

THE LAST SONDERKOMMANDO

By: David Libman

Spot forms on Doctor ISTVAN KOLODNEY, an elderly, grey-haired man typing with great absorption. Sounds begin to form out of the darkness:

"Raus! Raus! Schnell! Antraten! Antraten!"

A pistol shot.

"Raus! Raus!"

A thud simultaneous with a stifled scream.

A pistol shot.

A series of pistol shots followed by sound of machine gun.

Marching cadence:

"links, zvei, drei, fier - links, zvei, drei, fier."

A head count:

"Zveihundert fier, zvei hundert funf, zveu hundert zex, zvei hunder ziben," etc. Possibly up to two hundred twenty interspersed with **sounds of blows, shots, marching sounds, groans,** etc. It must be made evident that all these sounds are being evoked by memories associated with the typing.

Two figures appear - at first dimly - in the background.

Both are **dressed in the uniform of the S.S.** One is an officer, DOCTOR FRANZ SPRINGER, short, trim, a bit elegant, in his mid-thirties. The other is a sergent, OBERSCHARFURHER LINZ, a gross, burly man in his forties.

Both approach Doctor KOLODNEY as if they were also being evoked. LINZ is stolid-faced. SPRINGER is smiling with a trace of affectionate condescension. Springer stops several feet behind Doctor Kolodney but Linz continues forward. He places a hand on Kolodney's shoulder and a firm grip begins to form.

Kolodney, as if he were under a spell, rises without turning.

The sound of typing continues as do the sounds of the concentration camp. Kolodney is drawn into the darkness of the back stage as Springer watches. At some point, Kolodney sees Springer and as the lights fade they are gazing intently at each other. **Blackout.**

Lights up on the SonderKommando bunkroom in Crematorium #1.
It is furnished fairly comfortably with bunkbeds, lockers,
tables, and chairs. There is an elaborate wrought-iron chess
set; a game has obviously been abandoned while in progress.
There is a Swiss Cuckoo clock on one of the walls.
The room is empty.

BIEBER, a stooped, bald man of about forty enters.
 He is wearing striped prisoner's burlap and appears exhausted.
 He is heading for his bunk when the clock strikes the hour.
A bird emerges and emits seven cuckoos.
 It halts Bieber in his tracks.
 He gazes at it, mouth agape.
 When it stops, he continues to gaze at it for a short while.
 A shudder runs through his body.
 He goes quickly to his bunk and gets in, shoes and all, curling
 up like a fetus.

KARL, a strapping man in his mid-thirties,
 and ANDREAS, a slim, handsome man in his early twenties, enter
 together.

BIEBER and ANDREAS wear a YELLOW STAR on their shirts.
 KARL wears a RED TRIANGLE.

Andreas, who is weeping, is in Karl's comforting embrace.

KARL

I'll get you somethin' to drink.

**(Takes a step towards a well filled liquor cabinet, notices
 the recumbent Bieber)**

A drink, Herr Bieber? A little cognac?

BIEBER

(His back to them and the audience)

Cuckoo-cuckoo-cuckoo-cuckoo-cuckoo-cuckooo-cuckooo.

(Pause)

KARL

He's getting worse.

(He slugs a shot glass of cognac)

(To Andreas)

You should have let me drag them out.

ANDREAS

They were clinging to each other.

KARL

You dumb kid.

ANDREAS

Kissing each other passionately. At their age - I had to pry them apart. Uncle Gerhard and Aunt Lily - imagine.

He had his hand on her breast.

KARL

Spare yourself, you dumb dumb kid. What are you proving!?

What's the fucking purpose of it!?

What kind of exercise is this on yourself?

ANDREAS

(Bitterly histrionic)

Can't you guess? I am stirring the literary juices! It's called "a logical derangement of the senses." I am, after all, the Auschwitz Rimbaud!

KARL

Horseshit. Now stop driving yourself crazy. It won't help.

(Indicating Bieber)

You think he suffers less?

ANDREAS

Something really graphic, Karl - a scene like that. Something that will sell books by the millions. At the end, Rimbaud cared only for money, did you know that?

(Pause)

KARL

You're an overeducated Jewish fool. Have a drink.
Let it pass. It'll pass. You dumb kid.

(Karl fixes drinks)

In America they say mud in your eye.

(He Chuckles)

Hair of the dog that bit you.

(APPLEBAUM, a wiry man in his thirties enters)

APPLEBAUM

(To Andreas)

I heard about your relatives. My sincerest sympathies.

(To Karl, indicating Bieber)

Is he all right? How is he?

(He crosses to the immobile Bieber - Suddenly...)

BIEBER

Cuckoo-cuckoo-cuckoo-cuckoo-cuckoo-cuckoo-cuckoo.

APPLEBAUM

(Extremely agitated)

His condition reflects on all of us! If we could hold out for a few more weeks, the war will be over!

KARL

(Quiet Menace)

Shut up - or I will break your nose, Herr Applebaum.

(A Strained silence)

ANDREAS

Go take yourself off to the Puff, Herr Applebaum. The whores are waiting for you.

(Pause - Applebaum, as deliberately as he dares, goes to the door)

APPLEBAUM

I am truly sorry about your relatives, Andreas.

(He starts to go, turns back)

After all, these women are not here out of my doing. So why not make use of them? It would do both of you good if you came with me. Women, when they are especially sad, can be very sexy I am finding.

(Pause)

KARL

Get the fuck out of here. Go.

(Applebaum leaves, grimly resentful)

If I killed him - do you know what they'd do - they'd execute us. All of us. Unauthorized destruction of state property. Oh yeah. My fucking German Volkschaft? We are a country of rational maniacs!

ANDREAS

The dreams of reason breeds monsters - do you know who said that, Karl? The dreams of reason breeds monsters?

KARL

Who?

ANDREAS

What famous 17th century Spanish painter said those very words?

KARL

(Dismissingly)

Shut up. You're an overeducated Jewish fool. So fucking superior.

ANDREAS

Francisco Goya. He painted monsters of a human variety. Ever been to the Prado in Madrid, Karl? Fantastic. And stay at Augustino's off the Puerta Del Sol. Great breakfasts and very reasonable. And ask for Consuela. She'll do anything you want - brilliantly.

(LASZLO and SPIRO enter, both wear YELLOW STARS on work uniforms. They are stumpy men in their thirties. They go and sit at the chessboard. They gaze at it stolidly)

SPIRO

(Breaking the silence)

Move, you stinking Hungarian - your queen is threatened.

LASZLO

Oh - apologies Andreas - we won't play if it offends you.

SPIRO

(A sudden anger)

Who said!? You don't speak for me, my friend! He can drink!
What can I do with my stomach!?

ANDREAS

"Offend"? Or "me"? - what do you think, Karl? Are these words still functional? And the first person singular - no "I's" anymore. Obliterated.

KARL

This kid's got a paper asshole for sure.

LASZLO

My sympathies.

(They grimly resume the game. Long Pause)

SPIRO

(Reaching for a half-finished piece)

I had an uncle who loved strudel.

LASZLO

My father loved strudel. So did my mother. My brothers didn't like it. I can take it or leave it.

KARL

At least you had a family. You're lucky. I have nobody. Not even a distant cousin.

SPIRO

Who cares? They'd all be dead anyway. Except those in America. I had a chance to go to Chicago in 1938. When I heard how cold it was, I changed my mind. Check.

LASZLO
Check.

SPIRO
Once more - Check.

LASZLO
Check.

SPIRO
Back to you - Check.

LASZLO
And again - Check.

