain cells are losing their ability to hold memories separate. My memory can't wipe away what it doesn't need.

What it doesn't need. What doesn't it need?

A body in pieces – that's shit-I-don't-need number one. My hand shaking before pulling the trigger – shit-I-don't-need number two. Jerking off on base – more shit I don't need. Subtle shades of blood on my hands – that's shit I don't need. The things I don't need to have in my head. You can treat that. You can get past it. The doctor. The doctor said so.

You can get past murder.

Motherland.
Motherland – putrefaction. A mommy-pig.
And that goodnight poem of hers, every night.
The one about the braid. Before bed, and in every school, in honor, every year.
Tadeusz Różewicz.

Braid

When all the women
from the transport had been shaved
four workers with brooms
made of linden swept
and piled up the hair

Behind clean glass
the stiff hair of those asphyxiated
in the gas chambers
in that hair there are pins
and combs of bone

No light shines through it
No wind scatters it
No hand touches it

In large crates
the dry hair of the asphyxiated
billows
and a gray braid
a pigtail with a little ribbon
pulled at in school
by naughty little boys

Her tears. In her eyes. The mommy-pig, crying. Moved by how beautifully her son recites.
The rhythm. One, two. March.
You keep marching till you stamp down, pack down those hands sticking out of the ground,
those sunburnt legs; you just pave that shitpile over. Under the asphalt of great deeds. In the
name. Always some name, some “in.”
In the name of those relics of childhood. The two feet of the Motherland-Mommy-pig. She’s,
like, dead, but with a smile that portends her miraculous resurrection.
Sainted by her hand. As the bridegroom of murder. As a tin soldier, defender of her religion.
The one true. Get down to business. Her business.
A key hung around her neck. The Key of Duty.
This is my fealty to her. My filial fealty.
Because she gave birth to a son. A soldier-son. She sacrificed her Sow-womb, draped in a
black pall, now to take back what is hers.
And her corpse is eaten by worms. And it only looks like she’s alive. Because the worms of
the past wriggle on her body and coo, announcing the Gospel of Duty. A breast bared, like to
give suck. Only the milk’s poisoned: Honor. Patriotism. P. A. T. R. I. O. T. I. S. M.
H. O. N. O. R.
You liter of puke.
You litter, of rabid dogs.

I could bite you, tear you to pieces, spit you out, lick you clean, and it wouldn't be matricide. I could strangle my brother, whip my father, bang my wife with a broken bottle. And what? And nothing. I'll be a hero. War has its own laws.

And what good is our family's greenhouse-slash-concentration camp? We keep watering and fertilizing with the shit of the past, with these Motherlandish delusions. Enough. Enough of this shit.

And some of us are still blind.

They're still deaf.

To their health.

ACT I

Present day. Summer. One of the small villages near the western border, formerly Görlitz, now Górczyca, or else Gross Gandern, which is now Gądków Wielki. A house by the river on the edge of town. Long ago this had been a model German farmstead. Today, the house is occupied by Poles, so-called city folk.

Ursula and Her Story. Scene 1.

Enter Ursula with a smallish sack. She has a key dangling around her neck. But we cannot see it, since it is quite dark. She takes a ragdoll from the sack and starts playing an innocent game of theater.

URSULA

"Knock knock."

"Who's there?"

"It's me. Ursula."

"Ursula who?"

"The one with blond hair."

"Oh, it's you. Dear child. And where have you been all this time?"

"Hiding. Far away."

"Come in, dear child, come in."

Ursula lights a candle. Mother is sleeping in an armchair. Ursula circles around the sleeping woman and starts speaking.

(To the audience)

This is my house. It's white, with a little red roof. The windows aren't too big; they have brown shutters. The window sills had boxes with yellow flowers. There was a vegetable garden out front, with chives that bloomed purple. Geese and ducks would walk around the backyard. We had four rooms. I slept in one with my sister Liza, my brother Hans had the smallest room, and next to that were my mom and dad. There was a coal-burning stove here with very hot lids. Across from that, a small wooden table with a pitcher of sour milk. We always sat down at the table together; mommy would gather hot potatoes from the stove and pour them out on the table. We'd skin them and eat them with salt, sipping the sour milk. Then we'd all go out to the fields, even little Liza. I'd run out in front, singing my favorite song... Here, listen to my favorite song. They don't want to. You listen to it, then. You're listening, right?

(Sings)

Der Tag war grau,
Der Tag war schwer,
Und stürmisch ging die See,
Nun klärt es auf von Westen her,
Die Brandung glänzt wie Schnee.
Ums Achterdeck die Möwe fliegt
Und leiser kommt der Wind,
Der mich in gold'ne Träume wiegt,
Antje, mein blondes Kind.

Antje, Antje,
Hörst du nicht von ferne das Schifferklavier,
Antje, Antje,
Das Lied soll Dich grüßen von mir.

A knock at the door. Ursula puts out the candle and leaves.

*Son's Homecoming.
Darkness.*

SON Knock knock!

MOTHER Who's there?

SON Your kid.

MOTHER You've finally made it.

SON I'm beat.

MOTHER Did you take the bus?

SON I biked. You're sitting in the dark?

MOTHER The power's out. It's the wind.

SON I'll have a look.

MOTHER Leave it. Such a long way by bike?

SON Yeah, I biked. We always used to have candles in the drawer.

MOTHER We still do. I thought that something had happened to you.

SON I'm on my way, and you're worrying. *(He lights a candle.)* As it should be.

MOTHER You've changed. You've grown into a man.

SON On the scraps they serve at the dorm.

MOTHER And you have stubble... By bike. It must have taken you a couple of days.

SON Two.

MOTHER These days people drive cars.

SON And I ride a bike.

MOTHER How are things?

SON Fine.

MOTHER Really?

SON Everything's fine!

MOTHER I ask because I'm supposed to.

SON Everything's fine...

MOTHER Fit as a fiddle.

(Enter Widow)

WIDOW Hey, it's Tiny!

MOTHER No need to get all excited.

WIDOW I'm sorry.

SON I thought you'd left.

MOTHER We look after each other.

SON What is it you're sorry for?

WIDOW It's always best to apologize. Right from the start.

MOTHER Is something itching you, dear? You're leaning over so strangely.

WIDOW And how silly of me, coming to greet you in the middle of the night.

SON You've come in at just the right time, miss.

WIDOW What's this "miss"?

SON Force of habit... But I've grown up!

WIDOW You look good.

SON Fit as a fiddle.

MOTHER Ready for service.

SON Mom, please.

WIDOW Should I put the tea on?

MOTHER Let's not drag out the homecoming.

WIDOW I was drawing the bath. How could I have been so sure I'd be coming back? I might not, and then there'd be trouble.

MOTHER Exactly.

WIDOW I'm going.

(Widow leaves)

SON She came back?

MOTHER She never left. You've been gone a long time.

SON You never said anything when I called.

MOTHER So you've come, you've seen for yourself.

SON I'm going to bed.

MOTHER Your room's ready. Take a candle.

SON How are things on the river?

MOTHER Quiet, calm. Not a lot of tourists this year.