SPIRO
Check.

LASZLO
Check.

SPIRO
(Triumphantly)
Check - and mate.
(Pause)

LASZLO
You Greek son of a bitch. I'd like to slit your throat and
maybe I will someday.
(They start another game)

KARL
Do you know why I became a communist? Ask me why - originally -
I became a communist.

SPIRO
(Smirking)
The parties. The girls.

KARL

I had a good job. I was making good money.

I wasn't oppressed. I was lonely.

(Pause)

If I was married? If I had been a father? I never woulda had the nerve to oppose Hitler. What the hell did I think I was - immortal? A boy feels immortal. If I live to be thirty-six, it'll be a miracle.

(Pause)

I liked going to bed with pregnant women.

SPIRO

They can be very nice. Don't hurt the baby!

(He chuckles - remembering)

KARL

It turns me on.

SPIRO

It depends on the woman. Now if it's somebody else's child it's not so....

KARL

I would always imagine that the child inside her was me.

LASZLO

What is he talking about?

KARL

That I was the child inside her. The embryo.

(Spiro and Laszlo laugh. Karl takes it good-humoredly)

I know - I know what it makes me. But it would also make me sooooo tender. I was an excellent lover because I learned to use my imagination.

LASZLO

Any beer left?

SPIRO

No.

KARL

I was engaged seven times. Never married. I loved being engaged. I was always proposing marriage and then, with one thing or another, breaking it off.

LASZLO

My grandfather was married four times. And he had thirteen children. When he was on his deathbed, he asked the last one to bring him a picture of the first one. She wouldn't do it so he began to beg and plead. Then my father, who was her son - the first one's son - brought it to him. So the last one left crying her eyes out. But my grandfather died happy looking at the picture of his first wife. But the last one got all the money.

KARL

Why is it so easy to talk about absolutely anything with Jews? I actually never felt at home among Jews unless we were talking. So - here I am - among Jews who pull corpses out of gas chambers - at the Auschwitz Café' - ach! - I don't want to talk - I don't want beer - I want to fuck!

ANDREAS

So go to The Puff with Herr Applebaum.

KARL

I wish the hell I could!

ANDREAS

(Sarcastically)

You've never been to a brothel?

KARL

But these ain't whores. These are slaves. Maybe I'm not a true German. I like vice - but in the Danish style.

(BIEBER farts loudly; an ambiguous silence,)

(Then all laugh. JACQUES, a burly man in his thirties, enters wearing a prayer shawl and carrying a prayer book. He walks through the laughter and sits until it subsides)

JACQUES

(To Andreas)

I took the liberty of saying a special kaddish for your relatives.

(Pause)

ANDREAS

You amaze me.

JACQUES

I am beginning to amaze myself.

KARL

Let him alone. Why not? There could be a God. We're in hell - right? If there's a hell, there could be God, right? What kind of God? Ask me - What kind of God?

ANDREAS

(Ignoring the request)

Tell me, Jacques - when you stick your hands into the assholes of the newly dead looking for hidden valuables, do you still think God exists?

(Applebaum enters hurriedly)

APPLEBAUM

The Obersharfuhrer says they'll be no more transports for a week! He just got a communique'!

(Pause. A grim silence)

What do you think it means?

(Silence)

It's just not fair! The last sonderkommando stayed for over four months and we've not been at it for even two months yet! We were guaranteed three months at the least!!

BIEBER

Cuckoo-cuckoo-cuckoo-cuckoo....

(Applebaum leaps at Beiber and pulls him from the bunk)

APPLEBAUM

You Maniac! It's because of you they think we're no good anymore!

(Beiber suddenly animates and begins to strangle Applebaum. Oberscharfuhrer LINZ enters with Dr. KOLODNEY, now in his Mid-fifties, wearing civilian clothing. When they enter, In a sudden access of sanity, Beiber scurries back to his Bunk and remains still)

LINZ

(Good humored admonition)

Gentlemen! Gentlemen! What will Herr Doctor think of you?

(All except Beiber have risen to attention)

LINZ

Relax, he's one of your own - Chosen, nicht var?
A specee-ah-leest from Budapest - Herr Doctor Professor Kolodney. He is here to help Herr Doctor Springer with his research.

(Doctor Kolodney and the other tentatively nod)

A good bunch, Herr doctor, but after each transport they get a bit jittery. They are the ones who will supply you with your specimens. **(Indicating Andreas)** And here's our young genius. Wait till you hear him spout. Spout something for the Doctor, Genius. Quote some famous poet to him.

KARL

He's in no mood for it, Herr Ober. Have a drink. And what have you got for us today?

(Linz smiles, hands over cloth sack and fixes himself A drink. Karl examines the sack)

KARL

But where's the sulfa? You said there'd be sulfa.

LINZ

Sulfa didn't come with this shipment.

KARL

Come on, Linz. This is all aspirin and vitamin pills.

LINZ

It's not easy, you know. It's dangerous. I could be shot.

KARL

Oh horseshit - you're all a bunch of gangsters in here and you know it.

LINZ

Why you dirty communist bastard! Who do you think you're talking to!?

(Linz draws his pistol)

KARL

(Knowing he could be executed on the spot)

Okay-okay - take it easy! I apologize! I apologize!

LINZ

All of you are forgetting yourselves a little too much lately. You're all taking advantage of my good nature. You think all of this is easy for me? How many times have I asked for a transfer? But I'm a wounded Stalingrad veteran - and here is where they need me!

(He returns gun to holster)

KARL

That was a diamond, Herr Ober. And surely a diamond of that quality...

LINZ

I bring what I can.

KARL

Is worth more than a dozen boxes of aspirin.

LINZ

There's no sulfa to be had - except at the Front!

KARL

Then bring us more antiseptic.....or quinine.

(Pause)

LINZ

There's a shipment of something good coming in by the end of the week. It's called....I don't remember, but it's supposed to be good for the lungs. I'll bring you some of that - if I can.

(Pause)

Look - you fellas ain't such a bad bunch ,all things considered, but you gotta understand my position. Bullets won't bounce off my hide either, you know.

KARL

Come on, Ober - you're getting rich off us and you know it. If we let somebody else in on this, he'd get rich instead of you.

LINZ

Sure - but who says I'll ever get to enjoy it, eh?

KARL

We're all praying for you, Herr Ober - ain't that right, fellas?

(Linz' eyes narrow, but he shrugs off his pique rather quickly)

LINZ

Come Doctor, I'll show you the lab. It's just down the corridor. **(To Karl, about Beiber)** See he takes a shower. He can't do his job if he smells like a stuffed up toilet.

(He turns to leave)

APPLEBAUM

Herr Ober? Is it....true about the transports?

LINZ

What? Oh yeah - a week's rest. Enjoy it.

APPLEBAUM

(Very tentatively)

What can be the problem?

LINZ

Ask Heinrich Himmler. I only work here -heh- same as you.

(Pause. Linz hesitates. Speaks to all)

Look - I'm not heartless. I'm no damn Prussian. I'm a Bavarian and proud of it. But I got to be careful. My hide ain't magic against bullets either, you know. Come Doctor - we'll see the lab.

(Linz and Kolodney leave)

APPLEBAUM

Bastards! Slimy bastards!

JACQUES

(Has been examining contents of sack)

In a shoppe, I don't think these would be worth a hundred marks.

KARL

Diamonds are cheap in Auschwitz. It's medicines that are expensive.

ANDREAS

I wonder who he is, and what this so-called research is about.

APPLEBAUM

Herr Doctor Professor, no less. A spe-cee-a-leest.

SPIRO

Just another over-educated Jew. Like you, Laszlo. And our young genius here.

KARL

Who knows? Maybe he can help us. I'll find out if-

(A Loud thumping on the door)

VOICE (Off Stage)

Showers! Showers!

(The men rise and prepare themselves)

APPLEBAUM

(Pleading)

Herr Bieber - please. Please, Herr Bieber. What's the point? You must come. It's a shower, really only a real shower - believe me.

But if you don't come, it reflects badly on all of us.

(Pause. Bieber rises, grabs towel and soap)

SPIRO

Another game after dinner - you lousy Hungarian?

LASZLO

You slimy Greek - one of these days I'll volunteer you for "special treatment".

SPIRO

Not if I volunteer you first.

(All file out carrying towel and soap. As they leave, Laszlo's hand goes to Spiro's shoulder in a gesture of Comradeship. Pause - the room remains empty)

Lights Dim to BLACKOUT

Lights up on Lab, the main feature of which is a fully equipped dissecting table and instruments such as a bone saw, clamps, etc. which are spread on table and have obviously been removed from a large leather case which is open. Doctor Kolodney and SS Doctor Franz Springer (in uniform) are present. They have been drinking.

SPRINGER

So - when I saw your name listed - and from Budapest - I made sure I was personally there to greet you.

(He fills Kolodney's glass)

It's not bad this Polish cognac. The Poles can occasionally surprise us.

KOLODNEY

Thank you.

(Springer fills his own glass)

SPRINGER

Prosit.

KOLODNEY

Prosit.

(Pause)

SPRINGER

So - tell me doctor - what's been your most recent passion?

(Pause)

KOLODNEY

Spinal Cord.

SPRINGER

AH yes - some interesting work being done in Paris in that area.

KOLODNEY

Yes.

SPRINGER

Independent of your work?

KOLODNEY

We - ah - exchanged information with some regularity until....

SPRINGER

Of course. Well - perhaps some channels of communication can be opened. I'll see what I can do.

KOLODNEY

Thank you.

(Pause)

SPRINGER

(Rhetorical question)

In May of 1936, you operated in Brussels on one of the Thorwald Sisters.

KOLODNEY

..Yes..

SPRINGER

I was there - in the observation area. An energetic young buck in his first year of internship. I was the one who shouted the first "bravo!" - that was me. You looked at me and there was gratitude in your face.

(Springer beams. Kolodney smiles politely. Pause)

KOLODNEY

Herr Doctor - my wife and young daughter arrived with me yesterday... **(Springer stiffens - short pause)**

I would like to know if they are safe.

SPRINGER

How old is your daughter?

KOLODNEY

Just seventeen.

SPRINGER

And were they processed, do you know, to the trucks or on foot?

(Pause)

Trucks or foot?

KOLODNEY

Foot - yes - on foot.

SPRINGER

(With relief)

They are safe, Doctor. They've been assigned to D section in the Woman's Camp. I will see to their well-being personally.

KOLODNEY

Thank you.

(Pause)

SPRINGER

(An abrupt change of manner; business-like)

Officially, of course, we're engaged here at Auschwitz in studies of an anthropological nature: genetics, heredity - racial studies which do have their own....peculiar interest. Political interests - I'm sorry to say - are of....pre-eminent importance here. Do you understand?

KOLODNEY

I think so.

SPRINGER

Certain findings in certain areas will be encouraged whenever possible.

KOLODNEY

I understand.

SPRINGER

But there's also work being done here on dysentery typhus, nutritional studies, reproductive studies and - of course - your own work will certainly be encouraged.

(He breathes deeply, a relief to get this off his chest)

So..

(He Opens a gold cigarette case)

Egyptian - very fine tobacco and the paper has a most unusual texture.

KOLODNEY

Thank you.

(Springer lights both cigarettes)

SPRINGER

And - ah - before you rest and acclimate yourself to the surroundings, let me give you a word of advice. One must be flexible here. In Auschwitz, the supreme virtue is flexibility.

KOLODNEY

Will I be able to see my family?

SPRINGER

As soon as possible but....it is a large camp. Doctor. I'll do my best.

KOLODNEY

Thank you.

SPRINGER

Meanwhile you'll be comfortable. As you see, the room has been equipped for living; books, wine - radio, for security reasons - is strictly forbidden.

(Indicating sheaf of papers)

As soon as possible, please familiarize yourself with this material. Oh - you will be asked to treat members of the military personnel as well as the Sonderkommando - to whom you have already been introduced, I take it?

KOLODNEY

Yes.

SPRINGER

Good.

(Moves towards the door)

I also attended a number of your lectures in pathology at the Nagy Institute in the spring of '38. Lovely city - Budapest. Gypsy bands and the ubiquitous scent of paprika. I grew tired of the food, but the lectures were always quite tasty.

(Pause)

KOLODNEY

Thank you.

(A tapping on the door)

SPRINGER

Come in.

(Linz appears)

LINZ

Heil Hitler.

SPRINGER

(After a perfunctory return salute)

Well - what is it?

LINZ

Herr Commandant Hoess asks that Herr Doctor come to his office for an important meeting.

(Springer nods and begins to go)

SPRINGER

Bon soir, Doctor. And - ah - try to remain flexible. It's the only reasonable course under the circumstances.

(He leaves with Linz in tow. Kolodney wanders around for a few seconds when Applebaum's head appears in open doorway. Kolodney turns and is somewhat startled. Applebaum is grinning)

APPLEBAUM

They're attacking - the Russkies are attacking Warsaw! I just heard! **(He enters)**

Fishface likes you. He actually smiles when you're around. I never seen him in such good humor. How far is Warsaw from here? A thousand kilometres? A tank could do that in a week, yes?

KOLODNEY

Perhaps - I don't know.

APPLEBAUM

Don't be so cool, Doctor. We're all of us here in the same boat. You think this is a health spa? Some health spa!

**(Andreas and Karl enter pushing two wheelbarrows covered
With a sheet)**

KARL

These are from the Lab in Block Ten, Doctor - for autopsy.

(Hands him sheets of paper)

Sign all four copies, here and here.

This is your copy, which I sign.

APPLEBAUM

Guess what - the Russkies are attacking Warsaw! I heard Semmelweiss telling Linz and Linz just told Springer!

(Andreas whistles. He and Karl look to each other significantly. Meanwhile, Kolodney uncovers sheet and gasps with horror)

ANDREAS

Twins. Not very pretty, are they? Five hundred calories a day will do that to the best of us.

(Kolodney sits, ashen faced)

KARL

Buck up, Doctor. Put a good thick casing on the emotions or you're finished. You'll see worse than this from Block Ten.

APPLEBAUM

They're giving them bark and weeds to eat in Block Ten.

ANDREAS

The menu is posted on a bulletin board every morning.

APPLEBAUM

One group, this was last month, got a few different colored pills three times a day, with breadsticks and powdered milk until exactly half of them died. Then they killed the others to find out what was keeping them alive.

ANDREAS

It's called a "nutritional study".

APPLEBAUM

They put pregnant women into x-ray machines - I've seen it - and make babies come out half boy, half girl - webbed fingers - no arms and legs....you can't imagine the freaks they get. I saw one baby that looked like a fish... and it was still alive. When the mother saw it, she screamed something in French and tried to strangle herself.

(Jacques enters with packets of supplies)

JACQUES

You've heard about Warsaw?

KARL

Say a prayer for a hasty victory, Rabbi.