SON Let's go down tomorrow...to have a look.

Father's Phone Call.

Father is present on stage.

FATHER I really wanted you to call me, but you didn't. So I'm calling you. It's daytime here. I really have to get down to work soon.

SON Here it's night.

FATHER Yeah... That's right. How's your mother?

SON Fine.

FATHER I sent you some money.

SON Yeah. I know.

FATHER I'll send you more next time.

SON That's okay.

FATHER Don't stay there too long. Go somewhere. Take your mind off things.

SON I'm going to hang around here a bit.

FATHER The penitents are going to wear you down... They've forsaken the world. They have that luxury, because the bluebird of happiness brings them money from across the sea.

SON They're grateful.

FATHER Are you going to celebrate?

SON Same as every year.

FATHER Good...that's good. I won't make it...you see...

SON Don't explain.

FATHER We're free people. Aren't we?!

SON We are. Have a good time.

FATHER I am. I'm having a good time, son. And I have no regrets. You should have fun, too.

SON I'll have fun. I promise.

FATHER Good... That's good. I bet you've grown. Have you had beer yet?

SON I have.

FATHER That's the way! How else could you stand them?

SON Indeed.

FATHER Are you coming out?

SON If that's how it goes.

FATHER I'll be waiting.

URSULA

Walks around the house, singing. None of the household hears her.

Antje, Antje,

Hörst du nicht von ferne das Schifferklavier,

Antje, Antje,

Das Lied soll Dich grüßen von mir.

Son and Widow in front of the door out to the river.

WIDOW Lovely day. No wind.

SON I remember that dress!

WIDOW You remember that nonsense?

SON It was torn...at the shoulder.

WIDOW And now you couldn't even tell.

SON No, you couldn't.

WIDOW It really was stupid of me to come, but later...

SON You wouldn't have had the heart, miss?

WIDOW I thought that maybe we could go down to the river.

SON As you wish, miss.

WIDOW Don't call me "miss."

SON I'd love it if things could go back the way they were... You all called me "Tiny." My brother came up with that.

WIDOW His birthday's coming up...

SON We'll celebrate.

WIDOW If only the birthday boy could make it.

SON If only!

WIDOW You're nervous.

SON No. Just surprised.

WIDOW Surprised.

SON I'm surprised, miss...that you've stayed.

WIDOW I'm in no hurry.

SON You've got to be kidding.

WIDOW I've thrown together a picnic for the river. How's it look?

SON Great.

WIDOW Things taste better by the water.

SON What's keeping you here? Him?

WIDOW Anything's possible...

SON It's not like anything goes.

WIDOW You talk like Tiny.

SON Or maybe it's anything goes, but nothing is possible... I don't know.

WIDOW So that's how things are going to be?

SON Up to you.

WIDOW Tiny and his yellow shorts... You manage to crack me up, as usual.

SON I used to do somersaults for you. Remember, miss?

WIDOW And handstands...

SON And jump into the water...

WIDOW You were all sweaty, you'd run up for a slice of peach.

SON Which you would peel for me.

WIDOW My husband...

SON My brother would be lying on the blanket next to us with my mother, and, as usual, he'd be massaging her feet.

WIDOW That was so long ago...

SON I remember it well.

At the River.

MOTHER I'd go in for...a dip...to have a splash.

WIDOW Have a splash? *(she laughs)*

MOTHER Such a foolish, impertinent laugh.

WIDOW You startled me.

SON Let's go in.

MOTHER You're dreaming... I wouldn't be able to do it so blithely now...

SON Come on!

MOTHER How many times have I promised myself I'd do something...

SON Come on! Please.

MOTHER ...and then put it off till the right time...

SON This is the perfect time.

MOTHER People...like your brother...they don't put things off till later... When he set himself a task, he did it.

SON Wonder of wonders.

MOTHER Not everybody has that.

SON It's a shame he was squandered in the army.

MOTHER Don't start...

WIDOW I brought a picnic. How's it look?

SON Of course, he has the thanks of a grateful nation.

WIDOW Here...have an apple.

MOTHER He looks great in uniform.

WIDOW Women love a man in uniform...
(*She laughs*)

MOTHER That laugh. That stupid laugh.

WIDOW I'm sorry.

SON You're always saying sorry, miss.

MOTHER Better that than giggling.

SON Maybe this place has that effect on you...or maybe it's my mom's complements?

MOTHER You'll lose that arrogance of yours. In the army.

SON Sure I will...I'll lose everything.

WIDOW It's beautiful here...so beautiful.

MOTHER This land has seen a lot.

SON You don't like this place.

MOTHER This is where my father's health failed. He insisted that this land would keep him up. It kept up the German, so why not us? He couldn't club a hog. He'd stare out over our heads, his lips never came together... "Like a retard," my mother said... He fled to the church. He'd given up research for cow dung... He walked around the village in threadbare pants and sang the children Gypsy songs. I ate a lot of crow. Before the war, his eyes exuded pride... I've seen pictures... But all I had looking at me were the eyes of a retard... "My sweet little Shirley Temple", my mother cried, and she put my hair in ringlets. "I'll save you... You'll see streetcars and cafes... You'll be a lady... A lady in boots the color of Höflinger chocolate." She took me away... She knew what she was doing... I was afraid of this place... The sticky walls, always something scratching away inside... And now...who would have thought...I'm back here again.

WIDOW A stork.

MOTHER Sorry?

WIDOW A stork...there.

MOTHER Lovely.

SON Maybe it's on its way to eat its young.

MOTHER What are you talking about?

SON They throw the weaker hatchlings out of the nest. They tear them to pieces and feed them to the stronger ones.

WIDOW Weird.

MOTHER Nature's law.

WIDOW You couldn't tell by looking at them.

SON I remember that during one of those vacations I climbed up on the roof and looked into one of their nests. God-awful mess. A used condom, cans, some dirty old newspapers, pieces of wire, and in all that: eggs.

MOTHER Can't trust storks.

WIDOW No, you can't. (*laughs*)

Ursula and Her Story. Scene 2.

URSULA (*To the audience*) It's a good thing you didn't go down to the river... I'm not going to the river. I'm looking after the house. I have my own key. I close it, I open it, and then I close it and open it. They don't know I have a key... You really must listen to the bit about Elza and my dad. And the bike... When you go down to the river from our house, you pass a smallish rise on your right. It's perfect for riding your bike down. My dad had a bike. A green one. He sat me on the frame, and we sped down it. And I would laugh and press my head against his face. His moustache would brush against my neck. He had this thin, straight little moustache. Like Uncle Carl, Sleeping Beauty's father. Because Elza and I mostly played Sleeping Beauty. I was the evil witch. Elza was the good princess, and my brother Hans was the prince – he was good, too. He was awfully embarrassed about the kiss at the end. He always ran away. We didn't want him to, because the game is pointless without the prince, so I came up with the idea that Elza would hold a lump of sugar in her lips, and that she would push it into his mouth with her tongue just when they were about to kiss. And Hans really liked that. So much that we would just play the ending. Like this (*she kisses her ragdoll*). I was a little jealous of Elza. But then my dad had a bicycle, and hers didn't... (*To someone in the audience*) You be the prince. Want to? You have to wake up Sleeping Beauty. She's asleep the whole time. Would you all like her to sleep? You do, you want her to be asleep!