(Jacques, noting the specimens and the seated ashen-faced Kolodney, sizes up the situation)

JACQUES

There's nothing to do - if you remain interested in living - but to obey them, Doctor. And find a way to do a kindness here and there. You appear in good health. The war is almost over. Remember what you see here. Some of us must survive to tell about this.

APPLEBAUM

Why shouldn't we all survive? With the Russkies coming, what's the sense of killing us? It would go better for them if they didn't. They must be made to realize that!

KARL

They'll do what they want to do - like always. And it'll make sense or it won't make sense. So shut up or I swear - I'll kill you myself!

APPLEBAUM

Why!?! Why is it me that has to shut up!?! Why always me!?!

APPLEBAUM

(To Kolodney)

Do you know why he despises me? Why everybody despises me? Because....some weeks ago I led my Sister into Antartica. Could I have saved her? How could I have saved her? And if I had told her the truth - would that have helped her any? So she never knew until the last minute, and I saved her some pain, that's all. Sure I felt bad. But just because I didn't rant about it, they despise me. They think I have no feelings - hah! Because I didn't rant and rave about it like the genius arteest here. Who led his aunt and uncle in this very morning no less!

(Pause)

KARL

(Quietly to Kolodney)

He didn't lead them. I led them. He spotted them just as they were entering. There was nothing that could have been done for them.

(Karl steps up to Applebaum and punches him squarely in the Nose. He strides out pushing Andreas out of the way. Andreas goes out after him)

APPLEBAUM

(Coming back to his senses)

The filthy bastard broke my nose! Why me!?! Why always me!?!
The filthy fucking German Goyishe bastard!

(Kolodney, who has been sitting, rises and comes to Examine Applebaum)

KOLODNEY

Hold still.

(Pause)

No, I don't think it's broken....but with a nose, it's hard to tell. But I don't think it's broken.

APPLEBAUM

I can't keep my eyes open.

KOLODNEY

Go there and lie down.

(He indicates the dissecting table)

Here's some cotton. Rest there until the bleeding stops.

APPLEBAUM

I think it's broken, Doctor.

KOLODNEY

A nose will heal by itself. Don't worry - you'll be all right. Go - just rest for a while.

(Applebaum stretches out on the dissecting table)

APPLEBAUM

God will punish him for this. If I was everything he thinks I am, I'd report him, wouldn't I? But I won't - so he's wrong. He's persecuting me. I'm just not his kind of Jew like the genius is. Well, I'll show him. I'll show you all. If anybody gets out of tis alive, it'll be because of me!

(Long pause)

JACQUES

Have you been told about the Sonderkommando, Doctor?
What we do...,for a living?

(A bitter grin)

KOLODNEY

Only that you deliver specimens for autopsy.

JACQUES

That's when we're on vacation. When we're not on vacation, we herd people into Antartica to be killed while lulling them with the hope of a shower, and cautioning them about the safety of their belongings.

KOLODNEY

Gas chambers? That's....Antartica?

JACQUES

We herd them into Antartica and we pull them out. And then examine them for hidden valuables.

(Pause. Indicating the specimens)

After seeing that, can you doubt me?

KOLODNEY

People gassed....indiscriminately?

JACQUES

No-no - for the most part, discriminantly. Because indiscriminantly might make them feel like murderers. And discriminantly - too old, too young, too fat, too skinny - makes them feel....rational.

(Pause)

This is the twelfth - we are the twelfth Sonderkommando, Doctor. The others lasted from Four to Six months.

(Pause)

KOLODNEY

Are you then transferred?

JACQUES

(A bitter chuckle)

Oh yes - transferred - up the chimney into the Polish sky. We may set a record for briefness of tenure. You noticed the incinerators on the way in, I take it?

KOLODNEY

Yes.

APPLEBAUM

(Eyes closed, supping on dissecting table)

He thinks this is a health spa.

JACQUES

Anything is possible here, Doctor. Anything you can imagine. Don't let anything here surprise you.

KOLODNEY

Why....do you do it?

JACQUES

It will be a better death than beating and slow starvation, believe me. The Commandant never lacks volunteers for the Sonderkommando.

(Pause)

KOLODNEY

I see.

JACQUES

(Gathering himself with a sigh)

This is for you, Doctor - the week's supply of medicines.

(Kolodney perfunctorily looks at a rather plentiful supply)

KOLODNEY

My wife and daughter are in the women's camp - section D.

JACQUES

Quarantine. That can be....tricky. But if they're in good health....

KOLODNEY

Yes - quite good. Robust actually.

JACQUES

Then - God willing - they'll survive it and be put to work.

KOLODNEY

Doctor Springer said he'd try to locate them for me. Is he a man who....keeps his word, do you think?

(Pause)

JACQUES

Springer is an odd duck. You've noticed he doesn't carry a pistol?

KOLODNEY

But he's a doctor.

JACQUES

SS doctors carry pistols and even bludgeons here. But Springer... such princeliness... I don't think the man ever sweats.

KOLODNEY

If I knew they were all right, and could occasionally see them...

JACQUES

Well....he seems to favor you....hope for the best.

(Pause)

Doctor - some of these medicines would be greatly appreciated by those less....cared for than we. There's always more than enough for us but in the Camp Infirmary they have nothing. Not even aspirin. You can't imagine.

(Pause)

KOLODNEY

I'm sorry - please understand. I have my family to consider.

JACQUES

I assure you - there's no possibility of this being detected. There's more than enough for our needs.

KOLODNEY

Please - it would cause me great anxiety. And until I know for certain about my wife and daughter....

JACQUES

They need the medicines, Doctor. Desperately.

(Pause)

KOLODNEY

I'm sorry.

JACQUES

At least some bandages!

KOLODNEY

I'm sorry. I have my family to consider.

(Pause)

JACQUES

(Leaving; stone-faced)

Bon soir - Herr Doktor.

**(Kolodney looks at the sheet-covered bodies.
He approaches and uncovers one of them)**

DIM OUT

(A spot comes up on Kolodney wearing a lab coat)

KOLODNEY

(Flat, automaton-like voice)

I begin the dissection by removing the brain pan. Together with the cerebellum, I extract the brains and examine them. Then follows the opening of the thorax and removal of the sternum. Next I separate the tongue by means of an incision made beneath the chin. With the tongue comes the esophagus, with the respiratory tract comes both lungs. After a transverse incision

across the pericardium to remove the fluid, I take out the heart, wash and examine it. Then I remove the stomach. In both cases the mucous is swollen which results in a complete withering of the glands that secrete chloric acid. A lack of gastric juices renders digestion impossible but increases fermentation proportionally. The inflamed condition of the small intestine is accompanied by a thinning of the intestinal walls. Opening the liver, I found instead of the customary secretion, an almost colorless liquid which scarcely could affect the material still in the intestine, and would have been quite incapable of performing its digestive function. The inflammation of the large intestine results in both a withering and thinning of the intestinal wall so that the aforementioned organ is no longer primarily an osmosing agent but a conduit into the rectum of whatever the subject injected. Death of subject was established as approximately one hour before first incision.

(The light holds for a few seconds - DIM OUT)

-End of Act One-

Act Two

Several days later. The choral part of Beethoven's 9th Symphony. played at a low volume during intermission. As the audience returns, the volume rises counterbalanced by the faint sound of typing and Act 2 begins with Kolodney and Springer listening. The piece ends. For a while, silence.

SPRINGER

"All art aspires to the condition of music." That was the Englishman, Walter Pater, if I'm not mistaken. I was two years at Cambridge, Istvan. "The British". They love Beethoven. Diametrically opposed in temperament yet they worship him. "The Brits". Do you know "The Brits?"

KOLODNEY

(Seated - To Audience)

Moderately, I replied.

(Long Pause)

SPRINGER

I sincerely regret that we meet under such circumstances, Istvan. I harbor no antipathy to you or your people. Not all of us agreed with this program of personal extermination. Some of us opposed it. I opposed it.

KOLODNEY

(To the Audience)

He explained how matters got out of control.

SPRINGER

I opposed it as best I could. Many of us did. A considerable number opposed it - you'd be surprised. Deportation. resettlement. Some sort of labor-intensive internment - at worst. At the very worst. But not this....barbarism. This....inhumanity. And the Fuhrer? The Fuhrer? Certainly charismatic in his own rude way but - at the same time - remarkably clownish. We laughed at him and his ferocious Jew-hatred. The little corporal - the artist who never was.

He wouldn't last. He would go so far and fall by the wayside as the movement spread, and consolidated, and moderated. but then, you know, sometimes -yes- his eyes - his eyes would catch you... They would catch you and we eventually realized....No, he wasn't totally a clown. That he was actually making it work. That this ferocious Jew-hatred was working as what? A catalyst? That this pointlessness we Germans had been sinking into - this fragmentation.... as a people....as a Culture - to which your people, Istvan, your otherwise admirable people with their cosmopolitanism, their rootlessness, their iconoclasm, etcetera, etcetera, had significantly contributed - that you must admit. They - your people - would - yes - for a while - paradoxically - become - a unifying solution.

KOLODNEY

(To Audience)

He looked directly at me and waited. "How so?" I felt obligated to say although I had heard these accusations before.

(Pause)

SPRINGER

Please, Istvan, treat me as an equal.

KOLODNEY

(To Audience)

The Jews would be inconvenienced for a while, he continued, but they would ride it out - as they always do.

SPRINGER

But I never thought it would go as far as this. This.... would have been unthinkable.

KOLODNEY

(To Audience)

And now, Auschwitz was to be no more, he announced. The camp was being dismantled. They were going back into Germany to hold firm against the Russians until a negotiated peace could be achieved with the "Brits" and the Americans. The Americans and the Brits don't want the Bolshevik hordes storming all over

Civilized Western Europe, he said with a certain assurance, and laughed. **(Pause)**

I....I had to be careful with tis man. My family was still somewhere out there - hopefully still alive. But he hadn't, he said, been able to locate them. Probably they were being shipped to Germany to work in one of their underground armament factories, he said. But he couldn't locate them because they were no longer Names. On the bills of lading, they were Numbers.

(Kolodney lifts left sleeve to show the number tatoood on his forearm)

And we didn't know the numbers. The Quarantine Section for newcomers had been dismantled and combed - "combed" he said, for "able-bodied workers". If they are, as you describe them, they will be put to work in Germany.

"Not to worry, Istvan, the war is soon over. If you survive, your life will be restored to you", he said.

(Kolodney speaks to Springer)

It will depend on my family's survival - for my life - to be restored to me.

SPRINGER

Of course. Hope for the best.

KOLODNEY

(To Audience)

He offered me one of his Egyptian Cigarettes and a pat on the shoulder.

(Springer does so. Kolodney accepts cigarette. Springer withdraws one for himself. He lights both)

SPRINGER

My family, Istvan, has gone to live in the countryside. A chicken farm, actually, a sizeable distance from Cologne. Cologne was impossible. Our dear Brits and the unpredictable Americans are being ruthless. "Carpet Bombing" they call it. They are carpet bombing our cities. Our women and children are being punished for their country's sins. **(Pause)**
Have you no pity for our women and children, Istvan?

(Pause)

SPRINGER

We had no pity for yours.

(Pause)

I have a daughter too, you know - Gisella who, much to my great sorrow is....a bit afraid of her father.

(Pause)

KOLODNEY

How old?

SPRINGER

Four and a half. Very sweet little....very sweet gentle nature. Gisella - that was my mother's name.

My wife's name is Traudle. It's such a clumsy name and she is so delicate and refined. Traudle. **(He chuckles)**

I enjoy calling her Traudle. She is known as Trudi to all but her husband. She takes no offense to Traudle.

It's....because she loves me. Remarkable.

KOLODNEY

(To Audience)

I saw this person almost weep.

(Pause)

SPRINGER

We Germans - Germans of my political persuasion - admittedly - we crossed a forbidden border, Istvan. I can't believe - that the Germany I knew - could have perpetrated such actions. But we did. I did. On faith. An end to fragmentation and spinelessness. For our children. And grandchildren. We were willing to sacrifice ourselves. Self-immolation, Istvan. I don't exaggerate. Faith. Faith, that we would succeed in creating - for them - a better and more logical world.

(Pause)

Do you pity me?

(Pause)

I give you permission to pity me, Istvan.

KOLODNEY

(To Audience)

Not really, I said, taking truth as my shield. If he was having his game with me, that, I decided, would be the best course.

(Pause)

SPRINGER

Rightly so. It appears I've made myself - let myself be made - but actually, yes - made myself into a monster. What I did with those people in Block Ten - "Human Material" - will always haunt me. Always. That I can assure you.

KOLODNEY

(To Audience)

He continued to lament his actions. And his remorse seemed genuine. It was all a nightmare, he said, "From which I have suddenly awakened".

(Kolodney rises from chair, turns to Springer)

I am in no position to forgive you, Doctor Springer.

(Pause)

SPRINGER

No. Thank you for your honesty.

(Pause. He lightens up a bit)

On my furlough home last summer.... I found no difficulty in becoming intimate with my wife. Interesting. This was of great solace to me, of course. Little Gisella continues to be afraid of her father but....when I bribe her, she yields.

(We see Karl, Andreas, Laszlo, Spiro and Jacques follwed by Bieber enter the bunkroom. Bieber seems much calmer. He pours a drink, slugs it, and sits)

But I must bribe her....for her to be willingly close to me.

(Sound of two pistol shots, then a third)

Tomorrow is the New Year, Istvan. thre will be some mayhem from the S.S. No one is punished for killing a Jew. Even one of your magnitude. So be careful. I will do what I can for you...

(Linz is pushed stumbling through door of bunkroom followed by Applebaum who has a pistol.

Lights down in lab as Springer pours a new round)

APPLEBAUM

I wouldn't let him kill me, the son of a bitch!

LINZ

I wasn't going to kill you.

APPLEBAUM

Just for sport. He's drunk. It's his birthday.

LINZ

I wasn't going to kill you. yesterday was my birthday. Put the gun away. I need to barf.

(He runs into toilet and we hear him vomiting)

APPLEBAUM

He was going to kill me. He put his gun to my head.

LINZ

(From within toilet)

I was only joking.

APPLEBAUM

You were going to kill me!

LINZ

(Emerging from toilet)

I was joking. I wish no harm to any of you. You're a good bunch. Why did you kill Semelweiss? He was also joking.

KARL

You killed Semelweiss?

APPLEBAUM

I hid his body under the conveyer. I have his gun.

(Pause)

ANDREAS

You should have taken his uniform.

(Linz becomes the object of group scrutiny)

LINZ

Please don't kill me, boys. I have a wife and four children.
I'm Wehrmacht, not S.S. I'm Wehrmacht!

(He pulls out his identification and shows it)

I was out there fighting Russians but I caught one in the hip
and ended up here.

APPLEBAUM

If you help us to escape, we will let you live.

ANDREAS

Can you help us to escape, Herr Ober?