Sunburned, Back in the Cool Shade of the House.

MOTHER My legs are all swollen from the heat.

WIDOW You should prop them up.

MOTHER It's better to keep them down, so they know their place.

SON (*Looking out the window*) There are some people out there looking at our house.

MOTHER More German visitors.

WIDOW They walk around, ask questions.

SON Now they're looking at a tree.

WIDOW I once saw them hug the trees and kiss the ground.

MOTHER That's not very German.

SON They're coming our way.

WIDOW They've been here before. They were poking around the barn.

MOTHER They're such a pain. And for what?

SON Did they say something?

WIDOW I don't know German.

MOTHER A good thing, too. Awful language.

WIDOW The articles are a pain.

SON They're standing by the fence.

MOTHER Thank you, but no thank you. They're not going to march their heavy boots through our house.

WIDOW God, those German women are ugly.

MOTHER Absolutely! Our women somehow age with class. But those Germans – no class.

WIDOW Their faces are so masculine.

MOTHER They're that kind of people. All men.

SON I'm going to invite them in.

MOTHER Don't you move!

SON You're right, they might start shooting.

MOTHER Go out to them, then. Tell them about your grandfather.

SON What do they have to do with him?

MOTHER Same language.

SON This is a piece of their history.

MOTHER Well, it's not my history.

SON No understanding for others.

MOTHER And the fact that they turned my father into a retard is what, some kind of extenuating circumstance?

SON Mom, stop it.

WIDOW Oh God... Oh God.

MOTHER They show up, they leave, it'll be fine. No point in standing around. The house needs cleaning. If we're going to have everything ready for the birthday.

*Enter Ursula. As usual, with a ragdoll, which is now a hideous little thief.
The Widow, Son, and Mother do not hear her.*

URSULA Fear us... You must fear us. I am Nightmare, the Evil Witch, and this is my faithful servant, Thieffy. We steal your secrets and lock them away in a dark dungeon. And there are rats in the dungeon, and they'll eat your secrets. And their tails will grow huge. And they'll have eyes like yours...because they'll be you. Your secrets are you... Nightmare, the Evil Witch, sees all, knows all, is all-powerful. She knows all the stories of the world, all the people, because she knows all the dreams.

"Let's go, Thieffy."

"At your service, mightiest among witches."

"Handle yourself well, and I'll give you some goose-liver pâté."

"How kind, my lady."

The First Stolen Secret. The Son's Dream.

Ursula speaks through the Thieffy doll.

SON I would like to submit my application for alternative military service.

URSULA Read it aloud.

SON I am submitting my request for alternative service on account of my worldview and express moral principles. I believe that it is unacceptable to use violence against another person, regardless of the situation around the world, regardless of the ruling government's policies. I support democracy, tolerance, and the necessity of resolving disputes in a peaceful manner. I am definitively opposed to aggression. I would not be capable of executing an order that would harm another living being, even on penalty of death. I would therefore like my principles to be respected.

I am prepared to fulfill my duty to my fatherland through hard and honest work during the term of my alternative service.

URSULA You don't want to join the army?

SON Like I just read...I don't like aggression, and I abhor guns.

URSULA Do you have some kind of phobia of guns?

SON No, I don't. I think the only reason they're around is to aim and shoot at other people, and I don't agree with that.

URSULA Are you at all afraid of your own behavior once you have obtained a gun?

SON No, I'm not afraid. My dislike of guns is simply a consequence of the moral principles I have professed.

URSULA Do you profess a religion other than Christianity?

SON I don't profess any religion.

URSULA So your religion wouldn't prevent you from serving in the military?

SON No... Like I've already said, we're talking about moral principles.

URSULA And if some bad guys were to torture your mother, you wouldn't shoot them?

SON I refuse to answer that question.

URSULA What did your grandfather do in '39?

SON Yeah, my grandfather was tortured in '39. So what?

URSULA You're not ashamed?

SON No, no, I'm not ashamed. Article 82 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland guarantees me freedom of conscience.

URSULA Your brother was a professional soldier?

SON What does my brother have to do with it?

URSULA He died four years ago. Do you know anything about that?

SON No, I don't.

URSULA He was supposed to have gone back to the desert. He's not there now.

SON I'd like to leave now.

URSULA You have the same great potential as your brother...even greater.

SON Is that all?

URSULA That's all. Your application has been rejected.

Phone Call to His Father.

Father is present on stage.

SON Hello? Dad?

FATHER Yes, son?

SON They want to put me in uniform.

FATHER My, you really have grown up.

SON I don't know what I should do.

FATHER It is the duty of every citizen to defend the independence and sovereignty of the fatherland... Just kidding.

SON They want me to be just like my brother.

FATHER Grease somebody's palm, and that's that. No one will touch you.

SON I don't give bribes.

FATHER I'll send you some cash...you'll take care of it...

SON How do I tell mom?

FATHER Don't tell her anything for now. Listen, don't stay there... Don't waste your time.

SON I'm going to stay.

FATHER You know, I haven't been able to sleep...for a long time. I have a pain in my chest from not sleeping. I tried counting sheep.

SON Count kilometers.

FATHER I'm starting to be afraid of the end of the day.

SON Take some pills... I have to go.

FATHER Hello? Are you there? Come to me.

SON To hell with your America.

Widow Cannot Sleep.

SON Trouble sleeping, miss?

WIDOW I feel weird... It's this wind.

SON It was windy then, too.

WIDOW No one could sleep that night. The house was packed with guests.

SON My brother was supposed to go to the desert in the morning.

WIDOW I really don't know why I'm talking to you about this.

SON It's high time.

WIDOW I have to go.

SON Stay, miss. I'm sorry.

WIDOW Funny... Now you're the one apologizing.

SON You were wearing dark glasses.

WIDOW It was summer.

SON Are you embarrassed?

WIDOW You don't understand anything.

SON I'm trying to be nice.

WIDOW You don't have to be nice.

SON Why were you leaving, miss?

WIDOW I had no idea where I would go.

SON Under the nearest rock.

WIDOW I could have stopped him that night...

SON I saw the whole thing.

WIDOW That day... I wanted to surprise him. I dyed my hair...painted my nails...

SON And your mouth. He went up to you...yeah...and wiped it off. Wiped at it like it was graffiti in some dirty old doorway.

WIDOW I shouldn't have made myself up.

Ursula and Her Story. Scene 3.