(No reply)

BIEBER

Kill him.

LINZ

Please!

BIEBER

(Suddenly rational-seeming)

Then help us to escape.

(Pause)

KOLODNEY

(To Audience)

The foregoing is pure guesswork, of course. Again, I am
inventing a scenario as a bridge to when I was actually present.
But the characters - they were real people. Who suddenly came
crashing into the laboratory.

**(Linz is pushed into the lab followed by Applebaum who
holds the gun to his back. The others follow)**

KOLDNEY

(To Audience)

They were surprised but not unpleased to find Dr. Springer here with me. Although, just for an instant, authority re-asserted itself as Springer stared with icy disbelief and they, just for an instant, diminished.

APPLEBAUM

Watch out, Fishface is giving us the fish eye.

KOLODNEY

He said that and his compatriots started to laugh at the look of baffled outrage that crossed the Nordic visage of Herr Doctor Springer. Obersharfuehrer Linz mumbled an explanation but he was still drunk. "Shut up" said the one named Karl and then came a series of pistol shots from the corridors and singing - Germans singing, taunting and...shooting. And...fading away until all that could be heard was a shot or a series of shots - at an increasing distance.

"Sit down", said Karl to Dr. Springer.

SPRINGER

Thank you. I prefer to remain standing.

KOLODNEY

This Karl, who was not a Jew but a political prisoner got angry and lunged at him and Springer and he went tumbling. The Rabbi - Jacques - came forward and pulled at Karl as the ones called Laszlo and Spiro pulled Dr. Springer out from under. With an odd, half-smile he said, "The worms have turned." And then he said "I'm sorry. I apologize. I know how serious this must be for you." He brushed himself off and did indeed sit.

JACQUES

Help us to escape, Doctor, and we will spare your life.

(Long Pause)

SPRINGER

Escape from the Crematorea is made especially difficult. What do you think, Ober?

(Pause)

SPRINGER

Shall we help them?

(Linz stiffens with drunken surprise)

Yes - why not?

LASZLO

You will help us?

SPIRO

(Getting it straight)

To escape.

LASZLO

In what way?

SPRINGER

I don't know yet.

APPLEBAUM

The best and most likely way out of here! The quickest!

ANDREAS

Up the chimney into the Polish sky.

APPLEBAUM

Why does he say that!? Why do you say that!? How dare you say that!?!

KARL

Shut up!

APPLEBAUM

(Flourishing his pistol)

You shut up, you German bastard!

JACQUES

Herr Applebaum - please!

KARL

You fucking imbecile!

APPLEBAUM

How can we be so stupid as to trust him!? He's a German -He's not a Jew. He belongs over there with them!

(Pointing to Springer and Linz)

(Karl makes a move forward but Andreas springs in front of him to hold him back. Applebaum would've shot him)

JACQUES

Herr Applebaum - please!

KOLODNEY

Herr Applebaum!

(Pause)

KOLODNEY

(To Audience)

Reason prevails. Applebaum does lower the pistol but does not seem any the less furious. And then more shooting in the corridors - closer - closer - closer....then a very tense silence.

A shot or two, but going further off and much fainter, perhaps from outside where prisoners were not permitted to go without the most special of passes. And then, mixing with the gunshots, came bells. From the town. Church bells from the town of Auschwitz. Or as the Poles call it, since this, of course was once their country - Oswieszem. And mixing with the shots and the church bells - a polka. A band was playing a polka in the town of Oswieszem which the Germans called Auschwitz.

New Year's Eve. A party. Two or three accordians, a clarinet and, of course, a drum. And who knows who many people...

(We may indeed hear such a polka as the scene ends)

Act 2: Scene Two

Deep into the night. Springer and Linz are guarded by Jacques and Applebaum, each holding a pistol. Springer is alert and watchful. Linz is dozing but not asleep. Bieber is talking to nobody in particular. The men have been drinking but nobody is drunk. Some snoring. Pause.

BIEBER (A continuation)

And I had no idea when they summoned me. None - absolutely. That I was a Jew? Christophe Horst Bieber? Does that sound like a Jew?

(This makes him laugh)

SPIRO

Shut up.

BIEBER

Christophe Horst Bieber?

LASZLO

Shut up, (He yawns) Bieber.

JACQUES

Please, Herr Bieber. You're disturbing everybody.

(Pause)

BIEBER

On January 17th, in the year of our Lord, 1847 my paternal grandfather, in the Bavarian township of Straubing, converted to Lutheran. And my father was baptized a Luther so he was never a Jew, right?

But they said, this racial Bureau over at the S.S. - they said his father being born a Jew, and married to a Jew - it didn't matter that she also converted. And their children - all seven of them being baptized Luthers - all that still didn't matter because my mother who herself had some slight Jewish taint in her blood made me, they said, made me more than 50% percent Jewish - 55-45.

SPRINGER

I need to relieve myself.

(Jacques accompanies Springer to the toilet)

BIEBER

In addition to which - in addition to which, they decreed that I had wear a yellow star on my coat - front and back. Unbelievable! I go in a Luther and come out a Jew in hardly an hour's time. And a few days later - less than a week later - I get sent away to Poland packed like a sardine with other Jews. Not my wife -no- not my sons - not them either. They only sent me. But they kicked my sons out of school and put them to work on the roads. And my wife divorced me so she could keep her job.

(Springer and Jacques return to their places)

I don't believe in God. God made this world? Just look at it. The world could only have made itself.

JACQUES

How could the world make itself, Herr Bieber? How is that possible?

BIEBER

No God worth a rat's ass would make a world like this. In six days no less.

(Flat)

It's hilarious.

(Pause)

APPLEBAUM

Doctor - could you give me something? I have this pain behind the eyes. It's killing me.

KOLODNEY

Migraine?

APPLEBAUM

I don't know. I never had a pain like this before.

KOLODNEY

It sounds like a migraine.

LINZ

You killed Semelweiss. He's paying you back.

APPLEBAUM

What time is it, Doctor?

KOLODNEY

Half past three.

APPLEBAUM

A little sleep. My head is bursting. Please. Something for the pain.

(Kolodney counts out three pills and brings them to Applebaum who washes them down with wine)

Thank you.

(He hands the pistol to Kolodney)

Please.

(He curls up on the dissecting table. Kolodney sits facing the prisoners, pistol in hand. This seems to amuse Springer who smiles faintly. Kolodney is also faintly amused at the reversal in situation)

BIEBER

How can I go back after this? What good will I be to....anyone? Can I fuck my wife anymore after this - even if she'll have me? Or any woman? Can I teach children anymore after this? How did you survive Auschwitz, Herr Bieber? How was it you survived and others didn't?

(Bieber slowly erupts into laughter)

This can't be happening to me!

KARL

Bieber - shut up! Get some sleep. Try to think of the other people here. You're not the only one who suffers.

APPLEBAUM

Shut your yap, Bieber, and let people sleep. Don't be an asshole!

(Kolodney bursts into nervous laughter)

What are you laughing at, Doctor?

KOLODNEY

Nothing. I'm sorry.

APPLEBAUM

It's not funny.

KOLODNEY

No.

APPLEBAUM

It's not at all funny.

(Pause)

KOLODNEY

Try to rest. It will be light soon. The pills will soon take effect. **(Pause)**

APPLEBAUM

I'm sorry to be acting like this, Doctor.

KOLODNEY

That's all right.

APPLEBAUM

I'm not a nice person. I can't help it. I'm just.... not a nice person, and I never was.

KOLODNEY

Let the pills do their work, Herr Applebaum.

APPLEBAUM

I gave my children a cruel but beautiful stepmother.

(Applebaum closes his eyes and curls up again)

(Pause)

KOLODNEY

(To Audience)

So - We are waiting for the dawning of New Year's Day, 1945. The Russians would arrive on January 27th. The War would officially end on May 7th. But this was now. Dr. Springer had presented two possibilities for escape. Of course, the assumption was that he saw this as the only way to save his life. But I'm not sure how much he actually cared about his life. He was aware that severe punishment awaited him and others like him when Germany surrendered.

In light of that, he wasn't sure that his family wouldn't be better off without him - those sensitive plants - Traudle and Gisella - Traudle and Gisella. **(He chuckles)** "Traudle."

(He puts aside the sympathy that has crept in)

In any event, the plan agreed to involved Dr. Springer and the Ober, both in uniform, leading the eight of us out into the Polish countryside at dawn on some....nasty joke of a New Year's Day work party. Those two were well known to any guard who might still be alert and we would be passed right through. Right behind each of them would be one of us with a pistol. If they gave an alarm, they would also perish. We knew it was one point eight kilometers to the Vistula which would most likely be frozen over. There's a forest on the other bank. We would cross and take our chances in the forest with the partisans. Our hostages? **(He relishes the word)** They had to trust us that at some point we wouldn't kill them but hand them over as a goodwill gift to the partisans, who also might not kill them but hand them over to the Russians. That's the best they could hope for. Prisoners of war to the Russians, and a little bit back of their own medicine.

LINZ

(Coming abruptly alert)

Look boys. Listen to me. Listen to me. I swear to you, on my honor as, a soldier and....a fellow human being, I didn't know shit like this was going on. Back home nobody knows shit like this is going on. You think I would tell my wife about shit

like this? Even the Fuhrer doesn't know. It's Heinrich Himmler and his people at the S.S. who are responsible for this. They're not human those people and everybody's afraid of them.

(Pause)

JACQUES

They say you participated in executing the previous Sonderkommando, Herr Ober. Is that true?

(Pause)

Herr Ober? They say you participated.

LINZ

(Sizing things up; lying would have worse results)

I was given a direct order, boys.

(Pause)

You can't expect me to commit suicide. A direct order? I would have been executed on the spot. These Labor Camps are considered frontline duty.

KARL

Death camps. Say it, asshole. Death Camps.

(Pause)

JACQUES

Say it, Herr Ober. You'll find it good for the soul.

LINZ

I swear to you, I didn't know what this place was all about until I got here. And by then it was too late. Once you're here, you're here. You let yourself become another person or you go crazy. Most of the S.S. - they're already crazy so they fit right in. Me? I had to drown myself in alcohol to keep sane. You saw how much I was drinking!

(Pause)

KARL

Say it, asshole.

(Karl seems ready to spring)

LINZ

Death camps - okay? - Satisfied? Death Camps! Death Camps!

(Pause)

Goddamit - if the Fuhrer knew about this.....

(Pause)

SPRINGER

The Fuhrer knows.

LINZ

That's not true, Herr Doctor. The Fuhrer would not permit this if he knew.

SPRINGER

I'm sure he knows. They all know so why shouldn't he?

LINZ

Well, they keep it from him. He's not....he's not as young as he used to be and they say he's been sick lately. Those bastards - they betrayed him by taking us into this fucking war in the first place....

KARL

He took us to war, you moron! It was him! Where do you get this horseshit!?

LINZ

And now they're betraying him with these fucking death camps! But his intentions? His intentions were always pure for Germany! Too trusting - that's his problem!

KARL

Look what he did to the unions! Trusting!?

LINZ

The unions were corrupt!

KARL

The unions were not corrupt!

LINZ

Corruption was everywhere until he came along and cleaned things up and straightened things out - at least he tried to without giving us up to the Bolsheviks like you and your kind would!

(Pause)

KARL

Oh, shut up, Linz, before I put my foot up your ass.

(Pause)

LINZ

(Mending fences)

Okay - he didn't like the Jews so much, I grant you. But all he wanted to do is send them off somewhere like Palestine or....Russia. National resettlement - everyone benefits, right? To each his own. Because it's a problem with Jews, you know, wherever they go. That's the sorry truth, boys - I hate to say it, but a lot of people just don't like you.

I myself - I never had a problem with Jews. Good family people, the Jews. Hardworking. You can do business with a Jew.

Try doing business with an Italian. **(He chuckles)**

If you run across an Italian, what should you do? Kick him - he'll know why.

(Another chuckle. Karl gazes at Linz resignedly.

He turns to Springer)

KARL

(To Springer)

I don't blame people like him. I blame people like you. People like you should have known better.

(Pause)

SPRINGER

Mea Culpa.

(Pause)

KARL

What?

JACQUES

He accepts responsibility.

KARL

Isn't that wonderful? "He accepts responsibility".
Mea Culpa - that's a Catholicism, isn't it?

SPRINGER

Mea Culpa. Mea Culpa. Mea Maxima Culpa.

KARL

You're not a Catholic.

SPRINGER

No.

KARL

You're some kind of Count or baron, aren't you?

SPRINGER

A baron.

KARL

All of you aristocrats supported Hitler at the beginning.

SPRINGER

Yes - many of us did. At the beginning.

(Pause)

KARL

Why?

SPRINGER

We were mistaken.

(Pause)

KARL

(Mockingly)

"We were mistaken". "We were mistaken." You people drive me
fucking crazy. This thing you have.

This....what do they call it? Noblesse oblige? You degenerate son-of-a-bitch, was it noblesse oblige when you starved that bunch of twins to death in Block Ten? A doctor, no less. Coming to them when they begged for real food instead of pills and putting a stethoscope to their chest, listening to their hearts beat. Making them piss into bottles when they could hardly stand.

KARL

If you want to kill me, do it - Communist.

JACQUES

Karl - please - get some sleep. There's no point to this. The Russians will take good care of him.

(Karl approaches Springer. Jacques rises to block him)

Get some sleep - please. You're putting everything into jeopardy. He is what he is.

(Andreas comes forward, grips Karl's shoulder)

ANDREAS

Karl - please - there's no point.

(Karl yields and sits with Andreas. Pause)

SPRINGER

Tell me, Istvan, when you did those autopsies, how did you feel?

(Pause)

KOLODNEY

How I felt?

SPRINGER

Yes, how did you feel about....completing the process?

(Pause)

KOLODNEY

Filled with....horror at what being brought to such a condition must have entailed in suffering, Dr. Springer.

(Pause)

SPRINGER

But you didn't ask to be removed from your task, did you?

(Pause)

KOLODNEY

No.

SPRINGER

Because you knew your life depended on it.

KOLODNEY

And the lives of my wife and daughter.

(Pause)

SPRINGER

Istvan - these people were going to be put to death anyway. They were literally being plucked from the gas chambers and delivered to Block Ten. And not all the studies required such extremity. Some were relatively benign. Some involved relatively slight discomfort. Those people - if they're lucky - and the Russians get here soon enough - may yet survive.

(He rises)

JACQUES

Sit.

(He sits)

SPRINGER

Once here, I had no choice. My family....also became a factor. I....no longer had a choice in the matter. Both personally and professionally, I had no choice. **(Pause)**

KOLODNEY

I have no sympathy for you. You should have refused to function as you did.

SPRINGER

And taken the consequences? Is that what you would have done, Istvan?

KOLODNEY

I never would have lent myself to a criminal regime where such atrocity is possible.