URSULA (*To the Widow*) Don't be afraid. To you, I'm not Nightmare, the Evil Witch. Look: Thieffy is gobbling down his meatloaf. He's taking a break from his dark deeds. Do you hear the wind? It's really blowing out there, which means it's listening to what people are saying and carrying it to the four corners of the world... That's what my dad said... My dad was a good host. Everybody loved him. There was a pigeon coop next to the barn. Dad adored his pigeons. White ones. Snow-whites. He joked that he was going to teach them to bring letters to my mom. Because, throughout the war, dad would travel far from home. He taught people from around the world how to work. Other people should follow the example of us Germans, dad would say, and he'd toss me high into the air. They also had pigs where he worked. He often took them some rotten rutabaga, pickled beets, stale bread. Those pigs'll eat anything...he'd say. Mom didn't like pigeons. I remember how delighted she was when Hans shot one. It was the first time dad'd let him shoot his gun. Because dad had three great things: his mustache, his bicycle, and his pistol. Hans said the coolest thing is a uniform, but I didn't like that sour smell. For the Fuhrer, dad shouted, and released the pigeons. And Hans shot and shot. He managed to hit one. He was pleased. Dad was, too, but mom most of all. Then Hans said that the coolest thing is really the pistol. He marched around singing: „Am Adolf Hitler Platz, steht eine junge Eiche, strebt zur Sonne auf von Sturm und Not“... Do you know it? You really should. It went sort of like this (*hums*). I'll teach you the words. You want me to? So, repeat after me... Teach it to your children. Boys like it... You can march to it. Here we go! “Am Adolf Hitler Platz, steht eine junge Eiche“...

Mother and Son by the River.

SON There's a stronger current today.

MOTHER Don't sneak up on me. I can't stand when you creep around like that.

SON I'd like to speak with you.

MOTHER How tricky this river is. Look at those whirlpools.

SON You're not listening.

MOTHER Yes I am.

SON Then look at me.

MOTHER I hear everything.

SON You can't even look at me...

MOTHER Your brother's birthday is coming up. Why isn't he here yet?... Sometimes I think he's out there somewhere... Maybe he's lost his memory and can't find his way home...

SON I'm sure he has his compass and pocket knife.

MOTHER Such insolence. It's unacceptable.

SON I know very well what's acceptable.

MOTHER You've figured out what you want to be. You'll be disappointed, and then you'll be sorry.

SON I sort through garbage...and I know what I don't want to be.

MOTHER Because you put it on a t-shirt? Because you demonstrate with a bunch of freaks and shout until you lose your voice? You play at life... But your brother...your brother grapples with life and does so with honor...he's seen a thing or two...he's been to war. You think you're better than him.

SON He shot at people.

MOTHER He swore that he would. It's a matter of honor.

SON He followed idiotic orders.

MOTHER You have to hold fast to something. To have some important thing to see to in this world. And not to run around in bright shorts. Before you know it, you start to look like a retard. That's not for any sons of mine; I won't allow it.

SON You only have one left.

MOTHER You have no right to speak that way. I am his mother, and I know... I know.

SON I have a mother, too. I can't get her to stop hugging a corpse.

MOTHER You're just like your father. Weak... It's easiest to give up.

SON It's been four years. They found his uniform on the shore...

MOTHER I want to see the body.

SON The fish have eaten it up.

MOTHER Leave me alone...

SON I didn't want to.

MOTHER Leave me alone!

*On the Phone to Father.
Father is present on stage.*

SON Dad!

FATHER Yes, son...

SON It's been four years now...

FATHER A lot of time...

SON What do you do for fun?

FATHER You think that all I'm doing here is having fun? I'm working hard here.

SON Yeah, I know.

FATHER After work, I take the subway and observe. All the blacks, the yellows, the swarthy. All the strange people, all the suspicious packages, bags, and purses. I've already called the police twice.

SON I'm proud.

FATHER Really? We could all be together... Eight eyes are better.

SON Four.

FATHER What's that?

SON Nevermind... Dad... You knew... That my brother... You knew what was going on.

FATHER Where?

SON At home. At his home.

FATHER Your mother and I were at our place, they were at theirs. Your mother went there more often.

SON Nothing seemed weird to you?

FATHER I was sorry for the girl, because it was like she was in exile. Couldn't go dancing, couldn't go shopping... Though she's so weird... You couldn't tell by looking at her, and yet, typical Polish spoil sport...she ran to church too often.

SON I don't believe it. You didn't notice anything?

FATHER I was minding my own business. And I advise you to do the same, and you'll go far.

SON Right...I'll mind my own business...and have fun.

FATHER How's your mother?

SON The same.

FATHER Does she ever...you know... Does she ask about me?

SON No, she doesn't.

FATHER Is she wearing her hair up or down?

SON Up.

FATHER Too bad... She looks pretty with it down.

SON I wouldn't know. I haven't seen it.

Ursula and Her Story. Scene 4.

URSULA (*To the Widow*) Dad got a motorbike! How delighted we were. He drove it along the fence. Back and forth, and all the kids, Elza, Hans, Renate, Liza, Gustaf – they all ran after him. The motorbike was really something. Dad took me out for a ride. Only me. The world's greatest dad. I didn't even get so mad when Hans got a bicycle. He was older, after all. It would have been a lovely day if not for the terrible fight. In the evening, mom screamed at dad that he was an utter fool and that she didn't want to see him again. Then, through the slightly open door, I saw her shaving the hair by his pee-pee, and he kept saying that it was just some camp scum, worthless, a trifle, and it was all because of Gypsy tricks. Mom was still really mad in the morning, but after a couple of days dad came home from work with a black braid. He waved it around as he was speeding on his motorbike. He had such strange eyes and drops of sweat on his forehead, and he smelled even more sour than usual. He kept saying feverishly: "Yavsha shto bohtalo... Yavsha shto bohtalo". Mom wasn't angry anymore, she threw the braid out down behind the doghouse and burned it. Then dad went far, far away to fight for our Germany, and I never saw him again... It's too bad that mom burned the braid. If I had it, I really would be a horrible Witch, right?

"Thiefy!"

"Yes, my lady?"

"Time to work for your jar of gooseberries."

"Two?"

"Don't forget who makes the rules around here."

"It will be as you wish."

"Get going!"

Second Stolen Secret. Mother's Dream.

(*Ursula, as Thiefy, speaks through the doll.*)

URSULA Knock knock!

MOTHER Who's there?

URSULA It's a surprise!

MOTHER Oh!

URSULA I'm glad I can deliver it to you personally.

MOTHER It's for me?

URSULA Please open it.

MOTHER I can't... I've forgotten how.

URSULA Please try.

MOTHER I can't remember the last time I received something.

URSULA Sent from the Office of Memory.

MOTHER These are my father's things...

URSULA As you know, ma'am, we have been working on remembering your father.

MOTHER Yes, of course.

URSULA I'm sorry to say that we can no longer do so.

MOTHER Why is that?

URSULA We no longer find it reliable.

MOTHER It's your obligation.

URSULA We're very sorry.

MOTHER He sacrificed everything for his fatherland. We didn't even have a dog, because he couldn't stand the barking.

URSULA What you can do, ma'am, is send these things to the IVM.

MOTHER I don't follow...

URSULA The Institute for the Verification of Memory. Their job is to separate the wheat from the chaff in tragic historical events.

MOTHER He was a hero.

URSULA We have proof that your father didn't want to share his bread with his comrades in their deprivation as POWs.

MOTHER That's impossible.

URSULA The Institute for the Verification of Memory works on sorting heroes into the true and the false. The episode with the bread eliminates the possibility of counting your father among the true.

MOTHER What filth. You can't do this...