LASZLO

Please - please - Let him alone! What do you want from him? He's sorry. He wants to help us survive. The man is genuinely sorry. He's sorry. So let him help us instead of fucking with his mind like this. He wants to make amends so let him, for God's sake!

SPIRO

I personally would like to go on living, Dr. Kolodney - if you don't mind.

APPLEBAUM

(Without stirring)

I would like to see Paris before I die.

KARL

If there still is a Paris. There might no longer be a Paris when the Nazis get through with it. Germans despise the French and envy them at the same time.

(Amused)

Me too. In that, I'm a good German. I despise the French and....so often envy them. Now when the Russians take Berlin....

SPIRO

Fuck Berlin. I hope they burn it to the ground.

(Pause)

ANDREAS

I loved Berlin. There was something about Berlin that made it more exciting, more....original than Paris. The Nazis ruined Berlin. They sterilized it.

KARL

I lost my cherry in Berlin with a professional bicyclist - ten years older than me. The calves on that woman!

(Remembering it puts him a wicked good humor)

(To Springer)

How about you? How did you lose your cherry?

SPRINGER

It was with my wife. On our Wedding Night.

(Pause)

KOLODNEY

Springer's reply....that candid, simple rejoinder, flattened the levity that was....burgeoning in our little group. After that, until dawn came, it was mostly silence.

(Light change as dawn seeps into the high windows of the lab. The men begin to stir. Andreas gathers makeup material and hands it to the men who do each others faces as Kolodney speaks)

KOLODNEY

(To Audience)

With the dawn, we prepared for our daring attempt; a New Year's Day work party obviously contrived to feed some sadistic whim of our two Nazi guardians. There were expensive make-up kits; rouges, lipsticks, powders and the like filched from the piles of belongings left behind by those entering our man-made hell. Items that could be traded for whatever favor from the guards. We would make ourselves look like ghoulish clowns wrapped in outfits of striped burlap. Surely the uniformed personages, one of them an officer, leading us out into the Polish countryside had a bit of serious fun in mind. We fashioned the replica of a sub-machine gun from a rod and some metal clamps for the Ober to carry and we were on our way.

A sunny winter's morning - cold but not much wind.

Not at all bad for this time of year. We passed the inner checkpoint with hardly an acknowledgement.

Behind Springer, the Rabbi. Behind the Ober, Applebaum, no longer afflicted. At the outer checkpoint the two guards were considerably amused. One of them said, "Godspeed" as we passed beyond the wire and, in lockstep, marched along the road that led to the quarries.

We eventually veered off on an unpaved road that would lead us to the banks of the Vistula; hopefully frozen over enough to carry the weight of several men.

We were not quite in sight of the Vistula - not quite in sight - when Linz struck Applebaum with his fake sub-machine gun and bolted down a gully and across a field. Applebaum fired. So did the Rabbi, but the wily veteran of Stalingrad did all sorts of twisting and turning to avoid the shots and quickly put a distance between himself and our little group. And as Applebaum and the Rabbi fired at the fleeing Ober, Dr. Springer quite athletically fled in the opposite direction and also managed to escape. In a panic, we headed for the river. But I- I was, you see, well past fifty and simply not capable of such exertion. I began experiencing shortness of breath, dizziness and chest pain. All the classic symptoms. Further exertion would have resulted in my first heart attack. So I stopped and the others, with hasty regrets, continued on their way - *sauve qui peut*, as goes the saying. They made for the Vistula and I lay down in a ditch and covering myself with vegetation, somehow managed to calm myself, rested, and even managed to sleep a little until late that night when Vatush came and got me.

Vatush. (**He says the name with great affection**)

Vatush worked on his grand parents' poultry farm, a chief supplier of eggs and meat for the S.S. He was a working-class intellectual who had slipped back into the working class because the Nazis were killing Polish intellectuals as a matter of policy. Vatush was repairing a fence as we marched by and then, from afar, heard and saw the pandemonium as the Ober broke away and, I suppose, saw me falter and hastily construct a hiding place.

A courageous young man -oh- I suppose Vatush wasn't yet thirty. Wonderful broad-planed Slavic face. High cheekbones, snub nose - the Tartar look. He waited for the furor to die down, German soldiers all over the place, searching everywhere, trying to cut the escapees off before they crossed the Vistula into the safety of the forest. I heard them passing near me but - I suppose - my hiding place looked like -well- of course, I don't quite know what it looked like from outside but it was, as the saying goes, "sufficient unto the day".

Late that night, Vatush came and carried me - because I was halfway freezing to death - back to the farmhouse where his grandparents received me with a formal but not unkind hospitality. They fashioned a place for me in a space between the kitchen and the cellar. It was tight but made comfortable enough. The physician's body healed itself. I spoke no Polish but Vatush and I were fluent in both English and French, We conversed - an amalgam of both languages - whenever occasion allowed. Vatush, the young intellectual-in-hiding was, it seemed, conversation-starved.

On the 27th, the Russians came and I was free to linger in a refugee camp until Germany capitulated on May 7th.

I was advised not to go to Germany, My wife and daughter, if still alive, would most likely return to Budapest assuming that I would also, if still alive, do the same. So - if we all hewed to the same logic, and if we were still alive, our little family would reunite in Budapest.

I returned to Budapest and waited.

For two years. In our old apartment. Some of my property had been returned to me. And I had a job in a hospital.

Finally, I took a leave from my job and traveled to Germany. Went to all the agencies, to the sites of armament factories, both above and below ground. To whatever industry that employed forced labor in Germany and Austria, but to no avail. Not a trace of them. I was told -eventually- that one had to assume....

they were no longer alive.

So - I returned to Budapest, sold the apartment and came to America on the wings of a generous offer to teach at the Cornell University Medical School in Ithaca, New York overlooking Cayuga Lake. In time, I married a pediatrician -also a Camp Survivor- also bereft of her family. She is my good friend and we are moderately well-suited to each other. Since she was no longer able to bear children, we adopted a problematic nine year old boy who remains problematic into his adulthood. He's a talented photographer and...of essentially good heart. So there are positives to work with.

(Pause. He brightens)

Vatush has recently come to America with his family to occupy a post at the University of Virginia. He's not much different

except that he's lost most of his hair. But still Vatush. With a beautiful Irish wife, and opinions about everything. Last year, soon after my book came out, I received a letter with a Washington D.C. postmark on ordinary notebook paper.

(Springer comes into focus)

SPRINGER

Dear Istvan,

I read your book. It's not bad. A little belated, of course. You should have struck years ago while the iron was hot. But yes - I agree - Auschwitz - it does remain omnipresent - inside us - and suddenly - unawares - the memories attack - and we struggle to push them down. To go on with our little lives. Our...responsibilities to the present. And to those who depend on us.

(Pause)

I remain indescribably sorry for what we did to your people, Istvan but....life must continue. Anyhoo - as they say in your adopted country - Congratulations and good health, Doctor. Oh, in your book you wondered about the fate of the others. I understand the ice broke. I imagine all of them drowned but....maybe not. I sincerely hope not. Please believe me. Best wishes to your new family. I am so sorry you were not reunited with your wife and daughter. I was luckier than you. Again, congratulations. I am eagerly awaiting your next literary effort, Istvan.

(Pause. Kolodney thinks deeply about what he is about to say)

KOLODNEY

I hope, when you die, it's a....cleansingly slow and painful death.

(Pause. Takes on Springer's persona)

In what way cleansing, Istvan?

(Pause)

(To Audience)

I would have no reply to that.

-Slow Curtain-