URSULA If you'd like to send these things on, that is, to the IVM, I could take them with me. Beginning tomorrow, the Institute of Memory will be known as the Institute for the Verification of Memory.

MOTHER No...I'm not giving you anything.

URSULA The world needs to know about the false heroes. To make this possible for the world, we're organizing an exhibition dedicated to those who have been verified. Your father's things are valuable items for us.

MOTHER Please leave!

URSULA I do wish you would reconsider.

MOTHER Please go!

The Son Is No Longer a Virgin .

SON I've been looking for you.

WIDOW I'm not going anywhere...

SON You've busted your lip!

WIDOW Yeah...

SON Please lick it.

WIDOW Did I get it?

SON That's much better.

WIDOW You once thought about something all the time. About something bad. And you really wanted it to happen.

SON Yeah... Maybe.

WIDOW No. You're a good guy.

SON You can't blame yourself, miss.

WIDOW I'm bad, but not so bad that I couldn't stop it.

SON Tiny knows. Tiny saw the whole thing.

WIDOW No... Don't touch me...

SON Often, when you were asleep... I'd sneak into your room...and watch you sleep. I looked

at your knee sticking out from under the blanket...I'd lift the blanket...you were sleeping so peacefully... I'd go back to my room and jerk off... For the fallen! Till I swooned...

WIDOW You have the air of a little brat...

SON You had bruises on your shoulders...just like mine...I thought. I was always terribly bruised. As boys are... Tiny, and you, miss. What do you have there? Where are these scars from?

WIDOW Aiii.

SON What did you do?

WIDOW Good little boy. It's no big deal.

SON I think about you all the time.

WIDOW That can't be.

SON You deserve better.

WIDOW I don't want sympathy...

SON I could do a lot for you, miss.

WIDOW I'm not complaining...I just want him back. For things to be like they were...

SON You have such soft skin.

WIDOW You can't. It can't be.

SON I've never...

WIDOW Tiny... Stupid Tiny.

The Brother's Birthday. A Photograph.

SON What's that?

MOTHER What, you don't recognize it?

SON An altar?

MOTHER They set it beautifully... A solid frame...glass. The way it should be done.

SON Maybe I should go pick some flowers?

MOTHER I don't know how it happened that we haven't had his picture in the house until now?

SON Because in this house we're not in the habit of having pictures on display.

MOTHER I don't know if this is the best place. Maybe it'd be better here?

SON No, here is great. There's room for flowers...incense.

MOTHER He has to know that we think about him. We'll make an effort to reach out to him.

SON And what does the lady of the house say to that?

MOTHER Sorry?

SON You should ask.

MOTHER I'm not going to ask about anything...

SON Can't you be nice to her?

MOTHER I see it in your eyes... Her husband wasn't dead yet.

SON You hate her.

MOTHER She should have been faithful. You know what that means to a soldier?

SON Did you see what he did to her? Did you see her thighs, her shoulders? "This way she'll be faithful, Mom." Didn't he say that?

MOTHER She did it herself.

SON You're lying... He kept her here, far from anybody, so she wouldn't have a chance to run away. And when he came back, he checked around...like a dog...looking for the body. He sniffed around every scrap of her...

MOTHER That was their business.

SON You let it happen. You left her alone with it.

MOTHER A woman is always alone. She had a roof over her head and something to eat... She had dresses and necklaces... She didn't say anything...just looked with those big eyes of hers.

SON How many awful things can happen in one place? You knew about all of it. The two of you hounded her. A regular little family Gestapo!

MOTHER Get out of here. From now on I have only one son.

SON You've only had one son this whole time.

Son and Widow.

SON Tiny'll get by. Tiny has always gotten by somehow. Tiny...he wasn't there. He learned to be as little seen as heard. He was not to be found within the field of vision... He ate, drank, and grew like a plant... As if I'd come to the world by popping out of a bud. My mother was always tense whenever she saw me... She'd ask if everything was alright, as if there were something on her conscience... As if I'd had stains on my clothes. I'm naughty... A single day went well in my mother's life. The day my brother came into the world. It was only with him, just with him that she would smile. He'd arrive in a uniform that suited him to a T...she choked the air to call him a hero. She'd stretch her legs out on the sofa, and he'd massage her

feet. I'd walk by on some pretext... for a comic book or something. He told these funny...really very funny little stories, and she'd laugh... Jesus, did she laugh. Please, miss! I have very bad thoughts.

WIDOW You have a fever. Your mouth is so dry.

SON Is it even still possible to do something bad? Everything has already happened, and nothing's come of it.

WIDOW You're burning up.

SON Let's get out of here.

WIDOW Where would we go?

SON Far away... To some First Place.

WIDOW First Place?

SON Where we'll start all over again. We'll produce the First Children.

WIDOW I always wanted to have a lot of children.

SON The First baobab trees, vanilla, cinnamon, sapphires...lemurs. Let's go.

WIDOW Quiet... You won't remember any of this tomorrow.

SON You can't stay here, miss.

WIDOW You're so good to me. I saw that right away, on that first night when I came to say I was sorry.

SON You're not going to have to say you're sorry anymore, miss... What do you iron that uniform every day for? It should be burned...and those boots should be buried.

WIDOW I think about him all the time... He'll change...when he comes back...everything will be different. That night when the wind was blowing, when the house was full of people, and he wiped off my lipstick and tore my dress...I wished him ill... I had his gun in my hand, and if he returned...if he'd come back into our bedroom...I wouldn't have had the strength not to shoot.

SON It's too bad you didn't.

WIDOW What are you saying, child?

SON You can't leave me, miss. Now...that I've won you.

WIDOW You're so similar. Me and Tiny.

SON No one will catch us.

WIDOW I'm not running away...I won't make myself up...I won't die my hair. I'll wait. Leave me. Go.

The Third Stolen Secret. The Widow's Dream.

(Ursula, as Thieffy, speaks through the doll.)

URSULA Daughter...

WIDOW Thank you, God...you're here. I thought you were done talking to me. I did a bad thing.

URSULA I see all.

WIDOW I blamed you, God.

URSULA You asked...for some very bad things.

WIDOW Yes... I said I never wanted him to come back... That I wanted him to die...for him to be eaten up by dogs.

URSULA So, how does that sound to you?

WIDOW Bad...

URSULA And you also did some mean things, didn't you?!

WIDOW I did.

URSULA That's right... You think of yourself. You're selfish and impatient.

WIDOW I'm sorry, God.

URSULA You know that I give, but I also take away. You asked me for love and received it, but you didn't respect this gift. And I worked hard for it. It wasn't easy to find.

WIDOW I regret that... I regret what I've done.

URSULA I don't see it... I don't see it. Do you still have the gun?

WIDOW I do...

URSULA You wanted to do something foolish. And how does that look?

WIDOW Bad...

URSULA That's right... Give it here, for safe keeping...so you won't be tempted.

WIDOW That'll be better... It's hard, God...I don't know what I'm supposed to do.

URSULA Get ready to be slapped... Wait for it...and forget the foolishness.

WIDOW I'm always ready... I do it myself. Here, on my thighs and arms.

URSULA Good... I see all... I appraise it... That won't go uncounted.

WIDOW God...thank you.

Ursula to Thieffy.

-Thieffy.

-Yes, miss.

-You've earned a silver spoon.

-Are we done?

-Now I can give you back your freedom.

-You will?

-Nightmare, the Evil Witch, always keeps her word. Now run along.

War Letters.

Ursula, Mother and the Widow are reading letters. Ursula from her father on the Eastern Front to her mother, Mother from her father to her mother from Auschwitz, and the Widow from her husband in Iraq.

URSULA

My Love:

You write about troubles; sadly, we have to press on... As for me, if not for all of you I'd have put a bullet in my head long ago... Watching this mess here and the unlimited injustice in everything, you could lose your mind in despair. A horse is worth more than a person! To hell with it all. You ask, little one, who invented this war? The Germans started this war! [...] The enthusiasm was mad, especially in people who are right now sitting all snug at home. Reading your letter, where you write that the children are constantly asking about their father – it brought tears to my eyes. I miss you all so much, I don't know how much longer I can stand it. Day and night, I think only of being near you...

MOTHER

Dearest:

I write these letters without really believing that you'll ever read them... I carry them all with me, a testament to the powerlessness that envelopes me whenever I try to name what I see and feel here... I've ended up in Hospital Block 12 in Camp B II f. There are other doctors in here with me, of different nationalities. Their families were liquidated as soon as they'd arrived... It's so good that you made it, my love... that you're not here... As doctors, we have to save the bodies we go on calling patients. Really, they're already dead... But we're not allowed to think that way. We've received the clothes... of people from the transports. Civilian clothes allow me to maintain my human appearance... In the doctor's room I have a bed with sheets... I think of you.

WIDOW

Woman!

My ass is intact and feet are down... Every few hours they spray the base with fire. We don't move without our helmets and bulletproof vests on. The heat is 120 in the shade. We execute every order, even the dumbest ones, without grumbling and as best we can. Our colonel doesn't leave HQ but to go back and forth to the mess. From AC to AC. Anyone who thought this would be a beach vacation – they're shaking in their boots.

MOTHER

Not far from our barracks is the Gypsy camp. Whole families pass through here, mothers with children running, men and old-timers. They don't work. Colorful birds, the look of normal

life. On the grounds of the Gypsy camp is the experimental barracks. The lab director is a world-renowned pediatrician from Prague. Four years a prisoner of the camp. He does experiments on noma, that is, the facial gangrene that has infected the majority of Gypsy children. I've been assigned to help. For science?

URSULA

My Dearest: How are our treasures, Ursula, Hans, and little Liza? I am crying for you here. We lie like sandbags, one on top of the other. Every so often a sergeant from the KP visits us. We get vials labeled "Pervitin." After taking these tablets, we don't feel hungry, and we don't feel like sleeping. The lice and bedbugs don't leave us in peace day or night. My body is all scratched up. A man approaches madness and could go crazy – could you believe that even I can sometimes scream in fury?! I'm afraid of doing something really foolish.

WIDOW

Morning, foot patrol. Around every corner you see an insurgent stalking up and a dog strapped with an explosive charge. Everyone is suspect. You shoot to be sure... Think about what I'm living through here... Think about it whenever you have some foolish thoughts... You know what I'm talking about.

MOTHER

My Dearest:

What are you up to without me there? Alone... I think the worst... I dream of someone coming and, with one thick stroke, separating the good from the bad. No clear criteria for that here. No morally pure choice. All hope is in you.

URSULA

I must disturb you, my love, with certain questions. Among our soldiers there prevails an unpleasant and downtrodden mood with regard to our fatherland. They say here that the soldiers' wives aren't so faithful, that eighty percent of these women are running around with other men, taking advantage of their husbands' absence. Write to me whether this is possible, but there must be some truth in it.

WIDOW

This mission is looking more and more like a circus. We ride around in these frigging farm carts and old trucks. Stripped-down cars. Like in Saint Tropez, breeze, sunshine. No cover, no armor. But there's a bonus for each trip off base... I hope they extend my contract. We'll expand the house, we'll live well... One boy, young guy, got a letter from his girl...some limp-dick stuck it in her. You get that? He's out here, like, fucking collecting corpses, and she's there spreading her ass for some shit-heal... I'd kill her. I'd totally kill her.

URSULA

The temperature drops every couple hours. The sky and the ground here look completely different. All of us have blisters from frostbite. You don't know what I would give, my dear, for a pair of decent gloves. We kill dogs. Their skin is warm enough to bring us momentary relief... If only we could get out of this damned Russia, see it no more, forget all about it. The only thing I could hate more is you, were you to betray me. Forgive me, but this thought gives me no peace. I hope that you're done worrying your little head over that Gypsy braid.

MOTHER

I've been taking measurements of twins and dwarves. I compile the notes, observe patients whose minds have been infected. I'm fixing these pictures in memory. Death is not the worst

thing that can happen to you here. The patients ask for a fast-acting poison. I don't do it. I'm a doctor. I bring powders for wounds and bandages from the hospital. I pass them to prisoners from other barracks... Slight relief.

WIDOW

We're all fucking sappers. Yesterday two vanloads of wounded went into the air. And this is supposed to be a stabilization mission? It's a regular war. The Americans are equipped great. Technical wonders. "Shake 'n' bake" – phosphorus bombs, they melt muscle and burn skin. MK-77s – cluster bombs. They break apart into hundreds of pieces the size of pool balls. Depleted uranium shells. Sort of mini nuclear explosions. High-tech thermobaric bombs – they suck out the oxygen and kill with a shockwave, crushing people with enormous pressure. Of course, all these awesome things come on top of the standard equipment. And how do we look? We lack basic materials. The guys buy the parts they need from the Arabs at the bazaar. I hope you have all your parts where they should be.

URSULA

Dearest: My fingers refuse to obey. They're not capable of grasping this frosty rifle. There's been a blizzard for two days and two nights. We sit huddled up against a haystack, our only protection from the wind and the chunks of ice that bite our faces. We're huddled together like our piglets. The Russians are sitting on the other side of the haystack. Unfit for war, the same as us.

MOTHER

Vans marked with a red cross go daily toward the crematoria. Inside, they carry tins of Zyklon B. Greenish pellets the size of beans... They're poured through an opening in the roof of the crematorium... The gas first reaches the lower layers of air. I imagine those piles of bodies, those pyramids tangled together... Infants and children on the very bottom, then the elderly and women, and the strongest men at the top. And me – where?

URSULA

We're losing ourselves here completely... We're overcome with despair and depression. It's a living hell. Some people injure themselves in order to get out. They shoot through a slab of bread so that no one can see the powder burns. For the hardest cases, the medics keep ampules of morphine in their mouths so they don't freeze. We lie among corpses. The ground is too hard to dig graves.

MOTHER

Today our block's Reichsdeutsch covered the table with a damask tablecloth. He took out salt bacon, salami, canned food. Everything from today's transport. I recognize the Hungarian labels. I'm in agony, such that the food gets stuck in my throat... I was thinking of our child, whom we don't even have anymore, and maybe we won't have... How am I to tell him what I have become?

URSULA

I am unmoved by anything; I kill on my left, I kill on my right – the more I kill, the faster this will end. My eardrums burst with the detonations. The Bolsheviks are not people, they're animals, they just keep fighting with uncommon persistence, even when they're wounded and dying... I'm hungry! Hunger! If only this miserable war would end, I don't care how, just to get home, even on foot, even if I have to go on my hands and knees, if only to drag myself there and see my family and my fatherland one more time.

WIDOW

The bomb that was supposed to blow our car apart went off a few seconds too early. A few seconds. My friends from another patrol weren't so lucky. Bodies torn to shreds... Maybe everything torn off of some... I don't know. One completely burned, actually charred. He's alive. That's what I'm most afraid of. If I come back without my legs, with scars all over my body, promise me that you'll finish me off.

MOTHER

My experience here is one of terrible arrogance... I can't write anymore. I no longer have an internal "no"... It's dead. I'm consumed with dread at the thought of the reality awaiting me just past the gate. There's no desire in me to face up to it... Paradoxically, I dream of you... I hope that you'll find someone who will love you as much as I have.

The Son, Alone with a Pistol.

SON She plucked me like a week... It means nothing to her. Nothing... If only she had seen how he would be. How he pissed himself... He had to go back to the desert... honor and fatherland... "I've come to bid you farewell, little brother." He pressed his strong, fat fingers into my cheeks. "You're still little, and you don't know how shitty this is." Son of a bitch... He put the pistol to my head. "Grow up, because you have to deal with all this shit... If your big brother doesn't come back... You know... some quick burst of fire, or fuck-all..." He reeked of vodka and fresh puke... Too bad he didn't shoot... It must have been a riot for him... I couldn't calm these fucking muscles... When I look at her, I feel a desire to shoot... Or maybe I should shoot myself? Maybe my mother? Everyone has something that's reason enough not to go on living... every one of us has somebody to whom we're just some pile of shit, an eyesore, decomposing and betraying what we eat, what we use to wipe our asses, whether we floss... She put up wire fencing around my head, with her fear. She throws her own damage in my face. I was quiet inside, and now something is buzzing within me. How much am I me, and how much am I somebody else... He tore off her nail, and she mewed like a cat... That's her submissiveness. It's worse than plague... Silence... as if nothing had happened... Is she nuts? She lies... Everyone lies... I just want to tell it like it really was. Tiny saw the whole thing, Tiny knows... Tiny's bad... Whose fault is this? Who did it? Who...

Father on the Phone.

Father is present onstage.

FATHER You don't call. I was waiting.

SON I'm at the front, dad. I'm taking care of business.

FATHER I'm taking care of business, too. Yesterday I reported some Arab on the subway. He was suspicious. The police took him in. The sheriff pat me on the back. You know, one of those policemen with a metal plate on his chest. They have these really cool plates. Respect. Full respect...

SON You're in the enemy's camp. I have you in my sights.

FATHER Don't talk like that... Don't do anything stupid.

SON And why should I do something stupid, huh?

FATHER Something's going on, son. Something bad.

SON That's none of your concern, you coward...you piece of shit.

FATHER Maybe I should call back later.

SON Don't call. Understand? You don't exist. You were done the moment you left. "I have to earn our bread, son. Remember to be a decent person." You ran away...

FATHER I couldn't...not with her... When your brother disappeared...she became like herring: cold and salty. I couldn't stand how she goes on believing...she left her work, the city she loved so much, me – and for whole days she sat staring at that disgusting river... Life was over... And there was always you...I don't know what to call it...

SON In another sector...

FATHER Exactly...something like that.

SON I was counting on you, dad.

FATHER I'm useful... I help the police keep this city in order... I work like a horse. Let's stick together, son...

SON (Shoots) Right.

FATHER What was that?

SON You're done. Don't call again.

Order.

Son, with the pistol, as in the dream. He's bashing the framed portrait of his brother.

SON Enough of this shit!

MOTHER Leave it... I just framed that.

SON I see that some people are still deaf! Some are still blind.

MOTHER God... What's happened to you? It's because of her! The witch.

WIDOW Stop it, Tiny.

SON Tiny is gone! Forget about Tiny! Tiny's back in Tinyland. Spit on the picture!

WIDOW What?

SON I said spit on it!

WIDOW Stop.

SON Come on!

MOTHER Leave her alone.

SON You stay out of it.

MOTHER You have no right to spit on that picture.

SON Spit on it! Don't listen to her. She hates you as much as she hates me.

WIDOW You don't know anything. Put that down.

SON (*Burns the photograph of his brother*) That's that!

WIDOW Stupid Tiny... It's just a picture. Mine. I'm the one who took it. To calm the fever in my body, which wouldn't let me sleep. Your brother was right, he knew me... That's why I hate him most.

SON You're lying.

MOTHER Crazy woman. From God-knows-where. What are you doing here, anyway? Get out of here already, out of this house!

WIDOW I have to wait here. I have to...

SON You know, mom...on the night my brother, your son, died, she... She was thinking about very bad things. She was waiting for him with a gun in her hand, and...you put it so well before...that you didn't have it in you...how did you put it?

WIDOW That I didn't have the strength not to shoot...

MOTHER Murderess.

The light goes out. Ursula appears in the brother's uniform holding a candle.

SON My brother...

WIDOW My husband.

MOTHER My son.

SON Drowned...

WIDOW He's watching us.

MOTHER So gaunt. Right from the road.

SON Maybe it's not him...

WIDOW His uniform...

MOTHER His profile.

SON Tiny knows, Tiny saw the whole thing... That night...I was there...by the river... I saw.

MOTHER Son.

SON I saw him...take off his boots...his uniform. I saw him stagger, take a swig of

vodka...and get smaller and smaller... There was a terrible wind blowing that night... The leaves on the bushes were hitting me in the face... There was a strong current. I stood there. In the background you could hear the music from our house and the guests laughing. I couldn't move. I couldn't cry out...I didn't want to. Go...it's better for you this way... He went down...he disappeared under the water. I didn't even try to help him.

MOTHER What are you saying? He came back, after all.

SON The fucking drunk drowned...

WIDOW God... God, take back your merciless little gift... Love is not patient... It's not polite... It's filled with envy... It's carried away by hubris... It's shameless... It seeks its own... It's filled with rage... It does not forget a wrong... It does not forgive... It does not outlast everything... I don't trust you...God...don't talk to me anymore. I won't hear you, I don't want to hear you... Let him bloat up in the water, let predatory fish eat his eyes out, let whirlpools gnash his heart, let his arms get tangled around his neck, let his mouth get blocked up with muck and stones grow into his skin. Let his hair take root on the bottom of that goddamn river... Let a ribbon of ice cover the river forever... We'll light a bonfire on it and dance till morning... Without pain, without fear... We'll dance all through the night...

MOTHER My son, my beloved little boy.

SON You cut out his tongue, you gouged out his eyes... After all, one pair of eyes is good enough for two, one tongue is good enough for two... Tiny knows, Tiny saw the whole thing... That night...while that terrible wind was blowing...he came to you... You wanted him to rub your feet...as usual... He didn't want to go back to the desert... You were the only one who knew. He was afraid...all he was waiting for was for you to tell him there wasn't really anything to be afraid of...that he didn't have to go back there.

MOTHER They'll tear my heart into quarters.

The Son shoots at his brother. The apparition does not vanish. It moves towards them with the candle.

WIDOW It's a ghost...not a person.

SON That's not him.

MOTHER It's a little girl.

WIDOW A little kid.

MOTHER This house is cursed...for us to live our lives on graves... My father was digging...behind the shed...he wanted a little soil to build up the tomatoes... He pulled out some rag...then an entire body...this little blond girl... My father carried her to the forest...my mother lit a candle. We couldn't forget it. It's not something you can forget... But we did.

WIDOW A weary, wandering spirit.

SON It's taking off the uniform.

MOTHER It's opening its mouth.

WIDOW It wants to tell us something.

URSULA They used to say in our village that when someone with poor eyesight suddenly starts reading without glasses, it means that death is on its way. And Elza's grandmother started reading the newspapers without glasses, and she'd been nearly blind for ten years... Then our soldiers rode through the village on their motorbikes... That was a sight. Hans and I stared at it all day... It's over now... It's over now, my mother kept saying. The Ivans are devils, all the women in the village were saying. There was a terrible commotion, mama packed our things into trunks. She told me and Hans to put them on the wagon. I packed all the costumes we used in our games with Elza, and I hid them in a hole behind the shed. I was afraid they'd fall off the wagon while we were running away. Mama said we wouldn't be coming back here, but I didn't believe her. She wanted to throw away the key. I took it and hung it around my neck. I knew we'd be back, me, mommy, little Liza, daddy, and Hans. Hans put on his Hitlerjugend uniform and said that he'd protect us. Mommy ordered him to take it off this instant, and that's when Hans and I understood that something really bad was happening, because mama usually adored when Hans would walk around in his uniform. Once the wagon was full, we rolled it into our barn. I was glad, because Elza and the other girls were already there, and all the women from the village. Mama was nervous, since we had to wait for the evacuation order, so she told us to unroll our blankets and go to sleep. I was glad to sleep next to Elza, we huddled close together and weren't cold, and we could talk all night. We were awakened by the women screaming. "Die Russen kommen! Die Russen kommen!" The whole village was going crazy. The women were running alongside the packed wagons, ready for departure. Our neighbor, Renate, ran toward the river. Along with her daughters, Alma and Erna. To drown themselves... Mama is mumbling sort of strangely... pulling me, Hans, and little Liza onto the loft of the barn. Hans runs away, and little Liza is crying her head off. Now the other women are in the loft. They scramble to find twine, they take off their stockings and belts. We're going to hang ourselves, mama says.

Outside, you can hear the stamping of heavy boots. I look through the window and hear a shot. Stupid Hans... *(she animates the doll, places twine around its neck)* Mama puts twine around little Liza's neck, she doesn't let her cry. She hits her in the face. They're really hurrying with the hanging. Other women wheeze horribly, unable to die. I ran away. I wanted to go back home... there was a line of soldiers in front of the door. Elza lay inside... Sleeping Beauty. She didn't move. They went up to her one after the other and... wanted to wake her up. Just like Hans... Other soldiers are singing by the stove. One of them takes me on his knee and strokes my head. He smells a little like my dad. He has maybe a hundred watches on his arms. Strapped all in a row. He's smiling. He has the face of a troll. Where did they all come from? They must have come down the chimney... I remember that mama is still up in the loft, and I go back to the barn. They let me leave. "Málenka, málenka", they keep saying. It's terribly quiet up in the loft. Old Friede has foam on her mouth, but she's still alive. She hasn't been hanging long enough. Little Liza's not crying anymore. She's rocking, like in her crib. I get onto a sack of oats, mama puts the twine around my neck. You have to jump, she says. Jump! I jump...

This is my house. It's white, with a little red roof. The windows aren't too big, with brown shutters. The window sills have boxes with yellow flowers... You're like the wind. You go on telling my story. To the whole world. And it will be a kiss from the wind, a kiss from everybody, and then Sleeping Beauty will wake up and never fall asleep again. Otherwise, Nightmare, the Bad Witch, will take your secrets and lock them in her dark dungeon. And throw away the key. And dungeons have rats, and they'll eat up all your secrets... You don't

like me? Naughty Ursula? It's my fault? What really happened? All I wanted to do was tell my story... There's nothing wrong with that... is there? This is my house. It's white, with a little red roof. The windows aren't too big, with brown shutters. The window sills have boxes with yellow flowers.

(Ursula sings and exits)

Der Tag war grau,
Der Tag war schwer,
Und stürmisch ging die See,
Nun klärt es auf von Westen her,
Die Brandung glänzt wie Schnee.
Ums Achterdeck die Möwe fliegt
Und leiser kommt der Wind,
Der mich in gold'ne Träume wiegt,
Antje, mein blondes Kind.

Antje, Antje,
Hörst du nicht von ferne das Schifferklavier,
Antje, Antje,
Das Lied soll Dich grüßen von mir.

The Calm after the Storm.

Mother and Widow sit by the river. Widow massages Mother's feet and reads a letter from Tiny.

Dear Miss:

I hope that you do not think ill of me. That you have found an explanation for my fit of madness. It's the sort of thing that can happen to anyone. It lands on your head like a bit of plaster. And nothing is the same as it was. What's inside us just wakes up. It discovers its own helplessness. Its own degradation, and one never comes out of indignity unscathed. Once freed, love of self can lead anywhere. You turn into pure hatred. You sip it drop by drop. And before you know it you're the person you despised. Looking at what has occurred in our microcosm and in the so-called wider world, it's regular people who are hatched out of every wickedness, out of the sorrow of abandonment. Not crazies. There is no *inhuman* depravity. Everyone has the right to choose, and the bad choice fit me better, as it is, in principle, a better fit for mankind. I don't know how to express this more clearly, but I believe that you won't think it just the mutterings of some crazy adolescent. Everything that passed is still real. I hope that you also remember the good times, miss, those seconds, those glimmers of crushing brightness. Because there were those, too. There always are. Perhaps my flight into the wild whiteness of Greenland will allow me to rebuild myself. Please look after my mom. Farewell. Tiny.

MOTHER So many thoughts in that young head.

WIDOW They'll bring him relief, but they'll also lead him to temptation. Like this river.

MOTHER It finally spat out the body.

WIDOW I was with him in the morning. I washed the plaque.

MOTHER And did you visit the little girl?

WIDOW Yes. The gravestone came out lovely. Modest.

MOTHER That's good. Maybe I'll go myself tomorrow. I'll light a candle.

WIDOW As if looking at us from an airplane, this is our river, that's the house, here are these sort of smallish blotches, and so many tragic stories in this one blotch. It can't be concealed.

MOTHER A stork.

WIDOW What?

MOTHER A stork. There.

WIDOW Maybe a female?

MOTHER Could be.

WIDOW Yeah. It's looking for frogs.

The End

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